RESEARCH REPORT · 2026

Barriers and Breakthroughs

Women's Representation and Participation in the Political Process in Nigeria



PREPARED BY

LEAP AFRICA

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Foreword

Democracy is fundamentally incomplete when half of a nation's population remains virtually excluded from the halls of responsibility.



In Nigeria, despite women's vibrant participation as voters, grassroots mobilizers, and community organizers, their presence in elected office remains critically low. Following the 2023 general elections, women occupied approximately 20 of the 469 seats in the National Assembly, just 4%, placing Nigeria near the bottom of global parliament rankings. This falls drastically short of the 35% target established in the National Gender Policy.

This research report, *Women's Representation and Participation in the Political Process in Nigeria: Barriers and Breakthroughs* commissioned by LEAP Africa, documents this stark gap between political participation and political power. Drawing on a national sample of 2,810 survey respondents and extensive key informant interviews across all six geopolitical zones, the study illuminates the structural, economic, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers, from prohibitive campaign costs and political insecurity to male-dominated party gatekeeping, that impede women's advancement to elective office.

Crucially, this report goes beyond diagnosing obstacles to map practical breakthroughs and evidence-based solutions. It offers a clear, actionable agenda for political parties, electoral managers, lawmakers, civil society, and development partners.

On behalf of LEAP Africa, I invite all stakeholders to engage deeply with the evidence presented here and join us in advancing the systemic reforms required to build a truly representative, equitable, and democratic Nigeria.

Kehinde Ayeni

Executive Director, LEAP Africa
Lagos, Nigeria · 2026

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Abbreviations

AWPPI	Attitudes towards women's political participation index
CI	Confidence interval
d	Cohen's d, a standardised mean difference
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EED	Economic and educational barriers (score)
FMPC	Enabling mechanisms (score)
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
ISI	Institutional impediments (score)
PEH	Political environment and safety (score)
PIV	Visibility and policy impact (score)
PSC	Socialisation and cultural capital (score)
PVC	Permanent Voter's Card
SCB	Sociocultural barriers (score)
SD	Standard deviation

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

- Survey statistics and charts
- Participant voices from interviews
- Illustrative experiences and priorities for change
- Key markers and section accents

Survey results describe the people who took part, an unweighted, non-probability sample, not national prevalence. Interview participants are described by role, gender and zone.

Figures and tables

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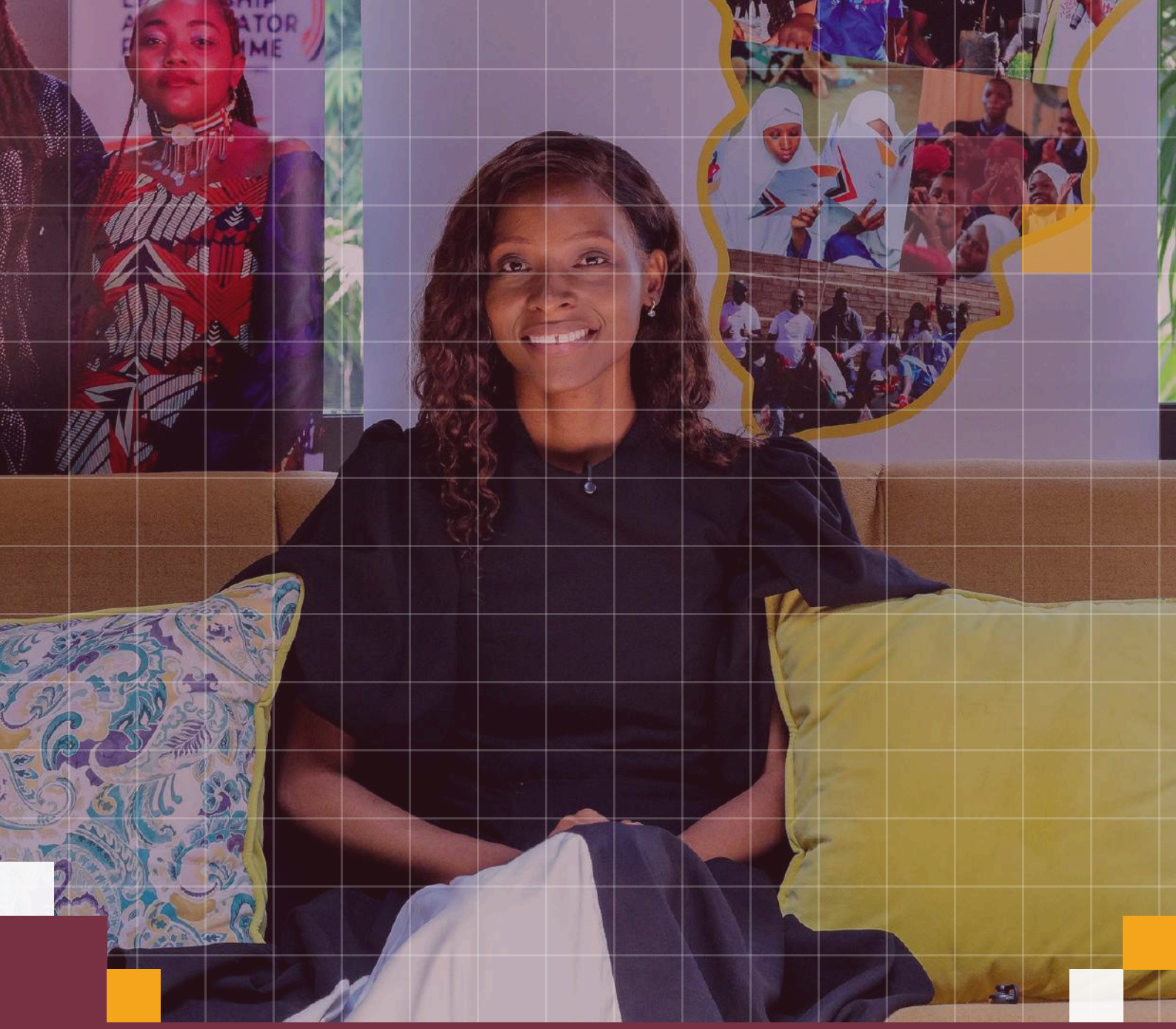
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SUMMARY

ES Executive summary

Women's under-representation in Nigeria is not simply a question of whether women are willing or prepared to participate in politics, or whether the public supports their leadership. It is also a question of who controls access to political opportunity. Women contribute to political and civic life, yet the route from participation to candidacy, elected office and decision-making influence remains shaped by unequal resources, gendered expectations, political insecurity and, critically, the practices of political parties.

Research context and purpose

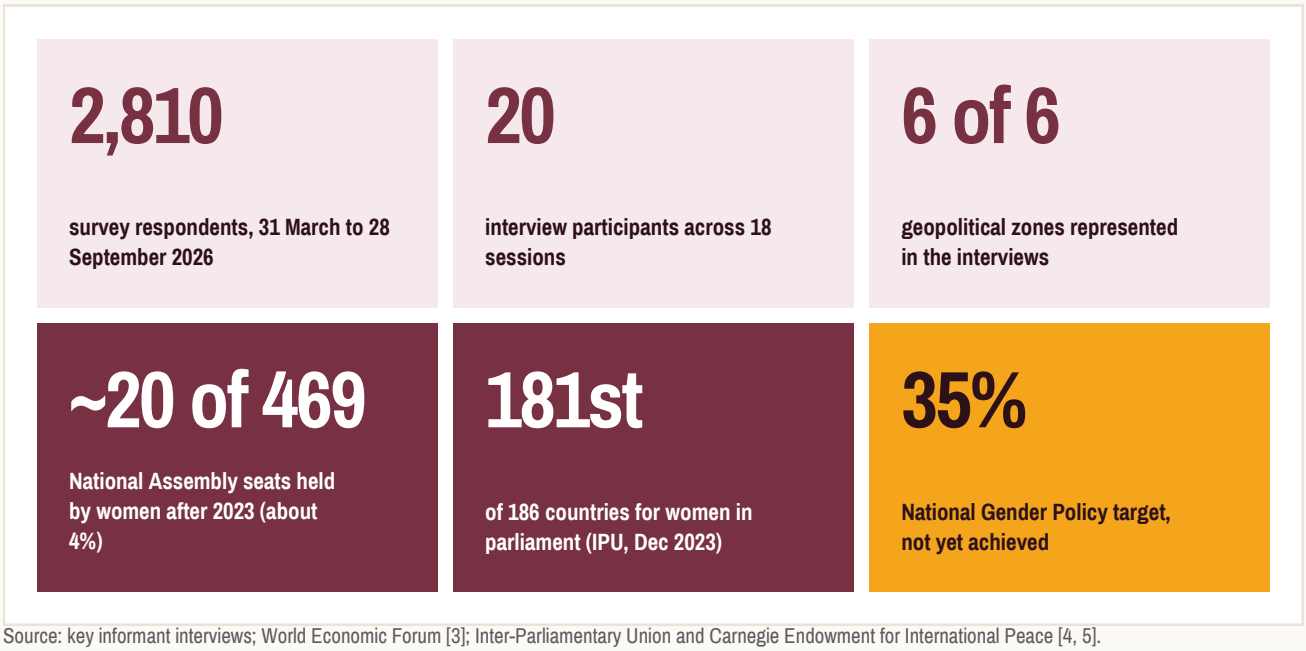
Women constitute about half of Nigeria's population, but their presence in elected political institutions remains very limited. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, women's representation in the National Assembly has remained in single digits. Following the 2023 elections, women occupied approximately 20 of 469 seats, or about 4%. Published counts vary slightly, reporting three or four women in the Senate and 16 or 17 in the House of Representatives. The Inter-Parliamentary Union ranked Nigeria 181st of 186 countries for women's representation in national parliaments in December 2023 [4]. The National Gender Policy sets a 35% target for women's representation in elective and appointive positions, but this remains a policy commitment rather than a binding statutory quota and has not been achieved [1, 2].

The gap matters for democratic inclusion and the distribution of public authority. Women may vote, mobilise, organise and advocate without gaining access to candidacy or leadership. Equally, election to office does not automatically confer equal influence over party or legislative decisions. The research examined the social, economic, educational, political and institutional conditions shaping women's participation and representation; considered how women navigate barriers and achieve breakthroughs; and identified reforms that could strengthen inclusion.

The analysis follows a pathway from political readiness and ambition through recruitment and party nomination to campaigning and electoral contestation. It distinguishes *descriptive representation*or women's numerical presence; *substantive representation*or their ability to influence decisions; and *symbolic representation*or the public significance of women's visibility in authority. These dimensions are related, but progress in one does not guarantee progress in the others.

FIGURE ES1

The study at a glance



Source: key informant interviews; World Economic Forum [3]; Inter-Parliamentary Union and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [4, 5].

How the research was conducted

The study combined a review of published research and policy documents, an online survey and semi-structured key informant interviews. The survey, *Shaping Nigeria's Political Future: Women's Participation Matters (Research Survey 2026)* ran from 31 March to 28 September 2026 and produced an analytical sample of 2,810 respondents. The qualitative component comprised 20 individual participants across 18 interview sessions, including political actors, public officials, civil society practitioners, academics, researchers and policy consultants. All six geopolitical zones were represented in the interviews, although coverage was uneven.

The survey was promoted through LEAP Africa and partner networks, and respondents self-selected into it. It was an unweighted, non-probability sample, relatively young and highly educated, with uneven geographical coverage. It describes the views and self-reported participation of those who took part, not national prevalence. Interviews were purposively selected for depth and cannot establish how common an experience is across Nigeria.

Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, group comparisons and adjusted models; open-ended responses and interviews were analysed thematically. The survey and interview findings were interpreted alongside published research, which provides context but cannot turn associations into causes. The study exceeded its proposed survey sample and interview range, but did not achieve the planned 70% women respondents or equal zonal allocation. Political ambition, candidacy decisions, nomination outcomes, campaign expenditure and the incidence of political violence were not directly measured.

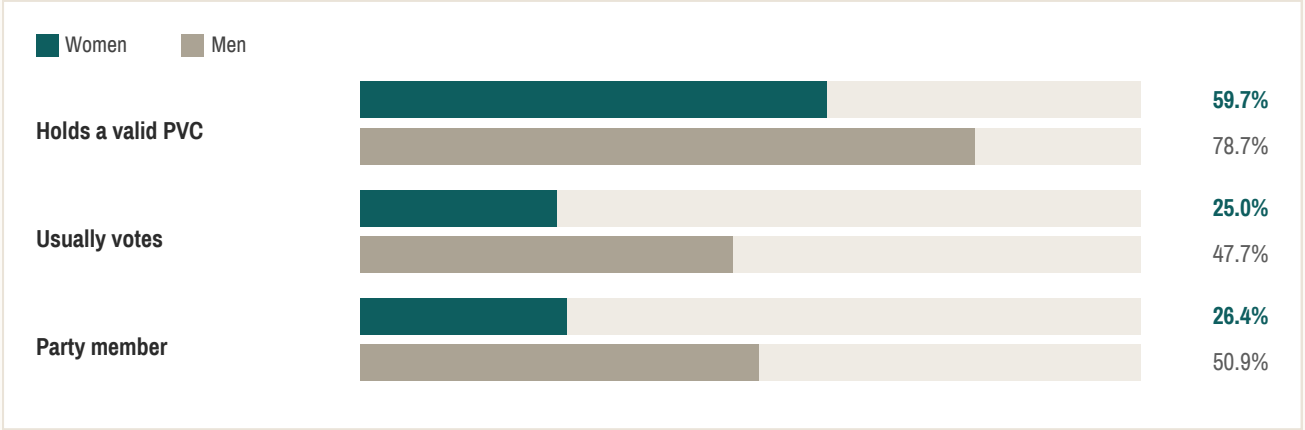
Principal findings

Unequal participation and very low representation

Within the survey sample, 68.6% held a valid Permanent Voter's Card (PVC), while 19.8% were registered but waiting to receive or collect one. Women respondents were less likely than men to hold a valid PVC (59.7% compared with 78.7%), to say that they usually voted (25% compared with 47.7%), or to report party membership (26.4% compared with 50.9%). These are sample findings, not national estimates. Among respondents who had voted never or only once and gave a reason, 53.3% cited lack of registration or access to a PVC; this rose to 64.4% among those aged 18 to 25.

FIGURE ES2

Registration, voting and party membership among women and men respondents



Interview participants described women as important contributors to grassroots mobilisation and campaign activity, but less influential in party leadership and candidate selection. The survey did not measure all forms of informal political work or candidacy. The interviews nevertheless illuminate a gap between women's political labour and their access to decisions about who contests elections and holds office.

Broad support, alongside continuing ambivalence

Attitudes towards women's political participation were generally supportive within the sample. The Attitudes towards Women's Political Participation Index averaged 4.13 on a five-point scale (n = 2,792); 68.3% scored at least 4.0. Support was strongest for voting for the most qualified woman (91.1%) and for women having the same chance as men to be elected (86.9%). Yet only 54.7% rejected the statement that men generally make better political leaders, while 29.4% agreed with it. Women's average attitude score was 4.40, compared with 3.85 among men (Cohen's d = 0.78). Men's average remained above the scale midpoint, so the findings do not support treating men as uniformly opposed to women's participation.

Interview accounts described how doubts about women's leadership can be reproduced through childhood socialisation, family expectations, care responsibilities, community judgement and reputational scrutiny. Participants also challenged restrictive cultural and religious interpretations. The survey found no clear adjusted relationship between attitude scores and respondents' PVC ownership, usual voting or party

membership. Because candidacy was not measured, the result leaves open whether attitudes influence electoral outcomes. It does caution against treating public support or attitude-change programmes as sufficient to secure equal political access.

Interconnected barriers and party gatekeeping

Four broad barrier domains emerged: socio-cultural expectations, economic and educational inequalities, institutional impediments, and political environment and safety. Institutional impediments received the highest average rating (4.18 out of 5). Some 82.6% agreed that parties rarely nominate women for winnable seats, and 89.2% agreed that party decisions are dominated by male elites. These are perceptions of party practice, not the findings of an audit of nomination records. Party members and non-members reported broadly similar concerns.

Parties control the formal route to candidacy through recruitment, nomination procedures and the allocation of tickets and campaign support. Interview participants described women's mobilisation work alongside limited access to party leadership, informal networks and selection decisions. Party gatekeeping is therefore a critical point at which wider inequalities can become unequal access to candidacy. How often exclusion is deliberate, and how often party actors frame decisions as judgements about electability, remains unknown.

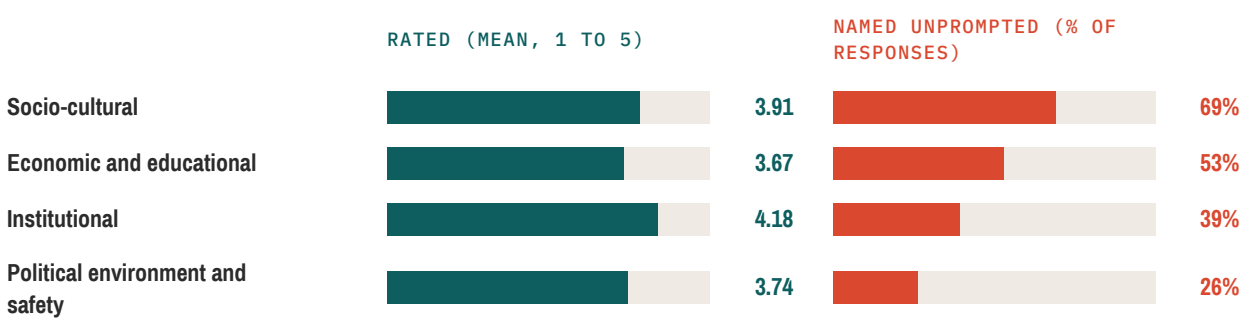
Financial constraints reinforce this barrier. The economic and educational score averaged 3.67, the lowest of the four domains, yet money was the most frequently named individual barrier in open-ended responses, appearing in 38% of coded responses about the biggest barriers. Respondents identified nomination fees, campaign costs and unequal access to resources. Interview accounts described informal payments, patronage, delegate-related costs and fee concessions used as leverage in particular cases. The study did not measure candidates' wealth or campaign expenditure and cannot quantify a gender gap in campaign finance. It does show how the cost of politics may influence who is regarded as viable and who can sustain a candidacy.

Socio-cultural expectations operate through family permission, unequal care responsibilities, party meeting schedules, assumptions about women's leadership and stigma directed at women in public political life. In the survey, 87.7% agreed that politics is still seen as a man's domain, and 79.7% that politically active women are judged harshly. Political insecurity adds another constraint: 79.9% expressed fear of harassment or intimidation during campaigns, and 70.1% agreed that online bullying discourages women from expressing political views. Interview participants described physical attacks and harassment, as well as reluctance to report incidents for fear of stigma or political consequences. Respondents' answers describe perceived risk and the interviews describe particular experiences, so neither shows how widespread violence is nationally or how far it deters candidacy.

The barriers reinforce one another. Social expectations can restrict access to networks; financial resources influence perceived electability; party structures determine whether political activity becomes a nomination; and insecurity raises the cost of visibility and contestation. They cannot be resolved adequately through isolated interventions.

FIGURE ES3

Four barriers: rated by respondents and named unprompted



Intersecting barriers, agency and enabling conditions

Interview accounts described women with disabilities facing assumptions about both gender and disability. One aspirant described a nomination-fee concession that changed when she sought to use it, illustrating how formal inclusion can fail through inconsistent implementation. This individual account is not evidence of prevalence, and the survey's disability subgroup was too small and non-random to support broad conclusions. Among survey respondents aged 18 to 25, 47.2% held a valid PVC and 72.6% agreed that online bullying discourages women from expressing political opinions. These findings point to the importance of accessible networks and safe opportunities for young women, but do not represent all young women in Nigeria.

Four illustrative accounts describe a legislator supported by practical mentorship and sponsorship; a woman with a disability navigating political aspiration and an uncertain fee concession; an aspirant whose experiences informed advocacy for reserved representation; and an advocate pursuing institutional change through legal, electoral and organisational routes. They show agency and collective action, but also the limits of individual resilience where party access, resources, safety and implementation remain unequal. They are illustrative, not representative pathways.

Respondents strongly supported potential enabling measures: agreement ranged from 88.3% for political finance reform to 92.2% for media visibility. Some 91.4% supported mentorship and leadership training, and 89.5% supported enforcing gender quotas. These are measures of endorsement, not proof of effectiveness. Interview participants valued mentorship most where it provided practical guidance, introductions and access to party processes.

A Nigerian experimental study found that advocacy training improved the quality and quantity of women's political participation, while sensitisation training for men improved attitudes but did not produce a comparable increase in women's participation during the period measured [27]. Comparative experience suggests that quotas can increase descriptive representation when rules, allocation and enforcement are credible, but numerical gains do not automatically guarantee substantive influence [7, 31].

What the findings mean

The central argument is that women's under-representation is a participation-to-power problem. Registration, voting, party membership, mobilisation, candidacy, election and influence are distinct stages. Progress at one does not guarantee progress at the next. Party gatekeeping is a critical conversion point because it is where social expectations, financial resources, informal networks and institutional rules shape who receives a nomination and the support needed to compete. It is not the only explanation: its effects are reinforced by unequal access to finance, care expectations, reputational sanctions, intimidation and weak enforcement of commitments.

The findings also show why descriptive representation and substantive influence must be considered separately. Increasing the number of women elected would address a major democratic deficit, but would not by itself ensure that women can shape party decisions, participate fully in legislative work or influence policy. Conversely, advocacy and technical participation can influence policy without conferring the authority of elected office. Meaningful inclusion requires fair access to political institutions and the ability to exercise influence within them.

Public support is an important enabling condition, but it has not translated into equal opportunity. The research brings together survey patterns, interview accounts and illustrative experiences to show how institutional, economic and social dimensions reinforce one another. It cannot trace a single causal pathway or measure the effects of specific reforms. Its conclusions remain proportionate to the non-probability survey, purposive interviews and supporting literature.

Priority recommendations

Nine priorities follow, sequenced by the earliest realistic point at which action can begin:

- **Close registration and PVC collection gaps.** The electoral management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), should use administrative data to identify gaps by age and gender, improve collection processes and work with women's and youth organisations to reach underserved groups, including persons with disabilities.

- **Make the 35% policy target accountable.** The responsible federal ministry should publish regular information on women's representation in elective and appointive positions and require institutions to explain persistent shortfalls.

- **Connect leadership development to practical support.** Civil society organisations and development partners should combine training and mentorship with transparent, tested assistance for nomination costs, transport, communications and campaign logistics.

- **Provide safe reporting routes.** Civil society organisations should strengthen confidential channels for documenting threats and harassment. Parties should adopt enforceable codes, investigation procedures and sanctions.

- **Make party nomination transparent.** Parties should publish timetables, eligibility rules, selection criteria, procedures, results and appeal routes, and report sex-disaggregated information on aspirants, nominees and candidates in winnable positions.

- **Redesign fee relief and address informal costs.** Parties should publish fee schedules and concession conditions, safeguard against coercion or forced withdrawal, and examine informal costs linked to delegate mobilisation and patronage.

- **Improve gender-responsive media practice.** Media organisations should promote substantive coverage of women candidates, train journalists and monitor gendered framing based on appearance, marital status or personal controversy.

- **Settle the design of reserved representation.** The National Assembly should lead consultation on legal options, allocation, the relationship between reserved and open seats, safeguards against elite capture, enforcement and substantive participation.

- **Engage men, communities and faith leaders.** Women's and civil society organisations should work with willing community, traditional and faith leaders to challenge restrictive expectations, without making women's participation conditional on permission or endorsement.

Responsibilities are distinct: electoral bodies should improve registration and voter access; government institutions should report against policy commitments; parties should reform candidate selection and protection; and the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly should consider required legal changes. Civil society and development partners can support aspirants and monitor institutions, while media, community and faith leaders can help widen public visibility and social legitimacy.

TABLE ES1

Where each stakeholder can start

Stakeholder	Most important actions
Political parties	Publish nomination rules and results; protect aspirants from forced withdrawal; redesign fee relief with safeguards; adopt codes with sanctions against violence
National Assembly	Settle the allocation, enforcement and framing of reserved seats; consider whether further disclosure or limits on nomination and campaign costs are appropriate through the relevant legal process
Federal gender ministry	Report regularly against the 35% target and require institutions to explain persistent shortfalls
Electoral management body	Close registration and card collection gaps, starting with young people and women
Civil society and development partners	Monitor nominations; rebalance support towards direct help and group mentorship; run confidential reporting of violence
Media, faith and traditional leaders	Gender-responsive coverage; engagement with leaders and men as allies, tested and monitored

No single intervention is sufficient. Training without practical access cannot remove nomination and campaign costs. Fee waivers without safeguards may create dependence. Visibility campaigns cannot secure a party ticket or protect women from abuse. Reserved representation without clear design and enforcement may reproduce elite control or fail to provide substantive influence. Progress requires practical support, institutional reform, protection and sustained social engagement.

Overall conclusion.

Improving women's political representation in Nigeria requires fairer access to candidacy, transparent and accountable party processes, resources that allow women to compete, protection from intimidation and institutions that honour their commitments. Women's agency, mentorship, advocacy and changing social expectations remain essential, but lasting progress depends on whether the political system enables women to enter, shape and exercise public authority.





CHAPTER 1

01 Introduction and Study Context

Women constitute about half of Nigeria's population but occupy only a small share of elected offices. This contrast raises a question that goes beyond the number of women who hold seats: how do social expectations, economic conditions, political institutions and the rules governing political competition shape women's opportunities to participate, secure candidacy and exercise political influence? This report examines the barriers that sustain the gap, the routes through which some women have made political breakthroughs, and the changes that could widen access to political life and decision-making.

Why women's representation matters

Women's presence in political institutions is widely recognised as an element of democratic legitimacy and inclusive governance [6, 7]. Representation matters because political institutions make decisions that affect the whole population. When women are persistently underrepresented, the composition of decision-making bodies does not adequately reflect the society over which those bodies exercise authority. The issue is therefore not confined to numerical balance. It concerns who has access to political influence, whose experiences inform public priorities, and whose interests are considered when policies and public resources are determined.

Research cited in the study associates women's leadership with greater attention to education, health and social equity, while also identifying the symbolic significance of women's visibility in positions of authority [6, 8]. Visible women leaders can challenge assumptions about who is qualified to lead and widen the range of political roles that girls and women consider possible. These effects should not be treated as automatic: the presence of women in office does not, by itself, guarantee that women's interests will be represented in policy. It does, however, create opportunities for both political influence and a broader public understanding of leadership.

International commitments have established equal participation in decision-making as a recognised objective. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goal 5 all affirm women's right to participate in public and political life [9, 10]. These commitments provide an important normative basis for reform, but they do not ensure that women can access the institutions in which political decisions are made. The persistence of unequal representation, despite decades of advocacy and formal commitments, points to the importance of examining the institutional and social conditions through which those commitments are, or are not, translated into practice.

Globally, women's share of seats in single or lower houses of parliament increased from 11% in 1995 to about 27% in 2024 [11]. The increase represents progress, but it also shows how slowly parliamentary representation has changed over a long period. The global figure further conceals substantial differences between countries and regions. It is against this uneven record that Nigeria's position needs to be understood: the question is not simply whether progress is occurring internationally, but why women's access to political office in Nigeria remains particularly limited and what forms of change could address the conditions sustaining

that outcome.

Nigeria's record

Nigeria remains near the bottom of international measures of women's political empowerment and parliamentary representation. The World Economic Forum ranked the country 136th of 146 countries on political empowerment in 2023 and 143rd of 144 countries in 2025 [3, 12]. Following the 2023 elections, the Inter-Parliamentary Union ranked Nigeria 181st of 186 countries for women's representation in national parliaments [4]. The National Gender Policy also cites an estimate that women hold approximately 6.7% of elective and appointive positions in Nigeria, compared with 22.5% globally, 23.4% across Africa and 15% in West Africa [1]. Taken together, these figures indicate a substantial gap between women's share of the population and their presence in formal political positions.**143**rd of 144 countries on women's political empowerment, 2025

The figures describe related but distinct measures. The international rankings concern political empowerment or women's representation in national parliaments, while the 6.7% estimate covers elective and appointive positions. They should therefore not be read as interchangeable measures or as if they share the same denominator. Their common significance is the scale of women's underrepresentation across political decision-making, rather than a claim that each statistic measures precisely the same institutional population.

The shortfall has persisted despite a formal policy commitment to greater inclusion. The National Gender Policy sets a target of 35% representation for women in appointive and elective positions, but the target is non-binding and has not been achieved [1, 2]. This gap between stated commitment and political outcomes is central to the study. It raises questions about the authority of policy targets, the incentives and obligations facing political parties and public institutions, and the practical barriers women encounter before and during political competition. A target can signal an agreed direction, but without effective implementation and accountability it may have limited influence over the decisions that determine who is recruited, nominated, supported and elected.

The study approaches this problem as the product of interacting constraints rather than a single obstacle. Socio-cultural expectations can shape whether women are encouraged to enter politics, how their ambitions are judged and how much time and mobility they can devote to political activity. Economic and educational inequalities affect access to the resources, networks and knowledge required to navigate political processes. Within political institutions, party structures, nomination practices and patronage relationships can influence which aspirants gain access to candidacy and campaign support. Violence, intimidation and harassment can further raise the personal and political costs of participation. These factors may reinforce one another: a woman's limited access to financial resources, for example, can become more consequential in a political environment where party access depends on established networks and costly competition.

These conditions do not mean that women are absent from political life or that political breakthroughs are impossible. Women participate in political and civic processes in different ways, and some have navigated constraints to secure office, influence public debate or advocate institutional change. The study therefore considers both exclusion and agency. Its purpose is not only to document the barriers that restrict women's political trajectories, but also to examine the enabling mechanisms and experiences that may offer practical

lessons for widening participation and improving representation.

Objectives and research questions

The study, *Women's Representation and Participation in the Political Process in Nigeria: Barriers and Breakthroughs*was designed by LEAP Africa to investigate the multi-level barriers that hinder women's participation and representation and to identify strategies and policy mechanisms that have enabled political breakthroughs, as set out in the study concept note. It is concerned with the conditions shaping women's political engagement as well as their access to leadership and decision-making positions. The study has three objectives:

- To analyse the socio-cultural, economic, educational and institutional barriers preventing women's full participation in Nigerian politics.
- To assess the breakthroughs and progress made in enhancing women's political representation and leadership at different levels of governance.
- To propose actionable policy recommendations for improving gender parity and inclusive political participation in Nigeria.

Five research questions guide the analysis. They connect the diagnosis of barriers with an examination of women's experiences, the conditions that have enabled progress and the reforms that may strengthen inclusion. The questions and the chapters in which they are principally addressed are set out in Table 1.1.

TABLE 1.1

Research questions and where they are addressed

No.	Research question	Where addressed
1	What are the major socio-cultural, economic, educational and institutional barriers that hinder women's political representation and participation in Nigeria?	Chapters 4, 5 and 7
2	What historical and social factors shape women's involvement in Nigeria's political process?	Chapters 3, 4 and 5
3	How have women navigated and overcome these barriers to achieve political breakthroughs?	Chapters 6 and 7
4	What lessons can be drawn from these experiences to inform future interventions and reforms?	Chapters 6 and 7

No.	Research question	Where addressed
5	What policies and institutional reforms are necessary to strengthen women's political representation and participation in Nigeria?	Chapters 6, 9 and 10

These questions are deliberately connected. Understanding the barriers requires attention to the historical and social context in which political participation takes place, as well as to the institutional processes that shape access to candidacy and office. Examining breakthroughs then makes it possible to consider how women have responded to those constraints and which forms of support or institutional change have helped. The final question moves from explanation to policy, while remaining grounded in the evidence generated by the study.

The Integrated Theory

The study is guided by the *Integrated Theory of Women's Political Participation and Representation in Nigeria*developed through a scoping review of relevant literature using the Gioia method [13]. The framework brings together socio-cultural, economic, political and institutional perspectives to explain how gendered constraints operate across different levels of political life. Its central proposition is that women's underrepresentation cannot be adequately explained by individual choices or a single institutional barrier. Rather, it emerges through the interaction of conditions that shape political ambition and readiness, access to party structures and resources, the ability to campaign and compete, and the extent to which women can exercise influence once represented.

The framework identifies three connected levels of influence. At the individual and community level, gendered socialisation and cultural expectations can discourage women from entering politics or constrain the time, mobility and public legitimacy available to them. These influences are not uniform or immutable. Political socialisation, participation in community life, exposure to role models and the accumulation of cultural and political knowledge can strengthen confidence and ambition. At the institutional level, political parties and electoral systems operate as gatekeepers: recruitment, nomination procedures, patronage networks and institutional practices can either open routes into political competition or reproduce existing inequalities. At the level of policy and wider systems, political violence and weak enforcement of gender commitments can discourage participation, while mechanisms such as quotas, mentorship and policy enforcement may help counter exclusion.

The theory also treats participation as a process rather than a single act. The political pathway begins with readiness and ambition, continues through recruitment and party nomination, and extends to campaigning and electoral contestation [14]. Barriers can arise at each stage and may accumulate as women move through the pathway. A woman may be interested in public service and active in her community but lack access to party networks; she may secure a nomination but be unable to mobilise the resources required to campaign; or she may contest an election in an environment marked by intimidation. Looking at the pathway as a whole helps distinguish participation in political life from access to formal candidacy and elected office.

Representation is understood in three related ways. *Descriptive representation* concerns women's numerical presence in political institutions. *Substantive representation* concerns whether and how women's interests are advanced through policy, advocacy and decision-making. *Symbolic representation* concerns the visibility of women in political roles and the meanings that their presence conveys about authority and leadership [15, 16]. These dimensions are connected, but they are not interchangeable. Increased numerical presence may create opportunities for substantive influence and symbolic change, yet neither outcome should be assumed without examining what women representatives are able to do and how political institutions respond to them.

Seven dimensions translate the theory into an analytical framework for the study. They shaped the survey and the interview guide and give the analysis a common structure (Table 1.2).

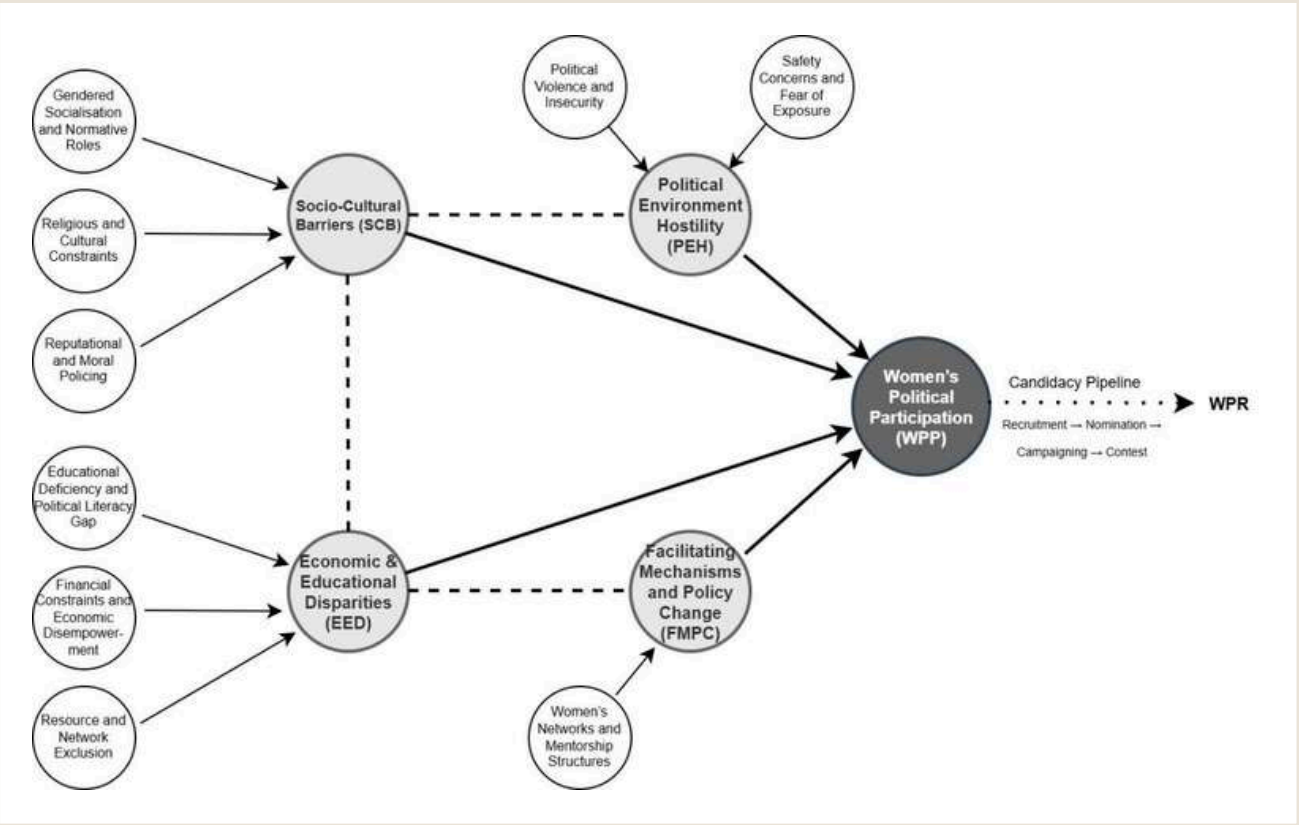
TABLE 1.2

The seven dimensions of the Integrated Theory

Code	Dimension	What it covers
SCB	Socio-cultural barriers	Gendered norms and roles, religious and cultural constraints, reputational and moral policing.
EED	Economic and educational disparities	Campaign and nomination costs, financial exclusion, education and political literacy.
PEH	Political environment hostility	Violence, intimidation, online abuse and safety concerns.
ISI	Institutional and structural impediments	Party gatekeeping, electoral system design and weak enforcement of gender rules.
FMPC	Facilitating mechanisms and policy change	Quotas, mentorship, targeted finance, advocacy and capacity building.
PIV	Policy impact and visibility	Women leaders' visibility, media representation and policy influence.
PSC	Political socialisation and cultural capital	Informal political discussion, community participation and endorsement by respected leaders.

FIGURE 1.1

The Integrated Theory: dimensions influencing women's political participation

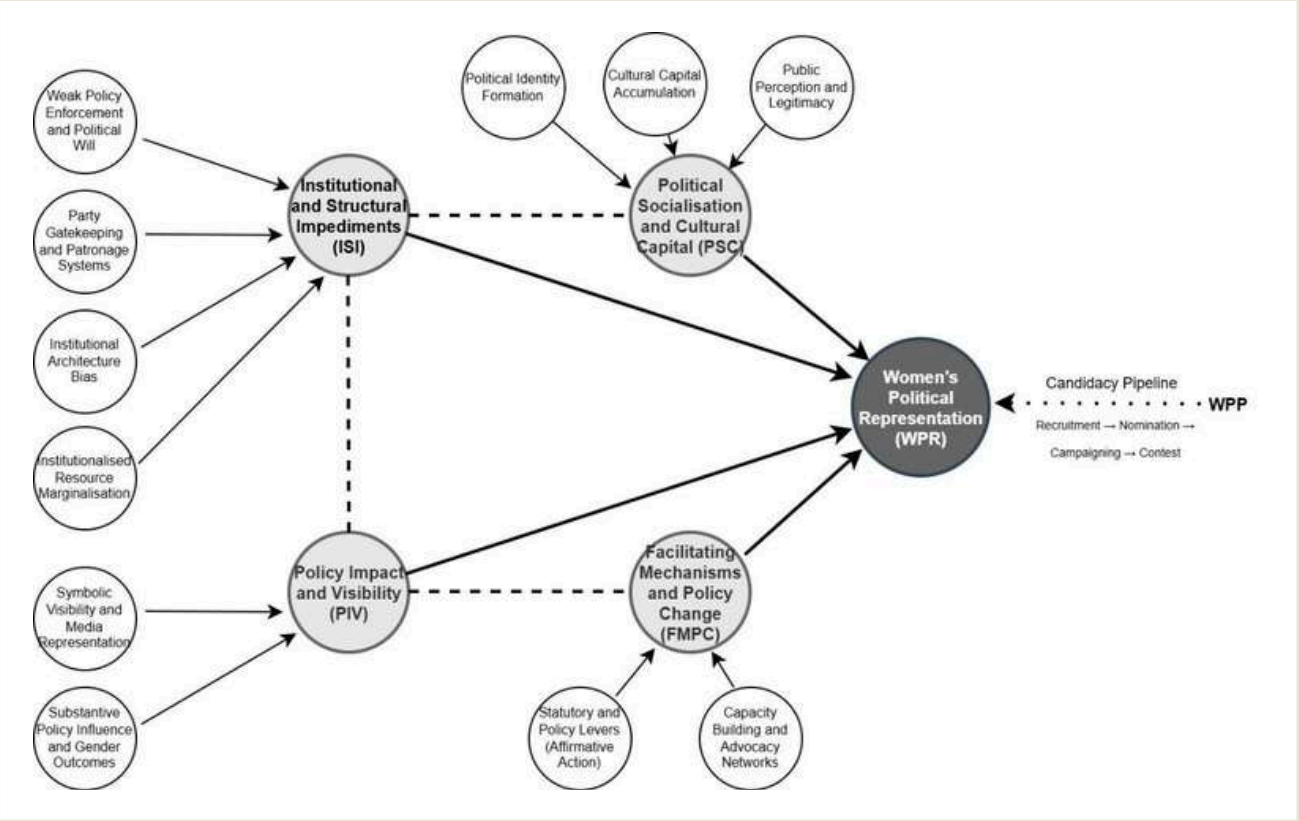


The two models show how the same political environment can shape both participation and representation, while drawing attention to different points in the process. Participation concerns the opportunities and constraints women encounter as they move towards and through political competition. Representation concerns their presence in decision-making institutions and the influence and public meaning associated with that presence. The distinction matters because improving one part of the pathway does not necessarily resolve barriers elsewhere. For example, increasing political awareness or training may strengthen readiness, but it cannot by itself remove party gatekeeping, financial barriers or threats to personal safety.

