

Portrayal of Female Political Aspirants in Selected Nigerian Newspapers: Revisiting Underrepresentation and Misrepresentation

OLUWASEYIFUNMI AKINWEHINMI* AND AYOBAMI OJEBODE**, Ph.D

Abstract

Most studies of print media portrayal of women show that there is a general bias against women: not only are women under-represented, they are also negatively portrayed. But there is an emerging body of studies that challenge this dominant position, and suggest that the portrayal of women is gradually changing. This study queries the print media portrayal of women in politics in Nigeria focusing on the 2007 and 2011 general elections. Through a content analysis of 4,386 political stories, selected from *The Guardian*, *This Day* and *Tell*, with deeper focus on the 337 stories that dealt with women contestants, the study found evidence of less but not negative representation of women. Female aspirants were generally portrayed as competent (87.8%) than as incompetent (12.2%); they were also shown as not leaning on men for victory (79.5%). More of them (89.7%) were portrayed as leaders than as followers (10.3%). They were also portrayed as professionals – not as those going into politics for want of a better occupation. The study concluded that while there is need for greater media space for women in politics, it is noteworthy that the little attention they receive now is positive.

Key Words: Women, Women in Politics, Politicians, Nigerian media

Introduction

For several reasons, the mass media are expected to give adequate coverage to women and men in politics. First of such reasons is theoretical. The social responsibility theory of the media, a normative theory, requests that the media should provide a representative picture of the constituent groups of the society (Folarin, 1998; Griffin, 2003). If the media overlooks any segment of the society, no matter how small that segment can be interpreted as a failure in their social responsibility.

The second reason is political. The media are considered the Fourth Estate of the realm (Macaulay, 1828). Just as the other three Estates (the executive, legislature and the judiciary) find the justification for their existence not in serving themselves but in serving the larger society; the media are expected to be outward looking. Not only this, the demands of a democratic and open society require that the media beam their searchlight on all corners of the society. The third reason is technical, it pertains (especially but not

*Oluwaseyifunmi Akinwehinmi is of the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

**Dr Ayobami Ojebode is a Senior Lecturer and Head, Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

exclusively) to the electronic media. The airwaves are said to belong to the entire society. As a result, the media should focus not only on the dominant group or on the powerful, but on every segment or group in the society.

Statement of the Problem

The foregoing argument has been used as a basis for assessing the media in terms of their coverage of different segments of the society. More often than not, the verdict is that the media concentrate on the activities of the elite or the dominant ethnic or political group. If the minorities are noted, it must be that something negative happened to them (Ojebode, 2007; Ojebode and Adegbola, 2009; Ojebode and Akinleye, 2009). Several studies on women in the media have concluded that they are under-reported or negatively portrayed (Steeves, 1993; Tseayo, 1996; Soola, 1996; Udegbe, 1996; Ojebode, 2006). This is understandable because in most societies, even where women are in the numerical majority, they are in the economic and political minority.

However, with reference to the portrayal of women in politics, the literature throws up some interesting challenge. While some studies suggest under-reporting and negative portrayal of women politicians (Ross, 2003; Nacos, 2005; Muhammad, 2010); many others either report positive coverage of women in politics or are simply inconclusive (Pusnic and Bulc, 2001; Wasburn, 2011). Recognising this challenge, in the literature, Wasburn (2011:1027) observes that gendered news reporting may not be uniform across different contexts. The point is that most of the studies carried out on women in politics in Nigeria have dwelled more on Women's political participation, that is the extent to which, women participate in party politics in Nigeria as well as the extent (or otherwise) to which they are respected and accepted as equal stakeholders in the democratization project (Fayomi, 2009). They have largely neglected the role that media play as a factor in shaping attitudes towards women in politics, that is, how women are represented and the degree of prominence given to women during campaigns and elections.

It is then important to ask: how are female politicians portrayed in each different political and cultural context? This is the question that this study seeks to address within the Nigerian context.

Research Questions

1. How are female political aspirants portrayed and framed in the selected Nigerian newspapers?
2. Does the portrayal reflects reality accurately or distorts the real image?

Women in Nigerian Politics

The political history of Nigeria shows that women have not remained in the back seat of decision making in the country; the problem however has been marginalization or unequal opportunities given to them in the areas of decision making (Effah-Attoe, 2002). This is evidenced by documented accounts of women's role in pre-colonial Nigeria that shows that quite a number of women's groups and organizations existed. For instance, the Igala kingdom was said to have been founded by a woman named Ebele Ejaunu. In Ijesha in Yoruba land; five of the thirty-eight Owa (kings) had been women. Also, many other Yoruba towns such as Ondo town were said to have been founded by women (Ogidefa, 2008).

In the Colonial period, Ogidefa (2008) observed that partisan politics was unfavourable for women as they were denied franchise and very few of them were offered any political or administrative appointments. During this period, only three women were appointed into the House of Chiefs, namely Chief Mrs Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti (appointed into the Western Nigeria House of Chiefs); Chiefs Mrs

Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu (both appointed into the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs). Meanwhile, the few women that achieved relevance were able to do that as a result of the influence of education. Education helped in the emergence of women as a political force to fight colonialism (Ogidefa, 2008).

Effah-Attoe (2002) notes that by 1960, women had already achieved the franchise to vote and be voted for, by then, some of them had contested and won elections. For instance, Mrs. Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria became the first female member of the Federal Parliament. In 1961, Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo had contested and won elections in the Aba Urban North Constituency on the platform of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) (Ogidefa, 2008). In the Fourth Republic which started on May 29, 1999, the Nigerian political scene witnessed an increase in the number of women political appointees. Even though many women did not win at the national level elections, a number of women, however, won elections as Councillors; and Lagos State produced a female Deputy Governor in the person of Senator Kofo Akerele-Bucknor. In the National Assembly, there were three women in the Senate.

In the 2011 elections, 10,037 persons contested for offices in Nigeria. Out of this number, 909 (9.1%) were females. In the six geopolitical zones, the South-West has the highest number of female candidates in the April election with 15.5% of the 2,116 persons contesting from the zone across political parties. Next is the South-East which has 11.9% of the 1611, South-South with 10.5% of 1624 and North Central with 8.5 % of 1371. However, the North East and the North West had the least female contestants with 4.2% of 1187 and 2.3% of 2,088 respectively (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2011).

Out of the 109 elected Senators during the 2011 polls, only 7 (6.4%) were women. This signifies a decrease in the percentage of female candidates that won at the previous polls especially in the 2007 general elections where 9 (8.3%) female candidates won the senatorial seats. Out of the 360 available seats for House of Representatives, women won 19 (5.3%). This is also a drop in the number recorded in 2007, 2003 and 1999 when the figures were 27(7.5%), 21(5.8%) and 12(3.3%) respectively.

From the foregoing, it is evident that a low number of women have been involved in electoral contests, perhaps due to the nature of politics in the country. Political activities such as long nocturnal meetings, lobbying and even clandestine actions such as oath-taking are some of issues that scare women off politics in addition to the high costs of election (Fayomi, 2009; Iloh and Ikenna, 2009; Muhammad, 2010).

Iloh and Ikenna (2009) focusing on women in 2003 and 2007 elections, found that, even though the number of women in electoral politics seemed to be on the increase within the study period, they are still grossly underrepresented.

Perhaps, the greatest manifestation of women marginalization is in politics. Despite constitutional declaration of the equal status of both sexes in most countries of the world, gender discrimination remains fully entrenched in the power configuration of the society, with consequences of limiting women's participation in the political process.

The study found that in 2003, no woman elected was governor in all of the 36 states. In the State Houses of Assembly, 3.54% of the seats were occupied by women; 6.11% of the seats were occupied by women in the House of Representatives 3.6% in the Senate. Explaining the near marginalization of women in politics, Yusuf (2009) notes that 'indigeneity' is what seems to promote the marginalization women in politics. According to her, female aspirants are told that by marrying outside their local governments of birth, they have lost their 'indigeneity'. She explained that women who are married to men who are non-indigenes of the local government where they live suffer systematic discrimination in their husband's constituency. They are told that they do not really belong because 'indigeneity' is based on consanguinity.