The framework is used as an organising and interpretive lens, not as a presumption that every dimension will have the same effect in every setting. The empirical chapters examine how the dimensions appear in the study evidence, how they interact and where enabling mechanisms may interrupt patterns of exclusion. Seven hypotheses derived from the theory in the study concept note are examined in Chapter 7. In this way, the framework connects the research questions to the design and interpretation of the study while allowing the evidence to refine, qualify or challenge the relationships proposed in the conceptual model.

FIGURE 1.2

The Integrated Theory: dimensions influencing women's political representation



Structure of the report

Chapter 2 sets out the methodology, including the study design, survey, key informant interviews, integration of the evidence, ethical considerations and limitations. Chapter 3 examines women's position in Nigerian politics and the patterns of participation and representation that provide the empirical context for the study. Chapter 4 considers attitudes towards women's political participation. Chapters 5 and 6 examine, respectively, the barriers women encounter and the conditions and mechanisms that have helped some women make political breakthroughs.

Chapter 7 brings the findings together, interprets their relationships and considers the Integrated Theory in light of the evidence. Chapter 8 presents illustrative accounts of women's experiences of participation, representation and advocacy, connecting individual experiences to the wider issues examined in earlier chapters. Chapter 9 draws the study's conclusions and identifies priorities for future research. Chapter 10 presents recommendations for change, organised around the actions and institutional responsibilities implicated by the findings.



CHAPTER 2

02 Methodology

The study combines a review of published research, a national online survey and in-depth interviews with informed stakeholders. This chapter describes the design as proposed and delivered, the evidence generated by each component, how the findings were brought together, and the limits within which they should be interpreted.

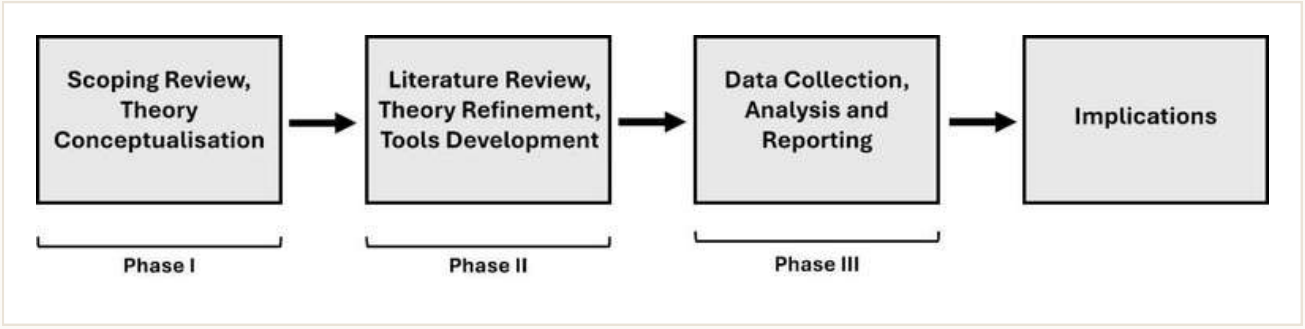
Design

The study was conceived as a mixed-methods inquiry into the barriers that shape women's political participation and representation in Nigeria and the conditions that may support political breakthroughs. The design envisaged a convergent parallel approach: quantitative and qualitative data would be collected in parallel, analysed separately and brought together at the interpretation stage. The completed study retained this broad logic. The survey and interviews were analysed as distinct evidence bases, and their findings were subsequently considered thematically alongside published research and policy documents.

The design therefore has three connected evidence components. First, a review of published research and policy documents provides historical, theoretical and comparative context. Second, the online survey describes the views and self-reported participation of the people who responded. Third, semi-structured key informant interviews provide contextual accounts from people with relevant political, public-sector, civil-society and research experience. The components address related questions, but they do not measure the same things and should not be treated as interchangeable.

FIGURE 2.1

Research phases of the study



The design brought together a review of published research and policy documents, an online survey and key informant interviews. The survey and interview evidence were analysed separately before the findings were considered together thematically.

The survey, *Shaping Nigeria's Political Future: Women's Participation Matters (Research Survey 2026)* collected responses between 31 March and 28 September 2026. The analysed sample comprised 2,810 respondents. The interviews comprised 18 sessions involving 20 individual participants. These are the achieved outputs and are the basis for the methodological account in this chapter.

Published research and policy documents are used throughout to situate the empirical findings, identify relevant concepts and provide comparative context, but they are not treated as a third fieldwork sample. Likewise, the survey and interviews are not presented as independently representative measures of the same population: the survey is a non-probability online sample, while the interviews are purposively selected accounts intended to provide depth and explanation.

The survey

The quantitative component was administered online. People chose to participate after the survey was promoted through LEAP Africa and partner networks. The achieved sample is therefore a non-probability sample of self-selecting respondents, rather than a probability sample drawn from a national sampling frame. Although the survey was intended to reach respondents across all six geopolitical zones and to include substantial participation by women, the realised sample did not achieve the gender balance or equal zonal distribution originally proposed. The size of the achieved sample does not remove these limitations.

The questionnaire covered respondents' characteristics and their political participation, including voter registration, voting history and party membership. It also asked about attitudes towards women's political participation; perceived socio-cultural, economic and educational, political-environment and safety, and institutional barriers; views on enabling mechanisms and policy change; visibility and policy impact; and political socialisation. Three open-ended questions invited respondents to describe cultural or social beliefs, identify the biggest barriers, and suggest steps that could increase women's representation.

Most attitudinal items used a five-point agreement scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Related items were combined into eight composite scores, calculated as the mean of the relevant items. The scores covered attitudes towards women's political participation (AWPPI), socio-cultural barriers (SCB), economic and educational barriers (EED), political environment and safety (PEH), institutional impediments (ISI), enabling mechanisms (FMPC), visibility and policy impact (PIV), and socialisation and cultural capital (PSC). Higher scores indicate more supportive attitudes for the AWPPI, stronger perceived barriers for the four barrier scores, and stronger agreement for the enabling, visibility and socialisation scores. The negatively worded attitudes item stating that men generally make better political leaders was reverse-scored. A score was calculated where no more than one item was missing, or no more than two items for the eight-item attitudes index.

TABLE 2.1

Composite scores used in the survey analysis

Composite score	Items	Valid responses	Mean (SD)	Meaning of a higher score
Attitudes towards women's political participation (AWPPI)	8	2,792	4.13 (0.75)	More supportive attitudes
Socio-cultural barriers (SCB)	5	2,785	3.91 (0.81)	Stronger perceived barriers

Composite score	Items	Valid responses	Mean (SD)	Meaning of a higher score
Economic and educational barriers (EED)	3	2,798	3.67 (1.01)	Stronger perceived barriers
Political environment and safety (PEH)	4	2,794	3.74 (0.91)	Stronger perceived barriers
Institutional impediments (ISI)	4	2,798	4.18 (0.76)	Stronger perceived barriers
Enabling mechanisms (FMPC)	5	2,786	4.33 (0.70)	Stronger agreement
Visibility and policy impact (PIV)	3	2,804	4.37 (0.75)	Stronger agreement
Socialisation and cultural capital (PSC)	3	2,801	4.33 (0.73)	Stronger agreement

Achieved sample and respondent profile

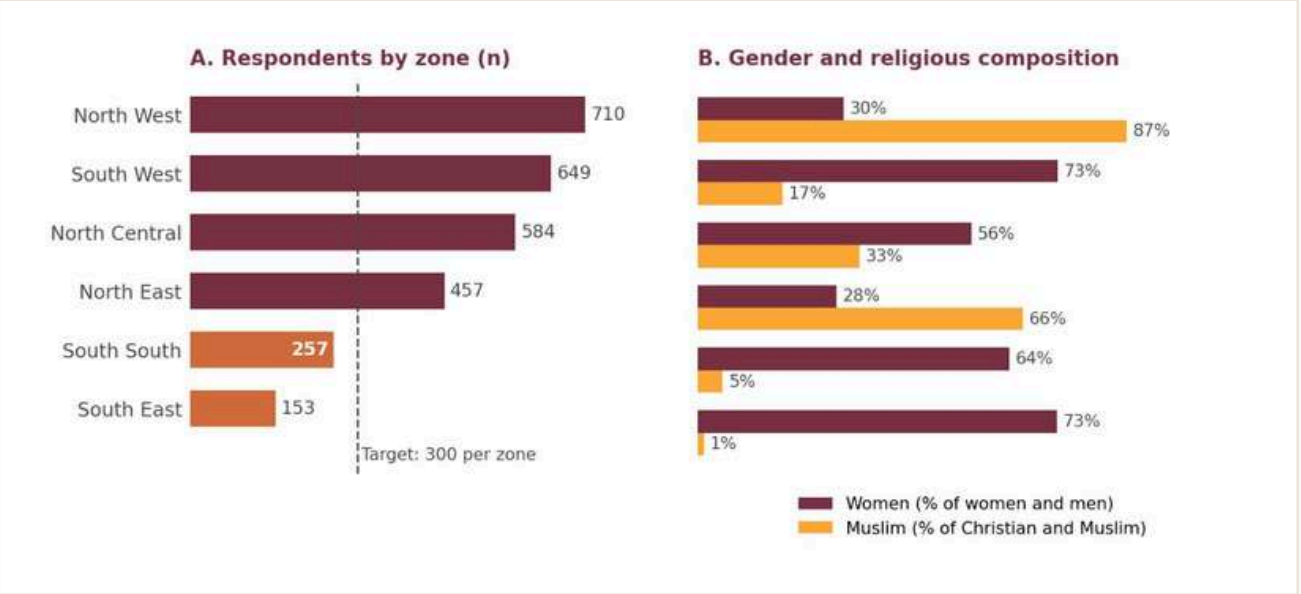
The survey generated 3,224 raw records. After 354 incomplete records and 60 duplicate respondents were removed, the final analytical dataset contained 2,810 respondents. Duplicates were identified through phone number or email matching, including Gmail dot and plus variants. All respondents in the final analytical dataset had consented and were aged 18 or above. The dataset was not weighted, and no further respondents were excluded from the final analytical file.

The achieved sample was relatively balanced by gender: 50.4% of respondents were women and 49.5% were men. It was concentrated among younger and highly educated respondents. Those aged 26 to 35 accounted for 52.1%, and those aged 18 to 25 for 32.5%, meaning that 84.6% were aged 35 or younger. A total of 70.5% held at least a bachelor's degree. Christian respondents accounted for 55.2% and Muslim respondents for 44.1%. Respondents were also concentrated in civil society organisations (25.8%) and education (21.4%).

Coverage extended across all six geopolitical zones but was uneven. The North West contributed 710 respondents, the South West 649, North Central 584, North East 457, South South 257 and South East 153. The gender and religious composition also differed across zones. These differences matter when interpreting comparisons: an apparent zonal difference may partly reflect the characteristics of the people who responded in each zone. The analysis therefore uses adjusted estimates where available, while the underlying sample remains uneven and non-representative.

FIGURE 2.2

Respondents by zone, and the gender and religious composition of each zone



Data analysis

Descriptive statistics are reported using the valid responses to each question as the denominator, with the relevant base stated alongside results. Composite scores are summarised using means, standard deviations, medians and the proportion scoring 4.0 or above. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, calculated among respondents who answered every item in the relevant score. The analysis also reports corrected item-total correlations and mean inter-item correlations.

Group comparisons used rank-based tests: the Mann-Whitney U test for two groups and the Kruskal-Wallis test for more than two groups. Effect sizes were reported using rank-biserial correlation and epsilon-squared, respectively. Mean differences were also reported with Welch 95% confidence intervals and Cohen's d where relevant. Chi-square tests with Cramér's V were used to compare agreement shares, and McNemar's test was used for paired items. Comparisons involving groups with fewer than 30 respondents were not made. To account for multiple testing, p-values were adjusted using the Holm procedure within each family of comparisons.

Adjusted analyses used ordinary least squares models with HC3 robust standard errors for composite scores, and logistic regression for participation outcomes. The first adjustment model included gender, age group, education, location, religion, disability and geopolitical zone. A second model added registration, party membership and voting history. Spearman correlations, with Bonett and Wright confidence intervals, were used to examine relationships between scores. The analysis places emphasis on the size and substantive importance of associations, rather than statistical significance alone. These procedures identify patterns of association and cannot show cause.

The three open-ended questions were analysed using a hybrid deductive and inductive coding framework. The framework was informed by the study's conceptual dimensions and refined through reading the responses. Coding rules and validation procedures were documented. The final validation sample comprised 120 randomly selected responses and produced precision of 0.84 and recall of 0.87. Because a response could be assigned more than one theme, theme percentages are not mutually exclusive. These percentages are approximate, reflecting the coding process and the nature of open-ended responses.

Statistical analysis was conducted using Python, including numpy, scipy 1.17.1 and statsmodels 0.15.0. Results were checked by recomputation from the original survey labels using separate code, and figures were reconciled with the analysis workbook.

Key informant interviews

The qualitative component used semi-structured key informant interviews to examine social norms, institutional dynamics, political processes and policy implementation issues that a structured survey could not explore in comparable depth. The interview guide was organised around the study's main thematic areas: socio-cultural barriers; economic and educational disparities; the political environment; institutional and structural impediments; and facilitating mechanisms and policy change. The semi-structured format allowed interviewers to pursue relevant examples and emerging issues while retaining a common thematic focus.

Participants were selected purposively on the basis of their expertise and their relevance to the study, with attention to coverage across the six geopolitical zones. The interview evidence comprised 18 sessions involving 20 individual participants. Two sessions were conducted jointly with two participants on the same call; each participant's evidence was retained and attributed separately in the analysis. The participant group comprised 15 women and five men. By stakeholder category, it included three political actors with legislative or candidacy experience, two public officials, ten civil society participants working across democracy, governance, women's advocacy, and disability and gender inclusion, and five academics, researchers or policy consultants. All six zones were represented, although coverage was uneven, and the zone was not recorded for two participants.

Interviews were conducted remotely. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. In one case, technical circumstances meant that no audio recording was available, and the analysis relied on the interviewer's session notes. Two jointly conducted sessions were affected in part by connectivity disruption or scheduling constraints, meaning that not all planned questions could be addressed. The interview findings are interpreted with these constraints in mind.

Analysis of interview evidence

Each interview was first analysed individually, producing a structured record of thematic findings and illustrative quotations. Evidence across interviews was then consolidated and coded to identify recurring themes and sub-themes, while retaining genuine differences and contradictions rather than forcing a single account. The consolidated material was examined across cases to identify mechanisms, differences by stakeholder and gender, and relationships between major findings. This process produced the study's thematic findings from the interviews.

Interpretation was not based on the frequency of mention alone. Findings were considered in light of recurrence, the diversity of participants supporting them, geographic breadth, specificity, consistency, relevance to the research questions and analytical significance. A point raised by a small number of participants could therefore be retained where it illuminated a relevant mechanism or institutional dynamic. Where a finding rests on limited testimony, its evidential basis needs to remain visible in the interpretation. Quotations are attributed by gender and broad stakeholder category, without initials or identifying details, and are lightly edited for readability where indicated.

Bringing the findings together

The survey and interview components were analysed separately before their findings were mapped by theme alongside the published research and policy evidence. The purpose of this synthesis was to examine what each source contributes to the research questions, not to treat one method as a test that confirms the other. The relationship between sources was classified in the integrated analysis as converging, complementary, divergent, specific to one source, or insufficient to support a firm conclusion.

This approach recognises the different evidential reach of the components. The survey describes the attitudes, perceptions and self-reported participation of its respondents. It can indicate how common a view was within this sample, but it cannot establish the prevalence of barriers across Nigeria or explain the mechanisms that produced a pattern. Interview accounts can illuminate experiences, institutional practices and possible mechanisms, but the purposive sample cannot establish how widely a view is held. Published research and policy documents provide historical and comparative context, but their findings must be interpreted in relation to their own settings and methods.

Three interpretive principles guide the synthesis. First, interview accounts are not treated as measures of prevalence, and survey percentages are not used on their own to explain mechanisms. Second, differences between sources are reported and examined rather than smoothed over. Third, agreement between sources is described as convergence or consistency in the evidence, not as proof of causation. In this sense, integration strengthens the breadth and contextual interpretation of the findings without claiming statistical representativeness, causal validation or independent verification that the design cannot provide.

Validation of Findings

The draft study findings were presented and discussed during a virtual validation session held on 19 November 2026, with 28 participants in attendance. The session provided an opportunity for participants to share feedback and observations on the findings.

Ethics and data protection

Survey respondents and interview participants gave informed consent, either in writing or verbally, after being told the aims of the study. Participants were informed of their right to decline questions or withdraw from participation. Interviewers explained the voluntary nature of participation and the right to stop an interview at any point before obtaining consent to proceed.

Data collection and processing were conducted in accordance with the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 [17]. Participants' confidentiality is protected: initials and identifying details are omitted, and quotations are attributed only by gender and broad stakeholder category. Sensitive material, including allegations and accounts relating to political violence or discrimination, was handled with care; allegations that could not be verified are not reproduced. A separate institutional ethics approval is not claimed.

Study design as planned and as delivered

The completed study differed from the original design in several important respects. The survey exceeded its proposed overall sample target, but did not achieve the planned proportion of women or equal allocation across the six zones. The number of interview participants exceeded the proposed range. The implications of these differences are important: the study draws on survey perceptions, interview accounts and published research.

TABLE 2.2

The study as planned and as delivered

Element	Originally planned	Delivered
Survey respondents	Approximately 1,800	2,810 respondents, collected between 31 March and 28 September 2026
Women among survey respondents	Approximately 70%	50.4%
Respondents by geopolitical zone	300 in each of the six zones	North West 710; South West 649; North Central 584; North East 457; South South 257; South East 153
Pilot survey	20 respondents	33 respondents in the pilot phase; excluding them changed no composite mean materially
Key informant interviews	10 to 15 interviews	20 individual participants across 18 sessions

Basis: the study's original design and completed research activities.

A sensitivity check found that excluding the 33 pilot respondents changed no composite mean by more than 0.00 points at the reported precision. The final analysis therefore retained the pilot respondents. The check concerns the effect of the pilot respondents on the results, not whether the pilot followed every validation procedure originally envisaged in the study design.

Limitations of the study design

The findings need to be interpreted in light of the different limitations of each evidence component. The survey's principal limitation is its non-probability, self-selected online design. Respondents chose to participate after promotion through LEAP Africa and partner networks, and the sample is relatively young, highly educated and concentrated among civil society and education workers. Results are unweighted descriptions of the 2,810 respondents and are not national estimates. The uneven distribution across zones and between women and men, together with the overlap between gender, religion and zone, also means that raw group differences may partly reflect sample composition. Adjusted estimates are used where available, but they do not convert the sample into a representative one.

Survey measures of registration, voting and party membership are self-reported. Voting history covers a ten-year period, making age an important consideration when interpreting reported voting patterns. The survey measures perceptions and respondents' own participation; it does not measure political ambition, candidacy, perceived access to political opportunity, or respondents' own experience of violence or harassment. It is cross-sectional and cannot show change over time. Associations between characteristics and outcomes should therefore not be interpreted as causal effects. The open-ended responses were coded by one analyst using a documented framework and checked against manual coding of a fresh sample. Theme percentages remain approximate and should be read with this limitation in mind.

The interviews provide depth and contextual explanation, not statistical prevalence. The 20 participants were purposively selected and cannot be assumed to represent the views of Nigerian women, political stakeholders or the wider population. Geographic coverage was uneven, the zone was not recorded for two participants, and the number of political actors, public officials and men was limited. Some accounts therefore rest on a small number of participants.

The study has a more limited basis for tracing individual political pathways and the specific processes through which women have reached elected office. The relevant discussion draws instead on interview accounts and published research, and should be understood within those evidential limits. Finally, comparative examples from other countries arise from political systems that differ from Nigeria's electoral system, party structures and federal arrangements. They can inform questions about design and implementation, but cannot by themselves establish which reforms would produce the same effects in Nigeria.

How to read the evidence.

The survey is strongest when describing the views and self-reported participation of its respondents; the interviews are strongest when illuminating context, experience and possible mechanisms; and the literature review provides historical and comparative framing. None of these components, alone or in combination, makes the survey nationally representative or establishes causal effects. Conclusions drawn from the study should remain proportionate to these distinct contributions.





CHAPTER 3

03 Where Women Stand in Nigerian Politics

Women's share of political office has barely moved since the return to civilian rule in 1999. The participation gap begins earlier, in access to voter registration and regular voting, and widens further where political parties determine who can contest and lead.

A history of uneven inclusion

Women's political participation in Nigeria has a longer and more varied history than contemporary patterns of exclusion might suggest. In several pre-colonial societies, women exercised recognised forms of political authority. Among the Igbo, for example, dual-sex political systems provided women with their own assemblies and offices alongside male institutions [18]. This history does not imply that women enjoyed equal power in every community or period. It does, however, caution against treating women's exclusion from formal political leadership as an unchanging feature of Nigerian society.

Two participants in this study drew on pre-colonial examples to question the assumption that leadership has always been understood as a male role. They argued that colonial administration and subsequent religious and social influences helped reshape political authority and the place of women within it. Their accounts are consistent with historical scholarship documenting women's political organisation and participation, while also illustrating that contemporary understandings of tradition are open to interpretation. The historical record is therefore relevant not simply as background, but because it shows that the boundaries of women's political authority have changed over time [18].

Formal political rights were extended unevenly across the country. Women in the South gained the franchise during the 1950s, while women in the North did not obtain the right to vote and stand for election until 1976 [19, 20]. The first woman entered the federal parliament in 1960 [20]. These milestones marked important changes in legal and institutional access, but they did not produce a consistent path towards equal representation. The period of military rule brought further restrictions on democratic participation. A directive in the early 1980s requiring at least one woman on each state executive council represented a formal measure of inclusion, even as women remained largely absent from the highest military decision-making bodies [20].

The return to civilian government in 1999 created an opportunity to deepen democratic inclusion. The National Gender Policy, adopted in 2006, subsequently set a 35% affirmative action target for women's representation in appointive and elective positions [2, 20]. The target established a national policy benchmark, but it was not a binding electoral quota and has not been achieved. The distance between this stated commitment and the distribution of elected office is evident in the record of successive elections.

A share of seats that has stayed in single digits

Women's representation in the National Assembly has remained in single digits in every election cycle since 1999. In the first election after the return to civilian rule, women won three of 109 Senate seats and 12 of 360 House of Representatives seats. Representation improved in the following cycles, reaching its strongest point in 2007 in the period covered by the historical series: nine Senate seats, or 8.3%, and 25 House seats, or 7.0%

[2]. The gains were not sustained. The figures for 2011 and 2015 show a decline or stagnation rather than a steady progression towards parity.

FIGURE 3.1

Women in the National Assembly by election cycle, 1999 to 2015

World Ranking	House of Representatives				Senate			
	Elections	Seats	Women	%	Elections	Seats	Women	%
181	03.2015	360	20	5.6	03.2015	109	7	6.5
125	04.2011	360	24	6.8	04.2011	109	7	6.4
117	04.2007	360	25	7.0	04.2007	109	9	8.3
107	04.2003	360	17	4.9	04.2003	109	3	2.8
104	02.1999	360	12	3.4	02.1999	109	3	2.8

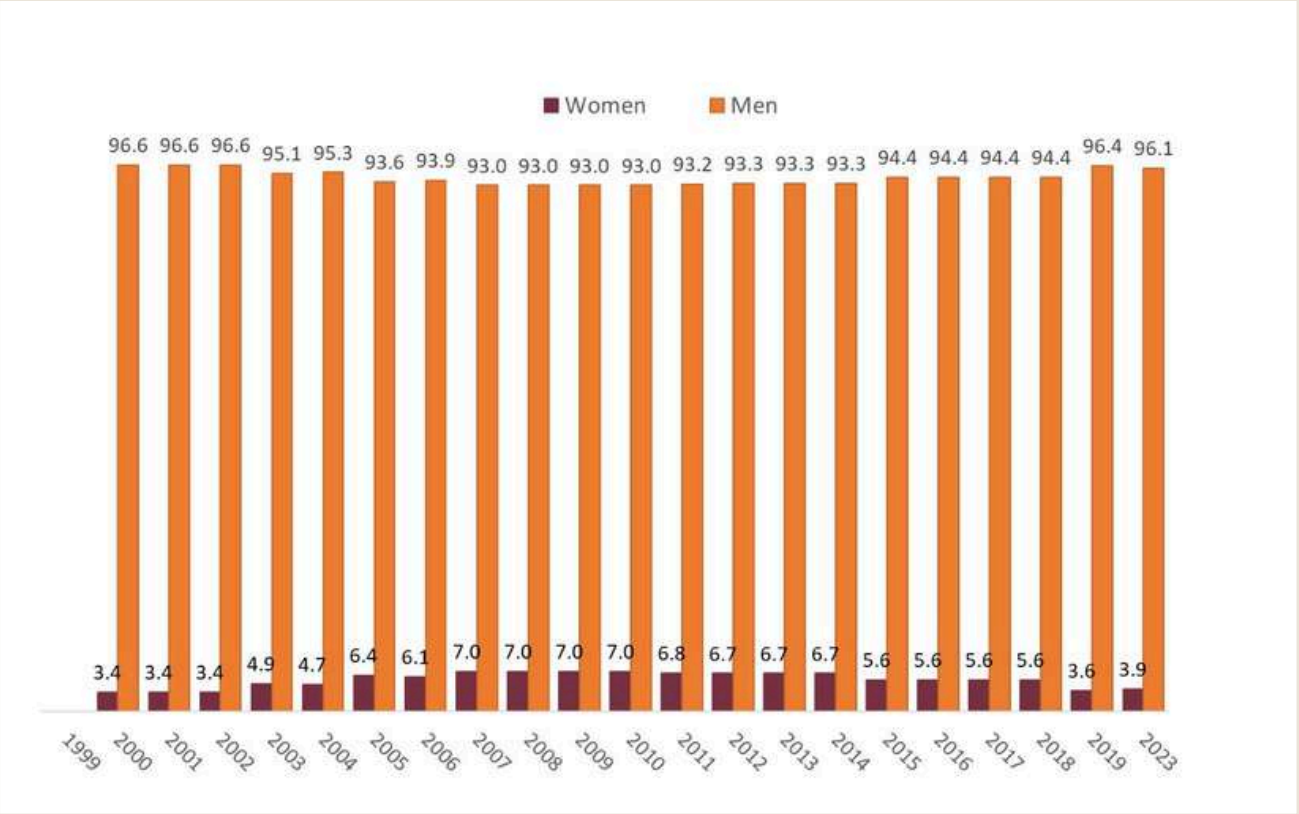
Source: Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre [2], Table 1.

The longer series through 2023 reinforces the same pattern. In the House of Representatives, women's share rose from 3.4% in 1999 to around 7% in 2007 and then fell, reaching 3.9% in the 2023 series. In the Senate, women's share rose to 8.3% in 2007, remained below that level in subsequent cycles and fell to 2.8% in 2023 [22]. These figures show that the modest gains of the 2000s did not become a durable expansion of women's representation.



FIGURE 3.2

Women and men in the House of Representatives, 1999 to 2023 (percentage of seats)



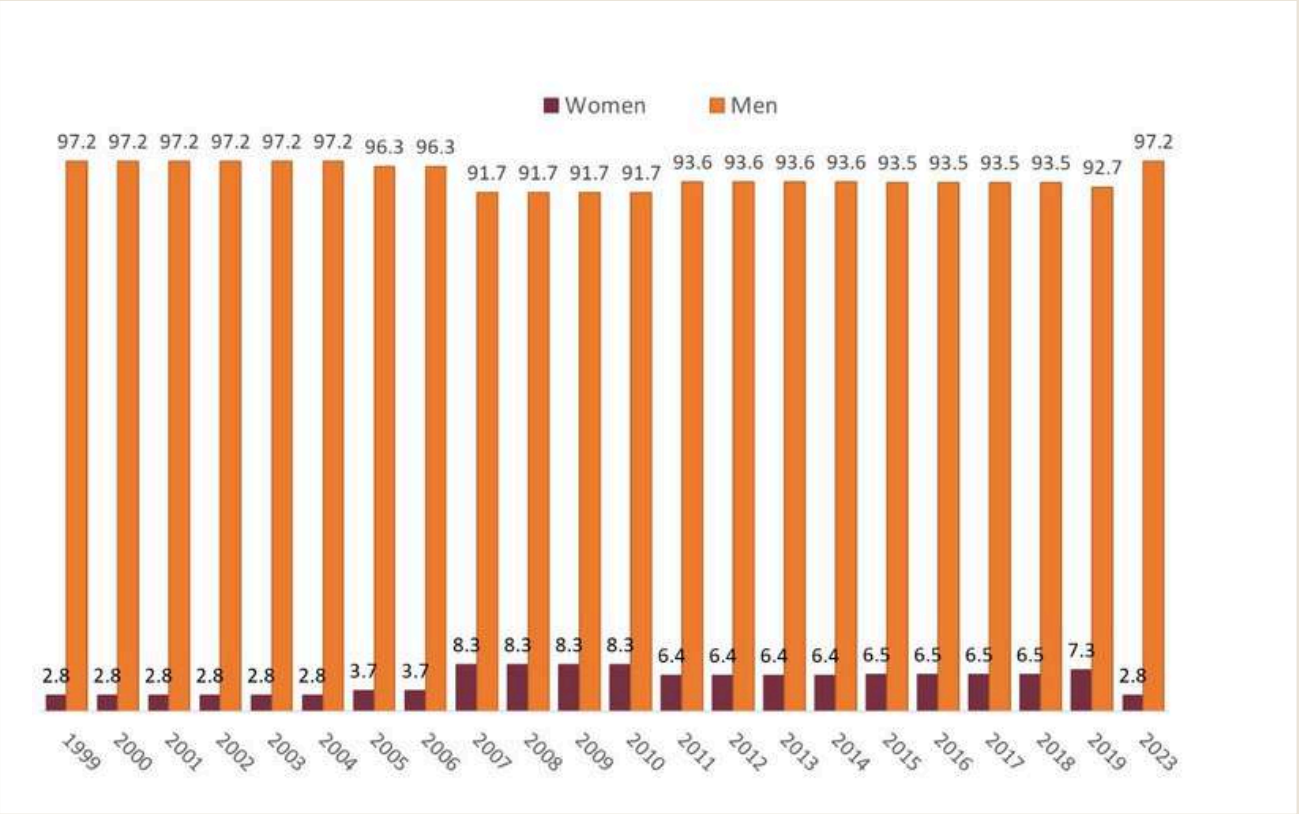
Source: adapted from Okedele [22]. Percentages are women's share of seats in the House of Representatives.

Following the 2023 elections, the available counts place women's representation in the National Assembly at approximately 20 of 469 seats, or about 4%. The underlying counts vary slightly across sources and reporting dates, with estimates ranging from three to four women senators and 16 to 17 women in the House of Representatives [4, 5, 22]. The precise count should therefore be read with its source and date in view; the difference does not alter the broader finding of very low representation. The Inter-Parliamentary Union ranked Nigeria 181st of 186 countries for women's representation in national parliaments in its December 2023 ranking [4].

The pattern extends beyond the federal legislature. During the 2019 to 2023 cycle, women held around 50 of approximately 990 seats in state Houses of Assembly, or about 5%. More than a dozen state assemblies had no women members. The evidence also points to particularly low representation in parts of the North: no woman had been elected to the Kano State House of Assembly, while 17 northern states elected no women after the 2019 elections [23, 24]. Nigeria has not elected a woman president, vice-president or state governor since the return to civilian rule in 1999 [21].

FIGURE 3.3

Women and men in the Senate, 1999 to 2023 (percentage of seats)



Source: adapted from Okedele [22]. Percentages are women's share of seats in the Senate.

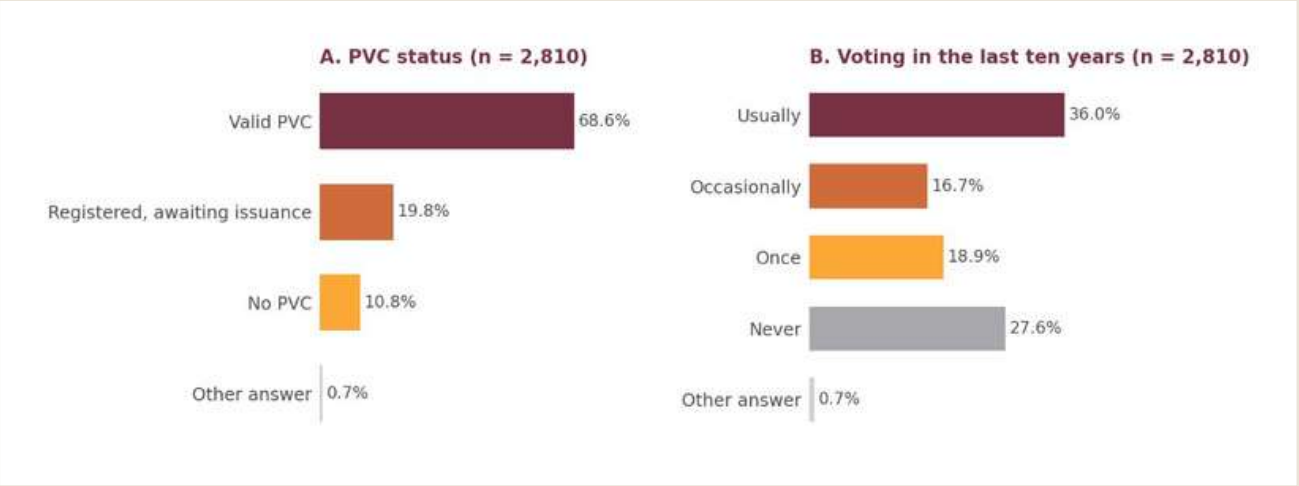
These figures describe different institutions and periods and should not be collapsed into a single representation rate. National Assembly seat counts measure elected federal legislators; state assembly figures describe a separate tier of elected office; and broader national estimates may include appointive positions as well as elected ones. The distinction matters because interview participants noted that women's presence in appointive positions has, in some periods, improved more than their representation in elected office. An increase in appointments therefore cannot be taken as evidence that access to electoral competition or party leadership has improved to the same extent.

Participation begins with registration

The gap in political participation is visible before the point of candidacy. The survey of 2,810 respondents asked about Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) status, voting over the previous ten years and party membership. It found that 68.6% held a valid PVC, 19.8% were registered but waiting to receive or collect a card, and 10.8% had no PVC. On voting history, 36.0% said they usually voted, 16.7% voted occasionally, 18.9% had voted once and 27.6% had never voted.**53.3%**cite no PVC or registration as the main reason for not voting

FIGURE 3.4

PVC status and voting history over the previous ten years



Registration status and voting history were closely associated within the sample. Among respondents with a valid PVC, 49.7% usually voted and 7.5% had never voted. Among those awaiting a PVC or without one, 72.1% had never voted. Card access may not be the only influence on voting behaviour, but the association shows that registration, and the practical completion of the registration process, are important points in the participation pathway.

Respondents who had voted never or only once were asked to identify their main reason. Of the 1,191 who provided a reason, 53.3% cited not being registered or not having a PVC. This was more than three times the proportion who cited security concerns or fear of violence, at 16.5%. Transport or distance to a polling station, work or family commitments, disillusionment with politics or candidates, and lack of information were each cited less often. Registration was named more frequently by the youngest respondents: 64.4% of those aged 18 to 25, compared with 42.1% of those aged 26 to 35. Security concerns were cited more often in the North East and North West than in the South South. These are respondents' stated reasons, not tested explanations of what would change their behaviour.

Gender differences were pronounced across the three participation measures. Among women respondents, 59.7% held a valid PVC, compared with 78.7% of men. A quarter of women said they usually voted, compared with 47.7% of men. Party membership was reported by 26.4% of women and 50.9% of men. Men were ahead on all three measures in each geopolitical zone represented in the sample. After adjustment for age, education, location, religion, disability and zone, the odds for men remained higher than for women: 2.05 times for holding a valid PVC, 2.26 times for usually voting and 2.14 times for party membership.

FIGURE 3.5

Main stated reason for not voting, among respondents who had voted never or once

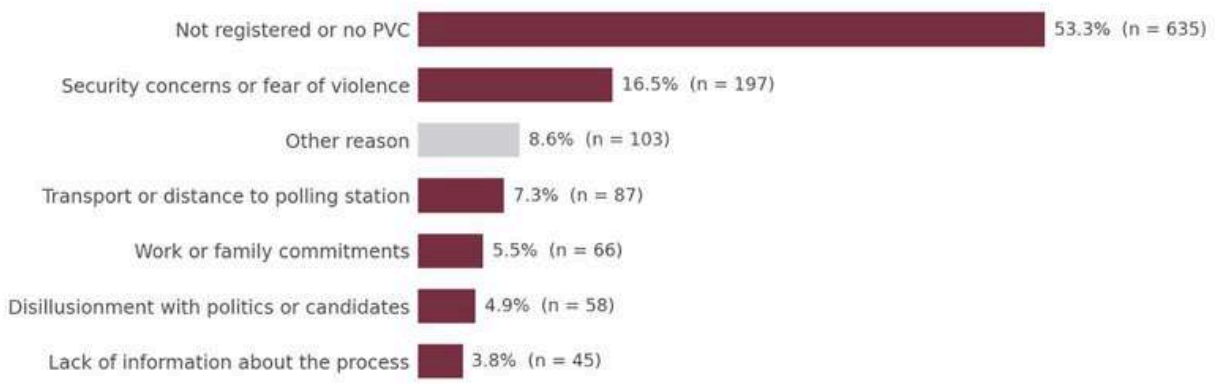
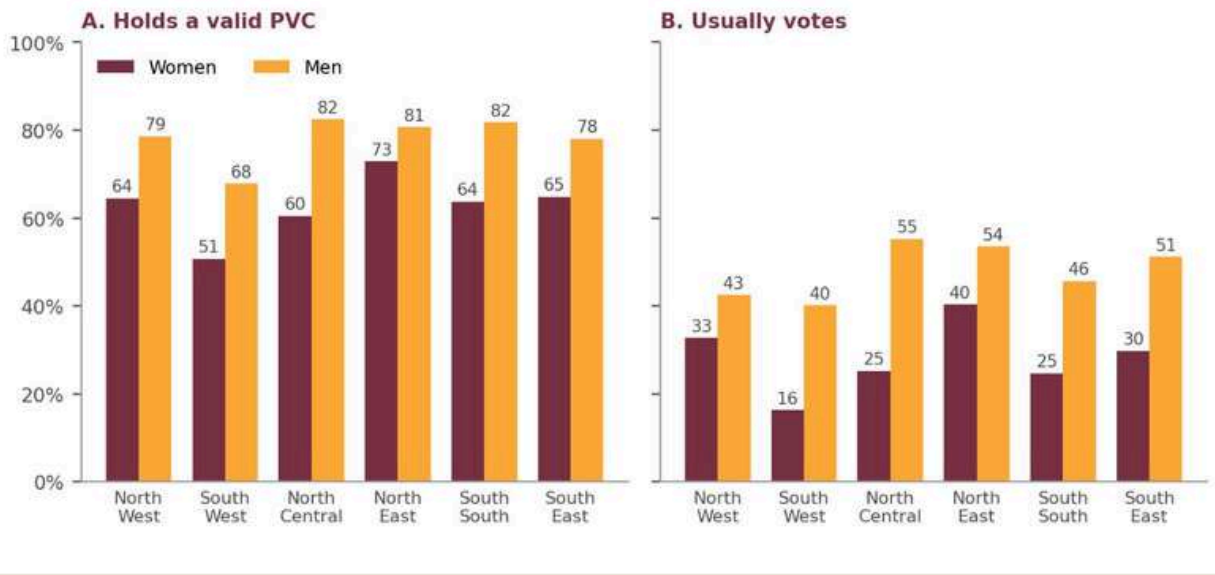


FIGURE 3.6

Valid PVC and usual voting among women and men, by geopolitical zone



Age is also relevant to participation. Only 47.2% of respondents aged 18 to 25 held a valid PVC, compared with 78.8% of those aged 26 to 35. The difference partly reflects the fact that the youngest group has had fewer opportunities to vote, and should not be interpreted solely as disengagement. Across the full sample, 38.5% reported some form of party membership: 21.9% described themselves as formal members and 16.7% as informal members. The gender gap in party membership suggests that women's participation is not only lower at the ballot box but also within the formal and informal structures through which parties organise political activity.

These findings need to be interpreted within the survey's design. Respondents self-selected into an online survey promoted through LEAP Africa and partner networks. The sample is young, highly educated and unevenly distributed across geopolitical zones; the results are unweighted and are not national prevalence estimates. They describe the experiences and views of the respondents who took part. The size of the sample allows detailed comparisons within it, but does not remove the limitations associated with non-probability recruitment.

Participation without power

Formal participation is only one part of political engagement. The survey measured voter registration, voting history and party membership, but it did not measure the extent of women's campaign work, grassroots mobilisation, informal political organising or influence within party structures. The interviews provide a different view of this part of the political process. Participants from civil society, political and academic backgrounds described women as central to grassroots mobilisation, campaign activity and voter turnout, while access to party leadership and candidacy remained restricted.

> *"If you check women, they are only being used as a grassroots mobilisation. But when you come to leadership, they don't give chance to the women for them to participate."*
>
> **Man, civil society participant**

> *"You are not even being given the opportunity to be in the box ring. How do you want to fight?"*
>
> **Woman, political actor**

Other participants described women as being used and then discarded, or questioned whether the visibility attached to mobilisation amounted to meaningful participation. The consistency of these accounts across stakeholder backgrounds and four of the six geopolitical zones represented in the interviews gives the pattern analytical weight. How frequently this experience occurs across Nigeria cannot be judged from a purposively selected sample that was not designed to be statistically representative, but the accounts do show how engagement can be separated from access to decision-making.

The mechanism described by participants centres on the position of political parties. Parties rely on the organisational and electoral work involved in mobilising communities, reaching voters and supporting campaigns. Yet party structures also control candidate selection and the allocation of tickets through which electoral work can be converted into elected office. Women may therefore contribute to the political success of parties without having equivalent influence over who is selected to represent those parties or who occupies positions of leadership. The imbalance is not simply between the number of women and men who participate; it concerns the distribution of authority over the routes from participation to representation.

This distinction helps explain why high levels of political activity do not necessarily produce a corresponding increase in elected representation. A woman may register, vote, support a candidate, organise a campaign or mobilise others without gaining access to the nomination process or the party decisions that shape political careers. Participants proposed collective organisation and bargaining by women's networks as ways to strengthen their influence, but the present chapter is concerned with establishing the nature of the gap rather than assessing remedies, which are considered later.

The evidence also points to a distinction between elective and appointive office. Two interview participants noted that women's representation in appointive positions has generally improved more than their representation in elected positions. These are different routes into public authority: appointments depend on executive selection, while elected office requires success within electoral competition and the party nomination process. The distinction helps reconcile accounts that describe the overall trajectory as worsening with those that recognise some gains in women's presence in government. Both can be true where progress in appointments coexists with stagnation or decline in elected representation.

Published research has similarly drawn attention to women's participation as voters and mobilisers alongside their marginal position in candidate selection [25]. Recent analysis has questioned whether participation without access to power should be treated as meaningful political inclusion [26]. This distinction also connects with the wider theoretical difference between descriptive representation, which concerns who is present in political institutions, and substantive representation, which concerns the capacity to influence decisions and advance interests [15]. The evidence presented here suggests that women's political engagement and their presence in elected office remain separated by institutional and organisational boundaries.

Two connected gaps in political inclusion

The survey identifies a gender gap in formal participation, measured through PVC ownership, voting and party membership. The interviews identify a further gap between women's political labour and their access to candidacy, party leadership and decision-making. These findings are complementary, not contradictory: they concern different forms of participation and different stages of the political process. The survey does not measure campaign mobilisation or candidacy, while the interviews explain how those activities may fail to translate into power.

Taken together, the evidence shows that women's political position in Nigeria cannot be understood through parliamentary seat counts alone. Their access to formal participation is uneven, with women respondents less likely than men to hold a valid PVC, vote regularly or belong to a political party. Beyond these measures, interview accounts describe women's work in political mobilisation as substantial but their access to candidate selection and leadership as limited. The result is a layered participation gap: one begins with access to registration and regular voting; another concerns the conversion of political engagement into representation and influence. The following chapters examine the attitudes, institutional practices and wider conditions that help sustain these patterns.



CHAPTER 4

04 Attitudes towards Women in Politics

Support for women's political participation is broad in the survey sample, but it is less consistent when questions move from equal opportunity in principle to women and men being treated as equally capable leaders. Attitudes differ markedly between women and men, and expressed support does not, by itself, explain who participates in formal politics.

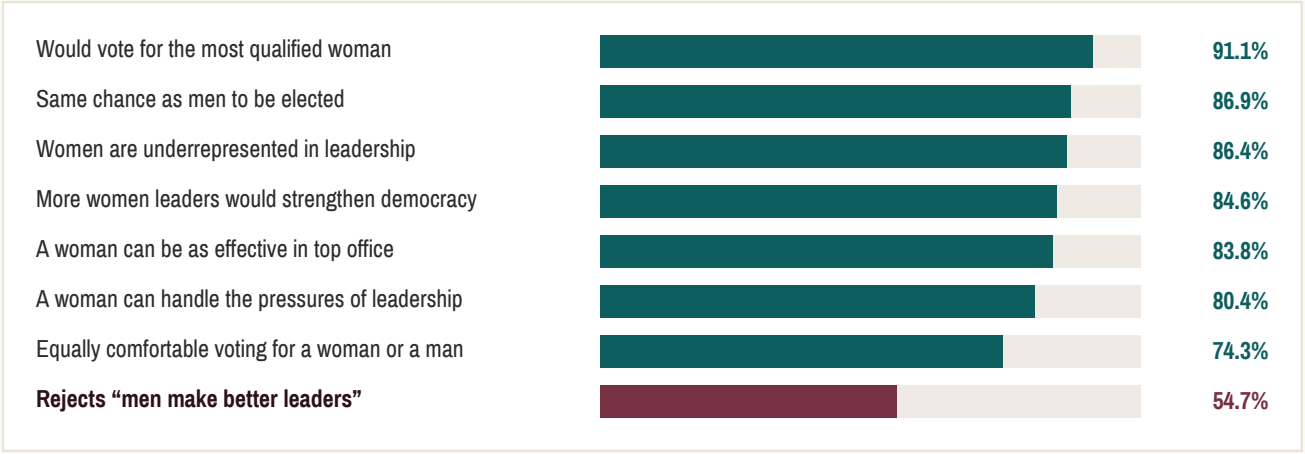
Broad support with a layer of ambivalence

The survey assessed attitudes through eight statements about women in political life, rated on a five-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The negatively worded statement that men generally make better political leaders was reverse-scored, so that a higher composite score consistently represents more supportive attitudes. The resulting Attitudes towards Women's Political Participation Index (AWPPI) was calculated for 2,792 respondents, allowing up to two missing item responses.**54.7%**reject the statement that men make better leaders

Overall, the AWPPI mean was 4.13 (standard deviation 0.75) and the median was 4.38. More than two-thirds of respondents (68.3%) had an average score of 4.0 or above, indicating agreement on average with the supportive statements. A further 23.9% scored from 3.0 to below 4.0, while 7.8% scored below 3.0 and therefore leaned towards the unsupportive end of the scale. The distribution is concentrated towards the supportive end, but the lower-scoring group and the differences between individual statements show why the average should not be read as a simple measure of consensus.

FIGURE 4.1

Responses to the eight attitude statements



The strongest support appears where respondents are asked to endorse a qualified woman or recognise the principle of equal opportunity. More than nine in ten say they would vote for the most qualified woman (91.1%), while 86.9% support women having the same chance as men to be elected. Support is also high for recognising women's underrepresentation (86.4%) and the proposition that more women leaders would strengthen democracy (84.6%). These responses indicate that the principle of women's political inclusion has considerable acceptance among survey participants.

Support becomes less consistent when respondents are asked to compare women and men directly. While 74.3% say they would be equally comfortable voting for a woman or a man of equal qualification, only 54.7% reject the statement that men generally make better political leaders. Almost three in ten (29.4%) agree that men make better leaders, and 15.9% are neutral. The difference between these responses is important: willingness to support a woman who is clearly the most qualified candidate is not the same as accepting women and men as equally capable political leaders.

The overlap between these positions is substantial. Of the 2,350 respondents who agree that women should have the same chance as men to be elected, 27.5% also agree that men generally make better political leaders. In addition, 528 respondents, representing 19.4% of those who answered both relevant questions, say they would vote for the most qualified woman but are not equally comfortable choosing between a woman and a man of equal qualification. Only 71 respondents hold the reverse position. This difference was statistically clear in the paired responses (McNemar test, p less than 0.001). For a sizeable group, therefore, support for women appears conditional on a woman being demonstrably more qualified, rather than reflecting an underlying acceptance of equal leadership capacity.

Support for equal opportunity is not the same as support for parity

Respondents can favour giving women the same chance to contest and still believe that men are generally better leaders. The gap between the strongest and weakest attitude items reveals ambivalence that a single average score would conceal.

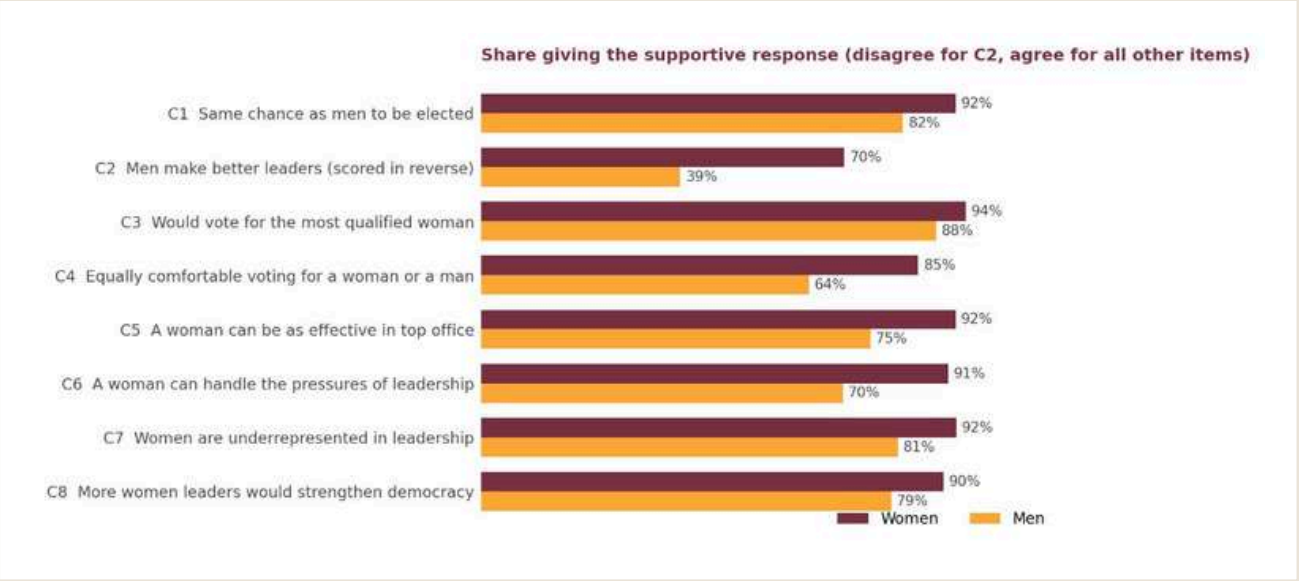
The eight items showed good internal consistency overall (Cronbach's alpha 0.83 among the 2,529 respondents who answered all eight). However, the statement about men making better leaders was less closely related to the other seven items. Its corrected item-total correlation was 0.15, and removing it would raise alpha to 0.88. It has been retained because it captures a substantively important dimension of attitudes towards women's leadership, even though it does not behave like the other items statistically. This distinction reinforces the value of examining individual responses alongside the composite index.

Women and men: the widest gap in attitudes

Respondent gender was associated with the largest difference in attitudes. Women recorded an average AWPPI score of 4.40, compared with 3.85 among men, a difference of 0.55 points (95% confidence interval 0.50 to 0.60; Cohen's d = 0.78). The gap was present in every geopolitical zone represented in the sample, ranging from 0.34 to 0.56 points. This is a substantial difference in the context of the five-point scale, although the scores also show that average attitudes among men remained above the scale midpoint.

FIGURE 4.2

Share giving the supportive response, women and men



The largest difference concerns the belief that men make better leaders. Seven in ten women (70.4%) reject that statement, compared with 38.6% of men. Conversely, 44.0% of men agree that men generally make better leaders, compared with 15.3% of women. The gap is also around 20 percentage points on equal comfort with voting for a woman or a man of equal qualification (21.2 points) and on whether a woman can handle the pressures of leadership (20.5 points).

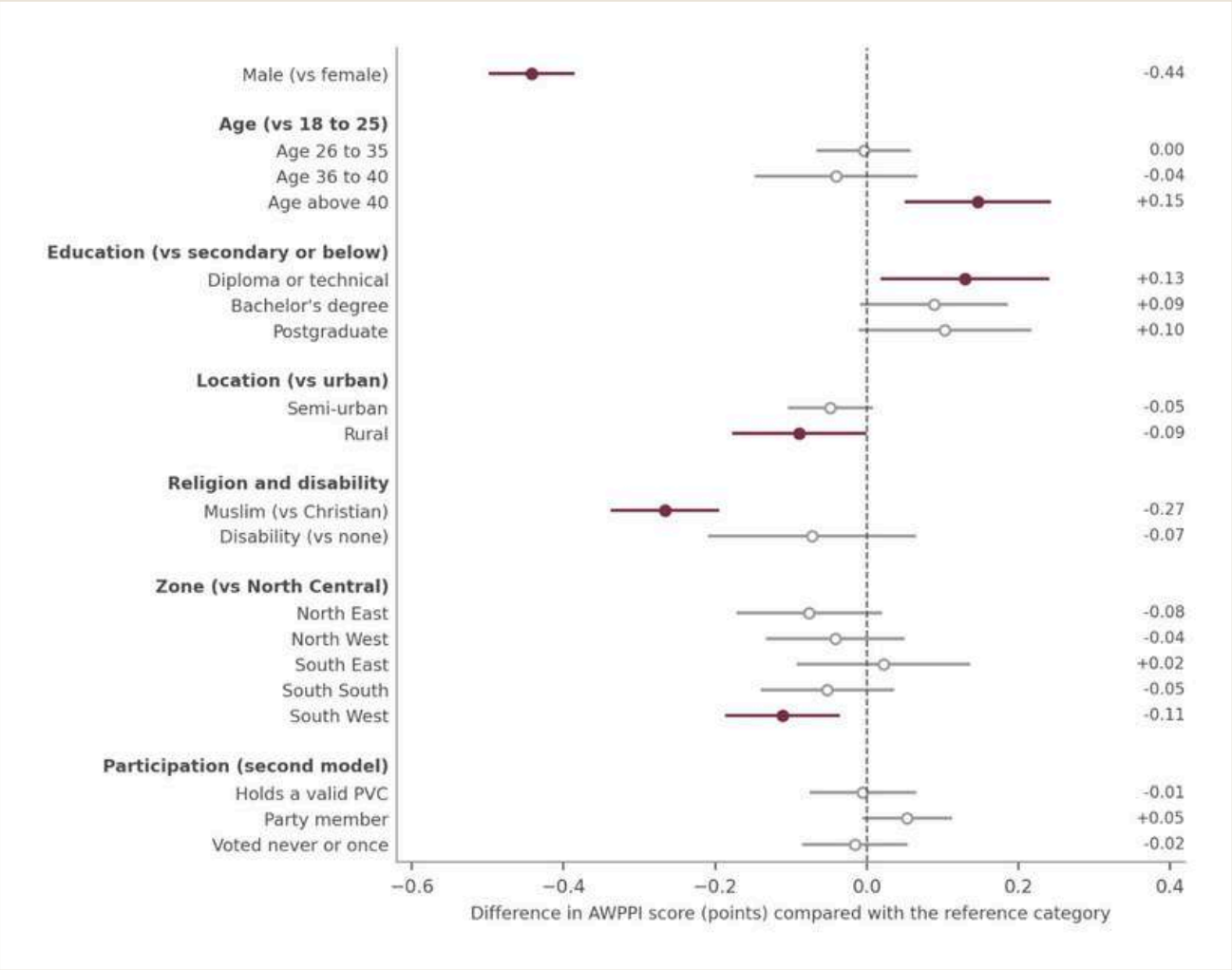
The difference is much smaller when respondents are asked whether they would vote for the most qualified woman: 93.9% of women and 88.1% of men give the supportive response, a gap of 5.8 points. Men in the sample are therefore not uniformly opposed to women candidates. The sharper divide concerns the more fundamental question of whether women and men should be regarded as equally capable and equally legitimate occupants of political leadership. The pattern also cautions against describing all men as unsupportive or all women as holding identical views. The group averages summarise differences within the sample; they do not erase variation among individuals.

Religion was the second largest observed difference. Christian respondents had a mean AWPPI score of 4.33, compared with 3.88 among Muslim respondents, a difference of 0.45 points (Cohen's d = 0.62). Both group averages remained above the midpoint of the scale. Before adjustment, scores also varied by geopolitical zone, with the North West and North East recording the lowest averages and the South East the highest. Much of this apparent regional variation reflected the gender and religious composition of the zones rather than an independent zone effect.

After adjustment for other measured characteristics, men scored 0.44 points lower than women (95% confidence interval -0.50 to -0.39), while Muslim respondents scored 0.27 points lower than Christian respondents (95% confidence interval -0.34 to -0.19). Only the South West differed from the North Central reference group after adjustment, by 0.11 points lower. Respondents above 40 scored 0.15 points higher than those aged 18 to 25; differences associated with other age groups, education and location were comparatively small. Disability was not associated with a clear difference in the adjusted attitude score.

FIGURE 4.3

Adjusted differences in attitude score by respondent characteristic



The gender and religion differences should be interpreted as associations within this sample, not as evidence that religion or gender alone determines an individual's views. The characteristics overlap: men in the sample were more likely than women to identify as Muslim, and the distribution of respondents also differed across zones. Adjustment reduces the risk of attributing to one characteristic a difference associated with another, but it cannot remove the limitations of an online, self-selected sample or establish why respondents hold particular views.

Doubt about women's leadership is learned early and enforced socially

The survey establishes that attitudes towards women's political leadership vary by gender and religion, but it cannot explain how those views are formed. Interview accounts and existing research help illuminate the social processes through which assumptions about leadership are learned, repeated and sometimes challenged. They point to socialisation from childhood, family and community expectations, religious interpretation and the reputational judgements directed at women who enter public political life.

One interview participant working in civil society described how boys and girls are encouraged to understand leadership differently from an early age:

> *"Men are actually trained to be the outgoing type and to be assertive, to take up leadership roles because naturally we look at them as leaders."*
>
> **Woman, civil society participant**

This account describes more than an individual preference. It points to a process through which confidence, public voice and the expectation of authority can be cultivated differently for boys and girls. When assertiveness is treated as a natural male quality and women's leadership is regarded as unusual, the resulting differences may later be interpreted as evidence of unequal capability rather than as the product of unequal social expectations. Research on gendered socialisation in Nigeria similarly identifies family expectations, community norms and educational content as channels through which political roles are reproduced across generations [28].

Other interview accounts show that these expectations are not enforced by men alone. A participant described an incident in which the wife of a male presidential aspirant characterised women seeking leadership as committing "an abomination". The significance of this account is not that it represents the views of women generally, but that restrictive norms can be internalised and reproduced by people of different genders. Attitudes become socially durable when they are embedded in everyday judgements about what is considered respectable, appropriate or acceptable conduct for women.

Family responsibilities and marital expectations also shape how political leadership is perceived. Interview participants described the scrutiny faced by women who seek office, including questions about who will care for children when political meetings take place late at night. One participant contrasted the questions asked of women with the absence of equivalent expectations for men. The underlying assumption is that care work remains a woman's responsibility even when she seeks to take on a public role. Such expectations can affect not only the practical time available for political activity but also whether a woman's political ambition is regarded as legitimate.

Religious beliefs form another part of this social environment, but religion cannot be treated as a single, uniform position on women's leadership. The survey found a difference in average attitudes between Christian

and Muslim respondents, and 77.7% of respondents overall agreed that religious or traditional beliefs discourage women from aspiring to leadership. Yet interview participants offered competing interpretations of the relationship between faith and women's political participation. Some described restrictive readings of religious practice, while others argued that the exclusion of women reflects selective interpretation rather than an unavoidable requirement of doctrine.

> *"Islam does not restrict women's leadership, participation, or economic empowerment... they practise what we call... selective interpretation, just to suit the male ego."*
>
> **Woman, civil society participant**

This account is important because it shows that religious authority and interpretation can be contested from within communities of faith. Not all religious leaders or adherents necessarily share this interpretation. Rather, it cautions against treating religion as a fixed explanation for attitudes and highlights the role of those who interpret, communicate and apply religious teachings in public life. The survey's association between religion and attitudes is consistent with religion being relevant, but it cannot identify the beliefs, institutions or experiences responsible for the difference.

Existing research provides further context. A study conducted across 450 rural wards in three south-western states found that nearly half of Nigerian men believed men make better political leaders, while two in five women reported never discussing politics with friends or family [27]. The study differs in geography and design from the present survey, so the findings should be compared in direction rather than magnitude. Research with women politicians also describes gossip, public shaming and a "politics of insult" directed at women who enter political spaces, including allegations that they have neglected family responsibilities or departed from accepted standards of femininity [24]. These accounts show how attitudes can move beyond private opinion and become social sanctions that influence women's public legitimacy.

At the same time, participants challenged the idea that contemporary gender expectations are inevitable or historically unchanging. Some pointed to examples of women's political leadership in pre-colonial societies, while others distinguished religious doctrine from interpretations used to justify exclusion. These arguments do not settle the historical or theological questions, but they reveal that social attitudes are contested. The same cultural and religious settings in which restrictive expectations are reproduced can also provide resources for questioning them.

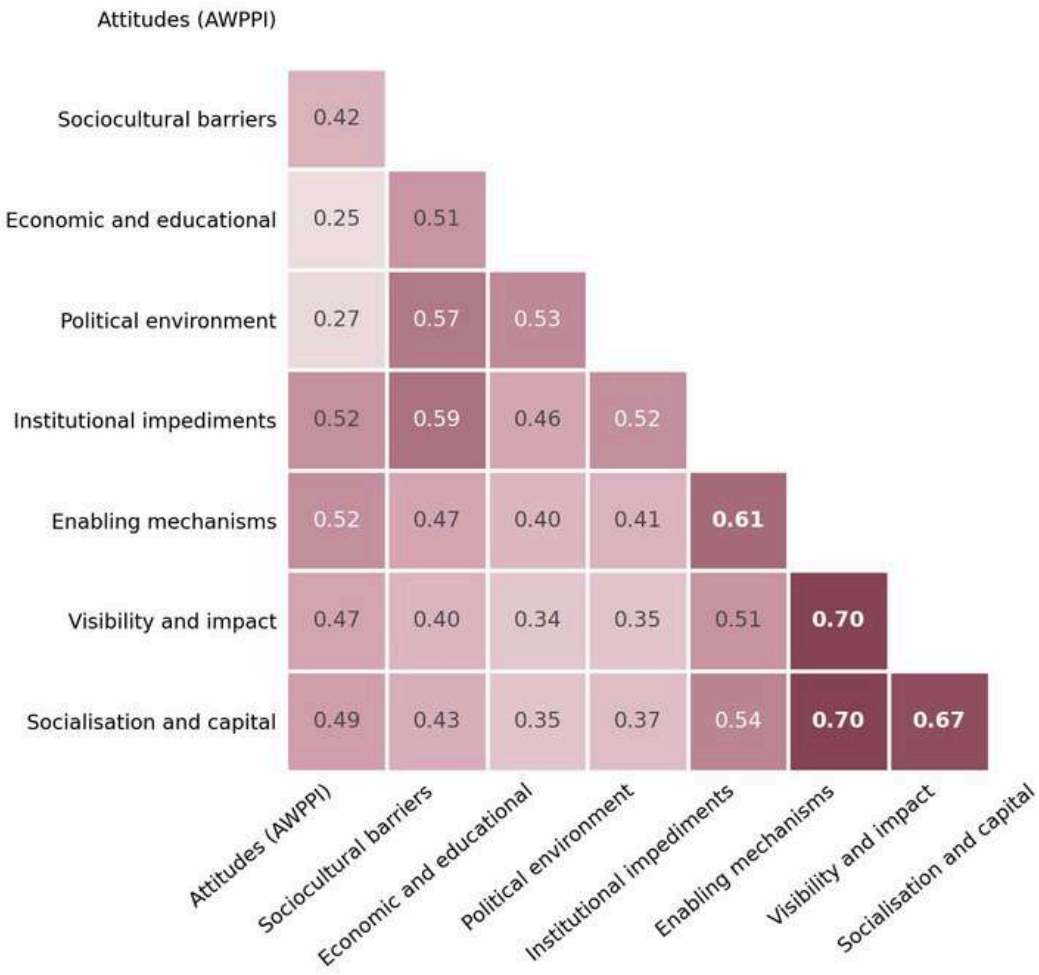
The evidence therefore points to a relationship between attitudes and social practice that is neither automatic nor one-directional. Families, communities, educational settings, religious institutions and public discourse can reinforce assumptions about who is suited to lead. Women and men may internalise, repeat or challenge those assumptions. The interviews provide examples of these processes, while the survey shows that support for women's political participation can coexist with beliefs that men are better leaders. The relative influence of each social setting, and any causal pathway from childhood socialisation to adult political behaviour, cannot be measured here.

Attitudes, perceived barriers and participation

Supportive attitudes do not necessarily mean that respondents underestimate the obstacles women face. Across the survey, the AWPPI was positively correlated with all seven other composite scores. The strongest relationships were with perceived institutional impediments (Spearman's rho = 0.52) and support for enabling mechanisms (0.52), followed by sociocultural barriers (0.42). The relationship was weaker with economic and educational barriers (0.25) and the political environment and safety (0.27). Respondents who were more supportive of women's participation also tended to recognise stronger barriers and endorse measures intended to improve inclusion.

FIGURE 4.4

Correlations between the eight survey scores



These relationships suggest that support for women's political inclusion is not simply a reflection of an assumption that the political environment is already fair. Many respondents appear able to support women's participation while recognising that institutions and social expectations constrain it. However, nearly all items

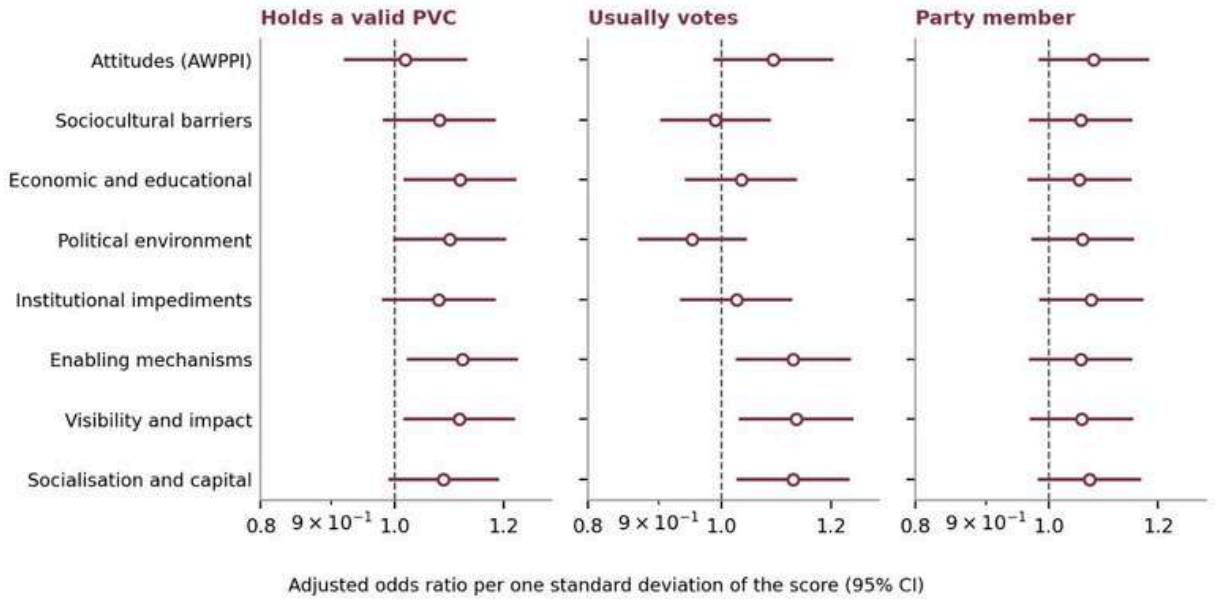
were worded so that agreement represented the positive response for the relevant score. A general tendency to agree may therefore contribute to the correlations. The pattern is informative, but it should not be interpreted as evidence that stronger awareness of barriers causes more supportive attitudes or vice versa.

A combined profile of attitudes and perceived barriers helps show how these positions are distributed. Among the 2,744 respondents with complete scores for the relevant classification, 37.6% were both supportive of women's participation and aware of strong barriers; 31.0% were supportive but perceived weaker barriers; 7.5% perceived strong barriers without being supportive; and 23.8% were neither supportive nor strongly aware of barriers. Women were more likely than men to fall into the supportive-and-aware group (45.7% compared with 29.4%). Conversely, 36.1% of men were neither supportive nor strongly aware of barriers, compared with 12.0% of women. Most men were not opposed to women's participation: 53.6% were classified as supportive. The difference lies partly in whether support is accompanied by recognition of the obstacles women face.

The survey also examined whether attitudes and perceptions were associated with respondents' own formal participation. After adjustment for age, gender, education, location, religion, disability and geopolitical zone, none of the attitude or perception scores clearly distinguished respondents who held a valid PVC, usually voted or belonged to a political party from those who did not. The estimated odds ratios ranged from 0.95 to 1.13 per standard deviation of the relevant score, and none remained clear after accounting for the number of tests conducted.

FIGURE 4.5

Adjusted associations between attitude and perception scores and formal participation



This finding needs careful interpretation. It does not show that attitudes are irrelevant to women's political inclusion, nor does it establish that attitudes have no effect on candidacy or electoral success. The survey measured PVC ownership, voting history and party membership; it did not measure political ambition,

decisions to seek nomination, success in party primaries or the influence respondents exercise within party structures. The result is narrower: within this sample, attitudes and perceptions did not clearly predict the three formal participation measures after adjustment.

Gender, by contrast, was strongly associated with both attitudes and formal participation. As discussed in Chapter 3, women respondents were less likely than men to hold a valid PVC, usually vote or belong to a political party. The absence of a clear association between attitude scores and these participation measures suggests that positive views alone do not explain whether a person can or does participate. Access to registration, the practical conditions of political engagement and the rules governing candidacy may matter independently of individual attitudes. Interview participants' accounts of women's mobilisation work alongside restricted access to leadership provide a further explanation of why favourable views in the abstract need not translate into equal opportunities in practice.

Attitudes matter, but they are not a substitute for access

The survey records broad support alongside persistent doubt about women's leadership. It also finds no clear adjusted relationship between attitude scores and respondents' PVC ownership, voting or party membership. These results do not settle the role of attitudes in candidacy, but they caution against treating attitude change alone as sufficient to alter women's political opportunities.

Taken together, the findings present a more complex picture than either widespread opposition or settled acceptance. Most respondents endorse women's political participation, yet a substantial minority continue to regard men as better leaders, and many express support for women only when a woman is clearly the strongest candidate. Women and men differ markedly in their average attitudes, while religion is also associated with differences in the sample.

Interview accounts show how expectations about leadership are learned and enforced, but also how they are challenged within families, communities and religious traditions. Finally, the relationship between expressed attitudes and formal participation is not straightforward. Supportive opinions coexist with unequal participation and with institutional arrangements that determine who can reach political office. The next chapter examines the barriers through which these wider expectations and unequal opportunities operate.



CHAPTER 5

05 Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Four kinds of barrier recur: norms that treat politics as men's work, the cost of seeking office, party gatekeeping and violence. They are widely recognised and reinforce one another, but which appears most serious depends on how people are asked.

Women's political exclusion in Nigeria is not explained by a single obstacle or by a lack of willingness to participate. It is produced through the interaction of social expectations, unequal access to money and networks, party practices that control entry to candidacy, and an environment in which intimidation can carry personal and political costs. These barriers affect different stages of political engagement, from the decision to become publicly active to the ability to secure a party ticket, campaign safely and exercise influence after an election.

Survey respondents rate institutional impediments highest among the four barrier domains. When asked to identify the biggest barriers in their own words, however, they name socio-cultural constraints and money most often. These findings are complementary rather than contradictory. The rating questions invite respondents to assess specific statements about political institutions, while open responses bring forward the constraints that are most immediate in their understanding of women's lives. Interview participants add an account of how these barriers operate in practice, including the informal exchanges, expectations and power relations that are not fully captured by survey ratings. Existing research places these experiences within the wider Nigerian political and electoral context.

TABLE 5.1

Four barriers compared

Barrier domain	Survey rating	Named unprompted	How the barrier operates
Socio-cultural	3.91; 64.7% to 87.7% agreement across items	69% of coded responses	Patriarchal norms, gendered socialisation and religious interpretation, working through family permission, party scheduling and stigma.
Economic and educational	3.67; 61.0% to 68.4% agreement across barrier items	53%; finance named by 38%	Nomination fees, campaign costs, informal payments to delegates and unequal access to resources.

Barrier domain	Survey rating	Named unprompted	How the barrier operates
Institutional	4.18; 82.6% to 89.2% agreement across items	39%; party gatekeeping 20%	Opaque, patronage-driven nominations and a gap between formal inclusion commitments and their implementation.
Political environment and safety	3.74; 53.3% to 79.9% agreement across items	26%; violence 23%	Violence, intimidation and online abuse, with fear of reputational or party consequences deterring reports.

Norms that define politics as men's work

Nigerian politics operates within a social order in which public authority and leadership have often been associated with men, while women are expected to carry primary responsibility for domestic work and care. These expectations shape more than private attitudes. They influence how women's political ambition is judged, how much time and mobility they can exercise, whether their participation is considered respectable, and whether they are treated as credible contenders for public office. Research on women politicians in Nigeria has documented the use of moral labels against women who enter politics, including accusations that they are neglecting their families or departing from accepted standards of femininity [24]. The description of politics as a "dirty game" can reinforce this judgement by presenting political engagement as incompatible with the conduct expected of women [26].

The survey shows how widely these perceptions are recognised. Nearly nine in ten respondents (87.7%) agree that politics is still seen as a man's domain. A further 79.7% agree that politically active women are judged harshly, and 77.7% that religious or traditional beliefs discourage women from aspiring to leadership. Around two-thirds agree that family responsibilities make politics difficult for women (64.8%) and that women politicians are labelled immoral or disobedient (64.7%). The findings suggest that exclusion is sustained not only by explicit opposition to women's leadership, but also by everyday expectations about the roles women should perform and the behaviour considered acceptable when they enter public life.

Women rate socio-cultural barriers more strongly than men, with an average score of 4.03 compared with 3.79. The difference remains after adjustment for other respondent characteristics. It is driven more by women's recognition of stigma and social judgement than by disagreement over family responsibilities. Women and men agree at similar rates that family responsibilities make politics difficult (63.1% and 66.5%, respectively), but women are more likely to agree that women politicians are labelled immoral or disobedient (71.6%, compared with 57.7% of men). This distinction matters: the burden of care may be widely recognised as a practical constraint, while the reputational penalty attached to women's political activity is more sharply perceived by women themselves.

FIGURE 5.1

Agreement with five statements about socio-cultural barriers



Religion is part of this social environment, but it should not be treated as a single or uniform explanation. Overall socio-cultural barrier scores do not differ clearly by religion. On the specific statement about religious or traditional beliefs, however, 82.1% of Muslim respondents agree that these beliefs discourage women from aspiring to leadership, compared with 74.0% of Christian respondents. Agreement is highest in the North West (84.6%) and lowest in the South East (72.1%) and South West (72.4%). These figures reflect perceptions within a self-selected sample, and they do not mean that any particular faith or region is inherently more restrictive. Gender, religion and location overlap in the sample, making simple regional or religious explanations unreliable.

Written responses add detail to the social expectations respondents associate with women's political participation. Domestic and caregiving roles account for 24% of coded responses about cultural beliefs, followed by stereotypes about women's capability (20%), culture and tradition (20%), religion (18%), marriage and spousal control (17%), patriarchy (16%) and moral policing (15%). Men mention religion more often than women (25%, compared with 11%), as do Muslim respondents compared with Christian respondents (27%, compared with 11%). These patterns indicate differences in how respondents explain cultural barriers, not differences in the objective prevalence of restrictive religious practice.

Interview participants described the points at which broad social expectations become practical constraints. Gendered assumptions about leadership were raised across stakeholder categories and all six geopolitical zones represented in the interviews. Participants referred to women needing a husband's permission to contest, the expectation that they remain responsible for childcare, and the scheduling of party meetings at times that conflict with domestic responsibilities. One woman described the double standard involved in late-night political meetings:

> *"if you're here at 2 a.m. for a political meeting, who is taking care of your children?... questions that nobody would ask a man... No one would ever ask the man"*
>
> **Woman, academic**

The significance of this account lies in the way a seemingly ordinary party practice can reproduce unequal access. A meeting scheduled late at night may be formally open to all members, yet women carrying disproportionate care responsibilities may find attendance more difficult or face criticism for attending. The same expectation can affect informal networking, where relationships and access to decision-makers are built outside formal meetings. A rule that appears gender-neutral can therefore have unequal consequences when it operates within unequal patterns of care and mobility. Participants also noted that women as well as men can enforce these expectations, illustrating how social norms become durable through community judgement rather than through the actions of one group alone.

Interview accounts also show that the relationship between religion, tradition and women's leadership is contested. One participant argued that the exclusion of women reflects selective interpretation rather than an unavoidable religious prohibition:

> *"Islam does not restrict women's leadership, participation, or economic empowerment... they practise what we call... the selective interpretation, just to suit... the male ego."*
>
> **Woman, civil society participant**

This is one participant's interpretation, not a statement that all adherents or religious leaders share the same view. Other interview accounts described restrictions on women's mobility and public mixing in particular northern settings, while another participant argued that restrictive expectations are not confined to one region. The interviews leave these competing accounts unresolved, but they do show that religious authority and community practice are important sites where women's legitimacy in public life is interpreted and contested.

Participants also challenged the idea that male political authority is an unbroken feature of Nigerian tradition. Some referred to pre-colonial examples of women exercising political authority in northern and south-eastern societies. These accounts do not, by themselves, provide a comprehensive history of women's political roles, but they do caution against presenting present-day exclusion as an inevitable or timeless cultural condition. The historical argument is relevant because it locates contemporary norms within social and political change, rather than treating them as fixed attributes of Nigerian communities.

Norms operate through permission, scheduling and reputation

Interview participants identified family permission, the timing of party business and reputational stigma as practical points at which gender expectations restrict women's participation. The survey confirms that these constraints are widely recognised, but it does not measure their direct effect on candidacy. Their relative weight compared with financial or institutional barriers therefore cannot be estimated from the available data.

The cost of candidacy

Money is a central barrier to women's access to electoral competition in Nigeria. The cost begins before a campaign reaches voters. Aspirants may need to pay for nomination forms, secure the support of party delegates, build relationships with political brokers, travel, communicate with constituents, organise mobilisation and maintain a visible campaign presence. These costs operate within wider economic inequalities that can limit women's independent access to finance and assets. Research on women politicians in Nigeria has documented reliance on friends, family and informal networks to raise campaign funds, while broader gender income disparities constrain women's ability to self-finance [24, 29]. One study estimates that the average Nigerian woman earns about 58.4 kobo for every naira earned by a man [24]. Analysis of the 2022 Electoral Act amendments has also raised concerns that the substantial increase in campaign spending ceilings widened the resource gap between aspirants [30].

The survey indicates that respondents recognise these pressures, although they rate the economic and educational barrier domain lower than the other three. About two-thirds agree that nomination fees discourage women from contesting (66.4%) and that women often lack the money to fund campaigns (68.4%). A smaller, though still clear, majority (61.0%) agree that limited access to quality education affects women's confidence to lead. The overall economic and educational score is 3.67, and opinion is more divided than for the other barrier domains: 20.9% of respondents have an average score below 3.0. The education item varies with respondents' own education. Agreement that limited education affects women's confidence is higher among respondents with secondary education or below (69.0%) and diploma holders (71.0%) than among bachelor's degree holders (57.3%) and postgraduates (57.7%). This is a difference in perceptions, not evidence that respondents' own education caused or prevented women's political participation.

FIGURE 5.2

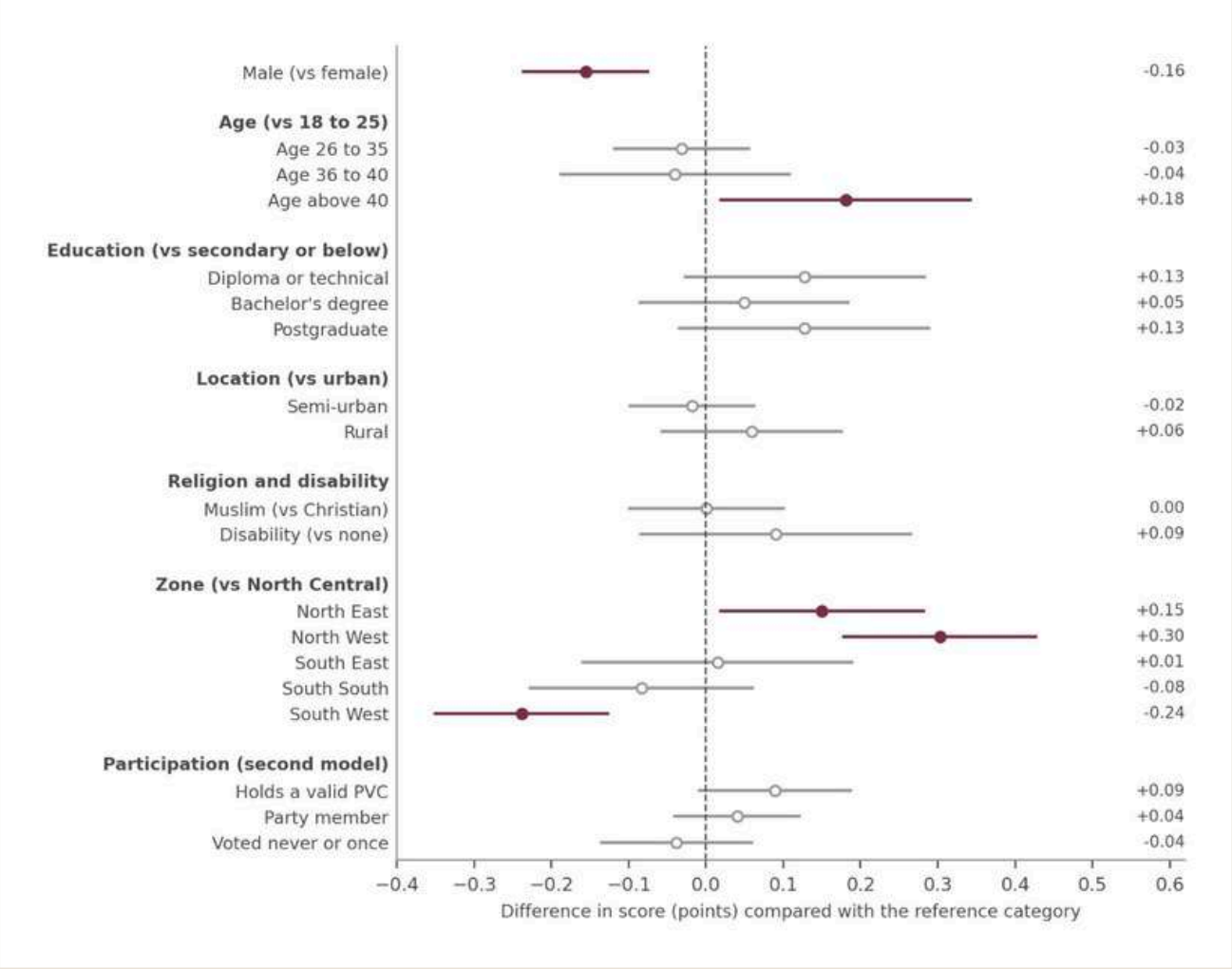
Agreement with statements about economic and educational barriers



The apparent lower ranking of finance changes when respondents are asked to name the biggest barrier without being given a list. Money is the single most frequent theme, appearing in 38% of coded responses to the open question on the biggest barriers. In total, 53% of coded responses identify an economic or educational constraint. This difference between prompted ratings and unprompted answers is analytically important. Respondents may recognise that party institutions and social norms are serious obstacles while still experiencing money as the most immediate and tangible cost of entering electoral competition. It would therefore be misleading to interpret the lower average score as evidence that financial barriers are marginal.**38%**name money as the biggest barrier, the most frequent theme

FIGURE 5.3

Adjusted differences in the economic and educational barriers score by respondent characteristic



Interview participants described costs that extend well beyond the official nomination fee. One participant cited a governorship nomination form costing approximately ₦50 million, discounted to ₦25 million for women, but still considered unaffordable for many aspirants. Two other participants independently cited figures of up to ₦100 million for senior nomination forms. These are interviewees' reported estimates, not an independently verified schedule of current party fees, and they should be understood as illustrations of the scale of costs described by participants rather than as uniform prices across parties or elections.