However, in the United States the experience is different from the above. Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid and Robertson (2004) observe that media coverage of female and male

candidates in The United States is mostly equitable in terms of quantity as well as quality. For example, parity is seen in assessments of their viability, positive versus negative slant, and the mention of their appearance. But the issue is that the media continue to associate male candidates more often with “masculine” issues and images and female candidates with “feminine” image traits. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the portrayal of female political aspirants in the print media during the 2007 and 2011 General Elections in Nigeria, specifically; the study focuses on the frame used in the reporting of female contestants.

Media Coverage of Women and Women Issues

The relationship between the issues concerning women and the media has always been a matter worth considering among researchers on gender studies. Matekaire (2003) had observed that the media play a significant role in determining how women in politics and decision making are viewed and perceived by society in general; the media seemed to reflect and endorse in many cases, the attitudinal problems emanating primarily from the customs and traditions of a male-dominated society where the woman’s position is often regarded as inferior.

For instance, Murray and Elesin (1996) in their study of newspaper coverage of women observe that the better the newspapers under study were in terms of quality reporting and scope of national and international coverage, the less it featured anything about women. According to them, “women were conspicuously absent from the pages and the few ones featured were portrayed as passive observers rather than active participants in life” (Murray and Elesin, 1996:102). In a similar work on the coverage of women in *The Guardian* and *Concord* newspapers in Nigeria, Tseayo (1996) found that stories on women received 16.0 % of which those portraying women in a negative image was 5.1%. He stated that:

The overall effect of the portrayal of women in the media is to reinforce, rather to reduce prejudices and stereotypes. In other words the ways in which the Nigerian women are presented ...in the mass media images reflect an interplay of social, cultural and ideological forces dominant in the Nigerian society (Tseayo 1996:47).

Moving gradually from the 1990s toward the twenty first century, Okpeki (2000) found that the media are central in perpetrating the condition of women as remaining in the back seat of life. The researcher content analysed the news stories of five national dailies in Nigeria and found that issues regarding gender as it affects women’s rights received 12-15 % of news coverage compared to more than 55% given to males’ stories. The mass media’s stereotypical and negative image of women according to her shapes public opinion and attitudes towards women.

The situation described above is not peculiar to Nigeria but to so many other countries in the world. Hoare (2007) observes that two key issues remain unchanged; the first is the stereotypical portrayal of women, men and gender role relations in much of the mainstream media. The second is the lack of women’s representation and participation in decision making positions within the media (Hoare, 2007).

She further explained that the link between these two issues is on one level obvious: the fact that so few women occupy positions of power makes it difficult for those who do to challenge the way women and gender roles are represented in the media. Hoare (2007) emphasized that the mainstream media environment cannot be described as gender-aware or women –friendly. This is because the main problem why women are represented this way in the media stems in part from a low involvement of women in the production of news and information. Encouraging more women to work in the media would enable them to tell their stories through their own words and images and promote positive reflection to substantially determine their own forms of representation.

As noted earlier, there are studies, too, that suggest that the portrayal that women receive from the media may not be totally negative. This controversy is part of the reason for this study.

Theoretical Framework: Ambiguous Mirror

We found a theoretical anchor for this study in the Lee Loevinger's *Reflective-Projective Theory* of the media. This theory holds important attraction for image and portrayal studies in the media. Whereas, many other theories of its time concentrated on the effects of the media, this theory concentrated on the content of the media and sought to explain why the media portray what in which way. It is thus a surprise that the theory has been least applied in media studies generally.

The theory, summarily conceives of the media as a mirror that reflects the society. It is a mirror that tells the society about itself. Loevinger (1968:108) says:

While the mirror can pick up points and aspects of society, it cannot create a culture or project an image that does not reflect something already existing in some form in society. The mirror can project an accurate or distorted image and it can reflect an image that is very vague and ambiguous or one that is more clearly defined.

The theory lays primary agency directly on the society rather than on those of the media. Yet, it does not project the media as completely innocuous photocopy machines of the society (Loevinger, 1968; 1969). Rather, it suggests that the media are capable of distorting the images they try to reflect.

The second aspect of the theory is the projective side. This aspect has to do with what the audience sees in the mirror. This theory depicts the audience as individuals with individual differences. Though the mirror is one, individuals looking at it see (project) different images and meanings. Loevinger (1968:109) says "the members of the audience project or see in the media their own visions and images". This second aspect does not concern the focus of this study.