Participants also described an informal financial layer beneath the official fee. An aspirant may receive a free or discounted form but still lack the money required to reach delegates and secure support during party primaries. One participant summarised the distinction:

> *"A female aspirant... may have a free form but no cash for the delegates and it's effectively... debt on arrival."*
>
> **Man, academic**

This account points to a political financing system in which formal costs are only one part of the resources required to compete. Informal payments, patronage and access to influential networks can determine whether an aspirant is able to convert a nomination into a viable campaign. Where political finance depends on relationships with wealthy sponsors or established power brokers, candidates who are less connected to those networks may be disadvantaged even when a formal fee concession is available. The scale and frequency of informal payments are not quantified, but interview accounts and published research on patronage-driven nomination processes converge in suggesting that official fee levels alone give an incomplete picture of the financial barrier.

Two interview participants linked the high cost of winning office to the incentives that may shape conduct after election. They argued that candidates who spend heavily to secure office may feel pressure to recover their expenditure once in public office. One participant described this as a problem of political financing and accountability:

> *"When they get to office, they have no treasure to steal. We are justifying and validating criminality."*
>
> **Man, academic**

This is an interpretation offered by interview participants, not a measured finding about the behaviour of elected officials. It nevertheless identifies a wider institutional concern: where access to office depends on very high private expenditure and patronage, the financing of political competition may shape both who can enter politics and the incentives attached to holding office.

The interviews raise a further issue about the design of financial concessions. Four participants from three professional backgrounds described cases in which free or discounted nomination forms were allegedly used as leverage against women who received them. Participants said that a woman might be pressured to withdraw or find that party support was reduced after she won a primary, with the concession subsequently presented as a favour for which she owed loyalty. One political actor stated:

> *"When a woman is given a form free... within the political parties, they use it as a weapon against women."*
>
> **Woman, political actor**

> *"They cut you short, because you did not contribute a lot... they treat you like a favour."*
>
> **Woman, academic**

This account is important but requires careful qualification. It came from women participants only; no male participant confirmed or contradicted it, and the survey and published research do not independently corroborate the specific claim that fee concessions are used in this way. It is therefore a lead for further investigation, not an established pattern across Nigerian parties. Other interview participants recommended fee reductions or waivers without raising this concern. The evidence supports examining not only whether financial relief exists, but also the conditions attached to it and whether recipients retain independence within party structures. Which concession model works best remains untested.

Cost operates formally and informally

The survey identifies money as the most frequently named single barrier in open responses. Interviews describe nomination fees alongside the cost of delegates, mobilisation and political relationships. Together, the evidence suggests that reducing the official fee alone would leave important informal costs untouched. The reported risk that concessions can create dependency is plausible but remains insufficiently corroborated.

Party gatekeeping and rules without consequences

Political parties are the principal route through which most aspirants gain access to elected office in Nigeria. They decide who can contest under a party platform, how candidates are selected and which aspirants receive organisational backing. The party nomination process is therefore not simply one stage in an otherwise open electoral system. It is a gate through which financial resources, social connections and political legitimacy are converted into a viable candidacy. Where party decisions are opaque or dominated by established male networks, women can be excluded before voters have an opportunity to assess them.

Nigeria's first-past-the-post electoral system places considerable weight on winning individual constituencies and can favour incumbency, concentrated resources and established political networks over broader party-list mechanisms [7, 31]. The absence of an enforceable constitutional gender quota further limits the institutional guarantees available to women aspirants [24]. Research on party organisation and democratic governance in Nigeria has identified weak internal democracy, opaque nomination practices and the influence of male party elders and political financiers as persistent constraints on women's access to candidacy [21, 24, 32, 33, 34]. The creation of women's leadership positions within parties does not necessarily resolve this problem where those positions carry limited influence over candidate selection and substantive decisions. One major party's national women's leader position has, for example, been described as a "gender-appeasing role" rather than a position with meaningful decision-making authority [21]. Research has also documented cases in which women who secured nomination tickets were pressured to step down or were replaced after the announcement of results [35].

These institutional concerns are widely recognised among survey respondents. The institutional impediments score is 4.18, the highest of the four barrier domains, and 75.4% of respondents have an average score of 4.0 or above. Agreement with each of the four statements exceeds 82%: 89.2% agree that party decision-making is dominated by male elites; 84.2% that gender quotas are absent or poorly implemented or enforced; 83.3% that women's wings are symbolic and not influential; and 82.6% that parties rarely nominate women for winnable positions. Women report stronger institutional barriers than men, with average scores of 4.34 and 4.01 respectively, but agreement is also high among men. Party members report broadly similar concerns to non-members, suggesting that recognition of institutional barriers is not confined to people outside party structures.

FIGURE 5.4

Agreement with four statements about party and institutional practice



Interview participants described party gatekeeping as the point where many of the other barriers converge. Most interpreted women's exclusion as deliberate or structurally maintained. They referred to the absence of women as consensus candidates, the influence of political financiers over candidate selection and the assumption that women are less able to repay the investment required to secure a ticket. One civil society participant captured the perceived pattern:

> *"We've not heard of any consensus candidate that is a woman. It's always a man."*
>
> **Woman, civil society participant**

A minority offered a different explanation. Two participants, both public officials, argued that parties select candidates according to their perceived ability to win rather than excluding women simply because they are women. One put the argument this way:

> *"What political parties do is they give an opportunity to the person that can win... why would I give you a ticket just because you're a woman?"*
>
> **Woman, public official**

The difference between these explanations should not be resolved by assuming that one account represents all parties or all selection decisions. The interviews leave this tension open. It is possible, however, for an apparently neutral judgement about electability to reproduce gendered exclusion if women have had less access to campaign finance, influential networks, political visibility and prior opportunities to demonstrate electoral viability. In that situation, the criteria used to assess who can win may reflect inequalities created before the selection decision itself. This is a plausible interpretation, although it has not been tested against every party decision.

Participants were more consistent in identifying the gap between formal commitments and implementation. Nigeria has policy commitments to women's representation, including the 35% target in the National Gender Policy, but participants argued that these commitments are not matched by consequences for non-compliance. One political actor questioned the distance between formal structures and practical change:

> *"We even have a gender desk in the National Assembly, but how does it translate into reality?... A lot of what is wrong is that there's no consequence. We don't implement our laws."*
>
> **Woman, political actor**

The issue is therefore not only whether gender-sensitive provisions or party structures exist on paper. It is whether they shape decisions, constrain gatekeepers and provide a route for redress when they are ignored. Formal commitments can coexist with informal practices that preserve existing distributions of power if no institution is responsible for monitoring compliance or imposing consequences. The interviews also reveal differences in how participants explain this implementation gap, including the absence of sanctions, weak communication between those who legislate and those who implement, and the possibility that policy commitments serve reputational purposes without changing domestic practice. These explanations are not mutually exclusive, and their relative importance is not yet known.

The party gate is the most widely recognised institutional barrier

Survey respondents strongly endorse statements about male-dominated party decisions, weakly enforced quotas, symbolic women's wings and the limited nomination of women for winnable positions. Interview participants identify the party as the point at which money, networks and formal rules meet. They disagree about whether exclusion is deliberate or driven by electability calculations, but converge on the importance of weak implementation and limited consequences.

Violence, intimidation and the cost of speaking out

Political violence is a feature of Nigeria's electoral environment, but women can face forms of intimidation that are specifically gendered and designed to undermine their legitimacy, safety or continued participation. Research has documented physical attacks, abductions, forced withdrawals, sexualised threats and harassment directed at women aspirants and candidates [36, 37]. A British Council study reported that gangs had been hired in some areas to prevent women candidates from campaigning [38]. UN Women has documented cases in which women who secured party nomination tickets were forced to step down under threats and intimidation [35]. More recent research on technology-facilitated abuse describes sexist slurs, doxxing and threats of rape and murder directed at women politicians in several Nigerian states, alongside inadequate responses by political parties [39]. UN Women treats violence against women in politics as a distinct form of exclusion requiring specific attention [40].

The survey captures the extent to which respondents perceive political participation as unsafe for women. Fear of harassment or intimidation during campaigns is the most widely held concern, with 79.9% agreeing. A further 70.1% agree that online bullying discourages women from expressing political opinions, and 69.9% that politics is violent and unsafe for women. A smaller majority, 53.3%, agree that women avoid politics because it is seen as corrupt or dirty. The average political environment and safety score is 3.74. Women score higher than men (3.84 compared with 3.65), including after adjustment, with the differences concentrated mainly in perceptions of online bullying, an unsafe environment and corruption. Women and men agree most closely on fear of harassment during campaigns: 81.1% of women and 78.7% of men endorse this concern. In open responses, 23% of coded answers identify violence, intimidation or harassment among the biggest barriers.

FIGURE 5.5

Agreement with four statements about the political environment and safety



These survey findings measure perceived risks, not respondents' own experiences of violence. The questionnaire did not ask whether an individual had personally experienced harassment, threats or physical attacks. It also did not establish how many women had withdrawn from political activity because of such experiences. The findings therefore show that insecurity is widely recognised as a barrier, but they cannot be used to estimate the prevalence of violence against women in politics or its direct effect on candidacy.

Interview participants provide a different form of evidence. The fullest first-hand accounts came from women with direct experience of candidacy, who described physical attacks, intimidation and online harassment. Participants also suggested that recorded incidents may substantially understate the problem because women fear the reputational or political consequences of reporting. One participant cited organisational

experience in which approximately 98% of young women candidates who had experienced violence or harassment declined to report it formally, fearing stigma within their parties. This is an estimate reported by one participant about the organisation's own work, not a national prevalence figure and not independently verified by the survey.

One participant who described being physically attacked at a party office also reported that the attacker faced no legal consequence. This account connects personal safety to the wider implementation gap: where incidents are not investigated or perpetrators are not held accountable, the absence of consequences can weaken confidence in the protection available to women. Fear of party stigma may also deter reporting even when formal channels exist. In this way, violence can operate twice: first as a direct threat to the woman targeted, and again through the expectation that speaking about the incident may damage her standing or future prospects within the party.

The interviews also caution against assuming that exposure to violence is uniform across the country. One participant's organisational data suggested that political violence, although historically widespread, may be concentrated in particular high-risk locations. This account sits alongside the more uniformly concerning experiences described by other participants. The accounts need not be contradictory: they may refer to different geographical patterns, political periods or units of analysis. Without a detailed incident dataset, the distribution of risk across states, and the way exposure varies by political office, party or election cycle, cannot be estimated.

Violence is widely feared and may be under-reported

The survey shows widespread concern about harassment, intimidation and online abuse, while interview participants describe direct experiences and reasons for not reporting them. Fear of party or reputational consequences may suppress disclosure. The number of women affected and the extent to which violence deters candidacy cannot be quantified from the available study data.

Barriers that reinforce one another

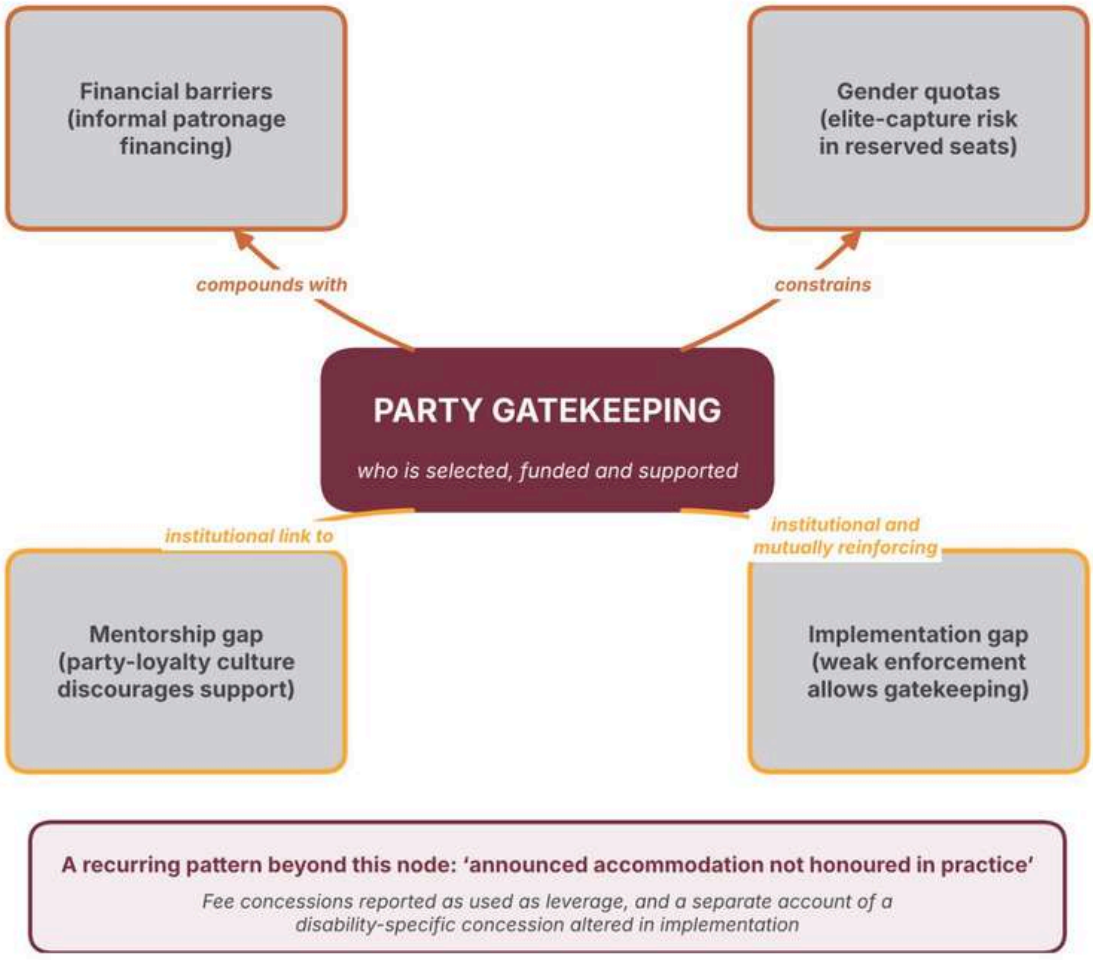
The four barriers do not operate independently. Their combined effect is most visible along the route from political interest to candidacy and from candidacy to effective participation. Social expectations can limit women's time, mobility and public legitimacy before they approach a party. Financial constraints can reduce their ability to build networks, pay nomination costs or demonstrate the resources that party gatekeepers associate with electability. Party structures then determine whether women's political work and aspirations are converted into a nomination, while intimidation can raise the personal cost of remaining visible or challenging decisions. Each barrier can therefore intensify the effect of the others.

Interview participants described party gatekeeping as the central connecting point. Informal patronage is simultaneously a financial barrier and a mechanism of institutional control: access to money may depend on relationships with party financiers, while those relationships can influence who receives a ticket. Reducing the official nomination fee without addressing informal payments and delegate networks may therefore leave the main gatekeeping mechanism intact. Similarly, a woman may be formally included in a party structure but

remain excluded from the networks in which decisions are made. The distinction between membership and influence is central to understanding why participation in party activity does not necessarily translate into access to candidacy.

FIGURE 5.6

Party gatekeeping as a connecting node between barriers



The same interaction can undermine measures intended to improve inclusion. Participants described a recurring pattern in which an accommodation is announced but not honoured in practice. The account of fee concessions allegedly being used as leverage is one example. A separate interview account concerning a concession for candidates with disabilities was also said to have been altered in implementation. How often such practices occur is not known, but these examples raise a broader institutional question: a formal entitlement offers limited protection if the institution responsible for delivering it can change its terms without transparent oversight or redress.

The survey supports the interpretation that respondents see the barriers as connected. The four barrier scores are moderately correlated, with coefficients ranging from 0.46 to 0.59. The strongest relationships are between socio-cultural barriers and institutional impediments (0.59), and between socio-cultural barriers and the political environment and safety score (0.57). These associations do not show that one barrier causes another. They do indicate that respondents who perceive one form of exclusion are also more likely to perceive others, consistent with the interview accounts of overlapping constraints.

TABLE 5.2

Barrier domains: rated agreement and unprompted mention

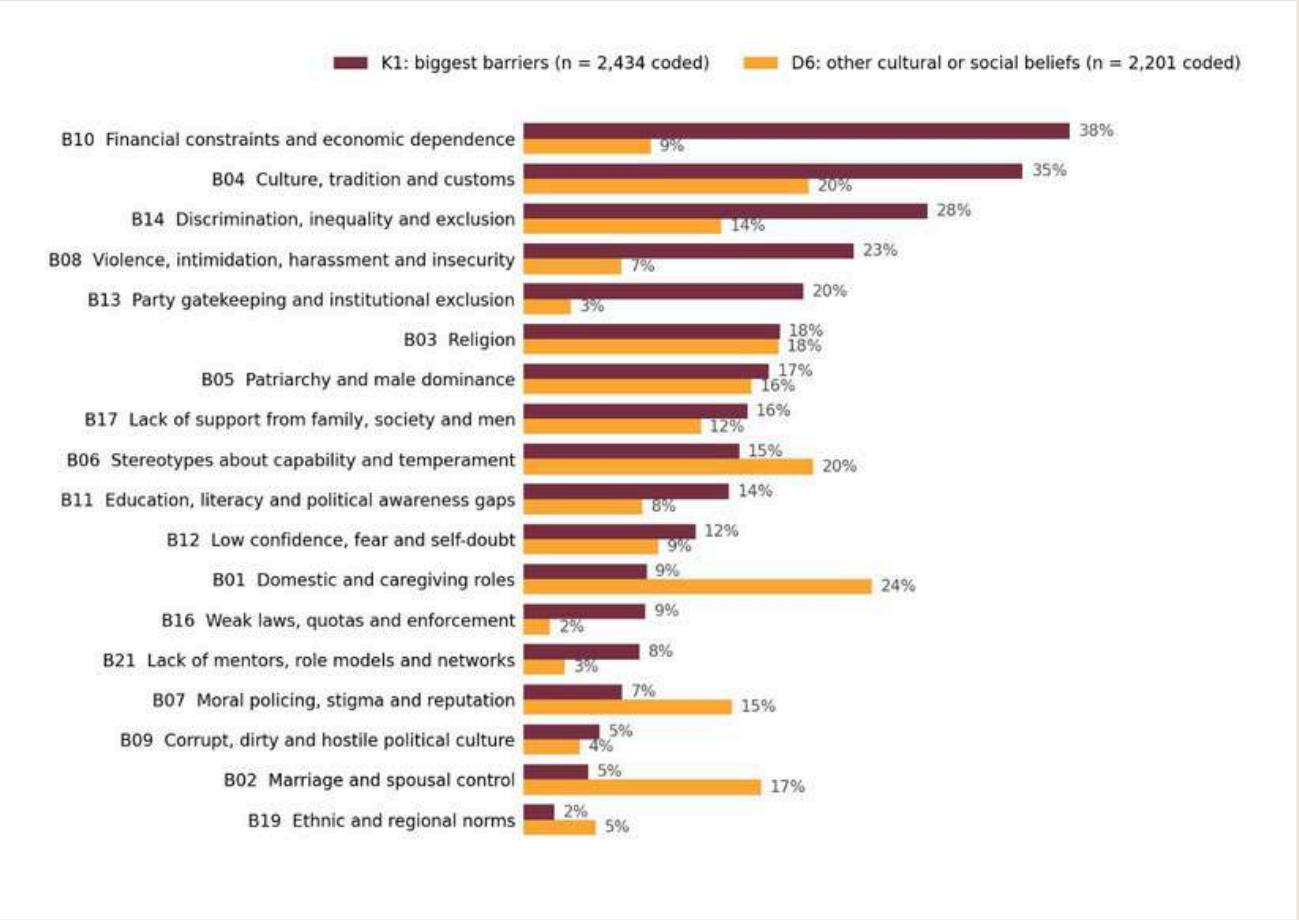
Barrier domain	Rated score (1 to 5)	Average agree or higher	Named unprompted
Institutional impediments	4.18	75.4%	39%
Socio-cultural barriers	3.91	56.3%	69%
Political environment and safety	3.74	49.3%	26%
Economic and educational barriers	3.67	51.3%	53%

The difference between the two rankings is informative. When respondents assess each domain through structured statements, institutional impediments are most prominent. When they describe the biggest barriers in their own words, socio-cultural expectations and economic constraints come first. Neither measure should be treated as the definitive ranking. Together they suggest that people recognise the institutional structure as a major obstacle while describing culture and money as the constraints that are most immediate in women's everyday political lives. Party gatekeeping connects these experiences: it is where money and networks influence selection, where social expectations can be reproduced through party practices, and where the implementation or non-implementation of formal rules becomes consequential.



FIGURE 5.7

Selected themes in written responses on cultural beliefs and the biggest barriers



Disability, region and religion

The evidence suggests that barriers may be compounded for some women, although the study cannot estimate the extent of these differences across the population. Interview participants described women with disabilities as facing overlapping forms of scepticism: assumptions about women's suitability for leadership and additional assumptions about the capacity of people with disabilities to participate in political life. One participant offered the example of a visually impaired person who had led a state agency. That example concerned an appointive position, however, and says little about whether comparable access exists in elective politics.

In the survey, 166 respondents identified as having a disability. They did not differ clearly from other respondents in holding a valid Permanent Voter's Card or in voting, and they were more likely to report party membership (64.5%, compared with 36.7%). The sample is small and non-random, and the result should be treated as a finding to investigate rather than evidence that women with disabilities face fewer barriers. Party membership is also not equivalent to access to nomination, campaign resources or elected office. The survey did not provide a sufficiently detailed measure of disability-related candidacy experiences to test the interview accounts directly.

Geographical and religious differences also require caution. After adjustment, respondents in the North West tend to report higher levels of several barriers, while those in the South West tend to report lower levels on some measures. Yet gender, religion and geopolitical zone overlap in the sample. These are differences in the pattern of reported perceptions, not evidence that all women in one region experience the same barriers or that regional identity alone explains them. The available data do not support a reliable ranking of women's lived political constraints by state or geopolitical zone.

Socioeconomic position is relevant to the cost of candidacy, but the survey does not directly measure women's personal wealth, assets, access to credit, campaign expenditure or ability to secure political sponsors. The evidence therefore supports the interpretation that financial requirements are likely to interact with wider economic inequalities, but it does not permit a precise estimate of how the financial barrier differs by income group. Similarly, some perceptions vary with age, but the evidence is too limited to map distinct candidacy pathways for younger and older women. Individual interview accounts illuminate possible mechanisms; they should not be generalised to all women who share a particular characteristic.

The evidence across these levels reinforces the central point of this chapter: women's political participation is shaped by more than individual confidence or willingness to engage. Social expectations influence who is considered legitimate in public life; unequal resources shape who can sustain political activity and compete for a ticket; party gatekeepers control the route into candidacy; and insecurity can deter women from speaking, campaigning or reporting abuse. These forces can operate at the same time, and their combined effect may be more restrictive than any one barrier considered in isolation.

The findings also help explain why women's political engagement does not automatically translate into representation. Women may contribute to political parties and campaigns, mobilise voters and participate in community activity, while remaining excluded from the decisions that determine candidate selection and access to office. The barrier is not simply entry into politics, but the unequal terms on which women are able to move from participation to candidacy and from candidacy to influence.

These interactions matter when considering the conditions that can enable women to make political breakthroughs. Measures that address only attitudes, skills or formal fees may be weakened if party gatekeeping, informal financing, social expectations and threats to safety remain unchanged. The following chapter examines the mechanisms and enabling conditions that respondents and interview participants identified, including the circumstances in which they may help women navigate or alter these barriers.

FIGURE 5.8

Barriers at individual, community, party, electoral and policy levels





CHAPTER 6

06 Breakthroughs and Enabling Conditions

Respondents endorse a wide range of ways to strengthen women's political participation. The evidence suggests, however, that their value depends on how they are designed and whether they change the institutional conditions that shape access to political power.

The barriers examined in the previous chapter do not make political breakthroughs impossible. Women enter political life, organise, contest elections and secure public office through a combination of personal commitment, supportive relationships, collective action and institutional opportunities. The evidence in this chapter points to several enabling conditions: enforceable rules that widen access to representation, financial arrangements that make candidacy more attainable, mentorship and visible role models, fairer media practice, training and advocacy, and the engagement of men and community institutions.

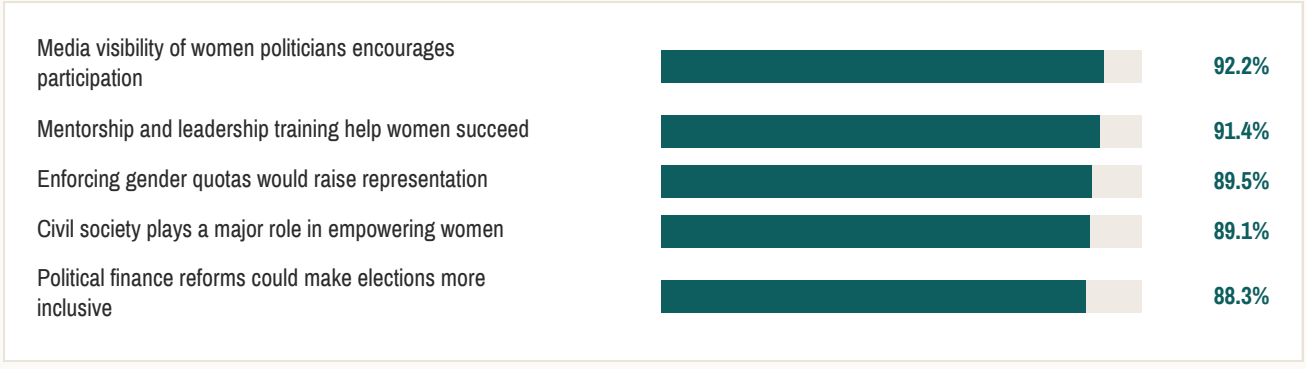
These mechanisms are not interchangeable. Some aim to strengthen individual confidence, skills and political knowledge. Others seek to change public expectations or create supportive networks. Quotas, reserved seats, party reform and political finance measures act more directly on the institutions that control access to candidacy. The survey records strong support for all of them, but support is not evidence of effectiveness. Interview participants and published research help identify the conditions under which each may contribute to change, as well as the ways it may fall short. A recurring theme is that interventions are most likely to matter when they reinforce one another and when their implementation is not left solely to the discretion of existing gatekeepers.

What respondents believe would help

Respondents express very high support for each of the five enabling mechanisms included in the survey. Agreement ranges from 88.3% for political finance reform to 92.2% for media visibility of women politicians. Mentorship and leadership training are supported by 91.4%, enforcing gender quotas by 89.5%, and the role of civil society organisations by 89.1%. No more than 5.2% disagree with any of the five statements. The pattern indicates broad acceptance that women's participation requires action across several domains rather than a single intervention.

FIGURE 6.1

Agreement with five statements about enabling mechanisms



Respondents also recognise the potential significance of women's presence in leadership. Almost all (93.6%, n = 2,784) agree that seeing successful women politicians inspires other women, while 90.7% (n = 2,772) agree that women leaders change perceptions of women's capability. A somewhat lower, though still substantial, 84.8% (n = 2,782) agree that women in leadership promote gender-sensitive laws and policies; 9.4% are neutral on this item. The distinction between these statements is important. Inspiration and changed perceptions concern the symbolic and social effects of women's presence. Gender-sensitive laws concern the possibility of substantive influence. The survey measures belief in these effects, not whether respondents have observed them or whether women's presence has produced particular policy outcomes.

Support is also high for routes through which women can build legitimacy and political capacity outside formal office. Between 90.6% and 92.2% agree that informal political discussion, community organising and endorsement by respected local leaders help women build skills and legitimacy. In particular, 90.9% agree that endorsement by respected local leaders, including community, traditional and faith leaders, increases a woman's legitimacy in her constituency. These findings suggest that respondents see political participation as socially embedded: women's opportunities are influenced not only by party rules and electoral institutions, but also by relationships and recognition within their communities.

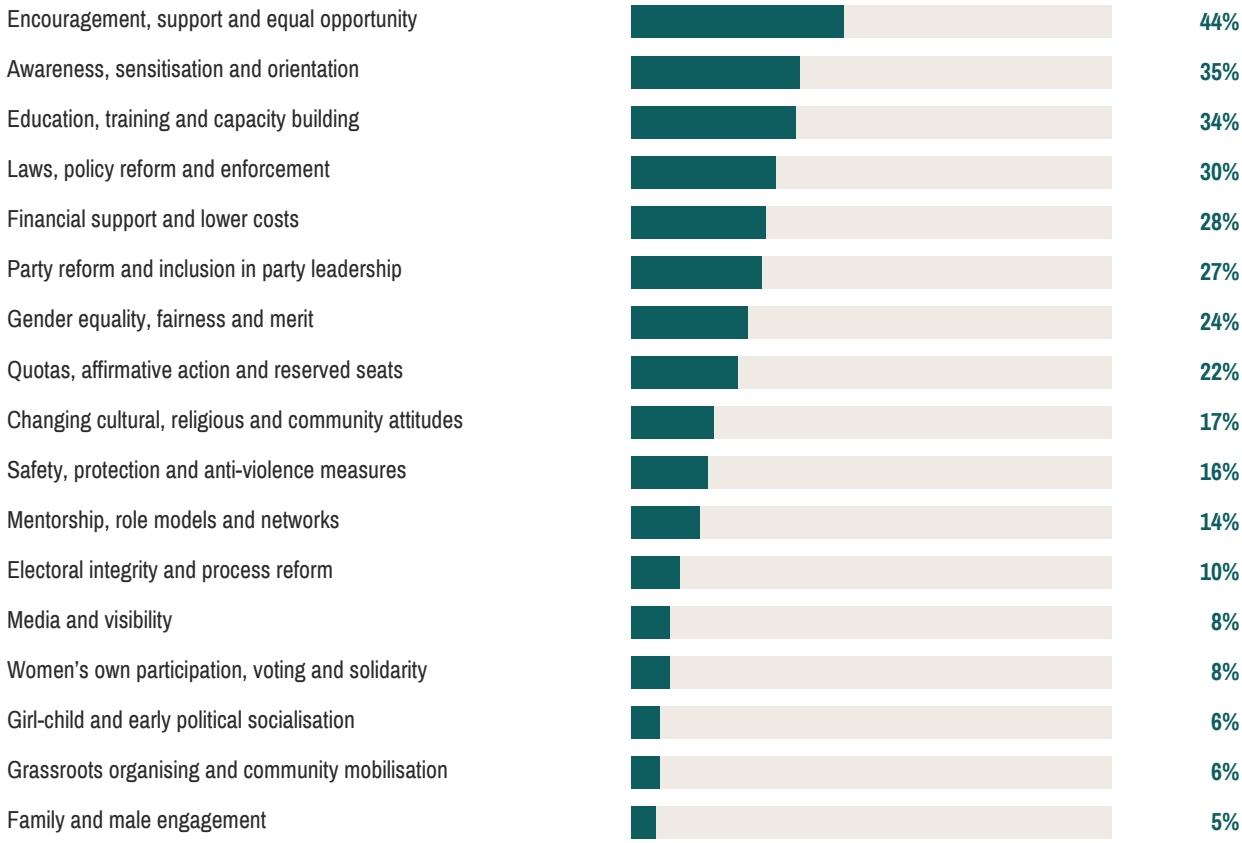
Women agree somewhat more strongly than men across the three enabling scores, by approximately 0.23 points on average. The difference is consistent across geopolitical zones and remains after adjustment, but it is modest relative to the overall level of agreement. Between 86.4% and 96.1% of women agree with the eight statements about enabling mechanisms and visibility, compared with 83.3% to 91.1% of men. The high agreement among men is notable given the gender differences in attitudes described in Chapter 4. It suggests that respondents can support measures to improve women's participation even where their views about women's leadership are less consistently egalitarian.

There is, however, a clear distinction between endorsing a proposed mechanism when prompted and identifying it as a priority in an open response. When respondents described in their own words what should be done to increase women's political representation, the most frequent themes were general encouragement, support and equal opportunity (44% of coded responses), awareness and sensitisation (35%), and education, training and capacity building (34%). Laws, policy reform and enforcement appeared in 30%, financial support and lower costs in 28%, and party reform in 27%. Quotas and reserved seats were proposed by 22%, safety and protection from violence by 16%, mentorship by 14%, and media visibility by 8%. These percentages are based on 2,462 coded responses; a response could carry several themes. Only one respondent opposed change, and no proposed step was mentioned at a clearly different rate by women and men.

Some 17% of coded proposals called for changes in cultural, religious or community attitudes, often through traditional and religious leaders, while 5% specifically mentioned engaging families and men. Only one respondent opposed change. The open responses therefore reinforce the broad support for greater inclusion, but they also show where respondents place their spontaneous emphasis. Encouragement, awareness and capacity development are more frequently named than individual structural mechanisms. At least one structural lever appears in 54% of responses, indicating that structural change is present in the public agenda even when no single measure dominates the unprompted answers.

FIGURE 6.2

Steps proposed to increase women's political representation



The two forms of evidence should be read together. High prompted agreement shows that respondents are receptive to a broad set of measures. Open responses reveal which ideas come most readily to mind when respondents are not given a list. Neither establishes the relative effectiveness of interventions, and neither can be treated as a definitive ranking of policy priorities. A programme or reform agenda based only on prompted agreement could overstate the strength of public commitment to a particular mechanism. An agenda based only on open responses could understate support for structural measures that respondents may not immediately identify without prompting.

Acceptance is not the same as demonstrated effect

The survey shows that respondents support the mechanisms presented to them. It does not compare their effectiveness or establish which should come first. The interviews and external evidence are therefore important for understanding the conditions, implementation risks and limits associated with each approach.

Quotas and reserved seats: broad support, contested design

Quotas and reserved seats are among the most direct mechanisms for increasing women's descriptive representation. Unlike interventions that seek to build confidence or improve public attitudes, they change the rules governing who can enter political institutions. Comparative research finds that quotas can increase women's legislative representation, particularly when they are legally binding, supported by placement or allocation rules and enforced through credible sanctions [31, 41]. In Nigeria, the absence of an enforceable quota has meant that policy commitments, including the 35% representation target in the National Gender Policy, have not produced a sustained increase in women's presence in elected institutions [21, 42].**89.5%**agree that enforcing quotas would raise representation

The survey indicates strong support for a quota mechanism: 89.5% agree that enforcing gender quotas would increase women's representation. A further 84.2% agree with a statement that quotas either do not exist or are poorly implemented or enforced. That second item combines two propositions, however, and does not reveal whether respondents are referring to the absence of a binding quota, weak implementation of existing commitments or both. In open responses, 22% propose quotas, affirmative action or reserved seats. This reflects broad acceptance of the principle of structural intervention, though not necessarily agreement on the form it should take.

The proposal for reserved seats has become a prominent part of the Nigerian debate. The Special Seats proposal, HB 1349, remains under consideration in the context described by the study. It proposes additional constituencies contested only by women rather than reserving a share of existing seats. This design has been advanced partly to avoid resistance from incumbents who may perceive a quota within existing constituencies as taking seats away from them. Opponents in the legislative debate have nevertheless described the proposal as discriminatory [26, 44]. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has supported the National Assembly since 2020 in examining options, including a proposed 30% quota on electoral lists, and has noted that 118 countries have adopted constitutional or electoral-law provisions intended to increase women's representation [43].

Participants who addressed quotas or reserved seats were almost uniformly supportive of the principle, and several described the debate as having moved from whether such a mechanism is needed to how it should be designed. Participants familiar with the legislative process described the procedural requirements for constitutional change, including a two-thirds majority and approval by at least 24 state assemblies, as well as a proposed review period of sixteen years across four electoral cycles. One participant cautioned that the measure would not be a complete solution, while believing it could substantially address underrepresentation:

"not going to be a silver bullet... but it will, to a greater extent, address the under-representation of women." Interview participant familiar with the legislative process"

Interview participant familiar with the legislative process

Support for reserved seats did not remove disagreement about the risks of particular designs. Four concerns emerged. First, an appointment-based model could be captured by politically connected women and fail to reach grassroots aspirants. One participant suggested reserving seats for women who had purchased

nomination forms and competed in party primaries but had not secured the party ticket. This would retain an element of political competition and could provide a route for women who had already demonstrated an intention to contest. It would not, on its own, resolve how candidates would be selected or how the process would be protected from party influence.

Second, participants raised the risk of tokenism, including an account of tokenistic implementation at state level. A reserved seat can increase the number of women in an institution without ensuring that its occupant has independent influence or a meaningful role in decision-making. Third, participants differed over how the mechanism should be framed. One argued that representation should be understood as a right rather than a favour; another worried that a mechanism perceived as giving women seats could weaken the standing of women who enter through it or reinforce the assumption that they are less capable of winning through ordinary competition. These positions expose a tension between the need to correct structural exclusion and the risk that the political legitimacy of women selected through a special mechanism may be challenged.

> *"Women are not asking for tables, it's a right... if you create that, it becomes less of this was earned and more of this was given."*
>
> **Woman, academic**

Fourth, participants questioned regional feasibility. One was sceptical that a quota would be accepted in parts of northern Nigeria, citing public resistance to a governor's proposal to allocate one of fifteen federal constituency seats to a woman. The participant expressed concern that reserved seats could be captured by political families:

> *"Very soon, if we continue with that special seat, you will see the wife of the governor will be selected... then it will now become a political seat."*
>
> **Woman, civil society participant**

This is a participant's concern about possible elite capture, not evidence that such capture has occurred under the proposed federal mechanism. Nor should the account be generalised to all communities or political actors in northern Nigeria. It does, however, show why design and public legitimacy matter. A mechanism intended to widen access could reproduce existing inequalities if allocation is controlled by the same political networks that currently shape candidate selection.

These concerns do not negate the case for quotas. They identify the institutional conditions on which their contribution depends: transparent allocation, clear eligibility, credible enforcement, public reporting, protection against arbitrary substitution and meaningful accountability for those responsible for implementation. The distinction between descriptive and substantive representation is central. Increasing the number of women in office is an important objective in a context of persistent exclusion, but numerical presence does not automatically confer autonomy or influence. The experiences of women representatives must also be considered in relation to party discipline, access to committees and leadership positions, freedom to raise

issues and the responsiveness of institutions to their contributions.

The principle has broad support; the design remains contested

The survey and interviews indicate substantial support for quotas and reserved seats. The concerns raised by participants relate to allocation, elite capture, tokenism, political legitimacy and regional acceptance. These are questions of implementation, not reasons to assume that all quota designs will have the same effect. Participants in the validation discussion added an important caution: reserved seats should complement, rather than discourage, women's participation in open electoral contests. They recommended pairing such measures with fee relief for women contesting open seats and minimum requirements for women's participation in party primaries as a condition for accepting candidate lists.

Finance reform: relief that works

Political finance reform is widely supported as a means of making elections more gender-inclusive. In the survey, 88.3% agree that political finance reforms could improve inclusion, and 28% of open responses propose financial support or lower costs. The support reflects recognition that the costs of candidacy extend beyond the purchase of nomination forms to campaign organisation, travel, communication, mobilisation and access to party networks. Measures discussed in the wider policy debate include gender-balanced party lists, incentives for parties that nominate women and caps on nomination fees for women aspirants [21, 43].

Nigeria has an institutional precedent in the Nigerian Women Trust Fund, established in 2011 to provide grants, leadership development and election monitoring for women [45]. Such initiatives can help candidates and women's organisations access resources that might otherwise be unavailable. However, published analysis cautions that piecemeal support may have limited reach without wider reform of campaign finance regulation and the political practices that make elections expensive [24]. Financial assistance can help an individual aspirant meet a particular cost, but it does not necessarily change the informal payments, patronage relationships or party decisions that determine whether she can secure a ticket and campaign effectively.