With this theory as a background, the question to ask is not whether or not the media portray a section of the society negatively or positively, sparsely or expansively. The question to ask, rather, is whether that portrayal reflects reality accurately or distorts the real image. In this study, we examine the image of the female politician as reflected by the print media. In doing this, we look at both the quantity and quality of portrayal as contained in the reporting.

Method of Research

The method chosen to achieve the purpose of this work was content analysis - "a method of studying and analysing communication content in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables"- (Wimmer and Dominic, 2000:135). Content analysis was chosen because the study dwelled on communication content and the method has been proven over time as fairly adequate for studying media content. Two national daily newspapers and one news magazine representing the print media namely: *The Guardian*, *This Day* and *Tell* newsmagazine served as the sources of data. The data analysed was obtained from segments such as news stories, features, editorials, in-depth reports, commentaries, letters to the editor and interviews focusing on female political aspirants. This study was only limited to two national newspapers and one newsmagazine based on the following ground:

Availability of Data

The pre study carried out before the main study reveals that out of five national newspapers sampled, *The Guardian* and *This Day* had more of women stories than the rest of the newspapers pre-analysed.

<i>Newspapers</i>	<i>Number of female aspirants' Stories found in a week</i>
<i>The Punch</i>	2
<i>The Guardian</i>	7
<i>The Nation</i>	3
<i>This Day</i>	9
<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	3

Sample

This study examined the coverage of female political aspirants during 2007 and 2011 elections. In line with usual election schedules, all the months constituting the campaigns and election period were purposively selected. This was from January 1-April 30 2007 and January 1-April 30 2011 (From the period the campaigns started to the end of election). Following this procedure, all the editions found during this period (week days and weekends) were purposively selected. In addition, choosing randomly, systematically or otherwise might make this study neglect some editions with substantial information relevant to the study because not all editions covered female aspirant's story. This thus informs the purposive choice of using all the editions published between the election periods. Thus, a total of 480 editions for a period of 480 days (8 months) constituted the sample size for the newspapers.

All the editions published during this period constituted the sample for the study. This came to 480 editions for each of *The Guardian* and *This Day*; and 32 editions for *Tell*. From these, we found 4,386 stories on political aspirants, out of which 337 focused on women aspirants. Though the study was about women, we took cognizance of stories dealing with men as well, for the purpose of comparison.

The Instrument

The instrument used in collecting data for this study was a content analysis coding sheet. Our reading of the newspaper articles analysed revealed that women are "marked down" on four major counts. They are sometimes depicted as incompetent, having a follower mentality (or second-fiddle mentality); dependent on men for political or other accomplishments, and often a poor substitute for men. Guided by this, we created four categories and eight sub-categories:

1. **Competence:** This category refers to stories that raise the issue of competence of female political aspirants to perform well in office. The story may rate the aspirant as *competent* or *incompetent* to hold political offices. The criteria for judging are words that describe or do not describe women as capable, able, skilled, equal, fit, qualified, good, and having enough knowledge and experience to function well in politics.
2. **Leadership:** This refers to stories that discuss aspirants' leadership qualities such as influence or power, especially of a political nature. Female aspirants might be portrayed as capable of being *leaders* or of being mere *followers*. The specifics qualities featured in this category are ability to or not to guide, direct, influence people, initiate and execute projects.
3. **Independence:** This category deals with stories that present the aspirants as self-reliant or capable of standing up for elections on their own (and winning) or otherwise relying on male politicians' influence. Sub-categories under this are *dependent* or *leaning on men*. This sub-category involves aspirants that are

described as having no capability of their own except from influential men in politics.

4. **Equality with Male Politicians:** Stories that discuss equality (or lack of it) fall under this category; mentioning or references made on this category involve equal treatment of all individuals as a basis for female aspirants to participate in electoral politics. When a story presents the female aspirant as an equal substitute to men, we coded as its Sub-categories which are *an equal substitute for men* or *a poor substitute for men*.