Interview participants raised a further issue about the design of nomination-fee concessions. Some supported lower fees or waivers, while others described cases in which a free or discounted form allegedly became a source of leverage over the recipient. They argued that a woman who had not made a financial contribution could be treated as having received a favour, and could subsequently face pressure to withdraw or reduced party support after winning a primary. One participant with direct candidacy experience described the concern:

> *"When a woman is given a form free... within the political parties, they use it as a weapon against women."*
>
> **Woman, political participant**

Another participant described how a concession could affect the way an aspirant was treated:

> *"They cut you short, because you did not contribute a lot... they treat you like a favour."*
>
> **Woman, academic**

One proposed alternative was a 50% reduction rather than a full waiver, combined with explicit party rules preventing pressure on candidates to withdraw. The argument was that a partial contribution might preserve a woman's negotiating position while reducing the immediate financial burden. This is a proposal arising from a limited number of interview accounts, not a tested intervention. Other participants recommended fee reductions or waivers without raising the same concern. It is therefore unclear whether partial discounts are more effective than full waivers, or whether the reported use of concessions as leverage is general practice across parties.

The accounts nevertheless identify a design issue that deserves attention. Financial assistance is not necessarily empowering if it creates a new dependency on the party official or sponsor who provides it. The value of a concession depends on whether the recipient retains control over her candidacy, whether the terms are transparent, and whether party support continues after the primary. It also depends on whether support addresses only the official fee or extends to other legitimate costs of campaigning and mobilisation. Participants repeatedly distinguished the formal price of a nomination form from the informal costs of reaching delegates and building support. Reducing one without addressing the other may leave the underlying financial barrier largely intact.

The evidence also points to a wider public-interest question. Some interview participants linked high campaign expenditure to incentives to recover costs after gaining office. This was an interpretation offered by participants, not a measured outcome of the study. It nevertheless suggests that reforms to women's access to political finance sit within a broader question about the integrity and affordability of electoral competition. A system that depends heavily on private wealth and patronage may disadvantage women while also weakening accountability for elected officials generally.

Financial support must protect independence as well as reduce cost

The survey supports finance reform, while interviews identify both the need for relief and possible risks in how concessions are delivered. No particular fee model has been evaluated. It points instead to the importance of transparent terms, protection against withdrawal pressure and attention to informal costs beyond the official nomination fee.

Mentorship, role models and the media

Mentorship and visibility are among the most strongly endorsed mechanisms in the survey. Some 91.4% agree that mentorship and leadership training help women succeed, 92.2% that media visibility encourages participation, and 93.6% that seeing successful women politicians inspires other women. Belief in the inspirational effect of visibility rises with age, from 90.4% among respondents aged 18 to 25 to 97.0% among those above 40. Yet when respondents propose changes in their own words, mentorship is mentioned in 14% of coded responses and media visibility in 8%. The difference again suggests that respondents recognise the value of these mechanisms when prompted but do not necessarily identify them as the most immediate priorities.

Role models can make political leadership more imaginable by showing that women can occupy public office, exercise authority and remain visible in political life. Interview participants described women who had cited a successful woman as the reason they decided to contest. One participant also linked visible role models with the confidence and consistency required to pursue political goals. These accounts suggest a possible pathway from visibility to aspiration: seeing women in leadership can challenge assumptions about who belongs in politics and provide an example that an aspiring candidate can identify with.

Participants also offered important qualifications. Two argued that the small number of visible women in Nigerian politics limits the scale of this effect. One questioned whether a sufficiently established group of successful women exists to influence participation widely, and suggested that the success of some prominent women reflects class and family wealth rather than a pathway that other women can reproduce. Another argued that young women encounter far more visible examples of success in entertainment than in political leadership. These views do not disprove the value of role models. They identify two conditions for visibility to have wider influence: there must be enough women in public office to create a visible presence, and their achievements must receive sufficient exposure to compete with other prominent role models.

> *"We don't have a political crop... I don't see whatever [visibility] influencing anybody to want to come out and vote, to come out and participate."*
>
> **Woman, academic and policy researcher**

Existing research supports the need to consider visibility alongside the institutional conditions that shape women's access to office. The small number of prominent women operate within a political structure that continues to exclude many others [21]. Visibility is therefore unlikely to substitute for measures that increase women's actual access to political positions. Its contribution may be greater when women are able to enter, remain in and exercise influence within institutions, creating a wider range of visible examples.

Mentorship faces a related structural constraint. The scarcity of women in political office limits the number of experienced women able to mentor aspiring candidates, while young women politicians have identified inadequate mentorship and support from established women as significant concerns [46, 47]. Interview participants described a gap between the mentorship younger women need and what established women in

office are able or willing to provide. One explanation focused on party loyalty: women officeholders may be reluctant to express criticism or publicly support other women if doing so risks political consequences. Another participant described a formal mentoring arrangement in which the assigned mentor was largely unavailable. A further participant acknowledged uncertainty about whether established women were providing meaningful mentorship.

> *"the political culture in Nigeria is not one that gives women so much space to ventilate their opinions without having some form of feedback. What I mean here is party loyalty in Nigeria is considered as something supreme."*
>
> **Woman, political actor**

These accounts point to both structural and individual limitations. Mentorship depends not only on the willingness of senior women to help, but also on their time, political freedom and access to influence. One participant openly preferred a male political patron because men currently hold greater practical power in party structures. That preference is not evidence that male patronage is inherently more effective; it reflects the unequal distribution of influence that shapes the choices available to aspiring women. Several participants suggested group-based mentorship, in which one senior mentor supports several aspiring women, as a more practical way to extend access when individual mentors have limited time.

Media visibility is similarly conditional. Interview participants described coverage of women politicians as disproportionately negative, scandal-focused or centred on appearance and marital status rather than political achievement. One participant used agenda-setting theory to explain how repeated coverage can shape what the public considers important and how it interprets a woman's political record. Another gave the example of women candidates being asked how they would manage childcare while men with similarly large families were not asked equivalent questions. Such practices can reproduce the idea that women's family responsibilities are a special concern and that their suitability for office requires additional justification.

> *"There's a theory we call in communication, agenda-setting theory of the media. They tell people what to think about and then tell them what they know about the situation."*
>
> **Man, policy researcher**

Published research on Nigerian media has also identified gendered coverage that marginalises or trivialises women politicians [47, 48]. One interview participant offered a qualification: critical reporting about a particular officeholder may sometimes reflect genuine conduct rather than gender bias. This is an important distinction. The aim is not to shield women politicians from legitimate scrutiny, but to ensure that reporting applies comparable standards and focuses on public responsibilities, policy positions and performance rather than appearance, marital status or assumptions about family roles.

Digital media add another dimension. In the survey, 58.3% of respondents say social media discussions influence their views on political participation moderately or heavily. The reported influence is lower among respondents aged 18 to 25 (50.3%) and respondents with a disability (38.0%). These differences describe the reported influence of social media on views, not the extent of online access or political engagement. Digital platforms can extend the reach of women's campaigns, networks and public advocacy, but they can also expose women to technology-facilitated abuse and harassment, as discussed in Chapter 5 [39]. Visibility without attention to online safety may therefore increase exposure to harm as well as opportunity.

Visibility and mentorship need a wider base of women in office

Role models can influence aspiration, and mentorship can transfer experience and political knowledge. Their reach is limited, however, when few women hold office, when party loyalty restricts their freedom to support others, or when media coverage undermines their legitimacy. These mechanisms are most credible as part of a wider process that increases women's access to political positions and makes their work visible on fair terms.

Training, advocacy and civil society

Civil society organisations provide an important bridge between women's political aspirations and the institutions through which participation takes place. They can offer political education, leadership development, advocacy skills, organising experience, networks and platforms for collective action. They can also monitor elections, engage political parties and public institutions, build coalitions and sustain pressure for changes that individual aspirants may be unable to secure alone. In the survey, 89.1% agree that civil society organisations play a major role in empowering women, rising to 91.8% among respondents who work in non-governmental organisations, compared with 88.4% among others. A further 88.5% agree that financial empowerment programmes can boost women's political participation. Education, training and capacity building appear in 34% of open responses.

Interview participants credited civil society organisations with filling gaps left by government and other institutions. Some described sustained advocacy as contributing to specific institutional gains. These accounts underline the value of collective action: civil society can keep women's representation on the public agenda, provide evidence to support reform, connect local experiences to national advocacy and create channels through which women can engage with decision-makers. Research on feminist civil society organisations in Nigeria documents their contribution to democratisation and gender equality over time [49]. Their influence may be cumulative, shaping the political and institutional environment even when it is not immediately reflected in election results.

The strongest experimental evidence discussed in this chapter comes from a randomised trial conducted with ActionAid Nigeria across 450 rural wards in three south-western states. The programme tested five sessions of advocacy training for women over five months and a separate sensitisation intervention for men. Women's advocacy training produced measurable improvements in the quality and quantity of political participation. The findings were consistent with the development of shared identity and collective confidence, suggesting

that training can help women act together and build a stronger sense of political agency [27, 50]. This is stronger evidence of an effect than expressed survey preferences or individual interview accounts, although the trial concerned political participation in rural wards and cannot show that training alone increases candidacy or election to office.

The men's sensitisation component reduced opposition to women's involvement and improved attitudes towards women leaders, but did not produce a comparable increase in women's participation during the study period [27]. This distinction is instructive. Changing attitudes among men may help create a more supportive environment, but behavioural change may take longer and depends on whether women have practical opportunities to participate. It also cautions against assuming that improvements in stated attitudes will automatically translate into greater access to candidacy or political power.

Programme-level evidence also illustrates the potential reach of sustained civil society and development-partner support. ActionAid Nigeria's Women's Voice and Leadership project, implemented from 2020 to 2024, reported supporting 12 women into key political roles, helping 40 women win electoral seats, inducting 190 women into traditional councils and enabling 17,296 women to collect permanent voter cards [51]. UN Women reported that its work in six states coincided with 11% women's representation in elective positions in those states, compared with a 3.8% national average [52]. These are programme figures reported by implementers. They indicate the scale and range of reported activity, but they are not independent impact evaluations and cannot show that the programmes alone caused the reported outcomes.

Interview participants also offered a practical criticism of existing support. Some considered capacity building and training too heavily emphasised relative to direct financial and logistical assistance. Their concern was that women may acquire skills and confidence but still be unable to pay the costs of nomination, travel, mobilisation or campaigning. One participant argued that no current intervention had demonstrably worked, a more sceptical position than the broader interview consensus. Another warned that women's networks could be co-opted by wealthy elites who steer capable women towards appointive positions rather than elective contests. The account highlights a distinction between access to public office in general and access to the electoral process through which voters choose representatives.

> *"Civil society is doing an incredible job... they will step up where the government feels, they will step up where other institutions feel."*
>
> **Woman, academic**

These criticisms do not negate the value of training or civil society action. They indicate that the contribution of such work depends on the pathway it opens. Training can improve the quality of participation, build collective confidence and strengthen advocacy. It may also help women understand party processes, communicate political priorities and organise support. But if the principal obstacles lie in nomination finance, party selection and the enforcement of rules, training cannot resolve them on its own. Civil society influence is likely to be stronger when capacity development is connected to advocacy, monitoring, access to resources and institutional engagement. The evidence supports a complementary model, rather than a choice between skills-based programmes and structural reform.

Training can strengthen participation, but it does not by itself secure candidacy

The randomised trial provides evidence that advocacy training can improve women's political participation. Programme reports show the scale of activities and reported outcomes, while interview participants identify gaps in financial and logistical support. These forms of evidence answer different questions and should not be treated as equivalent measures of impact.

Engaging men, communities and faith leaders

Women's political participation takes place within families, communities, religious institutions and party networks in which men often hold substantial influence. Engaging men is therefore not simply an exercise in changing individual attitudes. It can involve working with people who influence women's mobility, household decisions, access to networks, political legitimacy and the practical organisation of party activity. Three of the 20 interview participants independently emphasised the importance of engaging men as allies in efforts to advance women's political participation. Their argument was that men currently occupy much of the political space and that advocacy which excludes them risks creating resistance rather than building support.

> *"If you don't bring them on board, you are just creating more enemies for yourself."*
>
> **Woman, civil society participant**

The survey provides a basis for engaging community actors. Some 90.9% agree that endorsement by respected local leaders, including community, traditional and faith leaders, increases a woman's legitimacy in her constituency. Agreement is 93.0% among Christian respondents and 88.3% among Muslim respondents. Some 17% of open proposals call for changing cultural, religious or community attitudes, often through traditional and religious leaders, while 5% specifically identify family and male engagement. These figures indicate that respondents see community endorsement as a potential source of legitimacy, but endorsement may not translate into party nomination or electoral success.

Religious and traditional institutions should not be treated as homogeneous. Interview participants offered different interpretations of the relationship between religious belief and women's leadership. Some argued that

restrictive practices reflect selective interpretations rather than an unavoidable doctrinal position. Others described community expectations that can constrain women's mobility or public participation in particular settings. No single account of how religious institutions operate across Nigeria emerges from the findings, but they do suggest that faith leaders can be important interlocutors where they are willing to distinguish religious teaching from practices that restrict women's political agency.

The experimental evidence on men's sensitisation adds an important qualification. The trial reduced opposition to women's participation and improved attitudes towards women leaders, but it did not produce comparable increases in women's participation during the period measured [27]. Engagement with men may therefore contribute to a more supportive social environment without immediately changing the institutional conditions that govern women's access to political opportunities. The effects may also depend on who is engaged, the content and credibility of the intervention, the local context and the time available for changed attitudes to influence behaviour.

Community and faith-leader engagement can be particularly relevant where local endorsement influences whether women are accepted as credible candidates or public representatives. Yet endorsement should not become a new permission structure in which women's participation depends on approval from influential men. Its value lies in widening social legitimacy and reducing resistance, while recognising women's right to participate independently. The distinction is important: male allies and community leaders can help challenge exclusion, but they should not replace women's own leadership or determine which women are entitled to exercise it.

Lessons from other countries

Comparative experience shows that women's representation can increase through different institutional routes, but also that numerical gains can be fragile or coexist with constraints on political influence. Rwanda has the highest proportion of women in a lower house, at approximately 61%, following the adoption of a constitutional quota of 30% for decision-making bodies in 2003, during the post-genocide restructuring of the state [2, 53]. This level of descriptive representation has not removed concerns about women's autonomy, particularly within a dominant-party system in which candidates are vetted [54]. Rwanda therefore demonstrates the potential of a strong quota framework to change the composition of a legislature, but it does not show that numerical representation alone guarantees independent political influence.

Senegal adopted a parity law in 2010 requiring candidate lists to alternate women and men. The measure is associated with women holding approximately 43% to 46% of seats in the National Assembly [2, 7]. Its relevance to Nigeria lies in the binding nature of the rule and its effect on the composition of candidate lists. The institutional route is different, however. Nigeria's first-past-the-post system does not use the same party-list structure, and the Senegalese mechanism cannot simply be transferred without considering how candidates are nominated and elected in Nigeria.

South Africa illustrates both the potential and fragility of voluntary party quotas. Women held approximately 46% of parliamentary seats in 2020, supported largely by a voluntary 50% quota on candidate lists adopted by the African National Congress under a proportional representation system. Representation fell to approximately 43% in 2024 as the party lost vote share [2, 7, 55, 56]. This shows that party commitments can

produce substantial gains, but outcomes remain sensitive to party performance and the durability of internal rules. In a context where parties are important gatekeepers, voluntary commitments may be less reliable if they are not embedded in transparent procedures and backed by accountability.

Sweden's parties adopted rules requiring no less than 40% of either sex by the late 1980s, within a political culture in which gender equality had become a core value [56, 57]. The example demonstrates how party rules and wider social expectations can reinforce one another. It is not a direct template for Nigeria, where party structures, electoral competition and the enforcement environment differ. Rather, it illustrates the importance of sustained political commitment and internal party practices that make gender inclusion part of the way candidates are selected.

FIGURE 6.3

Women's political participation in Africa at a glance, 2021 and 2024

	Africa	Horn	East	Southern	Central	North	West	Annex
Lower houses of parliament 2024	26% (25%)	31% (33%)	34% (33%)	29% (28%)	22% (19%)	22% (24%)	20% (16%)	2
Upper houses of parliament 2024	21% (20%)	28% (30%)	34% (29%)	31% (29%)	28% (20%)	10% (11%)	7% (12%)	5
Parliament overall 2024	25% (24%)	35% (33%)	34% (32%)	29% (28%)	23% (19%)	20% (21%)	19% (16%)	5
Political party leadership 2024	9% (12%)	0% (17%)	11% (15%)	19% (14%)	0% (7%)	0% (0%)	0% (11%)	7
Election management bodies 2024	29% (28%)	30% (21%)	45% (45%)	39% (40%)	23% (20%)	15% (25%)	27% (24%)	8
Local government 2024	25% (21%)	29% (N/A)	24% (35%)	25% (20%)	24% (27%)	26% (3%)	28% (2%)	6
Speakers 2024	25% (21%)	0% (0%)	44% (33%)	43% (35%)	27% (18%)	0% (0%)	16% (16%)	9
Mayors of capital cities 2024	29% (19%)	40% (20%)	0% (0%)	20% (19%)	29% (43%)	17% (0%)	43% (20%)	10
Top executive positions 2024	13% (7%)	8% (10%)	28% (12%)	21% (9%)	11% (7%)	0% (0%)	11% (7%)	11
Cabinet 2024	24% (22%)	19% (17%)	36% (32%)	30% (26%)	18% (20%)	21% (13%)	21% (19%)	12

KEY
- Increased since 2021 (in brackets)
- Decreased since 2021 (in brackets)
- The same as 2021 (in brackets)

Source: International IDEA, Africa Barometer 2024 [7].

Three lessons recur across these examples. First, electoral systems matter: women are more likely to be elected under proportional representation than under first-past-the-post systems such as Nigeria's [7, 31]. Second, placement and allocation rules matter. A quota that allows parties to place women in unwinnable positions may increase the number of women on paper without changing the composition of elected institutions. Third, enforcement matters. Quotas without sanctions or credible monitoring can be ignored, while voluntary party commitments may depend on the fortunes and internal priorities of the party that adopted them [2, 56].

Regional and continental frameworks provide a further basis for advocacy. The African Union's Maputo Protocol commits states to women's participation in all electoral processes; Agenda 2063 sets an ambition of full parity in elected office by 2063; and the ECOWAS Supplementary Act of 2015 addresses affirmative action in decision-making [58, 59, 60]. In Nigeria, these commitments have functioned largely as advocacy levers in the absence of a binding domestic quota [7, 24]. Their practical effect depends on how international commitments are translated into domestic law, party rules and implementation arrangements.

Comparative examples should therefore be used to identify design principles rather than to assume that a model can be copied. Nigeria's federal structure, first-past-the-post electoral system, party organisation and political financing arrangements differ from those of Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Sweden. The international record supports the importance of enforceable rules, transparent allocation and consequences for non-compliance. It also reinforces the need to examine whether women who enter office can exercise substantive influence, rather than treating the number of women elected as the only measure of progress.

How women have reached office

The study sought to understand not only which conditions might help women participate, but also how women have navigated barriers to political breakthroughs. The evidence on individual pathways is more limited than the evidence on barriers and enabling conditions. The survey records respondents' beliefs about what would help; it does not document women's own experiences of securing nomination, winning elections or exercising influence in office. It is therefore important not to present the available material as a comprehensive account of how women have reached office across Nigeria.

Interview participants nevertheless identified several routes through which breakthroughs may occur. These included sustained civil society advocacy that helped secure institutional gains, individual leaders who made deliberate efforts to include women within their own institutions, and coalitions that brought women together to pursue shared political objectives. Participants emphasised that such routes depend on the willingness of decision-makers to act, the capacity of women's organisations to sustain pressure and the ability of coalitions to maintain collective purpose. They also described the limitations of routes that lead women towards appointive positions without addressing the barriers to elective office.

The accounts of role models and mentorship provide another perspective on how individual women's achievements can influence others. Interview participants described women who were inspired to contest after seeing a successful woman in public office, and one participant referred to receiving direct testimonials from women who identified her as the reason they had decided to stand. Such accounts show the potential of visible examples to shape aspiration, although how often this occurs, and whether inspiration is enough to overcome financial and institutional constraints, remains unknown.

The illustrative experiences presented later in this publication add depth to these themes. They include an account of mentorship, persistence and access to national office; the experience of a woman with a disability navigating political aspiration and formal inclusion; a political aspirant's experience alongside advocacy for reserved representation; and the legal, evidential and organisational routes through which institutional change may be pursued. These accounts are valuable for understanding particular pathways and the agency exercised by individual women. They should not be treated as representative of all women's experiences or as proof that the same route is available in every state, party or political context.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that women reach office through a combination of individual persistence, relationships, political opportunity and collective action. Yet these factors operate within a system in which parties and political institutions determine access to candidacy and resources. Individual achievement is therefore important, but it should not obscure the structural conditions that make some pathways possible and leave others inaccessible. The evidence is stronger on the enabling conditions that participants believe could make breakthroughs more likely than on the comparative success of particular routes into office.

What the evidence can and cannot establish

The survey identifies broad support for enabling mechanisms. Interviews explain how participants believe these mechanisms operate and where they may fail. Published research and programme evidence provide stronger support for some interventions, particularly advocacy training, but no single model can be assumed to work in every Nigerian context. No representative dataset of women's individual routes into office is available.

The evidence across this chapter points to the importance of combining enabling conditions rather than relying on any one in isolation. Training can strengthen political skills and collective confidence; mentorship can provide guidance and networks; media visibility can broaden the range of women seen as credible leaders; and engagement with men and community institutions can improve social legitimacy. These mechanisms are unlikely to overcome exclusion if women remain unable to secure party nominations, access campaign resources or rely on transparent and enforceable rules. Conversely, structural measures may be less sustainable if they are not accompanied by political education, public understanding, supportive networks and conditions in which women can exercise influence once elected.

The central distinction is between interventions that help women prepare to participate and those that change the institutional terms on which participation is possible. Both matter, but they address different parts of the political pathway. The evidence suggests that enabling conditions are most likely to reinforce one another when they connect individual and collective capacity with institutional access, transparent implementation and the opportunity to exercise substantive influence. The next chapter examines what these findings mean for understanding women's political participation and representation in Nigeria.

CHAPTER 7

07 Discussion



The evidence points to a structural explanation for women's under-representation. Women participate in political life and public attitudes are broadly supportive, yet access to candidacy and the institutions that determine who can compete remain constrained by party gatekeeping, money, informal networks and weakly enforced rules.

The central finding is not that women are absent from Nigerian politics, nor that the public is uniformly opposed to their leadership. It is that participation does not reliably translate into access to political power. Women vote, mobilise, organise and contribute to party and community life, but their progression towards nomination, electoral contestation and decision-making is restricted by a system in which formal party structures and informal networks allocate opportunity. These constraints are not independent. Financial resources influence who is considered viable; social expectations shape who can acquire and deploy those resources; insecurity can narrow the space for public participation and reporting; and weak enforcement allows exclusionary practices to persist.

This interpretation brings the findings together without reducing them to a single cause. Party gatekeeping is a central institutional constraint because parties control nominations and much of the access to political competition. It is not, however, an isolated mechanism. Its effects are reinforced by the costs of candidacy, patronage, gendered expectations, political insecurity and uneven access to networks. Public support for women's participation is therefore compatible with persistent exclusion: approval in principle does not necessarily alter the incentives, rules or relationships through which political opportunity is distributed.

Why the party gate, not public opinion, is the binding constraint

Explanations of women's under-representation often distinguish between the supply of women willing and prepared to stand for office and the demand for candidates by the organisations that select them. The findings give greater weight to the demand side, while showing why the two cannot be separated completely. Survey respondents express broad support for women's political participation and for mechanisms intended to improve representation. Yet they also identify institutional impediments as the most serious of the four measured barrier domains. The institutional score averages 4.18 out of 5, compared with 3.91 for socio-cultural barriers, 3.74 for political environment and safety, and 3.67 for economic and educational barriers. More than eight in ten respondents agree that parties rarely nominate women for winnable seats (82.6%), while 89.2% agree that party decisions are dominated by male elites.

These are perceptions of party practice, not a direct audit of nomination decisions. Their significance lies partly in their consistency across respondent groups. Party members themselves report broadly similar institutional concerns to non-members: their average institutional barrier score is 4.15, compared with 4.20 among non-members. Criticism of party practices is therefore not confined to people outside party structures. Interview participants also described women's active contribution to grassroots mobilisation alongside limited access to the decisions that determine candidacy. This is consistent with Nigerian research documenting women's presence as voters and mobilisers but marginality at candidate selection [25].

The survey further complicates a simple public-attitudes explanation. The attitudes index does not clearly distinguish respondents who hold a valid Permanent Voter's Card, usually vote or belong to a political party from those who do not, once the relevant characteristics and multiple comparisons are taken into account. This does not mean attitudes are irrelevant to political inclusion. It means that, within the outcomes measured, individual endorsement of women's participation does not explain who takes part. The distinction is between an individual's stated view and the social and institutional conditions under which political action becomes possible.

The participation pathway helps clarify this gap. Registration and voting are important forms of engagement, but neither guarantees access to party leadership, nomination or a winnable contest. Women may be highly visible in mobilisation and electoral work without holding equivalent influence over candidate selection or party resources. The party gate is consequently a critical point of conversion: it determines whether political interest, experience and mobilisation can be translated into candidacy. Accounts of women who secured a nomination but later faced pressure or loss of support indicate that access can remain precarious even after an initial decision has been made [35].

The argument is not that every party or every selection decision operates in the same way. Nor does the survey measure the actual frequency of women being denied tickets. Rather, the convergence between high perceived institutional barriers, interview accounts and existing research makes party selection a central explanation for the participation-representation gap. This also helps explain why advocacy and formal policy commitments have not produced a corresponding rise in women's share of elected office. Research on gender quotas distinguishes an incremental route, in which representation is expected to rise gradually as social conditions change, from a fast-track route in which rules deliberately alter selection outcomes [2, 31]. Nigeria's experience suggests that incremental change is unlikely to overcome entrenched party and patronage arrangements on its own.

Deliberate exclusion or the logic of electability?

Interview participants offered different explanations for why parties do not select more women. Many described exclusion as deliberate or structurally maintained, pointing to male-dominated leadership, informal networks and decisions made without meaningful participation by women. Two public officials, by contrast, described parties as backing candidates they believe can win. These accounts should not be collapsed into a single claim about motive. Party-level records of candidate selection, internal deliberations and the criteria applied to individual aspirants are not available, so how often exclusion is intentional, or how often party actors understand their decisions as electoral pragmatism, cannot be established.

The distinction is analytically important, but the two explanations are not mutually exclusive. Electability is not a neutral measure when the resources used to judge it are unequally distributed. In a first-past-the-post system, candidates may need substantial finance, local networks, political sponsorship and the capacity to mobilise supporters. Research on Nigerian political finance describes the influence of financiers and political patrons, sometimes referred to as godfathers, who expect returns on their investment [24, 34]. If access to these resources is already gendered, selectors can favour candidates who appear viable according to criteria that systematically advantage men.

In this setting, a party may sincerely believe it is choosing the strongest candidate while reproducing an unequal pattern. Financial backing, visibility among party elites, prior access to influential networks and the ability to mobilise delegates may be treated as evidence of electoral strength. Yet these attributes are not simply individual qualities. They are partly the accumulated result of access to resources and relationships from which women have historically been excluded. An apparently neutral judgement about experience or viability can therefore preserve existing inequalities without requiring an explicit statement that women should not lead.

This interpretation does not mean that all electability arguments are pretexts, or that every unsuccessful woman aspirant was more qualified than the candidate selected. It does show why claims about electability need to be examined against the conditions in which candidates build political capital. The survey finding that 82.6% believe parties rarely nominate women for winnable seats indicates a widely held perception, not the proportion of nominations that are objectively unwinnable. Establishing the relative importance of deliberate exclusion and electability calculations would require systematic party-level evidence, including nomination rules, delegate and primary results, candidate financing, the distribution of winnable seats and the reasons given for selection.

The implications of the two explanations are complementary. Where rules are deliberately disregarded or women are pressured to withdraw, transparency, enforceable procedures and accountability become central. Where electability is shaped by unequal access to finance and networks, the criteria and resources that determine political viability also matter. Addressing only explicit discrimination could leave resource-based exclusion intact; addressing only campaign costs could leave male-dominated selection structures unchanged. The evidence supports treating both as plausible and interacting mechanisms rather than deciding, without sufficient data, that one explanation accounts for all cases.

Money as a filter on who can compete

Financial exclusion is more than the difficulty of meeting a high nomination fee. It operates as a filter across the candidacy process. Aspirants may need to pay for party forms, mobilise delegates, maintain relationships with political patrons, travel, organise supporters and sustain a campaign. Informal payments and expectations of reciprocity can make the real cost substantially different from the official fee. Those able to raise large sums, or to secure backing from people who can, are more likely to be treated as viable. Women's unequal access to income, assets and influential networks can therefore affect not only whether they can afford to contest, but also whether party actors regard them as credible candidates [24].

The survey presents an apparent ranking puzzle. Economic and educational barriers receive the lowest average score of the four domains, at 3.67, yet finance is the most frequent individual barrier named without prompting, appearing in 38% of responses. In the broader open-ended classification, economic and educational barriers are mentioned by 53% of respondents, compared with 69% for socio-cultural barriers and 39% for institutional impediments. The difference between prompted ratings and open responses is not necessarily contradictory. When respondents assess a set of statements about barriers affecting women, they may place particular weight on factors they understand as gender-specific, such as restrictive expectations or party bias. When asked to name the biggest obstacles in their own words, the cost of politics may come to mind as a defining feature of the Nigerian political environment more generally.

This is a plausible interpretation, not a mechanism directly tested by the survey. It nevertheless helps explain why a cost experienced across the political system can have unequal consequences. If all aspirants face high costs, the effect is not necessarily equal. Those with less access to formal finance, wealth, political patrons or established networks have fewer ways to meet them. Women may face an additional disadvantage where financial resources are controlled by family members or where social expectations make independent fundraising and late-night political networking more difficult. The interaction of financial and social constraints matters more than either barrier considered alone.

Money also shapes the incentives of the political system. Participants linked high campaign expenditure to expectations that candidates will recover their costs once in office. Where political investment is treated as something to be recouped, access to office can become tied to patronage and obligations to financiers. This raises a governance concern beyond women's exclusion: a system that rewards the ability to spend heavily may strengthen the influence of those who finance candidates and weaken accountability to constituents. The study captures this concern through participant accounts and existing analysis, but it does not measure the extent to which elected officials recoup campaign expenditure.

The experience of nomination-fee concessions illustrates how a measure intended to reduce exclusion can be absorbed into the same relationships that create it. Some interview participants described free or discounted forms being used as leverage over women aspirants, while others supported financial relief. The accounts are few, and they do not point to a routine practice across parties. They nevertheless show why the terms of assistance matter. A concession that leaves a candidate dependent on a party sponsor may reduce one cost while creating another obligation. It may also fail to address delegate payments and campaign expenditure. The 2022 increase in campaign spending ceilings has been cited as widening the resource gap [30], but its effect on women candidates has not been independently estimated here.

Financial reform must therefore be understood as a question of political access and independence, not simply affordability. Reducing official fees may widen entry, but the effect is limited if informal costs, patronage and unequal access to campaign networks remain unchanged. Equally, broader political finance reform may not resolve discriminatory selection practices. The findings point to a cumulative process in which money influences who can enter, who is considered electable and whose position remains secure after nomination.

Norms that are widely recognised, unevenly held and embedded in party practice

The findings reveal a distinction between broad recognition of gendered barriers and the uneven distribution of personal attitudes. Respondents widely recognise that social expectations constrain women's political participation, but women and men do not express the same level of support for women's leadership. The gender gap is especially pronounced when respondents are asked to compare women directly with men as political leaders. This suggests that acceptance of women's participation has moved further than acceptance of women as equally legitimate holders of political authority. People may endorse a qualified woman in principle while retaining assumptions about who is naturally suited to leadership.

Religious differences require similar care. The survey identifies a moderate difference in attitudes between Christian and Muslim respondents, but both groups have average scores above the midpoint. Religion does not produce a clear difference in the overall socio-cultural barrier score after the relevant comparisons. Interview participants also distinguished religious teachings from selective interpretations and local practices. These findings do not support treating either faith community as homogeneous or religion as a fixed explanation for women's exclusion. They suggest instead that religious and cultural authority is contested, and that the same traditions may be interpreted and mobilised in different ways [24].

The absence of a clear relationship between individual attitudes and the participation outcomes measured is important for understanding how norms operate. A woman may support women's leadership and still face family expectations that restrict her movement, community scrutiny that damages her reputation, or party practices that make participation difficult. A man may express support for equality but continue to participate in a political environment where male networks control access to information and influence. Norms can therefore constrain behaviour through the expectations and actions of other people, not only through an individual's own beliefs.

Interview accounts make this institutional dimension visible. Participants described political meetings scheduled late at night, assumptions that women remain responsible for childcare, and the reputational costs of being publicly active. These practices may appear to be routine features of political organisation rather than explicit rules excluding women. Their effect, however, is to make participation more costly for people whose time, mobility and public reputation are governed by gendered expectations. A party meeting time, complaint process or informal networking practice can translate a wider social norm into an institutional barrier.

This relationship also qualifies the idea that culture and institutions are separate levels of explanation. Party practices are shaped by the social environment in which political actors operate, but they also reproduce and legitimise expectations about who belongs in politics. The moderate positive correlations between socio-cultural and institutional barrier scores (0.59), and between socio-cultural barriers and political environment and safety (0.57), are consistent with the perception that these constraints are connected. Correlations cannot establish the direction of influence, and shared agreement tendencies may contribute to the relationships. Their value is to show that respondents do not experience the domains as wholly separate.

The findings therefore point to a process of mutual reinforcement. Gender norms influence who is expected to speak, travel, fundraise and lead; institutional routines determine whether those expectations become consequential for access; and the resulting scarcity of women in decision-making can make male leadership

appear normal. This does not mean every community or party reproduces the same practices. It means that individual expressions of support are insufficient evidence that the social and organisational conditions of political participation have changed.

Safety, silence and the limits of what is known

Political insecurity matters both as a direct constraint and as a condition shaping who can participate publicly. Survey respondents widely perceive politics as violent and unsafe for women, and women report greater concern about harassment and intimidation than men. Fear of violence is also a stated reason for not voting, although it is less frequently cited than lack of registration or a Permanent Voter's Card. The political environment and safety score averages 3.74, while 16.5% of respondents who had voted never or once cited security concerns or fear of violence as their main reason for limited voting. These measures capture perceived risk and stated reasons, so they say little about how prevalent violence is among women candidates or voters.

Interview participants described threats, harassment, online abuse and intimidation, and raised concern that women may not report incidents. The significance of these accounts lies not only in the harm described but in the relationship between safety and institutional trust. Where a candidate fears stigma, retaliation or loss of party support if she reports abuse, the organisation expected to protect her may also be perceived as part of the risk. Under-reporting then becomes a plausible consequence of the political environment. However, there is no independently verified incident register or representative estimate of non-reporting, and individual accounts should not be generalised to all parties or candidates.

The survey found that perceptions of political risk were broadly shared across respondent groups. Respondents who cited security concerns as their reason for not voting did not have a meaningfully different average safety score from those who gave other reasons. This may indicate that fear is understood as a general feature of women's political participation rather than a perception confined to people reporting a specific personal experience. It does not show that everyone faces the same level of risk, nor does it allow the study to distinguish perceived insecurity from exposure to violence.

Online abuse extends the problem beyond physical campaigning and public meetings. The study's findings on online bullying, alongside research documenting gaps in party responses to technology-facilitated abuse [39], suggest that digital visibility can create additional exposure. This is particularly relevant to younger women, whose political expression and networks may be developed through digital platforms. The frequency and severity of online abuse across all groups are unknown, but the accounts show why visibility cannot be treated as an uncomplicated benefit.

Safety is therefore both an enabling condition and a test of institutional credibility. The willingness to participate depends not only on whether women are encouraged to enter politics, but also on whether they can speak, organise, contest and report abuse without unacceptable personal or political costs. The limits of the evidence should remain explicit: the study measures perceptions and records qualitative accounts, not the incidence of violence. Further interpretation should not convert fear into a prevalence estimate or treat a small number of interview accounts as representative of all women in Nigerian politics.

Why the remedies respondents endorse are contingent

Respondents strongly endorse the enabling mechanisms presented in the survey, with agreement ranging from 88.3% to 92.2% across political finance reform, civil society, quotas, mentorship and media visibility. This breadth of support is important because it indicates that the proposed mechanisms are not rejected by a substantial constituency in the sample. Which intervention would be most effective, how much it would cost and whether it would change nomination and election outcomes remain open questions. Each mechanism depends on conditions that the findings show cannot be taken for granted.

Quotas depend on design, enforcement and the distribution of decision-making authority. The National Gender Policy's 35% target illustrates the limits of a commitment without binding consequences. International research finds that quotas can increase women's descriptive representation when rules are enforceable and specify how candidates are placed [31, 41]. The interview concerns about elite capture, tokenism, regional feasibility and the framing of reserved seats show that even a binding mechanism can be weakened by the way candidates are selected and held accountable. A larger number of women in office would be a significant change, but it would not automatically ensure that those women can act independently or influence policy.

Mentorship depends partly on the availability of women who have reached positions from which they can offer meaningful support. Where women remain scarce in political office, the pool of experienced mentors is also limited [46]. Mentorship can provide information, confidence and networks, but it cannot by itself change who controls nominations. Visibility has a similar dependency. Seeing women in leadership can widen perceptions of what is possible, but interview participants questioned whether a small number of highly visible women can influence the aspirations of young women when those examples appear exceptional or inaccessible. Research on critical mass asks whether women need to reach a threshold share of seats before they can change institutional outcomes [61]. Whether greater visibility changes attitudes over time cannot be tested with cross-sectional data, and the cross-sectional association between visibility and perceived socio-cultural barriers cannot show a feedback effect.

Training and advocacy have a stronger basis in evidence of a specific outcome, but the scope of that evidence matters. A randomised trial in 450 rural wards in three south-western states found that advocacy training improved the quality and quantity of women's political participation [27]. It also found that sensitisation training for men improved attitudes but did not produce a comparable increase in women's participation during the study period. These results demonstrate that some interventions can change particular forms of participation in the settings studied. They leave open whether training leads to candidacy, nomination or election. Participants with programme experience also described a gap between training and the financial or logistical support required to contest.

Civil society advocacy can connect individual capacity to institutional change, but programme activity and reported outputs should not be confused with causal evidence of impact. The programme figures discussed in Chapter 6 indicate that organisations have supported women into political and traditional roles and helped women obtain voter cards. What would have happened without those programmes cannot be known. Their contribution is most plausibly understood as part of a wider process involving advocacy, networks, practical support and institutional engagement.

Community, traditional and faith leaders may influence the legitimacy attached to women's public participation, while men can be important allies in political spaces where they hold substantial influence. Yet endorsement by influential people cannot substitute for women's own authority, resources or access to decisions. The trial evidence on male sensitisation is a useful caution: improved attitudes do not necessarily produce immediate changes in participation. Engagement is therefore better understood as one condition within a wider process, rather than as a substitute for institutional access.

Table 7.1 sets the level of survey support for each mechanism beside the conditions and limits identified in the interviews and published research.

TABLE 7.1

Conditions and limits of the enabling mechanisms respondents endorse

Mechanism	Survey agreement	Conditions on which it depends	Limits and risks identified
Quotas and reserved representation	89.5%	Enforceable rules with consequences for non-compliance and clear provisions on how candidates are placed or selected [31, 41]. A settled allocation model, public reporting and safeguards, as participants proposed.	Participants cautioned about elite capture, tokenism, regional feasibility and the framing of reserved seats. A binding mechanism can still be weakened by the way candidates are selected.
Political finance reform and fee relief	88.3%	Published fee schedules and written conditions, safeguards against pressure to withdraw, and attention to informal costs such as payments linked to delegates.	Concessions were described as being used as leverage against recipients, in accounts from a small number of participants. One participant proposed a 50% reduction with rules against withdrawal pressure; this remains untested.
Mentorship and leadership training	91.4%	Enough women in positions from which they can offer meaningful support. Participants suggested group-based models as one way to extend limited mentoring capacity.	Mentors are scarce where few women hold office [46]. Neither mentorship nor training changes who controls nominations, and a trial found improved participation but no evidence that training leads to candidacy [27].

Mechanism	Survey agreement	Conditions on which it depends	Limits and risks identified
Media visibility	92.2%	Coverage that avoids framing women candidates by appearance, marital status or personal controversy, as participants and published research describe [48].	Visibility may seem exceptional or inaccessible unless more women are visible [61]. Whether visibility changes attitudes over time cannot be tested with cross-sectional data.
Civil society support	89.1%	Practical support for nomination costs, transport, communications and campaign logistics alongside training and mentorship, as participants with programme experience described.	Reported programme outputs come from implementers, not independent evaluations. Support does not by itself change how parties select candidates.
Engagement of community, traditional and faith leaders and men	90.9%	Willing leaders and men as allies, with engagement treated as one condition within a wider process.	A trial found improved attitudes without a comparable increase in women's participation during the study period [27]. Endorsement cannot substitute for women's own authority, resources or access to decisions.

The remedies are consequently complementary but not interchangeable. Training may prepare women to participate; mentorship and visibility may help them imagine and navigate political pathways; civil society may organise collective pressure; community engagement may reduce social resistance; finance reform may widen the pool able to compete; and enforceable rules may change the decisions through which candidates are selected. Where these mechanisms are disconnected, an intervention may improve one stage of participation while leaving the next stage unchanged. Their contribution depends on whether they connect to the points at which political opportunity is allocated.

What other countries suggest for Nigeria's parties and rules

Comparative experience is most useful when it identifies the institutional conditions associated with increased representation, rather than when it is treated as a menu of models that can be transferred unchanged. Rwanda and Senegal demonstrate how constitutional or legislated quotas can alter the composition of legislatures. Senegal's parity law combines equal numbers of women and men on candidate lists with alternating

placement, reducing the scope for parties to satisfy a quota by placing women in less competitive positions [2, 7]. Rwanda's constitutional quota has contributed to the world's highest share of women in a lower house, but concerns about the autonomy of elected representatives within a dominant-party system show that numerical representation does not settle questions of influence [53, 54].

South Africa illustrates a different route. A voluntary quota adopted by the African National Congress contributed to high representation within a proportional representation system, but the share of women in parliament fell as the party's electoral position changed [55, 56]. The example shows both the potential of party-level commitments and their dependence on the fortunes and continuing commitment of the party applying them. Sweden's party rules, developed within a political culture where gender equality had become an established party value, similarly suggest that voluntary arrangements are more likely to endure when they are embedded in internal political norms and practice [56, 57].

These cases point to three institutional considerations. First, electoral systems shape the available route to representation. Candidate-list quotas are easier to apply within proportional representation systems than within Nigeria's first-past-the-post system [7, 31]. Second, placement rules matter: a numerical requirement without provisions governing the competitiveness of candidates may produce formal compliance without meaningful electoral opportunity. Third, enforcement determines whether a commitment changes party behaviour or remains aspirational. These lessons are consistent with the Nigerian evidence on the gap between formal gender commitments and party practice.

The comparative cases cannot show that a particular model would work in Nigeria. The political systems, party structures, constitutional arrangements and historical contexts differ. Rwanda's high representation cannot be taken as proof that a similar quota would generate equivalent outcomes in Nigeria, and South Africa's voluntary party route may be less transferable where parties are not internally committed to gender equality. The comparative evidence is therefore strongest as a set of questions about enforceability, candidate placement, party incentives and the autonomy of women elected, rather than as a direct policy prescription.

Continental and regional commitments, including the Maputo Protocol, the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the ECOWAS Supplementary Act on gender equality, provide a wider normative basis for women's participation [58, 59, 60]. Their existence does not guarantee domestic implementation. Nigeria's experience reinforces the distinction between adopting a commitment and changing the institutions that determine whether it is observed. The comparative record strengthens the argument that rules matter, but it also cautions that rules must be embedded in arrangements capable of enforcement and accountability.

Reform against the interests of those who control the gate

A structural explanation raises a question of political incentives. The institutions that control access to candidacy are also the institutions whose practices would need to change. Political parties control nominations, while legislators elected through existing party arrangements influence the legal rules governing elections, quotas and political finance. Reform may therefore require decisions by actors who benefit from the current distribution of influence. This does not mean that all party leaders or legislators oppose change, but it helps explain why public support and formal commitments do not automatically produce institutional reform.

The debate around reserved representation illustrates this tension. Participants described resistance from some lawmakers, including arguments that special seats would discriminate against men [26]. Others anticipated regional opposition or questioned whether reserved seats might be captured by politically connected families. These accounts show that reform is contested not only over its technical design but also over who gains access to political authority. A proposal can be supported in principle and still face resistance when it changes the distribution of seats, influence or resources.

The existence of gender desks, women's wings and formal inclusion commitments that participants described as weak or symbolic reinforces the distinction between institutional form and institutional effect. A structure may exist without controlling budgets, nominations or decisions. The same risk applies to any new mechanism that is created without clear authority, transparent procedures or consequences for non-compliance. Institutional change cannot be inferred from the adoption of a policy or the creation of a committee alone.

The evidence suggests that sustained pressure and accountability beyond the immediate interests of party selectors may be important to reform. Civil society advocacy, public reporting, independent scrutiny of nomination processes and legal obligations can make institutional performance visible. These mechanisms are not guaranteed to overcome resistance, and their comparative effectiveness has not been evaluated. They do, however, help explain why reform cannot depend solely on voluntary goodwill from the actors who control access to political opportunity.

Young women at the start of the pathway

The age profile of the survey gives particular importance to the experiences of young women, although the sample is not a representative estimate of Nigeria's youth population. Among respondents aged 18 to 25, 47.2% hold a valid Permanent Voter's Card. Among those in this age group who had voted never or once, 64.4% cited registration or access to a card as the reason for limited voting. These findings point to a practical barrier at the beginning of the political participation pathway. They also show that political inclusion cannot be understood only through candidacy and office-holding: young people may be lost from formal participation before they have the opportunity to develop political experience.

Young women also encounter social and digital conditions as political habits and aspirations form. In the survey, 72.6% of respondents aged 18 to 25 agree that online bullying discourages women from expressing political opinions. Interview participants described limited mentorship from established women and

questioned whether the small number of visible women politicians provides young women with accessible role models. Existing research similarly identifies inadequate mentorship and support as concerns for young women politicians [47]. These findings suggest that early political socialisation is not only about awareness or interest; it is also shaped by whether young women can find networks, encouragement and safe spaces in which to develop political confidence.

Progression from early interest to candidacy requires more than an initial willingness to participate. Young women need opportunities to acquire political knowledge, take part in community and party activity, develop relationships and gain access to resources. If registration is difficult, public expression carries reputational or online risks, and party networks remain difficult to enter, the pathway can narrow at several points. Because individuals were not followed over time, it is not possible to say how many young women move from voting or mobilisation into party leadership or candidacy, but the evidence does show that barriers at early stages and at the nomination stage are connected in the wider process of political exclusion.

Age should not be treated as a proxy for a uniform experience. Young women differ by geography, socioeconomic position, disability, education, religion and political networks. The evidence is too limited to map all of these intersections or to compare the trajectories of different groups of young women systematically. The relevant conclusion is narrower: the early stages of participation matter, and barriers encountered there can limit the pool of women who later have the experience and networks needed to seek office.

The Integrated Theory in light of the findings

The Integrated Theory introduced in Chapter 1 explains women's political participation and representation through three interrelated levels: micro-level individual and community conditions, meso-level institutional and organisational arrangements, and macro-level political, economic and policy structures. It brings together seven dimensions: socio-cultural barriers (SCB), economic and educational disparities (EED), political environment hostility (PEH), institutional and structural impediments (ISI), facilitating mechanisms and policy change (FMPC), policy impact and visibility (PIV), and political socialisation and cultural capital (PSC). It also traces a candidacy pathway from readiness and ambition through recruitment and nomination to campaigning and contestation, while distinguishing descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation.

The findings broadly support the framework's central proposition that exclusion is produced through interacting conditions rather than a single barrier. They also refine how the levels relate to one another. The clearest evidence concerns the institutional dimension: it receives the highest average barrier score, and the interview accounts describe party practices as a point through which financial resources, networks and social expectations influence access to candidacy. The institutional level is therefore not simply one factor among several. It is a conversion point at which upstream inequalities can become decisions about who is nominated, supported and able to compete.

The framework's distinction between upstream and downstream constraints is useful, but the evidence suggests that these should not be understood as a strictly linear sequence. Socio-cultural expectations can shape women's early ambition and access to networks, while party practices can reinforce those expectations by determining who is seen as credible or electable. Economic resources affect readiness and mobilisation,

but also influence the decisions of party selectors. Political insecurity can affect public expression and campaigning, while weak institutional protection may reinforce the expectation that women should avoid political visibility. The dimensions therefore operate recursively: institutional practices reproduce social and economic inequalities, and those inequalities in turn shape the resources and relationships through which women approach institutions.

The candidacy pathway remains analytically important because it makes visible the difference between participation and representation. The study has stronger evidence about some early forms of participation, including registration, voting and party membership, than it has about ambition, nomination decisions and candidacy trajectories. The survey does not directly measure political ambition or the conversion of aspiration into a party ticket. The interviews provide accounts of gatekeeping and withdrawal, but they do not constitute a representative record of candidate experiences. The framework's claims about ambition and candidacy are therefore supported by qualitative accounts and contextual evidence, not tested as population-level causal relationships.

The seven propositions associated with the theory can be assessed against the measures that were available. The table distinguishes findings that are directly observed from propositions that remain plausible but untested. It does not treat a perception score as a direct measure of behaviour or an association as evidence of causation.

TABLE 7.2

The study's theoretical propositions and what the findings support

Proposition	Measures available	Finding	Interpretation and evidential status
H1	Perceived economic and educational barriers; open-ended naming of finance; registration, voting and party membership.	Economic and educational barriers average 3.67. Finance is the most frequent individual barrier named without prompting, at 38%. The score has no clear adjusted association with the three participation outcomes.	Consistent with cost as a barrier to candidacy, as interview participants and published research describe. The survey did not measure ambition or candidacy, so the proposition about reduced ambition and candidacy is not directly tested.

Proposition	Measures available	Finding	Interpretation and evidential status
H2	Perceived political environment and safety score; fear of violence as a stated reason for limited voting.	The safety score averages 3.74. Fear of violence is cited by 16.5% of respondents who voted never or once. The score does not clearly distinguish participation groups.	Fear is widespread and may deter candidacy or reporting. The survey measured perceived risk, not personal experience or the incidence of violence. The causal effect on participation is not established.
H3	Perceived socio-cultural barriers; attitudes towards women's participation; registration, voting and party membership.	Socio-cultural barriers average 3.91. Neither the barrier score nor the attitudes index has a clear adjusted association with the participation outcomes.	Interview accounts suggest norms operate through other people's expectations and institutional routines as well as individual beliefs. The effect on ambition was not measured directly.
H4	Perceived institutional barriers, including party nomination for winnable seats; interview accounts and existing research.	Institutional impediments are the highest-rated barrier domain, averaging 4.18. Some 82.6% agree that parties rarely nominate women for winnable seats.	Strongly supported as a widely held perception and reinforced by qualitative accounts and published research. The survey did not test a direct association between institutional scores and perceived access or actual nomination outcomes.
H5	Endorsement of informal participation, political discussion and endorsement by local leaders; participation measures.	More than nine in ten respondents endorse the relevant forms of informal participation and community support. These scores do not clearly predict measured participation.	The routes are valued and may support confidence and readiness, but their effect on ambition or progression into candidacy is not established.

Proposition	Measures available	Finding	Interpretation and evidential status
H6	Endorsement of five enabling mechanisms; registration, voting and party membership; interview evidence.	Support is very high, with the enabling mechanisms score averaging 4.33. The score has no clear adjusted association with the measured participation outcomes.	Endorsement demonstrates acceptance, not intervention effect. Interview accounts and comparative evidence show that outcomes depend on enforcement, design, resources and connection to institutional access.
H7	Visibility and policy impact score; socio-cultural barrier score; cross-sectional survey responses.	The visibility and policy impact score correlates positively with socio-cultural barriers (0.40).	Those who value visibility also tend to recognise strong barriers. The cross-sectional design cannot test whether visibility reduces socio-cultural barriers over time or establish a feedback effect.

Scores are on a five-point scale, with higher barrier scores indicating stronger perceived barriers. Participation outcomes refer to the measures available in the survey. Adjusted associations were assessed with the study's multiple-comparison procedures.

Three elements of the theory receive the clearest support. First, institutional arrangements are central to the conversion of participation into representation. Second, the barrier dimensions are interrelated, with party gatekeeping connecting social expectations, finance, political networks and enforcement. Third, enabling mechanisms are conditional: their endorsement is high, but their effects depend on institutional design and implementation. The study also qualifies the proposed role of visibility. Respondents value women's visibility and tend to recognise socio-cultural barriers at the same time, but the evidence cannot demonstrate that visibility reduces those barriers over time. Interview participants' concerns about the limited number and social accessibility of visible role models further caution against assuming an automatic symbolic feedback effect.

The findings also refine the economic dimension. Financial constraints should not be understood only as a lack of individual resources. They are embedded in a political economy of nomination fees, informal payments, patronage and expectations of return. Similarly, the political environment dimension includes not only perceived violence but the institutional conditions that influence reporting and protection. These refinements make the theory more attentive to how formal and informal power operate together.

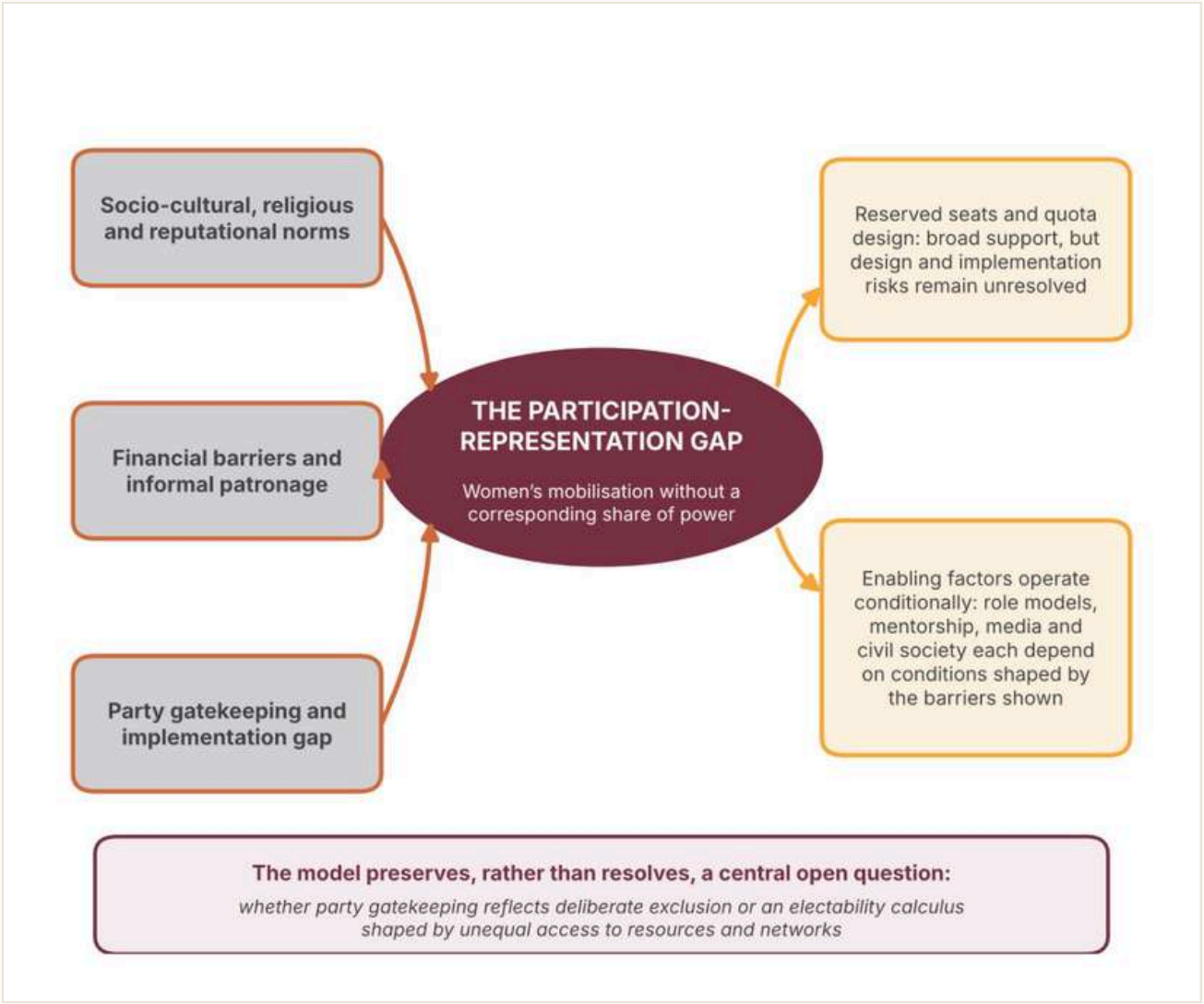
Finally, the distinction between descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation needs to remain explicit. Increasing the number of women in office would address the immediate deficit in descriptive representation. It would not automatically ensure that women can shape policy, exercise independent judgement or alter public

assumptions about political leadership. Substantive influence depends on access to decision-making and the ability to act within party and legislative institutions. Symbolic change may follow from visible representation, but such change over time has not been measured. The theory is therefore supported as a multi-level explanatory framework, while several of its proposed pathways remain propositions for further testing rather than causal findings established by this study.

Figure 7.1 brings these relationships together as a conceptual model. It shows how socio-cultural norms, financial barriers and party gatekeeping converge on the gap between participation and representation, and how reserved seats and the enabling factors operate conditionally on those barriers.

FIGURE 7.1

A conceptual model of women's political participation in Nigeria



Implications for women's participation and representation

The discussion has implications for how women's political inclusion is understood. First, participation should not be treated as a single outcome. Registration, voting, mobilisation, party membership, candidacy, election and influence are distinct stages, and progress at one stage does not guarantee progress at the next. The gap between women's engagement and their access to elected office is not a contradiction; it is a defining feature of the political pathway described by the findings.

Second, the evidence places particular weight on the institutions that allocate political opportunity. Public support for women's leadership is meaningful, but it does not in itself alter candidate selection, access to party networks or the resources required to compete. Party gatekeeping is central because it mediates the effect of other barriers. Yet party practices cannot be understood separately from the financial and social conditions in which they operate. The distribution of political power is shaped by the interaction of formal rules, informal patronage, resources and expectations about legitimate leadership.

Third, representation is a question of both numbers and authority. Greater descriptive representation is necessary in a context where women remain a small minority in elected office. But the presence of women in institutions should not be taken as evidence that they have equal influence over decisions, a distinction that scholarship on descriptive and substantive representation treats as central [62, 63]. The experiences of other countries, the debate over reserved seats and the accounts of party loyalty in Nigeria all point to the importance of examining the conditions under which women exercise political agency after entering office.

Fourth, the evidence challenges approaches that treat women's exclusion as a deficit in women's confidence or capacity alone. Training, mentorship and political awareness may be valuable, but they cannot compensate fully for inaccessible party structures, high campaign costs, unsafe political environments or weak enforcement. At the same time, structural reform without attention to early participation, community legitimacy and the development of political networks may leave women less able to benefit from new opportunities. The central implication is that individual agency and institutional conditions are interdependent.

Finally, the findings matter for democratic inclusion more broadly. When political participation is extensive but access to candidacy and decision-making remains narrow, the system draws on women's labour and mobilisation without distributing authority on equal terms. This weakens the claim that political institutions reflect the population they govern. It also limits the range of experience and interests present in public decision-making. Women officeholders will not always advance the same policy priorities, but persistent exclusion restricts who can contribute to political debate and exercise public authority.

The central argument

Women's under-representation in Nigeria is best understood as a participation-to-power problem. Social expectations, unequal resources and insecurity shape women's ability to enter and remain in political life, but party gatekeeping is a critical institutional point at which these inequalities are converted into unequal access to candidacy. Measures that strengthen individual capacity or public support matter, but their contribution is conditional on whether political institutions allow women to compete and exercise influence.

This discussion provides the analytical basis for the illustrative experiences that follow. Those accounts offer a closer view of how women navigate the political pathway, how support and institutional opportunity intersect, and where individual breakthroughs encounter wider structural limits. The conclusions and recommendations that follow draw on the combined evidence without assuming that any single intervention can resolve the problem.





CHAPTER 8

08 Illustrative Experiences: Women's Participation, Representation and Advocacy

The preceding chapters have examined the scale of women's participation and representation, public attitudes, the barriers that restrict political access and the conditions that can support change. Aggregate findings establish patterns across the survey sample, but they cannot show in full how those conditions combine over the course of an individual woman's political journey, how a party decision is experienced by an aspirant, or how advocates work to change the rules. The four accounts in this chapter bring those processes into view.

The accounts approach women's participation from different positions: a woman who reached national legislative office through sponsorship and persistence; a woman with a disability whose political aspiration exposed the limits of formal inclusion; a political aspirant whose experience of party contests informed her advocacy for reserved representation; and an electoral democracy and gender inclusion advocate working through legal, evidential and organisational routes to institutional change. They illuminate different pathways and different combinations of barriers, resources and forms of agency.

These are illustrative accounts, not a representative sample of Nigerian women. Their evidential status also differs. Some passages describe events the participant says she personally experienced. Others convey her interpretation of political processes, observations about institutions, or achievements undertaken by an organisation and its partners. The narrative distinguishes these forms of evidence and does not treat an individual account as proof of how frequently a practice occurs. Where dates, outcomes or procedural details were not established, they are not supplied. Identifying details have been omitted or generalised, and bracketed words in quotations replace identifying terms.

How to read the accounts

Each experience is presented on its own terms. The analysis connects it to the wider study where this helps explain its significance, while preserving the distinction between personal experience, participant interpretation and organisational evidence. The accounts should not be read as typical pathways or as evidence that individual determination can, by itself, overcome structural exclusion.





ILLUSTRATIVE EXPERIENCE · EXAMPLE 1

Mentorship, persistence and access to national office

A female national legislator from the North Central geopolitical zone

> **“lots of men that they have principles, they don’t vote for women”**

THE ACCOUNT, STEP BY STEP

1. Political entry through a woman incumbent
2. Mentorship and access to nomination
3. The first contest and the interval before the second
4. Experience of office
5. Preparing successors
6. What made this pathway possible
7. Implications for sponsorship and office

Example 1: Mentorship, persistence and access to national office

A female national legislator from the North Central geopolitical zone

Political entry through a woman incumbent

The legislator described a longstanding interest in public affairs that had not initially translated into a plan to seek elected office. "I have been always political," she recalled. As a young woman, she had won student union office despite being told by "lots of men that they have principles, they don't vote for women". Her later entry into party politics in the early 2000s was partly a search for a platform from which to express her views. She had considered writing a newspaper column but worried that "people would think it's his opinion, not mine". Joining a party offered another route to public engagement. She also wrote to legislators about issues that concerned her.

The transition from political interest to candidacy came through an existing woman legislator who was not returning to her seat and wanted a woman to succeed her. A mutual contact sought permission to pass on the participant's telephone number. The prospective candidate was initially reluctant. She felt she knew little about legislative office and questioned whether she was equipped to contest. What shifted her thinking was a legislator's observation that criticising political decisions was easier than taking responsibility for changing them. The comment stayed with her: "So, it piqued me."

Mentorship and access to nomination

The outgoing legislator's support was practical from the outset. Her first question was whether the aspirant was registered to vote. She was not, and registration was due to close within three days. The aspirant did not know her ward, so the mentor identified it for her. Recalling the process, she said: "She mentored me through the whole process," including "remembering that I did not have a ticket." When the aspirant explained that she had no money, the response was "you don't need any". She followed the instructions she was given, attended the relevant events and met the people to whom she was introduced. She secured the nomination.

"I didn't give anybody any money, because I didn't have any to give."

She contrasted her route with that of another aspirant who had expected to receive the nomination and had distributed money, believing that this placed him in a stronger position. Her account does not suggest that money is generally unimportant in party politics. Rather, it shows how direct sponsorship and access to local political knowledge can, in a particular circumstance, help an aspirant navigate a process that others approach through financial transactions.

The mentor also explained that residence in a constituency does not necessarily mean that a newcomer understands its political relationships. She identified three local stakeholders whom the aspirant needed to meet, explaining that "it's one thing to live in the areas, another thing to key into the politics of that place". The candidate then campaigned village by village. She told voters that she "was not there to buy them" but was "offering myself". Looking back, she acknowledged that "in retrospect, it looked like a really real and very idealistic campaign, but it worked."

The first contest and the interval before the second

She described her first election as closely contested against the government's candidate. She later heard from an electoral official that a request for a recount might have changed the result. She attributed part of the difficulty to her inexperience, recalling: "I was new in politics, just only a few months... I didn't know a lot of things." She challenged the result in court. The first court ruled that over-voting had not affected the outcome. On her lawyer's advice, she appealed. The appeal court set the earlier ruling aside and ordered the disputed areas to be revisited. After almost a year, she conceded, explaining her decision through the view that "politics was not a destination, it's a journey".

The defeat did not end her involvement in public life, but the route back to the ballot was long. She remained engaged with communities for almost two decades and appeared on the ballot only once during that period, although the presence of her posters led some people to assume that she had contested more often. By the time she was approached again, she said she "had resigned from politics". A party was looking for someone it believed local people trusted and liked. As she put it, "since the problem was always a ticket, here is a ticket." She did not initially want to return to office, but accepted the opportunity and now serves as a legislator.

Experience of office

Her account of legislative office was more guarded than her account of entering politics. She said women who reach office "are treated so unfairly. It makes it difficult and frustrating to be there." Before she took her seat, a male colleague told her she was "going to be troublesome". She understood this as a gendered judgement: "the word that's used for active women, but you don't use it for vocal men". When she questioned why a committee of twenty men had no women members, she was told that she was raising "gender, gender".

She also described how women's presence can be treated as a means of satisfying external expectations rather than ensuring meaningful participation. In her observation, international parliamentary bodies penalise delegations that have no women, with the result that a small number of women may be "sent all over the world" to make delegations appear properly constituted. She further observed that parties sometimes replace sitting women with men. These are her assessments of institutional practice, rather than independently verified counts of how often such decisions occur.

Her account included an incident in which she said she was physically assaulted at a party office while trying to protect a younger woman. She reported that no arrest had followed. Asked what her party did about violence against women, she said it took a position "in theory", but "there's nobody who's really implementing it". The distinction she drew between formal positions and practical action echoes the wider study's concern with the gap between institutional commitments and their enforcement.

She identified a small number of legislative initiatives associated with her work. An equal-opportunity bill she had introduced had passed first reading, while a special seats proposal and a constitutional amendment concerning spousal citizenship remained pending. Her broader assessment was that "a lot of what is wrong is that there's no consequence. We don't implement our laws." These comments describe her view of the institutional environment and the status she reported at the time of interview; they should not be read as a complete account of the legislative history of each proposal.

Preparing successors

The legislator did not present her own route as a model that could simply be replicated. Instead, she described attempts to create opportunities for other women. Two years before the interview, she approached several women and encouraged them to spend time with her because she wanted to prepare a successor: “Why don’t you start hanging out with me?” When she raised concessions for women with her party chair, he said he would grant them but would not identify candidates. His response was: “You go find the women.” She found that “women who are actually willing to go out there are not that many.”

She had paid nomination fees for women, including at least one or two women with disabilities, but said they “didn’t get very far”. She proposed a collective “lobby bloc. Women saying, include us”, as well as mentoring pairs in which a younger woman would be attached to an older woman in the same constituency. Her suggestions reflect an understanding that individual sponsorship can open a door but is difficult to sustain when it depends on the availability and initiative of a few incumbents.

What made this pathway possible

The legislator attributed her success to “tenacity and resilience”. She observed that “most women who have succeeded did not give up after one try”, while also noting that “women find it difficult to take the humiliation of defeat”. Persistence is clearly part of her account, but it does not explain the pathway on its own. Her entry depended on a woman incumbent who was leaving office and actively sought a woman successor; sustained mentorship that helped her navigate registration, ward politics and nomination; a later party opening for a candidate considered trusted by local people; and continued community engagement during the long interval between contests.

These enabling conditions are not equally available to all aspirants. The survey found broad agreement that parties rarely nominate women for winnable positions and that mentorship and leadership training can help women succeed. Her experience gives the latter finding a specific meaning: mentorship mattered because it involved more than encouragement. It provided timely practical guidance, introductions and access to the nomination process. Published research has also noted the scarcity of women mentors, partly because relatively few women hold political office [46]. The legislator’s efforts to identify and prepare successors show how difficult it can be to reproduce the conditions that enabled her own entry.

Implications for sponsorship and office

This experience illustrates how sponsorship by a woman already in office can help an aspirant navigate the financial and relational demands of party politics. It also shows the limits of relying on informal sponsorship. Such support may be decisive for an individual, but remains episodic unless it is organised and supported by institutional practice. The long interval after her first defeat further demonstrates that persistence can involve substantial personal and political costs. Finally, entry into office did not remove the barriers she encountered: gendered labelling, exclusion from decision-making spaces and weak responses to violence shaped her experience after election. Access to office and the ability to exercise influence within it are distinct challenges.



ILLUSTRATIVE EXPERIENCE · EXAMPLE 2

Political aspiration, disability and the limits of formal inclusion

A woman with a disability and political aspirant from the North West geopolitical zone

> **“I wanted to contest as a senator… I know what I went through.”**

THE ACCOUNT, STEP BY STEP

1. An aspiration and an unfinished process
2. Fee concessions and the cost of entry
3. Recognition of capability
4. Sponsorship within the party
5. Support for other women and arguments about rules
6. Formal provisions and practical access
7. Implications for implementing inclusion measures

Example 2: Political aspiration, disability and the limits of formal inclusion

A woman with a disability and political aspirant from the North West geopolitical zone

An aspiration and an unfinished process

The participant leads an organisation that promotes women's participation and leadership and works against stigma affecting women and girls with disabilities. She is also a political aspirant. During the interview, she described having sought a senatorial ticket in the year of the interview: "I wanted to contest as a senator... I know what I went through." She recalled that she "was up, I wanted to go and buy a form". Her account describes an attempt to enter the candidacy process, but does not establish whether she subsequently purchased the nomination form, proceeded to screening, participated in a party primary or withdrew. It would therefore be inaccurate to describe her as having completed the nomination process or contested an election.

Fee concessions and the cost of entry

Her most specific account concerned the cost of nomination. She described an arrangement announced in earlier discussions under which persons with disabilities would pay for the expression-of-interest form and receive the nomination form free. She said that the party had used the concession in its campaigning. However, when aspirants arrived to act on it, the terms had changed: "Unfortunately, when we now got there, we were now seeing that... they changed it that 50% should be paid."

She questioned what such a change meant for meaningful access: "Are we not indirectly telling them we will use money to push these people out of the game?" She considered the amounts high for women and asked, "Do you want them to exchange their body to pay?" She also questioned how a woman on a modest income could compete for a local seat if aspirants were expected to raise sums running into millions, and how such demands could be reconciled with efforts to reduce corruption.

The significance of her account lies not only in the amount required, but in the uncertainty surrounding the concession. An announced measure that changes when an aspirant reaches the point of payment does not provide reliable access. It may also communicate that the institution has not treated the participation of women with disabilities as an entitlement that must be made workable. Her account is her experience of the arrangement and should not be taken as evidence of how every party applies fee concessions.

Recognition of capability

The participant connected the financial barrier to the way women are judged when they express political ambition. She described a society that can respond to a woman's candidacy with questions such as "Who is she? What can she offer?" Without what she called "the masculine backing", a woman may be assumed to be "just going there to do nonsense". For women with disabilities, she said, the judgement is compounded by assumptions about disability. She described a demeaning term used about a person with a disability who stands for office and explained what it conveyed: "they don't believe that a person with disability has the right to hold power. They are not seeing the ability, they are just seeing the disability."

She distinguished equality from equity. “We are not saying equally, we are saying equity.” In her view, identical treatment does not create an enabling environment when people face different barriers. Another participant working on inclusion described a related challenge: women with disabilities “have to first prove to their audience, to their voters... that they are first human and equal in rights and dignity, and not a charity case”. Together, these accounts point to the importance of recognising women with disabilities as political actors with rights, capabilities and political claims, rather than treating them primarily as recipients of assistance.

Sponsorship within the party

The participant was clear that her progress depended in part on support from a person within the party. She said she had entered the process late, but “he still stood by”. She described a male party figure who accompanied her to local government and ward chairmen without asking for payment and who, in her words, “sees the ability in me”. She compared political entry to “a school on its own” and described the experience of an aspirant without a guide as being taken “into an empty house” and left there.

She also identified resources she brought to the process herself. She was “not coming from a zero level”: her civil society work had strengthened her confidence and her ability to understand and work with people. She saw her presence in politics as an opportunity to challenge assumptions about disability among colleagues, saying she was “coming into politics to create awareness to you to understand that every one of you can become a disabled tomorrow”. Her account therefore combines the barriers she encountered with a deliberate effort to shape how disability is understood in political spaces.

Support for other women and arguments about rules

She said she had funded or supported four women with disabilities to contest elections in the year of the interview. Her description of what support should involve was specific. Training that ends once a woman has been introduced to a party leaves her in the “empty house”; support, she argued, must include finance and continue through the results. Reflecting on her own experience, she said her participation “has opened my eyes to understand that financial support is why women are running away from politics”.

She also argued that evidence of women’s political participation should count aspirants, not only candidates. In her view, public mockery of women who lose can deter them from returning: “such women will never come up again”. She pointed to her work on government technical working groups in her state as an example of influence that does not depend on holding elected office. This broadens the meaning of participation beyond winning a seat, while retaining the distinction between access to decision-making and electoral representation.

On regulation, she proposed that the electoral commission should require parties to include minimum numbers of women and persons with disabilities among their aspirants. She argued that parties should not be able to present “100% masculine male candidate to [the electoral commission] and get it approved”. She supported reserved seats in principle but expressed concern that they could be captured by established political interests and “will now become a political seat”. She preferred allocation through contests within parties.

Formal provisions and practical access

The account brings together two conditions that are sometimes treated separately: the affordability of political entry and the recognition of a woman's right and capacity to exercise political authority. A fee concession that is announced but reduced at the point of purchase may exclude an aspirant financially. Even if the fee is reduced, however, assumptions that a woman with a disability is not capable of holding office can continue to restrict her prospects. The participant's argument is therefore not simply for a lower price. It is for arrangements that recognise different needs, operate reliably and support women beyond initial recruitment.

The survey found that 66.4% of respondents agreed that nomination forms discourage women from contesting. Among the 166 survey respondents who reported a disability, party membership was higher than among respondents without a disability, although the difference should be treated cautiously because the group was relatively small. Party membership is not the same as candidacy, and the survey did not measure the progression of women with disabilities through nomination and election. These findings provide context but cannot verify or generalise the participant's experience.

Her account should not be reduced to disability or framed as a story of personal inspiration. It describes a woman with political ambitions, organisational leadership, experience of advocacy, relationships within a party and sustained support for other women. Her central criticism is that institutions can respond first to disability and only afterwards, if at all, to the person's political capability. Her own actions challenge that assumption, while also showing that individual effort cannot replace accessible procedures, reliable concessions and sustained institutional support.

Implications for implementing inclusion measures

The experience suggests that an inclusion measure must be clearly communicated, predictable and implemented as announced if it is to function as access. It also shows that affordability is only one condition. Recognition, political sponsorship and continued practical support matter as well.



The participant's emphasis on support through the results offers a useful test of programme effectiveness: the relevant question is not only whether women receive training or are introduced to party officials, but whether they can proceed through the stages of political competition without the terms of access being changed against them.



ILLUSTRATIVE EXPERIENCE · EXAMPLE 3

Contesting for office and advocating reserved representation

A female political aspirant and institutional reform advocate from the North Central geopolitical zone

> **“the first woman in my constituency to get on the ballot”**

THE ACCOUNT, STEP BY STEP

1. Entering contests as a first woman candidate
2. Cost, networks and imposed candidates
3. Pressure to withdraw in favour of a preferred candidate
4. Reputation, harassment and cultural expectation
5. From personal experience to the reserved seats campaign
6. Candidacy, constraint and reform
7. Implications for candidate selection and reform design

Example 3: Contesting for office and advocating reserved representation

A female political aspirant and institutional reform advocate from the North Central geopolitical zone

Entering contests as a first woman candidate

The participant had been active in politics for more than a decade. She said she "ran for office twice": first as a candidate for a state assembly seat and later for a seat in the federal House of Representatives. In the first contest, she was "the first woman in my constituency to get on the ballot". She described having to persuade voters to support a woman and to confront the expectation that an unmarried woman should not be "where elders are seated to be talking about politics". Her account does not state how either contest ended or whether she stepped aside in either, and those outcomes should not be inferred.

Cost, networks and imposed candidates

She organised her account around three connected pressures. The first was the cost of political competition. Politics, she said, is "highly monetised". Consultations, party stakeholders and constituency gatekeepers all made demands, and she had not understood "that it cost this much". Other aspirants were "spending and outspending at a rate that you cannot meet up", a pattern she described as "financial bullying". She recounted demands from party leaders for cars, gifts and renovations to their houses. Once her aspiration became public, constituents also approached her with personal needs, including school fees and burial costs. She observed that much of what women raised "goes for security".

The second pressure was exclusion from informal decision-making. She described a "boys club" that met in spaces where she was not present, meaning that "some key decisions will be taken that you're not going to be part of". The third was the imposition of candidates by powerful party actors. In her account, men with money and political structure "sit in their room to dictate" who proceeds, while a godfather may impose a candidate "with the sole aim of getting his money back". She believed women were often not considered capable of repaying such investment. In those circumstances, she argued, competence was not the principal consideration.

Pressure to withdraw in favour of a preferred candidate

Her most specific account concerned the use of a fee concession during a party primary involving nine male aspirants. As the only woman, she believed she deserved consideration. Instead, stakeholders told her: "you did not buy your form. You only paid for the expression of interest. You should step down for a preferred candidate." She explained that parties sell nomination forms to raise money and that a free form "looks on the outside as a good strategy, but within the political parties, they use it as a weapon against women".

Stakeholders also questioned her ability to compete in the general election. She said they did not dispute her capacity to serve in parliament, but argued that "the opponent I'm going to face in the general election is a money bag" and that she lacked the finance to challenge him. In her words, her competence was "not the question at the table". The account shows how an apparently supportive measure can be turned into a reason to question an aspirant's legitimacy or commitment. The concession lowered the cost of initial entry but, in the party's subsequent argument, became a basis for pressing her to withdraw.

Her proposed alternative followed directly from this experience. Women should pay half the price of a nomination form, she argued, so that they have "some form of recognition and a voice within the party". A woman who pays half should not then be compelled to step aside. Published reporting on nominees being pressured to withdraw describes a similar mechanism [35]. Her proposal is not simply a request for reduced fees. It seeks to prevent the terms of a concession from being used to remove women from the contest.

Reputation, harassment and cultural expectation

The participant also described attacks on her reputation that were unrelated to her record or political positions. She said that online, "fake images or photoshop and screenshot images that are not originally from me" were circulated "to assassinate my character", alongside fabricated messages intended to discourage her supporters. In political spaces, she encountered gestures and assumptions about her sexual availability. Being a young woman, she said, "further compounds it". Her single status was also used by some constituents as a reason to question her suitability.

These are first-person accounts of the scrutiny she said she experienced. They sit alongside the survey findings that many respondents believe fear of harassment and intimidation discourages women from participating, and that online bullying can discourage women from expressing political opinions. The survey, however, captures perceptions and cannot show how common the particular incidents she described are.

From personal experience to the reserved seats campaign

Her advocacy for reserved representation is distinct from, although informed by, her experience as an aspirant. She was a member of an advocacy committee established by the leadership of the National Assembly to promote special seats for women and had participated in a women's group that worked on the proposal in the preceding Assembly. She presented the proposal as a response to persistent underrepresentation, but cautioned that it was "not going to be a silver bullet". She believed it could "to a greater extent, address the under-representation of women".

She described the proposed measure as a way to create "a political ecosystem" in which women serving in special seats over the proposed 16 years, or four election cycles, could subsequently contest other seats. She noted that the constitutional amendment would require the votes of 24 state assemblies and that "we have members as we speak that are still not convinced". She also wanted women to be brought into party structures so they could continue to seek tickets in open contests. Without that wider inclusion, she warned, women standing for other positions might be "told to go and contest for the special seats only". She wanted the proposal treated "as a national issue and also as a democratic issue and not as a women's issue".

Her recommendations extended beyond the bill. She called for engagement with traditional and religious leaders because their interpretations influence how communities understand tradition; sanctions against candidates who exceed campaign spending limits; volunteer security networks to reduce the cost of personal protection; and media practices that do not ask women about household arrangements when comparable questions are not put to men. She also observed that women in senior positions may be reluctant to criticise their parties because "the political parties always serve as the alpha and beta" in determining whether they retain their posts. This was her observation about institutional dependence, not a claim about her own position.

Candidacy, constraint and reform

Her account shows how a measure intended to widen access can be converted into a mechanism for exclusion. The concession reduced the immediate cost of entry but was later invoked to question her commitment and press her to step aside. This is consistent with concerns raised by other interview participants about the implementation of fee concessions. It also connects with the wider finding that party decision-making is widely perceived to be dominated by male elites. The participant's account complicates a simple distinction between deliberate exclusion and judgements about electability: stakeholders reportedly acknowledged her competence while arguing that her financial position made her unviable against a wealthier opponent. In practice, a criterion presented as neutral can reproduce unequal access to the resources required to satisfy it.

Her position on reserved seats is shaped by this experience. She sees them as a response to the party's control over access to candidacy, but not as a sufficient remedy. Her concerns about backlash, women's place in party structures and the need to sustain open-seat opportunities underline the importance of design. The survey showed strong support for quotas in principle, but it did not test which allocation arrangements would be effective or how they might affect women's access to other forms of candidacy.

Implications for candidate selection and reform design

The account suggests that fee concessions and party selection criteria must be considered together. A concession that can later be interpreted as evidence of insufficient commitment may not create meaningful access. It also shows why the participant views reserved representation as one element in a wider reform agenda, alongside women's presence in party structures, enforceable spending limits and protection from harassment. Her experience adds a practical dimension to the design question: reforms must not only open a route into politics, but also prevent the institutions controlling that route from changing its terms after women have entered.



ILLUSTRATIVE EXPERIENCE · EXAMPLE 4

Legal, evidential and organisational routes to institutional change

A female electoral democracy and gender inclusion advocate from the South East geopolitical zone

> **“there is no particular provision for women”**

THE ACCOUNT, STEP BY STEP

1 A professional vantage point

2 Commitments without legal force

3 Evidence on violence and the reluctance to report

4 Money, primaries and electoral design

5 What advocacy has and has not achieved

6 Limits of commitment without enforcement

7 Implications for accountability and support

Example 4: Legal, evidential and organisational routes to institutional change

A female electoral democracy and gender inclusion advocate from the South East geopolitical zone

A professional vantage point

The participant is a lawyer by training and a senior programme leader in a national organisation working on electoral democracy and political inclusion. She said she had spent about 19 years working on systems intended to support women's representation. Her account differs from those of the aspirants and legislator because it is primarily an organisational and legal perspective. Many of the achievements she described belong to her organisation and its partners, rather than to her alone. Her personal experience includes advocacy and protest. She characterised the current situation as "a red zone", warning that without drastic and targeted action governments at all levels could be composed almost entirely of men.