Also the following frames were adopted:

1. Issue frame: An issue-specific approach to the study of news frames which allows for a profound level of specificity and details relevant to the event or issue under investigation.
2. Background frame: Background frame gives a little introduction on the female aspirants before the story. This was viewed in two ways, which is when journalists write stories by making salient either the aspirants' personal background (P1) (when emphasis is placed on aspirants' private individual life rather than her qualities) or professional background (P2) (possessing different educational certificates and outstanding achievements) as a basis for aspiring for a political post.
3. Strategy frame: Strategy frame focuses on journalists' frames that portray aspirants as just wanting to occupy positions of power (sheer number) or as people with different ideas on how to govern. This was also categorized under just winning (JW) or having ideas to govern (HIG). Photos and captions were also analysed based on this to check the significance (SIG) or insignificance (ISG) of aspirants.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected by the researchers from January to April 2007 and 2011 respectively. Newspapers and newsmagazine were consulted in the news media archival section of Kenneth Dike library (University of Ibadan). In coding the data, paragraphs were read one after the other until the entire article was read and references made to the devised content categories were coded using the units of analysis mentioned in the previous page under Methodology. The data was analysed using simple statistical frequencies and percentages and supported by qualitative evidences from the newspapers.

Findings and discussion

In presenting the findings, we first compare the proportion of stories on female political aspirants with that of male political aspirants. Then, we look at the portrayal of women in the stories devoted to female aspirants. After this, the frames deployed in presenting female aspirants were examined.

Our findings show that women in politics in Nigeria received little coverage space. Of the 4,386 stories on political aspirants, only 7.7% (337) was about women; 92.3% was about men. As Figure 1 shows, there was a slight decrease from attention to women in 2007, which was 7.9% to that of 2011 which was 7.4%.

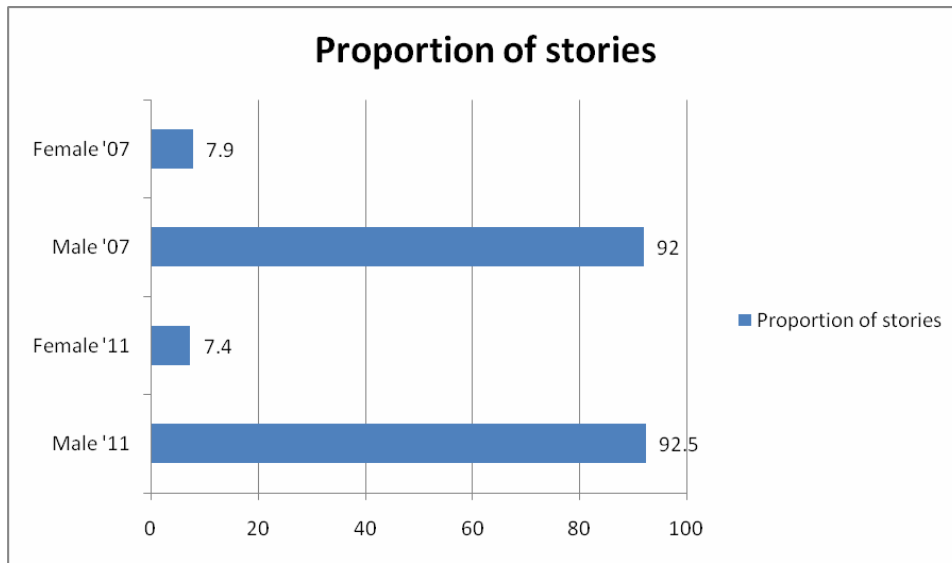


Fig. 1: Proportion of Stories on Male and Female Politicians: 2007 and 2011

If we go by the actual figures provided by Akiyode-Afolabi (2011), we can see a strong reflection of actuality in the proportion of stories. Akiyode-Afolabi (2011) shows that only 9.1% of contestants in the 2011 elections were women; while 90.9% were men which suggests that, the proportion of media stories allotted to women seems to be close to what obtains in real life situation. This implies that under-representation of women in the media is not a creation of the media but a product of journalists’ efforts to reflect reality. Further, this finding did not find support in the findings of (Ogundipe-Leslie 1990; Murray and Elesin 1996; Tseayo 1996; Udegbe 1996) who opine that women were conspicuously absent from the pages of newspapers and the few ones featured were portrayed as passive observers rather than active participants in life. This thus shows that there is already a paradigm shift in the way women are portrayed in the print media.