Commitments without legal force

Her central argument concerned the distance between policy commitments and enforceable obligations. She said Nigeria had no specific legislation promoting women's political representation. In her account, the Constitution's general non-discrimination provision did not amount to a specific guarantee of women's representation, while provisions concerning balanced representation addressed ethnic composition rather than sex. She acknowledged gender-sensitive language in electoral law but argued that "there is no particular provision for women". The National Gender Policy was, in her view, the principal policy instrument, but government responses had relied on the argument that "it is a policy and not a law". She said the courts had rejected that position.

She described litigation brought by her organisation and partners against the Federal Government over the non-implementation of the policy's affirmative action commitment. The case began in 2019. She said the court "found the federal government wanting" and ordered implementation. She placed the judgment around 2021 or 2022, while indicating that she would need to confirm the date. She said the government appealed, but that the appeal "never saw the light of day". The judgment was subsequently used in engagement with the new administration, although she considered the level of women's representation in appointments still inadequate: "We have barely 12 female ministers." Her conclusion was that "legislation is an important instrument of social engineering". The date and procedural status of the judgment require confirmation before they are stated more precisely.

Evidence on violence and the reluctance to report

The participant described her organisation's work observing elections, which she put at 29. She cited national representation figures also discussed elsewhere in the study, including four women senators, about 16 women in the House of Representatives and about 52 women among roughly 991 to 993 state assembly seats, with about 13 state assemblies entirely male. These were figures she cited during the interview; they should be understood in that context rather than treated as a new independent count in this chapter.

Her most consequential organisational evidence concerned violence and under-reporting. Following the 2019 elections, her organisation held closed meetings with young women who had contested. She described recurring accounts of sexual advances when women expressed interest in running, physical attacks against those who refused, threats to family members and online abuse, including manipulated images. When she asked how many participants wished to report what had happened, she said "basically 98% said they were not interested in making reports". The few who were willing to report were, in her account, those for whom the contest was their last. She attributed the reluctance to fear of party consequences: "the moment you do this, you're stigmatising the party before you know it, the parties start sidelining you." A woman who reports may be labelled "that loud mouth who reports everyone". Her assessment of the prospects for justice was stark: "no justice most times."

This is organisational evidence drawn from closed meetings with a particular group of women, not a representative estimate of the prevalence of political violence or non-reporting. Its value lies in showing how fear of institutional retaliation may prevent incidents from entering formal reporting systems. It helps explain why official records alone may provide an incomplete picture, while not establishing the national scale of the problem.

Money, primaries and electoral design

Her analysis of political finance paralleled the accounts of the aspirants. "Money has become a major tool for excluding women", she said. She argued that fee concessions can lead women to be pressed to step down during primaries, with the result that "most of the women that emerge are those that paid in full". She also believed that political patrons direct their resources towards male candidates because they do not expect women to perform as well at the ballot. These are her interpretations of political finance and party practice, informed by her organisation's work.

She identified two structural features as particularly consequential. The first was the electoral system. She argued that the first-past-the-post model does not enable inclusion and referred to an earlier reform committee's recommendation of a mixed system. She also cited a neighbouring country's adoption of a mixed system as an example of legislative change associated with increased representation of women. The second feature was the party system. She argued that the law governing direct primaries gives parties broad authority to determine how their primaries are conducted. Where parties choose consensus arrangements, she said, "most times consensus are only men". She also described parties as insufficiently institutionalised, allowing a small number of gatekeepers to dominate decisions and "would never make rules to favour women" [33].

What advocacy has and has not achieved

The participant was candid about both the achievements and limitations of civil society advocacy. She credited women's organisations and civil society groups with securing gender-sensitive provisions and administrative changes within the electoral commission, including a gender policy, a gender and inclusion unit and disaggregated data. She described these developments as "product of the advocacy by women's, by civil society and women's group". She also took part in a ten-day protest outside the National Assembly in 2022, although the gender bills under consideration did not pass. Engagement with political parties had led to the creation of women's leader positions, but "we're not seeing as much result".

Her organisation's support for candidates included media profiling, assistance with flyers and digital communication, a documentary and book series on young women's political experiences, and a political organising programme for women in 2022. She described efforts to secure family acceptance of the programme by requiring men to attend the venue and see the training content. She also challenged the assumption that an unsuccessful candidate necessarily represents a failed intervention: "when we support candidates and they don't win an election, it does not mean we did not achieve results." Her organisation tracked visibility, performance, willingness to contest again and changes in community perceptions of women's leadership. As she put it, "even if it is one, it's a win because of how difficult politics is in Nigeria".

She also identified constraints on the work. Funding for gender equality initiatives was shrinking. Although capacity building was valuable, she argued that "a lot of these women have the capacity, they have what it takes. They just need money or other forms of support". She called for greater flexibility in funding so that organisations could meet practical campaign needs, including flyers and radio airtime. She described strong hostility in the legislature towards the reserved seats proposal and backlash against work in conservative communities. Her priorities were legislation making women's representation mandatory, financial support for women seeking office, and engagement with religious, state and media institutions to "tell a better story" so that the image of a leader becomes "gender neutral".

Limits of commitment without enforcement

The account shows how an organisation can use the available instruments of change: litigation, evidence gathering, protest, engagement with parties and direct candidate support. It also shows the limits of each when the rules governing political selection remain unchanged or when decisions are not implemented. A court judgment directing the implementation of an affirmative action commitment, followed by continued shortfalls in appointments, illustrates the distance between policy and practice that recurs throughout the study.

Her account of reluctance to report violence adds an organisational perspective to the accounts of intimidation and party retaliation. The figure of 98% refers to the women who participated in the closed meetings she described; it must not be generalised to all women candidates. Her analysis also connects financial barriers to the survey finding that money was the most frequently named individual barrier in open-ended responses. Her emphasis on direct financial and visibility support reflects her organisation's experience. Other participants placed greater emphasis on training and capacity development, and the difference should be retained rather than resolved into a single view.

Implications for accountability and support

The participant's experience suggests that formal commitments require more than policy statements or court decisions. Their value depends on implementation, monitoring and consequences for non-compliance. It also highlights the role of civil society in producing evidence about candidate experiences, party processes and political violence, particularly where women may be reluctant to report through formal channels. Her approach to evaluating candidate support recognises that political influence and progress cannot be measured only by immediate electoral victory. Visibility, performance, the decision to contest again and shifts in public attitudes may also matter, although they should be assessed alongside, not instead of, women's access to elected

office and decision-making power.

What the four accounts show together

The four experiences do not offer one explanation for women's underrepresentation. They reveal different routes into political activity and different points at which access can be enabled, restricted or withdrawn. Read together, they make visible the interaction between personal initiative, relationships, party practices, financial resources, social recognition and the rules governing political competition. Their value is not that they represent all Nigerian women, but that they show how broader patterns identified in the study can be experienced in particular political and organisational settings.

Access is shaped by several conditions at once

The first account shows a route into national office made possible by sponsorship from a woman incumbent, practical mentorship, local political introductions and a later party opening for a candidate considered trusted by the community. The second shows an aspirant with substantial civil society experience encountering a fee concession that changed at the point of purchase, alongside assumptions that placed disability before political capability. The third describes the interaction of high costs, informal party networks, imposed candidates and pressure to withdraw. The fourth moves from individual contests to the legal, electoral and organisational arrangements within which these experiences occur.

Party processes appear in all four accounts, but they do not operate in the same way for each participant. For one woman, a party nomination became possible through a mentor's intervention. For another, a concession intended to support inclusion was altered in practice. For the third, the terms of a concession were later used to question her commitment and press her to step aside. The advocate's account shows how party rules and electoral arrangements can sustain these patterns beyond any one contest. These differences reinforce the wider study's finding that party gatekeeping is a critical point at which social expectations, financial resources and institutional practices converge.

Money is not a single or uniform barrier

The legislator's account is unusual because she was able to obtain a nomination without paying money, a route she attributed to mentorship and sponsorship. In the second account, the cost of a form and the alteration of a concession threatened access before the participant's candidacy pathway could be completed.

In the third, money shaped party relationships, constituency demands, security costs and the argument that a wealthier opponent would be impossible to defeat. The fourth account locates these experiences within a wider system of political finance, party primaries and patronage.



Together, the accounts distinguish the cost of entry from the informal demands that follow an aspiration, the design of fee concessions and the use of financial capacity as a test of electability. This helps explain why the survey's structured measures and open-ended responses do not produce identical rankings. Respondents rated institutional barriers most severely, while money was the most frequently named individual barrier in written responses. The experiences show how these constraints can operate together rather than as separate obstacles.

Mentorship and political access depend on relationships, but remain fragile

Mentorship appears in several forms. The legislator received direct guidance from a woman incumbent who helped her understand registration, ward politics and nomination. The aspirant with a disability relied on a male party figure who introduced her to local party actors and supported her without payment. The third participant's account shows what happens when informal networks and decision-making spaces remain closed to women. The fourth describes organisational efforts to connect women to political opportunities through training, candidate profiling and support.

These relationships can create access that formal rules do not provide, but they are often dependent on individual goodwill and organisational resources. The legislator's difficulty finding women willing to contest, and her proposal for mentoring pairs and a lobby bloc, point towards the need to organise sponsorship rather than leave it to chance. The aspirant with a disability similarly argued that support should continue beyond initial training or introduction. The accounts therefore qualify any assumption that mentorship alone is a sufficient intervention. Its value depends on whether it connects women to nomination, resources, protection and opportunities to exercise influence.

Disability inclusion requires more than formal equality

The second account makes visible a dimension that cannot be subsumed under the general category of barriers facing women. The participant described how disability shaped assumptions about her capability and how a fee concession could fail to provide meaningful access if it was not implemented as announced. Her distinction between equality and equity draws attention to the need for political processes to account for different barriers rather than assume that identical treatment is sufficient.

Her experience also cautions against treating women with disabilities only as beneficiaries of inclusion programmes. She is an organisational leader, political aspirant, party participant and supporter of other women. Her account shows both the agency exercised by women with disabilities and the institutional changes needed for that agency to translate into political opportunity. Because the survey's disability subgroup is small, the broader pattern of candidacy or representation cannot be inferred, and it is particularly important not to overgeneralise from this individual experience.

Representation does not end with winning office

The first account shows that entry into national office does not guarantee equal treatment or substantive influence. The legislator described gendered labelling, exclusion from committee decision-making and a weak institutional response to violence. She also described attempts to prepare successors and widen women's access to political office. Her experience makes the distinction between descriptive representation and substantive representation concrete: a woman may occupy a seat while still confronting barriers to participation in the institution's decisions.

The second participant identified forms of influence through civil society leadership and government technical working groups, even without a completed electoral contest. The third linked her experience as an aspirant to advocacy for reserved seats and broader reform of party structures. The fourth described organisational efforts to improve candidate visibility and to measure progress even when candidates do not win. These accounts broaden the understanding of political influence while retaining the importance of access to elected office. Advocacy, technical participation and visibility can contribute to change, but they do not remove the need for women to be present in formal decision-making institutions.

Advocacy and legal reform matter, but implementation remains decisive

The fourth account demonstrates the range of routes through which civil society organisations seek institutional change: litigation, election observation, documentation, public protest, engagement with parties and support for aspirants. The third participant's work on reserved representation provides a complementary view from someone who has also experienced party contests. Both accounts recognise that legal and policy measures can open opportunities, but neither treats formal adoption as sufficient. Implementation, party incentives, political resistance and the allocation of resources shape whether a commitment changes women's actual access.

The differences between participants on reserved seats are important. The legislator and the third participant support special representation as a means of widening access, although both situate it within wider institutional reform. The aspirant with a disability supports the principle but worries that the arrangement could be captured by established interests and prefers contest-based allocation within parties. The advocate sees reserved representation as part of a broader legislative and electoral reform agenda. These positions do not need to be made uniform. They reveal genuine questions about design, accountability, the relationship between reserved and open seats, and the risk that a measure intended to address exclusion could create a separate political channel controlled by existing elites.

Persistence matters, but cannot substitute for structural change

The legislator's persistence was substantial, but her path involved a long interval between contests and depended on sponsorship and political opportunity. The aspirant with a disability warned that women who are mocked after losing may not return. The third participant described the financial and reputational pressures that can make continued participation difficult. The advocate explained why her organisation measures progress beyond electoral victories, while still identifying the need for direct resources and enforceable rules.

None of the accounts supports a simple message that determination is enough. Resilience may help women navigate political processes, but it cannot by itself make nomination procedures transparent, ensure that concessions are honoured, open informal decision-making networks, prevent harassment or enforce legal commitments. Capacity development and mentorship can strengthen readiness and confidence; they cannot substitute for fair access to party tickets, campaign resources and institutional authority.

How the accounts illuminate the wider study

The survey identifies patterns in perceptions and reported participation across its respondents. The interviews provide accounts of how barriers and enabling conditions can combine in the lives and work of particular participants. The four experiences add depth to the study's central argument that access to candidacy is a point at which several conditions meet. They show that the pathway is not linear: a woman may move from advocacy into party politics, encounter a barrier before completing nomination, remain influential outside elected office, or reach office and then face constraints on her ability to exercise authority.

In terms of the Integrated Theory, the accounts bring the seven dimensions into relationship. Socio-cultural expectations shape whether women are recognised as legitimate political actors. Economic and educational conditions influence the resources available to them. Political hostility and insecurity raise the costs of visibility and contestation. Institutional and structural arrangements determine access to nomination, party decision-making and formal authority. Facilitating mechanisms include mentorship, sponsorship, fee concessions, reserved representation and collective advocacy. Policy impact and visibility concern whether women's presence changes public expectations and institutional practice. Political socialisation and cultural capital influence who is equipped, encouraged and connected to participate.

The accounts also show why these dimensions should not be treated as isolated variables. A fee concession is an economic measure, but its implementation is institutional and its meaning is shaped by political relationships. Mentorship can build confidence and political knowledge, but its effect depends on access to party decision-makers. Visibility can help establish credibility, but can also expose women to scrutiny and harassment. Legal reform can create an obligation, but its effect depends on implementation and enforcement. The experiences therefore support an understanding of women's participation and representation as shaped by connected conditions across individual, organisational and institutional levels.

Limits of inference

These four accounts are illustrative, not representative. They cannot show how common any particular experience is, what a specific intervention causes, or how all routes into office compare, and they gain their meaning from the survey, the wider interviews and the published research discussed in earlier chapters. Their contribution is to show how the study's broader findings may be experienced in particular contexts, while preserving the differences between the participants.



ILLUSTRATIVE EXPERIENCE · EXAMPLE 5

Visibility, scrutiny and learning after a contest

A female political aspirant and youth development advocate from the South West geopolitical zone

> **“I knew I wanted to be in politics. But the truth is, where do I even go? How do I even start?”**

THE ACCOUNT, STEP BY STEP

1 Aspiration and entry

2 The contest and what is established about it

3 Visibility and online scrutiny

4 Marital status and expectation

5 After the contest

6 Mentoring and lessons

7 Analytical value and limits of this account

Additional Illustrative Example

Example 5: Visibility, scrutiny and learning after a contest

A female political aspirant and youth development advocate from the South West geopolitical zone

ASPIRATION AND ENTRY

The participant described herself as a politician and programme manager who leads a youth development initiative. She said she contested a state legislative seat in the 2023 general election. Her interest in politics began while she was at school: "I knew I wanted to be in politics. But the truth is, where do I even go? How do I even start?" She said her father helped her "brush the bush and show me the way". She later joined a leadership fellowship that paired her with a sitting woman legislator, although arranging contact was difficult because "she's mostly not in the country".

THE CONTEST AND WHAT IS ESTABLISHED ABOUT IT

Her account gives limited detail about the contest itself. She did not explain how she secured a nomination, what she spent or how she performed. When the interviewer raised financial barriers, she said she did not want "to drag and go back to sharing my experience when it comes to financial aid". Much of her discussion of party processes used the general second person and described patterns rather than events she clearly identified as her own. She described a pattern in which women who pay for an expression-of-interest form are later asked by party leaders to defer to a man who has paid more, sometimes in exchange for an appointment. She summarised the offer as "that's the only thing that they give women". This general commentary should not be interpreted as a personal account of what happened in her own contest.

VISIBILITY AND ONLINE SCRUTINY

Her own experience concerned public scrutiny. She said that in 2023, "when you check my name on Google, you will hardly see anything", and contrasted this with men who were building their public profiles: "Men are building their profile. Women are not." Before running, she removed old photographs and videos from her social media accounts. A campaign flyer later went viral after being reposted by a public figure. Commenters judged her appearance, asking: "look at this one that is wearing makeup, too much... Are you sure she will be able to do this?" She noted that many of the commenters "are not even from my constituency". Her conclusion was that "Branding is very, very key."

MARITAL STATUS AND EXPECTATION

She said her marital status shaped how others viewed her political ambition. When she began in 2023, people told her it would be difficult "because I'm single". Although she is now married, she said, "I'm still scared to use the surname [...] for now, because so many people do not even know that I'm married". She described a wider difficulty for married women who may be told by their hometown that they no longer belong there, while their husband's community may regard them as outsiders. She said this barrier was "very, very obvious in the North". This was her account of a wider pattern, not evidence that every married woman faces the same experience. The survey found that many respondents believed family responsibilities make politics difficult for women, providing broader context without verifying her specific account.

AFTER THE CONTEST

After the election, she attended a programme for about twenty women who had lost. The programme reviewed participants' online presence and addressed legal and media issues. She said it taught her "to push myself out more", and added: "I almost wanted to give up on politics, but [the programme] was able to encourage me." She had since moved to a different party and described the discussion of consensus arrangements as discouraging: "if I was thinking of doing it now, probably I would have more discourage to even do it now".

MENTORING AND LESSONS

Through a youth fund, she had tried to attach young leaders to women mentors but found that "we couldn't find women". She said women in office were busy with projects and family responsibilities and offered her view that some "don't want competition". She contrasted this with men, who accumulate interns. She argued that civil society programmes often concentrate on elite groups and should reach women in markets and schools. Her advice to young women was to "know yourself, know what you want" and not to wait: "just do it." Her position on reserved seats had shifted from scepticism, expressed through the question "are we looking for equality or equity?", towards support, although she remained concerned that parties might rush the process and "end up giving the baton to the wrong people".

ANALYTICAL VALUE AND LIMITS OF THIS ACCOUNT

This account offers a useful perspective on visibility as both a resource and a source of exposure. A limited online profile may weaken a candidate's public recognition, while increased visibility can invite judgement of appearance, marital status and perceived suitability. Her experience after the election also addresses a stage that receives less attention in the principal accounts: the support available to women after defeat and the conditions that influence whether they consider contesting again. These themes connect with the survey finding that 58.3% of respondents said social media influenced their views on political participation moderately or heavily, and with published research on women's media visibility [48]. Her difficulty finding mentors also echoes the scarcity of women mentors discussed elsewhere [46].

The account is presented separately from the three principal accounts for four reasons. First, the contest itself is described in limited detail, and the participant declined to elaborate on its finances. Second, several themes, including youth, a 2023 contest, marital status and online scrutiny, overlap with the fuller third account. Third, much of her discussion of party processes is general commentary and cannot safely be treated as her personal experience.



CHAPTER 9

09 Conclusions

Women's under-representation is not adequately explained by a lack of public support or by women's unwillingness to participate. The evidence points to the conditions under which participation can become candidacy, representation and meaningful influence, and to the institutions that control that progression.

The central conclusion of this study is that women's political exclusion in Nigeria is sustained less by an absence of participation than by the unequal conditions under which participation can be converted into political power. Women engage in political and civic life, contribute to party and community activity, seek office and organise for institutional change. Yet these forms of engagement do not provide equal access to nomination, electoral competition or decision-making authority. The decisive constraint lies in the interaction between social expectations, unequal resources, political insecurity and the institutional arrangements through which parties and other political actors distribute opportunity. Party gatekeeping is a critical point in this process, although it operates within, and is reinforced by, wider economic, social and political conditions.

Conclusions

Barriers are cumulative, and access to candidacy is a critical point of exclusion

The study identifies a connected set of barriers rather than a single explanation for women's under-representation. Gender norms and expectations shape how women's political legitimacy is judged and the responsibilities they are expected to fulfil. The financial demands of seeking office affect who can sustain an aspiration, secure a nomination and remain competitive. Political parties and informal networks determine access to tickets, influential relationships and resources, while intimidation, harassment and concerns about safety raise the personal costs of visibility and contestation. These conditions reinforce one another. For example, unequal access to finance can affect how an aspirant is judged as viable; social expectations can influence access to the networks through which finance and sponsorship are mobilised; and weak accountability can allow exclusionary practices or intimidation to continue.

Institutional barriers were the most highly rated domain in the survey, while financial cost was the most frequently identified individual barrier in open-ended responses. Interview accounts help explain why these findings are related: party decisions are shaped not only by formal rules but also by patronage, personal relationships, informal payments and the influence of actors who control selection. The evidence therefore places party gatekeeping at the centre of the explanation, without suggesting that all parties or selection decisions operate identically. The survey captures perceptions of party practice rather than a direct audit of nominations. The interviews provide accounts of particular experiences, not estimates of how often each practice occurs.

Formal commitments and public support have not secured equal political opportunity

Women's political involvement in Nigeria has been shaped by a history of uneven access to political rights and by social expectations that have changed over time but remain influential. The persistence of low representation alongside formal commitments to gender inclusion illustrates the distance between policy

recognition and implementation. The National Gender Policy's 35% target has not been translated into a binding and consistently enforced requirement across elective and appointive positions. The issue is therefore not simply whether gender equality is recognised in policy, but whether commitments alter the rules, incentives and practices that govern access to political institutions.

Survey responses indicate broad support for women's political participation and for measures intended to improve representation. That support is not uniform or unconditional. Attitudes differ by gender and religion, and some respondents express support for women's leadership while retaining doubts about women's capacity or suitability for political office. Interview accounts show how gendered expectations can be reproduced through family responsibilities, community judgement, reputational scrutiny and selective interpretations of cultural or religious norms. They also show that these expectations are contested. Stated attitudes cannot be shown to cause particular participation outcomes. Indeed, after adjustment, the measured attitude and barrier scores did not clearly distinguish respondents by PVC ownership, usual voting or party membership. This cautions against treating public opinion or attitude change alone as a sufficient explanation, or as a sufficient response, to unequal political access.

Participation does not necessarily translate into representation or influence

The survey found substantial gender differences in the participation measures it examined. Women respondents were less likely than men to hold a valid Permanent Voter's Card, to report that they usually vote or to belong to a political party. These differences were present across geopolitical zones and remained after adjustment for other measured characteristics. They should be understood as patterns within the study's self-selected sample, not as nationally representative estimates. They also concern registration, voting and party membership, not the full range of political activity.

Participation itself is not a single or linear pathway. Registration and voting matter, but neither guarantees influence within a party or access to candidacy. Women may mobilise voters, organise at community level and contribute to party activity while remaining excluded from decisions about nominations and the distribution of political resources. Nor does election to office necessarily confer equal authority once inside political institutions. The illustrative experiences show that women who reach elected office may still encounter marginalisation in party and legislative decision-making, while women who pursue candidacy or advocate reform can exercise influence without holding elected office. These accounts illuminate possible pathways and constraints; they are not representative of all women's experiences. Taken together, the evidence requires a distinction between participation, descriptive representation and the substantive ability to shape decisions.

Breakthroughs depend on institutional conditions as well as individual agency

The study identifies a range of mechanisms that respondents believe can support women's participation, including quotas and reserved representation, political finance reform, mentorship, leadership development, visibility, civic engagement and civil society advocacy. Support for these mechanisms is high, but endorsement should not be confused with evidence that a particular intervention has worked. Their contribution depends on design, implementation, enforcement and the political context in which they operate. Measures that directly change access to nomination or representation address a different constraint from interventions that build confidence, skills or public awareness. Both may have a role, but capacity development cannot compensate for selection systems that remain closed, and formal quotas cannot guarantee substantive influence if their design or enforcement is weak.

The individual experiences described in Chapter 8 point to the importance of agency, persistence, sponsorship, mentorship and collective advocacy. They also show the limits of relying on individual resilience. A mentor can help an aspirant navigate party networks, but cannot independently make nomination transparent. A fee concession may reduce a formal cost, but can become a source of leverage if its terms are unclear or inconsistently applied. Visibility can strengthen recognition and credibility, while also exposing women to appearance-based judgement and online abuse. Legal and policy commitments can create an opening for change, but their effects depend on institutional follow-through. The broader lesson is that individual support and collective action are most meaningful when the institutional environment enables women to exercise the opportunities they create.

The study's contribution is to connect participation, candidacy and representation

The Integrated Theory provides a way to understand these findings across individual and community, institutional, and policy and systems levels. Its seven dimensions are not separate explanations operating in isolation. Socio-cultural barriers, economic and educational disparities, political environment hostility, institutional impediments, facilitating mechanisms, policy impact and visibility, and political socialisation and cultural capital interact across the pathway from readiness and ambition to recruitment, nomination, campaigning and contest. The evidence supports the value of examining these connections, while also showing where the study could not test the proposed relationships directly.

In particular, the research contributes a distinction between the presence of women in political activity and their ability to progress through the institutions that confer political authority. It brings together patterns in reported participation and attitudes, perceptions of barriers and enabling conditions, and accounts of how particular women have navigated political and advocacy spaces. This combined perspective helps explain why broad support for inclusion can coexist with persistent under-representation, and why increasing women's skills or visibility does not necessarily change who receives a party ticket or who exercises influence after election. The analysis cannot trace a single causal pathway or measure the effect of specific reforms. It does, however, identify the points at which exclusion is experienced and the institutional conditions that any sustained change must address.

Future research priorities

The study establishes a pattern of connected barriers and identifies conditions on which potential remedies depend. Several important questions remain unresolved. Addressing them would strengthen the evidence available to political parties, public institutions, civil society and other actors seeking to improve women's political participation and representation.

How parties select candidates

The study identifies party gatekeeping as a critical constraint, but it cannot determine whether women's exclusion is deliberate in particular cases or results from judgements of electability shaped by unequal access to resources and networks. Further research should examine how aspirants are screened, who receives party tickets, how decisions are made and what criteria are applied. This should include party-level records and the experiences of women who sought nomination but were not selected. Such evidence would clarify where formal rules, informal influence and assumptions about viability shape outcomes.

The candidacy pathway

The survey measured registration, voting and party membership, but not political ambition, decisions to seek office or progression through party primaries. Longitudinal research following women who consider, begin and abandon candidacy would help identify when they enter or leave the process, what barriers they encounter at each stage and how those barriers combine. It would also provide a stronger evidence base on the different routes through which women reach elected office or sustain political influence outside it.

What works in practice

Fee concessions, reserved representation, mentorship and other forms of support are widely endorsed, but their effects have not been established by this study. Carefully designed pilots with independent evaluation could examine which approaches improve access and under what conditions. This is particularly important for measures intended to reduce nomination costs, where the terms of assistance and safeguards against pressure or capture may determine whether support reaches the intended candidates.

Women's experience of political violence and intimidation

The survey captures perceived risk and stated concerns, while interview accounts describe particular experiences of threats, harassment and reluctance to report. Neither provides a representative estimate of the incidence of violence against women in political life. Further research should use safe, confidential and appropriately designed methods to document women's experiences, including online abuse, the consequences of reporting and the ways intimidation may affect decisions to participate, seek nomination or remain politically active.

More representative evidence across regions and groups

The survey was self-selected and non-probability based, with uneven representation across geopolitical zones and respondent groups. A repeat study using a representative sampling design, sufficient numbers in each zone and adequate inclusion of women would allow regional and religious differences to be examined more reliably. It should also be designed to examine how age, disability and socioeconomic circumstances intersect with gender, rather than treating women as a homogeneous group. This would help distinguish patterns within particular respondent groups from differences that can be generalised to the wider population.

The evidence points to a clear conclusion: improving women's political representation in Nigeria requires more than encouraging women to participate or securing expressions of support for equality. It requires attention to the conditions that determine whether women can move from participation to candidacy, compete on fair terms, enter political institutions and exercise meaningful influence once there. Individual agency, mentorship, public advocacy and changing social expectations remain important, but they cannot substitute for institutions that distribute political opportunity fairly and apply their own commitments consistently.

The next chapter translates these conclusions into priorities for action, identifying the changes and institutional responsibilities most closely connected to the barriers and enabling conditions documented in this study.





CHAPTER 10

10 Recommendations: Priorities for Change

A practical agenda for opening access to political participation, making candidate selection more accountable, reducing the unequal costs of seeking office and ensuring that women can participate without intimidation.

The study points to nine priorities for change. They respond to a central finding: women's under-representation is sustained not simply by low participation or limited public support, but by the conditions through which participation becomes candidacy, electoral competition and influence. The recommendations therefore combine practical measures that can begin within existing processes with reforms requiring decisions by political parties, public institutions and legislators.

The priorities are grouped by the earliest realistic point at which action can begin. Immediate actions can be taken through existing administrative, programme and civil society processes. Medium-term actions require decisions by political parties or institutions and should be advanced before the next election cycle. Longer-term actions depend on legal, constitutional or sustained social change. These horizons are sequencing guides, not fixed implementation deadlines.

How to use the recommendations.

The lead and supporting actors are proposed on the basis of the roles identified in the study. They should be confirmed with the institutions concerned before implementation. Budgets, statutory targets and precise deadlines for each action lie outside what the evidence can determine. Progress measures below are suggested indicators for stakeholders to adapt, not targets already agreed or validated.

Priorities for change at a glance

TABLE 10.1

Priorities for change at a glance

No.	Priority	Proposed lead actors	Horizon
1	Close registration and Permanent Voter's Card collection gaps, starting with young people and women	National electoral management body	Immediate
2	Report publicly against the 35% National Gender Policy target and create accountability for shortfalls	Federal ministry responsible for gender policy	Immediate

No.	Priority	Proposed lead actors	Horizon
3	Rebalance support for political aspirants from training alone to training plus direct practical assistance	Civil society organisations and development partners	Immediate
4	Create protected, confidential ways to report political violence and intimidation	Civil society organisations and political parties, for distinct functions	Immediate
5	Make party nomination transparent and enforceable	Political parties	Medium term
6	Redesign nomination fee relief and address informal costs	Political parties	Medium term
7	Adopt gender-responsive media practice	Media organisations and professional bodies	Medium term
8	Settle the design and enforcement of reserved representation	National Assembly	Longer term
9	Engage men, community and faith leaders as partners in change	Women's and civil society organisations, in partnership with relevant institutions	Longer term

The horizons distinguish actions that can begin within existing processes from those requiring party or institutional decisions, and those dependent on longer-term legal or social change.

Immediate actions

These actions address practical barriers that can be acted on through existing electoral, programme and civil society processes. They also create evidence and accountability that can inform the more structural reforms that follow.

1 Close registration and PVC collection gaps

IMMEDIATE ACTION

WHY THIS MATTERS

Among respondents who had voted never or only once, 53.3% identified lack of registration or a PVC as a reason for limited voting. The proportion was 64.4% among respondents aged 18 to 25. A further 19.8% of all respondents were registered but waiting for a card. Women were less likely than men to hold a valid PVC, at 59.7% compared with 78.7%. These are findings from a self-selected survey and should not be treated as population estimates. In July 2026, INEC announced the piloting of a downloadable replacement card for registered voters whose cards are lost or damaged. This may ease replacement, but it does not address first-time collection or registration, which are the gaps this study identifies.

PROPOSED ACTION

- The national electoral management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), should use administrative registration and collection records to identify locations and groups with persistent gaps, and publish data on registration, card production and collection disaggregated by age and gender.
- Work with youth and women's organisations, universities and community-based groups to provide accurate information on registration, collection locations and procedures, and to organise targeted information and collection support where administrative data identify need.
- Investigate delays between registration, card production and collection, and communicate clearly how eligible voters can resolve problems.
- Make outreach and collection information accessible to persons with disabilities and people facing mobility, literacy or digital access barriers.

RESPONSIBILITY

Lead: the national electoral management body. Support: youth and women's organisations, universities, civil society organisations and development partners.

INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS

Published administrative data show whether the gaps between registration and collection are narrowing by age and gender; outreach records show which underserved groups and locations have been reached. One project reported that 17,296 women collected cards through targeted engagement [51], illustrating the potential contribution of civil society partnerships, not establishing a national effect.

2 Report publicly against the 35% National Gender Policy target

IMMEDIATE ACTION

WHY THIS MATTERS

The National Gender Policy sets a 35% representation target, but this has not been achieved. Interview participants described a gap between formal commitments and consequences for institutions that fall short, including the observation that "there's no consequence" [1, 2]. The target is a policy commitment, not a binding statutory quota. Public reporting can make performance visible, but reporting alone does not create legal enforcement.

PROPOSED ACTION	■ The federal ministry responsible for the National Gender Policy should establish a regular public reporting process showing women's share of elective and appointive positions across federal and state institutions. ■ Publish the data by institution and level of government, using consistent definitions and clearly identified sources. Keep elective and appointive positions separate because the routes into them differ. ■ Invite institutions that fall short of the target to publish an explanation and describe the measures they intend to take. The National Assembly, state governments and civil society monitors should use the published information in oversight and public accountability. ■ Where a binding obligation or sanction is proposed, identify the legal basis and responsible authority separately rather than implying that the existing policy target already carries such force.
RESPONSIBILITY	Lead: the federal ministry responsible for the National Gender Policy. Support: the National Assembly, state governments, relevant public institutions and civil society monitors.
INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS	A regular, accessible public record reports women's representation by institution and type of position; institutions explain persistent shortfalls; and subsequent reports make changes, or lack of change, visible.

3 Rebalance support for political aspirants

IMMEDIATE ACTION

WHY THIS MATTERS	Advocacy training has been shown to improve women's political participation in a randomised study [27]. However, interview participants with programme experience considered direct financial and logistical assistance insufficient relative to training. The costs of nomination, travel, mobilisation and campaigning can remain prohibitive even when women have acquired relevant skills. Mentors are also scarce when relatively few women hold political office [46].

PROPOSED ACTION	■ Civil society organisations and development partners should review programme portfolios to establish whether training is connected to practical support at the stages when aspirants face costs and party processes. ■ Retain political education and leadership development, but pilot transparent assistance for eligible aspirants with clearly stated criteria. Depending on programme design and available resources, this could include support for nomination-related costs, transport, accessible campaign materials, communications and other essential logistics. ■ Develop group mentorship arrangements in which several aspirants can draw on one experienced mentor, alongside peer networks and structured introductions to relevant political and civic networks. ■ Support coalitions of women aspirants to share information, coordinate advocacy and sustain engagement beyond a single election period. ■ Design access arrangements that include young women, women with disabilities and aspirants with limited financial resources. Eligibility and selection should be transparent, and assistance should not be conditional on abandoning an elective contest or accepting an appointive route. ■ Evaluate pilot support to establish who is reached, whether recipients progress to nomination and primaries, and whether the support creates unintended dependencies or pressure.
RESPONSIBILITY	Lead: civil society organisations and development partners. Support: women in political office as mentors, women's organisations and political parties. Parties remain responsible for their own nomination and candidate-support arrangements.
INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS	Programme monitoring tracks the proportion of supported aspirants who proceed to nomination, complete primaries and remain engaged in political activity. Evaluation also records who is excluded, the forms of support used and any reported pressure or unintended consequences. These measures assess progression, not simply the number of people trained.

4 Create protected, confidential ways to report political violence

IMMEDIATE ACTION

WHY THIS MATTERS	Some 79.9% of survey respondents expressed fear of harassment or intimidation during campaigns. This measures perceived fear, not the incidence of violence. One organisation, as described by an interview participant, found that about 98% of young women candidates in its engagement declined to report incidents because of anticipated stigma within their parties. This is an account from a particular organisational context, not a national estimate. Participants also described weak consequences for perpetrators and inadequate party responses to online abuse [39].

PROPOSED ACTION	■ Civil society organisations should establish or strengthen independent, confidential channels through which women candidates, aspirants, campaign workers and party members can report threats, harassment, intimidation and online abuse without having to report first to the party structures they may fear. ■ Set clear protocols for informed consent, secure record keeping, referral, confidentiality and protection against retaliation. Explain what the channel can and cannot do, including the limits of confidentiality where immediate safety or legal duties are involved. ■ Political parties should adopt or revise codes of conduct covering physical intimidation, sexual harassment, threats, coercion and technology-facilitated abuse. Codes should specify investigation procedures, proportionate sanctions and routes of appeal, and should apply to party officials and supporters as well as candidates. ■ Develop referral arrangements with relevant security and justice institutions for cases requiring investigation or protection. Their precise roles should be agreed with those institutions rather than assumed. ■ Ensure reporting and support arrangements are accessible to women with disabilities and available beyond the formal campaign period.
RESPONSIBILITY	Civil society organisations should lead independent reporting and documentation; political parties should lead on internal codes, investigations and sanctions. Relevant security and justice institutions should support enforcement within their mandates. Media organisations and development partners can support awareness and safe referral.
INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS	More incidents are safely documented; reporting channels can demonstrate confidentiality and referral practice; parties publish information on codes and action taken without exposing complainants; and monitoring can identify patterns in the types of abuse reported. An increase in reports should not automatically be interpreted as an increase in violence, since it may reflect greater confidence in reporting.

Medium-term institutional improvements

These priorities require changes to party rules and practices, or sustained agreement among media institutions and professional bodies. They should be advanced before the next election cycle so that procedures are clear before aspirants enter the process.

5 Make party nomination transparent and enforceable

MEDIUM-TERM ACTION

WHY THIS MATTERS	Institutional impediments were the highest-rated barrier domain, with a mean score of 4.18. Some 89.2% of respondents agreed that party decisions are dominated by male elites, while 82.6% agreed that parties rarely nominate women for winnable positions. These are perceptions, not a direct audit of party decisions. Published research documents opaque primaries and cases in which women were pressured to step down or replaced after winning nominations [35].

PROPOSED ACTION	■ Political parties should publish nomination timetables, eligibility requirements, selection criteria, delegate or voting procedures, appeal routes and final results sufficiently early for aspirants to understand and challenge the process. ■ Publish sex-disaggregated information on the number of aspirants, candidates who enter primaries, nominees and candidates placed in winnable positions. Explain how the party defines a winnable position and apply the definition consistently. ■ Establish an independent or appropriately separated internal complaints process, with written decisions and protection against coercion, forced withdrawal or substitution outside the party's published rules. ■ Give women's wings and women party leaders defined roles in candidate selection and other decisions affecting party strategy, finance and representation. Participation should include decision rights, not only consultation or mobilisation duties. ■ Address informal practices alongside formal rules. Party monitoring should examine delegate-related payments, patronage and pressure that may bypass published procedures. ■ Where voluntary commitments prove insufficient, the National Assembly should consider whether electoral law can provide a clear basis for disclosure, review and proportionate consequences, consistent with the applicable legal framework.
RESPONSIBILITY	Lead: political parties and their national and state governing structures. Support: the National Assembly where statutory change is required, civil society election monitors [45], women's organisations and development partners.
INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS	Parties publish comparable nomination information; complaints are recorded and resolved through stated procedures; the numbers of women aspirants and nominees, including those in winnable positions, can be tracked; and reported cases of forced withdrawal or irregular substitution can be monitored.

6 Redesign nomination fee relief and address informal costs

MEDIUM-TERM ACTION

WHY THIS MATTERS	Finance was the most frequently named individual barrier in open-ended survey responses, cited by 38% of respondents. Some 88.3% agreed that political finance reform could make elections more gender-inclusive. Interview participants described fee concessions being used as leverage against recipients, including pressure to withdraw in favour of preferred candidates. These accounts identify a risk, though how widespread the practice is remains unknown.

PROPOSED ACTION	■ Political parties should publish the full cost of seeking nomination, including expression-of-interest and nomination fees, payment deadlines, eligibility for concessions and the conditions attached to any assistance. ■ Rather than assume that unconditional waivers are the best solution, parties should pilot partial fee reductions or other transparent forms of assistance with written safeguards against pressure to withdraw, endorse another aspirant or accept a different political role. ■ Use independent monitoring to assess whether recipients can complete the primary process without coercion, whether the support reaches aspirants with limited resources and whether alternative designs work better. ■ Examine informal costs associated with delegate mobilisation, travel, accommodation, campaign logistics and patronage. Parties should clarify permissible expenditure and disclosure expectations. The National Assembly may consider whether further disclosure or limits are appropriate through the relevant legal process. ■ Women's funds, civil society organisations and development partners may provide supplementary support, but should use transparent selection, conflict-of-interest safeguards and clear conditions that preserve candidates' independence.
RESPONSIBILITY	Lead: political parties. Support: the National Assembly where electoral law is relevant, women's funds, civil society organisations and development partners.
INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS	Parties publish fee schedules and concession rules; pilot monitoring records access, completion of primaries and reports of withdrawal pressure; and available expenditure information makes informal and formal costs more visible. The pilot evidence should guide whether and how a model is extended.

7 Adopt gender-responsive media practice

MEDIUM-TERM ACTION

WHY THIS MATTERS	Some 92.2% of survey respondents agreed that media visibility of women politicians encourages participation. At the same time, interview accounts and published research describe coverage that focuses on women's appearance, marital status or scandal rather than political positions and competence [47, 48]. Visibility can create recognition, but it can also expose women to scrutiny and abuse. It should therefore be pursued alongside changes to political access and media practice.

PROPOSED ACTION	■ Media organisations and professional bodies should agree practical guidance for election reporting that applies consistent standards to women and men candidates, including questions about policy, competence, public record and campaign proposals. ■ Provide editors, reporters, producers and digital teams with training on gender-responsive political coverage, including how to avoid appearance-based or marital-status framing and how to report harassment without reproducing abusive material. ■ Monitor the volume, prominence and framing of coverage of women and men candidates, including the treatment of women with disabilities and younger candidates. Monitoring should distinguish substantive political coverage from visibility that is primarily personal or sensational. ■ Political parties should provide timely access to women candidates, policy materials and campaign information, while media organisations retain editorial independence.
RESPONSIBILITY	Lead: media organisations and professional bodies. Support: civil society monitoring organisations and journalism training institutions.
INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS	Periodic content monitoring identifies changes in the balance and framing of coverage, including whether women candidates receive substantive scrutiny of their policy positions and whether gendered personal framing declines.

Longer-term legal and social change

These priorities require sustained political agreement, careful institutional design or changes in social expectations. Preparatory work can begin earlier, but implementation depends on consultation, legitimacy and continued accountability.

8 Settle the design and enforcement of reserved representation

LONGER-TERM ACTION

WHY THIS MATTERS	Some 89.5% of survey respondents agreed that enforcing gender quotas would increase women's representation. Interview participants broadly supported stronger measures while raising concerns about elite capture, tokenism, the framing of reserved seats and regional resistance. These concerns show that agreement with the principle does not settle the design.

PROPOSED ACTION

- The National Assembly should lead an open process to examine the legal and constitutional options for reserved representation, including the number and allocation of seats, the relationship between reserved and open seats, eligibility, tenure, enforcement and sanctions for non-compliance.
- Consult women's organisations, women with disabilities, political parties, state-level actors, electoral experts and communities across geopolitical zones. Consultation should address concerns about legitimacy, regional representation, elite capture and the risk that reserved seats become a separate or lower-status route into political office.
- Consider transparently the different allocation approaches raised in the study, including appointment and contest-based options such as allocation among women who competed in party primaries but did not receive a ticket. These are distinct models with different implications for voter choice, party control and accountability; the choice should not be predetermined.
- Specify the institution responsible for administering the measure, the process for resolving disputes, the consequences of non-compliance and how the measure interacts with existing elective positions.
- Develop a baseline and monitoring plan before implementation. Report not only the number of seats filled but also who occupies them, the transparency of selection and the extent to which officeholders can participate in substantive decision-making.
- Begin engagement early with state institutions where constitutional amendment procedures require their participation. Comparative evidence indicates that electoral systems and enforcement arrangements matter, but models from other countries should be assessed against Nigeria's institutional context [7, 31].

RESPONSIBILITY

Lead: the National Assembly. Support: State Houses of Assembly where constitutionally required, women's and civil society organisations, political parties and development partners.

INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS

A publicly accessible proposal specifies the allocation model, legal basis, enforcement arrangements and safeguards; consultation records the views of affected groups; and, if adopted, public reporting tracks compliance and the substantive participation of women occupying reserved seats.

9 Engage men, community and faith leaders as partners in change

LONGER-TERM ACTION

WHY THIS MATTERS

Women and men differ markedly in their attitudes towards women's political leadership. In the survey, the gender difference in the attitudes index was substantial (Cohen's d = 0.78), and 44.0% of men agreed that men generally make better political leaders. At the same time, 90.9% of respondents agreed that endorsement by respected local leaders can strengthen a woman's legitimacy in her constituency. Interview participants proposed engaging men as allies and working with religious and traditional leaders. These findings support engagement, but do not imply that communities or faith traditions are homogeneous or that endorsement alone will change party selection.

PROPOSED ACTION	■ Women's and civil society organisations should develop and test locally appropriate engagement with men in families, parties and communities, focusing on practical support for women's participation and opposition to intimidation, rather than treating men as a single audience. ■ Work with willing traditional and faith leaders to discuss women's political leadership in ways that reflect local context and distinguish religious or cultural teachings from selective interpretations used to restrict women's participation. Avoid presenting religion or culture as inherently opposed to women's leadership. ■ Support community dialogues that involve women as agenda-setters and decision-makers, including young women and women with disabilities. Engagement should not require women to seek permission from community authorities or make their participation conditional on endorsement. ■ Use repeat surveys, qualitative feedback and programme monitoring to assess whether engagement changes attitudes and whether women experience greater practical support. Distinguish changes in expressed attitudes from changes in registration, party access, candidacy and safety. ■ Adapt approaches across regions and social contexts rather than applying a single national message. The evidence from a trial of sensitisation training for men indicates that attitudes can shift without a corresponding short-term increase in women's participation, so this work should complement, not replace, institutional reform [27].
RESPONSIBILITY	Lead: women's and civil society organisations, working in partnership with relevant traditional and faith institutions. Support: media organisations and development partners.
INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS	Repeat measurement identifies changes in attitudes and reported support from families and communities; qualitative monitoring records whether women experience greater freedom to participate and whether community engagement includes women's voices in setting priorities. These indicators should be interpreted alongside evidence on institutional access.

Responses the findings do not support on their own

The evidence also indicates where a response, if used alone, is unlikely to address the problem adequately.

- **Unconditional nomination fee waivers as the principal financial remedy.** A small number of interview accounts describe fee concessions being used as leverage against recipients. Not all waivers are necessarily harmful, but the accounts justify written conditions, safeguards and piloting before a model is adopted more widely.

- **Training or confidence-building without practical access.** Training can improve political participation and preparedness, but it cannot by itself meet nomination, campaign and logistical costs or change party selection practices. It should be connected to practical support and institutional reform.

- **Attitude-change or visibility campaigns as stand-alone solutions.** Public support for women's participation is substantial, but measured attitudes did not clearly distinguish respondents by PVC ownership, usual voting or party membership after adjustment. Visibility also cannot secure party nomination or protect women from abuse on its own.

- **Reserved representation without a settled design and enforcement system.** Adoption alone would not resolve questions of allocation, accountability, legitimacy, elite capture or women's substantive influence. These issues need to be addressed before and during implementation.
- **Party commitments without disclosure and accountability.** General statements of support for women do not demonstrate fair selection. Published procedures, accessible complaints routes, disaggregated information and consequences for breaches are necessary if commitments are to change practice.

Where action should begin

The most direct route to changing women's access to political power is to address the candidacy pathway and the institutions that control it. Practical access to registration and PVC collection can be improved immediately. Parties can make nomination rules more transparent and their application more accountable. Financial support can be redesigned and tested, while independent reporting arrangements can help women speak out without relying on the structures they fear. Longer-term legal reform, including any reserved representation measure, requires open consultation and enforceable design. These actions should proceed alongside sustained work with communities, media and political networks, not instead of institutional change.

The priorities are mutually reinforcing. Better registration and card collection widen access to voting, but do not resolve barriers to candidacy. Training and mentorship can strengthen women's readiness and networks, but need to connect to resources and fair party processes. Public reporting can expose the distance between gender commitments and institutional practice, while legal and party reforms can create obligations that are capable of being monitored. Protection from violence makes participation safer, and media and community engagement can help shape the environment in which women seek and exercise political authority.

Implementation should therefore be accompanied by transparent monitoring, meaningful participation by women affected by the reforms and periodic review of what is working.

The purpose is not simply to increase the number of women who enter political activity, but to widen fair access to candidacy, improve the conditions under which women compete and ensure that women who enter political institutions can exercise meaningful influence.



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Qualitative quote bank

This appendix collects additional quotations from the interviews that complement, but do not substitute for, the evidence in the main chapters. They are organised by theme and illustrate nuance, contrasting views or practical detail. Each is the participant's own wording, lightly edited for readability: filler words and false starts are removed and omissions are marked by ellipses. Participants are identified only by gender and broad stakeholder category, and details that could identify an individual have been left out. The quotations show how participants understood the issues and are not measures of how common any view is.

Norms, history and religion

"So if a woman comes up, comes out to contest or to participate in an election, politically, first and foremost, the first thing that they try to find out is, oh, is she married? She's married, how many children does she have?"

Woman, academic

"And so most times when people make reference to tradition, the reference they are making to tradition is a reference that only stops at the colonial times. And that has informed our sociocultural disposition to women representation."

Woman, civil society participant

"for a country like Nigeria... we are seen as a very religious country. And to a large degree, both Christianity and Islam... are very aligned on a number of things about the roles of women in building a society."

Woman, academic

Money, parties and gatekeeping

"Think of the parties that give concession, most of the women that emerge are those that paid in full. So one thing we've also learned is that money is one major tool to exclude. Money ensures exclusionary politics or politics of exclusion."

Woman, civil society participant

"I am of the opinion that the cost of forms should not be given free. It should be given at half the price, and I have my reason."

Woman, political actor

"because our political parties are the sole gatekeepers and we don't have independent candidacy provision in our constitution, it means more work needs to be done on the political parties as regarding the cost of forms."

Woman, political actor

"It can be sexual harassment, it can be cyber bullying and also it can be financial bullying. I will say financial bullying because you realise that within the political party space people that you're running for office with are going to be spending and outspending at a rate that you cannot meet up."

Woman, political actor

"Let's call it what it is. It is bribery... it is just designed to stuff the pockets of those who have power."

Woman, academic

"if we get it right, we fund the way they are able to do their campaigns, able to travel, reach out to the electorate, to the voters. They're able to buy campaign vehicles and move them around"

Woman, academic

Violence and safety

"The environment is not safe. The safety of a woman in that environment is very minimal."

Man, academic

"for those who wanted to continue in the path, they felt restrained from making reports because of their interest to continue."

Woman, civil society participant

Quotas and reserved seats

"We will never be given any special advantage when it comes to politics. And the earlier we accept that, the better for us."

Woman, public official

"so that women can really show interest, we can push a narrative of giving a percentage to every woman that is good enough to go and pick party form."

Man, academic

Mentorship, visibility and media

"she still had that confidence that she can do it and she was consistent."

Man, academic

"It would inspire, not just inspire a woman to be a doctor, but also tell her that when she's a doctor, she can also be the head of the medical association. Same with the bar association."

Woman, academic

"the media should change their language or they should be sensitive when using words to describe female politicians. They should not concentrate on portraying women as objects, as sexual beings, or as beings that do not have any value to add to governance or politics."

Woman, political actor

Civil society

"I do believe that the work of women groups, civil society group has been to advocate, to push, engage political parties. We're not seeing as much result."

Woman, civil society participant

Supplementary quantitative tables

These tables give the detailed survey results behind the findings in Chapters 2 to 7, and each is referred to in the text where relevant. Percentages use the valid responses to each question as the denominator. Scores run from 1 to 5; a higher score means more supportive attitudes for the attitudes index and stronger perceived barriers or stronger agreement for the other scores. Results are unweighted and describe survey respondents, not the Nigerian population. Differences between groups are raw differences unless the table says they are adjusted.

TABLE B1

Respondent profile

Characteristic	n	% of valid responses
Age group (n = 2,810)	Age group (n = 2,810)	Age group (n = 2,810)
18 to 25	914	32.5%
26 to 35	1,464	52.1%
36 to 40	265	9.4%
Above 40	167	5.9%
Gender (n = 2,810)	Gender (n = 2,810)	Gender (n = 2,810)
Female	1,415	50.4%
Male	1,390	49.5%
Prefer not to say	5	0.2%
Disability (n = 2,810)	Disability (n = 2,810)	Disability (n = 2,810)
Yes	166	5.9%
No	2,621	93.3%
Prefer not to say	23	0.8%
Marital status (n = 2,810)	Marital status (n = 2,810)	Marital status (n = 2,810)
Single	1,876	66.8%
Married	872	31.0%
Separated or divorced	33	1.2%

Characteristic	n	% of valid responses
Widowed	13	0.5%
Prefer not to say	16	0.6%
Highest education (n = 2,810)	Highest education (n = 2,810)	Highest education (n = 2,810)
Secondary or below	340	12.1%
Diploma or technical	442	15.7%
Bachelor's degree	1,513	53.8%
Postgraduate (master's or PhD)	468	16.7%
Other (specified)	47	1.7%
Sector of work (n = 2,810)	Sector of work (n = 2,810)	Sector of work (n = 2,810)
NGO or non-profit	726	25.8%
Education	600	21.4%
Healthcare	265	9.4%
Public service or government	166	5.9%
Private sector	412	14.7%
None (not applicable)	318	11.3%
Other (specified)	323	11.5%
Location (n = 2,810)	Location (n = 2,810)	Location (n = 2,810)
Urban	1,169	41.6%
Semi-urban	1,210	43.1%
Rural	431	15.3%
Religion (n = 2,810)	Religion (n = 2,810)	Religion (n = 2,810)
Christianity	1,550	55.2%
Islam	1,240	44.1%
Traditional	9	0.3%
Other	11	0.4%
Geopolitical zone (n = 2,810)	Geopolitical zone (n = 2,810)	Geopolitical zone (n = 2,810)
North West	710	25.3%

Characteristic	n	% of valid responses
South West	649	23.1%
North Central	584	20.8%
North East	457	16.3%
South South	257	9.1%
South East	153	5.4%

Source: survey data [4]. Percentages are of valid responses to each question; none was missing. Education, sector and zone groupings are defined in the analysis workbook. Zone is derived from state of residence.

TABLE B2

Valid PVC, usual voting and party membership by respondent characteristic

Characteristic	Respondents (n)	Holds a valid PVC (%)	Usually votes (%)	Party member (%)
All respondents	2,810	69.1%	36.3%	38.5%
Gender		V = 0.21	V = 0.24	V = 0.25
Female	1,415	59.7%	25.0%	26.4%
Male	1,390	78.7%	47.7%	50.9%
Age group		V = 0.33	V = 0.35	V = 0.04
18 to 25	914	47.2%	13.3%	36.3%
26 to 35	1,464	78.8%	44.0%	39.5%
36 to 40	265	81.0%	59.2%	42.3%
Above 40	167	85.5%	58.9%	35.9%
Highest education		V = 0.20	V = 0.18	V = 0.10
Secondary or below	340	48.5%	15.4%	44.4%
Diploma or technical	442	72.5%	39.6%	47.7%
Bachelor's degree	1,513	68.9%	36.4%	35.5%
Postgraduate	468	81.9%	48.2%	36.1%
Location		V = 0.05	V = 0.02	V = 0.13
Urban	1,169	71.1%	37.2%	32.5%

Characteristic	Respondents (n)	Holds a valid PVC (%)	Usually votes (%)	Party member (%)
Semi-urban	1,210	66.4%	35.1%	39.8%
Rural	431	71.5%	37.2%	51.5%
Geopolitical zone		V = 0.18	V = 0.18	V = 0.22
North West	710	74.4%	39.5%	48.3%
South West	649	55.3%	22.5%	23.1%
North Central	584	70.3%	38.7%	34.8%
North East	457	78.6%	49.9%	53.0%
South South	257	70.2%	32.4%	37.4%
South East	153	68.5%	35.5%	32.0%
Religion		V = 0.09	V = 0.10	V = 0.20
Christianity	1,550	65.4%	32.1%	30.0%
Islam	1,240	73.6%	41.6%	49.4%
Disability		V = 0.04	V = 0.03	V = 0.14
Disability	166	62.4%	30.9%	64.5%
No disability	2,621	69.6%	36.8%	36.7%

Source: survey data [4]. Percentages exclude respondents who answered 'Other' on PVC status (n = 20) or voting (n = 21), so overall figures differ slightly from Figure 2.2; bases are 2,790, 2,789 and 2,810. The shaded row for each characteristic shows Cramér's V for the three outcomes. Groups under 30 respondents, 'Prefer not to say' and 'Other' categories are not shown. Associations with V of 0.10 or more are statistically significant after Holm adjustment ($p < 0.001$).

TABLE B3

AWPPI items: scores, supportive responses and reliability

Item	n	Mean (scored)	% supportive	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
C1 Same chance as men to be elected	2,779	4.32	86.9%	0.58	0.81
C2 Men make better leaders (scored in reverse)	2,719	3.37	54.7%	0.15	0.88
C3 Would vote for the most qualified woman	2,763	4.49	91.1%	0.63	0.80

Item	n	Mean (scored)	% supportive	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
C4 Equally comfortable voting for a woman or a man	2,766	4.02	74.3%	0.63	0.80
C5 A woman can be as effective in top office	2,776	4.24	83.8%	0.74	0.79
C6 A woman can handle the pressures of leadership	2,774	4.08	80.4%	0.71	0.79
C7 Women are underrepresented in leadership	2,771	4.29	86.4%	0.57	0.81
C8 More women leaders would strengthen democracy	2,760	4.23	84.6%	0.64	0.80
AWPPI composite (8 items)	2,792	4.13			0.83

Source: survey data [4]. Scores run from 1 to 5; item C2 is shown after reverse-scoring (6 minus the response). % supportive is the share who agree or strongly agree, except for C2 (disagree or strongly disagree). Item-total r is the correlation between an item and the sum of the other seven; alpha is Cronbach's alpha for the scale if the item were removed. Scale alpha is 0.83 (n = 2,529 with all items answered).

TABLE B4

AWPPI score by respondent characteristic

Characteristic	n	Mean (SD)	Median	Effect size	Holm p
Gender				r = 0.47	< 0.001
Female	1,408	4.40 (0.62)	4.50		
Male	1,379	3.85 (0.78)	4.00		
Age group				ε^2 = 0.003	0.057
18 to 25	910	4.11 (0.78)	4.38		
26 to 35	1,453	4.13 (0.75)	4.29		
36 to 40	262	4.08 (0.79)	4.25		
Above 40	167	4.35 (0.52)	4.43		
Highest education				ε^2 = 0.013	< 0.001
Secondary or below	337	3.94 (0.88)	4.25		
Diploma or technical	439	4.04 (0.73)	4.25		
Bachelor's degree	1,501	4.17 (0.74)	4.38		

Characteristic	n	Mean (SD)	Median	Effect size	Holm p
Postgraduate	468	4.24 (0.69)	4.38		
Location				$\varepsilon^2 = 0.008$	< 0.001
Urban	1,162	4.20 (0.70)	4.38		
Semi-urban	1,202	4.12 (0.76)	4.38		
Rural	428	3.98 (0.85)	4.13		
Geopolitical zone				$\varepsilon^2 = 0.065$	< 0.001
North West	703	3.91 (0.78)	4.13		
South West	645	4.27 (0.69)	4.38		
North Central	581	4.26 (0.72)	4.38		
North East	455	3.92 (0.84)	4.13		
South South	256	4.30 (0.59)	4.38		
South East	152	4.43 (0.61)	4.50		
Religion				r = 0.34	< 0.001
Christianity	1,544	4.33 (0.62)	4.46		
Islam	1,228	3.88 (0.84)	4.13		
Disability				r = 0.12	0.057
Disability	164	3.93 (0.90)	4.25		
No disability	2,607	4.15 (0.74)	4.38		
Valid PVC				r = 0.09	< 0.001
Valid PVC	1,917	4.10 (0.75)	4.25		
No valid PVC	855	4.20 (0.75)	4.38		
Party membership				r = 0.10	< 0.001
Party member	1,074	4.05 (0.79)	4.25		
Not a member	1,718	4.18 (0.72)	4.38		
Voting history				r = 0.11	< 0.001
Never or once	1,299	4.19 (0.76)	4.38		

Characteristic	n	Mean (SD)	Median	Effect size	Holm p
Occasionally or usually	1,472	4.08 (0.75)	4.25		

Source: survey data [4]. n is the number of respondents with a valid AWPPI score in each group. The shaded row for each characteristic shows the effect size of the group comparison (rank-biserial r for two groups, epsilon-squared for more than two groups; absolute values) and the Holm-adjusted p value across the 20 comparisons of AWPPI and sociocultural barrier scores. Groups under 30 respondents, 'Prefer not to say' and 'Other' categories are not shown.

TABLE B5

Sociocultural barrier items: scores, agreement and reliability

Item	n	Mean	% agree	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
D1 Politics is seen as a man's domain	2,780	4.23	87.7%	0.53	0.74
D2 Politically active women are judged harshly	2,757	4.02	79.7%	0.60	0.72
D3 Religious or traditional beliefs discourage women	2,773	3.99	77.7%	0.58	0.72
D4 Family responsibilities make politics difficult	2,765	3.63	64.8%	0.46	0.76
D5 Women politicians are labelled immoral or disobedient	2,766	3.67	64.7%	0.58	0.72
Sociocultural barriers score (5 items)	2,785	3.91			0.77

Source: survey data [4]. Scores run from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); a higher score means a stronger perceived barrier. % agree is the share who agree or strongly agree. Scale alpha is 0.77 (n = 2,641 with all items answered).

TABLE B6

Sociocultural barriers score by respondent characteristic

Characteristic	n	Mean (SD)	Median	Effect size	Holm p
Gender				r = 0.17	< 0.001
Female	1,405	4.03 (0.74)	4.00		
Male	1,375	3.79 (0.86)	3.80		
Age group				ε^2 = 0.002	0.229
18 to 25	905	3.97 (0.81)	4.00		

Characteristic	n	Mean (SD)	Median	Effect size	Holm p
26 to 35	1,450	3.89 (0.82)	4.00		
36 to 40	264	3.81 (0.87)	4.00		
Above 40	166	3.95 (0.68)	4.00		
Highest education				$\varepsilon^2 = 0.000$	1.000
Secondary or below	336	3.86 (0.94)	4.00		
Diploma or technical	438	3.85 (0.88)	4.00		
Bachelor's degree	1,498	3.93 (0.76)	4.00		
Postgraduate	466	3.94 (0.82)	4.00		
Location				$\varepsilon^2 = 0.005$	0.002
Urban	1,161	3.98 (0.76)	4.00		
Semi-urban	1,199	3.90 (0.80)	4.00		
Rural	425	3.75 (0.95)	3.80		
Geopolitical zone				$\varepsilon^2 = 0.004$	0.040
North West	702	3.98 (0.86)	4.00		
South West	646	3.87 (0.77)	4.00		
North Central	579	3.96 (0.76)	4.00		
North East	453	3.83 (0.91)	4.00		
South South	254	3.86 (0.72)	4.00		
South East	151	3.91 (0.76)	4.00		
Religion				r = 0.04	0.479
Christianity	1,538	3.91 (0.75)	4.00		
Islam	1,227	3.91 (0.89)	4.00		
Disability				r = 0.03	1.000
Disability	163	3.89 (1.00)	4.00		
No disability	2,600	3.91 (0.80)	4.00		
Valid PVC				r = 0.00	1.000
Valid PVC	1,912	3.91 (0.81)	4.00		

Characteristic	n	Mean (SD)	Median	Effect size	Holm p
No valid PVC	853	3.91 (0.82)	4.00		
Party membership				r = 0.01	1.000
Party member	1,068	3.90 (0.87)	4.00		
Not a member	1,717	3.92 (0.77)	4.00		
Voting history				r = 0.06	0.057
Never or once	1,298	3.95 (0.82)	4.00		
Occasionally or usually	1,466	3.88 (0.80)	4.00		

Source: survey data [4]. A higher score means stronger perceived sociocultural barriers. n is the number of respondents with a valid score in each group. The shaded row for each characteristic shows the effect size (rank-biserial r for two groups, epsilon-squared for more than two groups; absolute values) and the Holm-adjusted p value across the 20 comparisons of AWPPI and sociocultural barrier scores.

TABLE B7

Economic and educational barrier items: scores, agreement and reliability

Item	n	Mean	% agree	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
E1 Nomination fees discourage women	2,776	3.74	66.4%	0.63	0.62
E2 Women lack campaign funds	2,747	3.76	68.4%	0.68	0.57
E3 Limited education affects confidence	2,778	3.53	61.0%	0.46	0.81
Economic and educational barriers score (3 items)	2,798	3.67			0.75
E4 Empowerment programmes can help (remedy; not in score)	2,781	4.31	88.5%	n/a	n/a

Source: survey data [4]. Scores run from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); a higher score means a stronger perceived barrier. % agree is the share who agree or strongly agree. Item-total r is the correlation between an item and the sum of the other items; alpha is Cronbach's alpha for the scale if the item were removed. Scale alpha is 0.75 (n = 2,694 with all items answered). E4 is a remedy statement, reported separately and not part of the score.

TABLE B8

Economic and educational barriers score by respondent characteristic

Characteristic	Lowest-scoring group (mean)	Highest-scoring group (mean)	Effect size	Holm p
Gender	Male (3.66)	Female (3.68)	r = 0.00	1.000
Age group	36 to 40 (3.62)	Above 40 (3.77)	ε^2 = 0.000	1.000
Highest education	Bachelor's degree (3.62)	Diploma or technical (3.81)	ε^2 = 0.005	0.016
Location	Urban (3.64)	Rural (3.76)	ε^2 = 0.002	0.396
Geopolitical zone	South West (3.44)	North West (3.89)	ε^2 = 0.030	< 0.001
Religion	Christianity (3.60)	Islam (3.77)	r = 0.12	< 0.001
Disability	No disability (3.66)	Disability (3.86)	r = 0.15	0.022
Valid PVC	No valid PVC (3.58)	Valid PVC (3.71)	r = 0.08	0.028
Party membership	Not a member (3.63)	Party member (3.74)	r = 0.08	0.014
Voting history	Never or once (3.62)	Occasionally or usually (3.72)	r = 0.05	0.380

Source: survey data [4]. A higher score means stronger perceived economic and educational barriers (n = 2,798). The table shows the group with the lowest and the highest mean score for each characteristic (full group means and standard deviations are in the workbook). Effect size is the rank-biserial r for two groups and epsilon-squared for more than two groups (absolute values). Holm-adjusted p values allow for the 30 comparisons of the three scores in Sections 5 to 7. Groups under 30 respondents, 'Prefer not to say' and 'Other' categories are not shown.

TABLE B9

Political environment and safety items: scores, agreement and reliability

Item	n	Mean	% agree	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
F1 Politics is violent and unsafe for women	2,774	3.79	69.9%	0.58	0.76
F2 Women fear harassment or intimidation	2,760	4.00	79.9%	0.65	0.73
F3 Online bullying discourages women	2,782	3.77	70.1%	0.64	0.73

Item	n	Mean	% agree	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
F4 Women avoid politics seen as corrupt or dirty	2,771	3.40	53.3%	0.56	0.77
Political environment and safety score (4 items)	2,794	3.74			0.80

Source: survey data [4]. Scores run from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); a higher score means a stronger perceived barrier. % agree is the share who agree or strongly agree. Item-total r is the correlation between an item and the sum of the other items; alpha is Cronbach's alpha for the scale if the item were removed. Scale alpha is 0.80 (n = 2,677 with all items answered).

TABLE B10

Political environment and safety score by respondent characteristic

Characteristic	Lowest-scoring group (mean)	Highest-scoring group (mean)	Effect size	Holm p
Gender	Male (3.65)	Female (3.84)	r = 0.11	< 0.001
Age group	36 to 40 (3.69)	18 to 25 (3.79)	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.000$	1.000
Highest education	Diploma or technical (3.73)	Secondary or below (3.75)	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.000$	1.000
Location	Rural (3.65)	Urban (3.77)	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.000$	1.000
Geopolitical zone	North East (3.64)	North West (3.80)	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.002$	1.000
Religion	Islam (3.73)	Christianity (3.75)	r = 0.01	1.000
Disability	No disability (3.74)	Disability (3.76)	r = 0.05	1.000
Valid PVC	No valid PVC (3.73)	Valid PVC (3.75)	r = 0.02	1.000
Party membership	Party member (3.74)	Not a member (3.74)	r = 0.01	1.000
Voting history	Occasionally or usually (3.71)	Never or once (3.78)	r = 0.04	1.000

Source: survey data [4]. A higher score means stronger perceived barriers in the political environment (n = 2,794). The table shows the group with the lowest and the highest mean score for each characteristic (full group means and standard deviations are in the workbook). Effect size is the rank-biserial r for two groups and epsilon-squared for more than two groups (absolute values). Holm-adjusted p values allow for the 30 comparisons of the three scores in Sections 5 to 7. Groups under 30 respondents, 'Prefer not to say' and 'Other' categories are not shown.

TABLE B11

Institutional impediment items: scores, agreement and reliability

Item	n	Mean	% agree	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
G1 Parties rarely nominate women for winnable seats	2,780	4.11	82.6%	0.61	0.80
G2 Party decisions dominated by male elites	2,768	4.31	89.2%	0.66	0.78
G3 Quotas absent or poorly enforced	2,776	4.17	84.2%	0.65	0.78
G4 Women's wings are symbolic, not influential	2,772	4.13	83.3%	0.68	0.76
Institutional impediments score (4 items)	2,798	4.18			0.82

Source: survey data [4]. Scores run from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); a higher score means a stronger perceived barrier. % agree is the share who agree or strongly agree. Item-total r is the correlation between an item and the sum of the other items; alpha is Cronbach's alpha for the scale if the item were removed. Scale alpha is 0.82 (n = 2,681 with all items answered). G3 combines two propositions (quotas absent, or poorly implemented or enforced).

TABLE B12

Institutional impediments score by respondent characteristic

Characteristic	Lowest-scoring group (mean)	Highest-scoring group (mean)	Effect size	Holm p
Gender	Male (4.01)	Female (4.34)	r = 0.23	< 0.001
Age group	36 to 40 (4.11)	Above 40 (4.34)	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.002$	0.956
Highest education	Secondary or below (4.03)	Postgraduate (4.23)	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.002$	0.396
Location	Rural (4.05)	Urban (4.23)	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.003$	0.059
Geopolitical zone	North East (4.07)	South East (4.29)	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.002$	0.970
Religion	Islam (4.06)	Christianity (4.27)	r = 0.11	< 0.001
Disability	Disability (4.10)	No disability (4.19)	r = 0.00	1.000
Valid PVC	Valid PVC (4.17)	No valid PVC (4.18)	r = 0.02	1.000

Characteristic	Lowest-scoring group (mean)	Highest-scoring group (mean)	Effect size	Holm p
Party membership	Party member (4.15)	Not a member (4.20)	r = 0.02	1.000
Voting history	Occasionally or usually (4.16)	Never or once (4.20)	r = 0.05	0.321

Source: survey data [4]. A higher score means stronger perceived institutional impediments (n = 2,798). The table shows the group with the lowest and the highest mean score for each characteristic (full group means and standard deviations are in the workbook). Effect size is the rank-biserial r for two groups and epsilon-squared for more than two groups (absolute values). Holm-adjusted p values allow for the 30 comparisons of the three scores in Sections 5 to 7. Groups under 30 respondents, 'Prefer not to say' and 'Other' categories are not shown.

TABLE B13

Enabling mechanism and visibility items: scores, agreement and reliability

Item	n	Mean	% agree	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
H1 Mentorship and leadership training help women succeed	2,787	4.36	91.4%	0.70	0.86
H2 Enforcing gender quotas would raise representation	2,765	4.33	89.5%	0.73	0.85
H3 Civil society plays a major role in empowering women	2,772	4.28	89.1%	0.71	0.85
H4 Political finance reforms could make elections more inclusive	2,771	4.26	88.3%	0.70	0.86
H5 Media visibility of women politicians encourages participation	2,775	4.39	92.2%	0.72	0.85
Enabling mechanisms score (5 items)	2,786	4.33			0.88
I1 Seeing successful women politicians inspires other women	2,784	4.50	93.6%	0.67	0.76
I2 Women leaders promote gender-sensitive laws and policies	2,782	4.23	84.8%	0.66	0.77
I3 Women in leadership change perceptions of capability	2,772	4.39	90.7%	0.70	0.73

Item	n	Mean	% agree	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
Visibility and policy impact score (3 items)	2,804	4.37			0.82

Source: survey data [4]. Scores run from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); a higher score means stronger agreement. % agree is the share who agree or strongly agree. Item-total r is the correlation between an item and the sum of the other items in its scale; alpha is Cronbach's alpha for the scale if the item were removed. Scale alpha is 0.88 for enabling mechanisms (n = 2,659) and 0.82 for visibility and policy impact (n = 2,724), among respondents who answered every item.

TABLE B14

Enabling mechanisms and visibility scores by respondent characteristic

Characteristic	Enabling mechanisms: effect size	Holm p	Visibility and impact: effect size	Holm p
Gender	r = 0.17	< 0.001	r = 0.19	< 0.001
Age group	ε^2 = 0.000	1.000	ε^2 = 0.002	0.518
Highest education	ε^2 = 0.000	1.000	ε^2 = 0.001	1.000
Location	ε^2 = 0.001	1.000	ε^2 = 0.000	1.000
Geopolitical zone	ε^2 = 0.001	1.000	ε^2 = 0.000	1.000
Religion	r = 0.07	0.050	r = 0.06	0.089
Disability	r = 0.05	1.000	r = 0.01	1.000
Valid PVC	r = 0.02	1.000	r = 0.01	1.000
Party membership	r = 0.02	1.000	r = 0.00	1.000
Voting history	r = 0.01	1.000	r = 0.02	1.000

Source: survey data [4]. Effect size is the rank-biserial r for two groups and epsilon-squared for more than two groups (absolute values); Holm-adjusted p values allow for the 30 comparisons of the three scores in Sections 8 and 9. Group means and standard deviations are in the workbook. Women, Christian respondents, urban respondents and those with a diploma or bachelor's degree score highest where differences are clear.

TABLE B15

Political socialisation and cultural capital items: scores, agreement and reliability

Item	n	Mean	% agree	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
J1 Informal political discussion builds confidence and voice	2,772	4.28	90.6%	0.71	0.79

Item	n	Mean	% agree	Item-total r	Alpha if item deleted
J2 Informal political activities build skills and networks	2,765	4.37	92.2%	0.75	0.75
J3 Endorsement by respected local leaders adds legitimacy	2,772	4.35	90.9%	0.68	0.82
Socialisation and cultural capital score (3 items)	2,801	4.33			0.85

Source: survey data [4]. Scores run from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); a higher score means stronger agreement. % agree is the share who agree or strongly agree. Scale alpha is 0.85 (n = 2,698 with all items answered).

TABLE B16

Socialisation and cultural capital score by respondent characteristic

Characteristic	Lowest-scoring group (mean)	Highest-scoring group (mean)	Effect size	Holm p
Gender	Male (4.22)	Female (4.45)	r = 0.17	< 0.001
Age group	36 to 40 (4.29)	Above 40 (4.43)	ε^2 = 0.000	1.000
Highest education	Secondary or below (4.21)	Bachelor's degree (4.36)	ε^2 = 0.000	1.000
Location	Rural (4.22)	Urban (4.37)	ε^2 = 0.001	1.000
Geopolitical zone	North East (4.26)	North Central (4.42)	ε^2 = 0.003	0.279
Religion	Islam (4.26)	Christianity (4.39)	r = 0.07	0.057
Disability	Disability (4.26)	No disability (4.34)	r = 0.01	1.000
Valid PVC	No valid PVC (4.32)	Valid PVC (4.34)	r = 0.01	1.000
Party membership	Party member (4.32)	Not a member (4.35)	r = 0.01	1.000
Voting history	Never or once (4.33)	Occasionally or usually (4.34)	r = 0.01	1.000

Source: survey data [4]. A higher score means stronger agreement (n = 2,801). Effect size is the rank-biserial r for two groups and epsilon-squared for more than two groups (absolute values). Holm-adjusted p values allow for the 30 comparisons of the three scores in Sections 8 and 9. Groups under 30 respondents, 'Prefer not to say' and 'Other' categories are not shown.

TABLE B17

Barrier themes in answers to D6 and K1

Theme	Framework dimension	D6: n (% of 2,201 coded)	K1: n (% of 2,434 coded)
B10 Financial constraints and economic dependence	Economic and educational	195 (9%)	927 (38%)
B04 Culture, tradition and customs	Sociocultural	438 (20%)	847 (35%)
B14 Discrimination, inequality and exclusion	Institutional	304 (14%)	686 (28%)
B08 Violence, intimidation, harassment and insecurity	Political environment	150 (7%)	560 (23%)
B13 Party gatekeeping and institutional exclusion	Institutional	73 (3%)	475 (20%)
B03 Religion	Sociocultural	391 (18%)	435 (18%)
B05 Patriarchy and male dominance	Sociocultural	350 (16%)	416 (17%)
B17 Lack of support from family, society and men	Sociocultural	272 (12%)	380 (16%)
B06 Stereotypes about capability and temperament	Sociocultural	444 (20%)	366 (15%)
B11 Education, literacy and political awareness gaps	Economic and educational	183 (8%)	349 (14%)
B12 Low confidence, fear and self-doubt	Economic and educational	207 (9%)	292 (12%)
B01 Domestic and caregiving roles	Sociocultural	535 (24%)	209 (9%)
B16 Weak laws, quotas and enforcement	Institutional	41 (2%)	207 (9%)
B21 Lack of mentors, role models and networks	Economic and educational	63 (3%)	197 (8%)
B07 Moral policing, stigma and reputation	Sociocultural	320 (15%)	167 (7%)
B09 Corrupt, dirty and hostile political culture	Political environment	87 (4%)	129 (5%)
B02 Marriage and spousal control	Sociocultural	365 (17%)	110 (5%)
B23 Societal mindset and public perception	Sociocultural	33 (1%)	100 (4%)
B19 Ethnic and regional norms	Sociocultural	111 (5%)	52 (2%)

Theme	Framework dimension	D6: n (% of 2,201 coded)	K1: n (% of 2,434 coded)
B22 Expectation that women stay silent or unseen	Sociocultural	72 (3%)	21 (1%)

Source: survey data [4]. Source: survey data, open-ended responses. D6 asked about other cultural or social beliefs and K1 about the biggest barriers. Responses can carry several themes. Themes with fewer than 3% in both questions are in the workbook. Dimensions: the study's framework (concept note); the allocation of themes to dimensions is the analyst's.

TABLE B18

Proposed steps in answers to K2

Theme	Framework dimension	n	% of 2,462 coded
S09 Encouragement, support and equal opportunity	Socialisation and capital	1,074	44%
S01 Awareness, sensitisation and orientation	Socialisation and capital	851	35%
S02 Education, training and capacity building	Socialisation and capital	840	34%
S06 Laws, policy reform and enforcement	Facilitating mechanisms	730	30%
S04 Financial support and lower costs	Facilitating mechanisms	700	28%
S07 Party reform and inclusion in party leadership	Facilitating mechanisms	677	27%
S11 Gender equality, fairness and merit	Institutional	590	24%
S05 Quotas, affirmative action and reserved seats	Facilitating mechanisms	545	22%
S10 Changing cultural, religious and community attitudes	Sociocultural	421	17%
S08 Safety, protection and anti-violence measures	Political environment	394	16%
S03 Mentorship, role models and networks	Facilitating mechanisms	355	14%
S15 Electoral integrity and process reform	Institutional	257	10%
S13 Media and visibility	Visibility	199	8%
S12 Women's own participation, voting and solidarity	Socialisation and capital	191	8%

Theme	Framework dimension	n	% of 2,462 coded
S16 Girl-child and early political socialisation	Socialisation and capital	156	6%
S17 Grassroots organising and community mobilisation	Socialisation and capital	146	6%
S14 Family and male engagement	Sociocultural	113	5%

Source: survey data [4]. Source: survey data, open-ended responses. Responses can carry several themes. Encouragement, support and equal opportunity is a broad theme that covers general calls to include and support women; specific mechanisms (quotas, funding, training) take their own themes. One further respondent opposed any change and is not tabulated.

TABLE B19

Themes mentioned at different rates by women and men

Question	Theme	Women (%)	Men (%)	Difference (points)	V	Holm p
D6	B03 Religion	11%	25%	13.9	0.18	< 0.001
D6	B04 Culture, tradition and customs	15%	25%	10.5	0.13	< 0.001
D6	B06 Stereotypes about capability and temperament	25%	15%	-9.3	0.12	< 0.001
D6	B19 Ethnic and regional norms	3%	7%	4.0	0.09	0.001
D6	B17 Lack of support from family, society and men	10%	15%	5.6	0.09	0.004
K1	B03 Religion	12%	24%	11.3	0.15	< 0.001
K1	B19 Ethnic and regional norms	1%	3%	2.4	0.08	0.003

Question	Theme	Women (%)	Men (%)	Difference (points)	V	Holm p
K1	B11 Education, literacy and political awareness gaps	12%	17%	5.2	0.07	0.015
K1	B23 Societal mindset and public perception	5%	3%	-2.7	0.07	0.042

Source: survey data [4]. Source: survey data, open-ended responses. Percentages of coded responses from women and from men. Themes with at least 30 mentions were compared (62 tests across the three questions, Holm adjusted); only differences with Holm-adjusted p below 0.05 are shown. No K2 theme differs. Difference is men minus women.

TABLE B20

Differences between women and men, and between Muslim and Christian respondents, across the eight scores

Score	Women: mean	Men: mean	Women minus men: d (95% CI)	Adjusted difference for men (95% CI)	Muslim minus Christian: d
Attitudes (AWPPI)	4.40	3.85	0.78 (0.71 to 0.86)	-0.44 (-0.50 to -0.39)	-0.62
Sociocultural barriers	4.03	3.79	0.31 (0.23 to 0.38)	-0.28 (-0.35 to -0.21)	0.01
Economic and educational barriers	3.68	3.66	0.02 (-0.05 to 0.10)	-0.16 (-0.24 to -0.07)	0.17
Political environment and safety	3.84	3.65	0.21 (0.14 to 0.29)	-0.21 (-0.28 to -0.13)	-0.03
Institutional impediments	4.34	4.01	0.44 (0.36 to 0.51)	-0.30 (-0.36 to -0.24)	-0.27
Enabling mechanisms	4.44	4.21	0.33 (0.25 to 0.40)	-0.21 (-0.26 to -0.15)	-0.20
Visibility and policy impact	4.49	4.25	0.33 (0.25 to 0.40)	-0.23 (-0.29 to -0.17)	-0.18
Socialisation and cultural capital	4.45	4.22	0.32 (0.24 to 0.39)	-0.20 (-0.26 to -0.14)	-0.19

Source: survey data [4]. Scores run from 1 to 5. d is the standardised mean difference (Cohen's d); the adjusted difference is the coefficient for men from the ordinary least squares models in Sections 3 to 9 (adjusted for age group, education, location, religion, disability and zone). Group sizes are in the workbook.

TABLE B21

Supportive and aware: attitudes and perceived barriers combined

Group	n	Supportive and strong barriers	Supportive, weaker barriers	Not supportive, strong barriers	Neither
All respondents	2,744	37.6%	31.0%	7.5%	23.8%
Women	1,391	45.7%	37.5%	4.9%	12.0%
Men	1,348	29.4%	24.2%	10.3%	36.1%

Source: survey data [4]. Percentages of respondents with a valid AWPPI score and all four barrier scores. Supportive: AWPPI of 4.0 or above. Strong barriers: mean of the sociocultural, economic and educational, political environment and institutional scores of 4.0 or above. Women compared with men on the first column: Cramér's V = 0.17, $p < 0.001$.





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