We now turn to the portrayal of the female aspirants. Table 1 presents the findings.

Table 1: How the Papers Present Female Aspirants

Category	Sub-categories	Frequency	%
Competence	Competent	187	87.8
	Incompetent	26	12.2
	Total	213	100
Leadership qualities	Has leadership qualities	139	89.7
	Lack leadership qualities	16	10.3
	Total	155	100
Independence	Independent	31	79.5
	Leaning on men	7	20.5
	Total	39	100
Equality with Men	An equal substitute	18	56.3
	A poor substitute	14	43.7
	Total	32	100

There were 213 stories dealing with the competence of the aspirants. Out of this, 87.8% presented them as competent. There were 155 stories that touched on the leadership qualities of the women of which 139 (89.7%) portrayed them as possessing leadership qualities. Of the 39 stories that raised the issue of dependence on men for victory in elections, 79.5% showed that the female aspirants were independent. Also, 56.3% of stories that compared the female aspirants with male showed them to be an equal substitute for men.

A look into the quotes of some of the stories sheds further light on these positive trends in the portrayal of women. For instance, *This Day* (March 10, 2007 p 111) describes an aspirant, Mrs Udom thus:

Mrs Udom was not selected for the usual tokenistic purpose of pandering to feminine sentiments but somebody with an intimidating track record of experience and achievements in critical sectors both at home and beyond the shores of this country.

Another female contestant, Hajia Rabi, in *The Guardian*, (April 3, 2007 p 68) was depicted as someone whose “ability to offer quality representation” has been noticed since “her emergence as PDP candidate late last year”. Yet another candidate was appraised for her leadership qualities as a “...good human mobilizer...several qualities have been discovered in her which made her qualified for the post...” (*The Guardian* 2007, Feb 20 pg 20).

On the negative side are stories portraying women as depending on men for electoral victory, such women as Gbemisola Saraki, Maryam Ali, Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, Bilqis Sulu-Gambari were depicted in different articles analysed as women whose victory was not a product of merit but of their father or husband’s political stamina:

More than anything else, her father’s influence and firm grip of the PDP machinery in Ogun state contributed to Iyabo’s emergence as the senatorial candidate for Ogun central (*This Day*, Jan 28, 2007 p. 112)

The following was also portrayed of Gbemisola Saraki and Bilqis Sulu-Gambari:

While Gbemisola will rely on the popularity of her father during the election, Gambari will use the goodwill of her father (*The Guardian* 2011 Jan 20, pg 69).

In concluding this section, we would say that the portrayal of women in politics has been largely positive. They are competent to hold political office, possess leadership qualities, capable of achieving electoral victory on their own merit and to some extent, an equal substitute to men. Thus, when members of the public read news on women aspirants they are likely to find many of them as competent and skilled to govern. The only concern is that when these stories are calculated to the proportion of stories written on male candidates as reflected in figure 1 earlier, then, our findings cannot conclude that the media is objective in helping the women candidates achieve their goal on the political agenda in terms of media representation.

We now focus attention on the frames adopted in presenting the female aspirants. Professional frame (as an aspect of background frame) has the highest percentage with 27.4% signalling the notion that the Nigerian print media do not devote much attention to personal activities of the aspirants. An example of this is given in *This Day* (March 2007, p 24) that

Evidently, most people now appreciate the equivalent patterns of historic and potential success in women leaders as most of them are driven by a vision or mission, which transfers them to the most senior leadership positions. One of these women led by a vision of creating a safe haven for the youths, thereby ensuring the development of the nation is Mrs. Folake Olunloyo-Oshinowo.

However, this not to say that personal framing no longer exists in media coverage as 10.9% of the frames still constituted personal frames. An example of personal framing is illustrated by this quote: "...She represents in many people's mind the personification of a bully and a powerful woman who always got what she wanted through force and also through fair or foul means...where she occasionally lobbed insults at anyone who did not agree with her views" (*The Guardian*, March 18 2011, p 52). However, the concern is that personal framing is not the preoccupation of frames adopted on female political aspirants rather, a considerable number of the candidates were introduced based on their experience, education and other qualities that electorates hold as a necessity for aspirants.

Table 2: Frames Employed in Presenting the Aspirants

Frames	<i>The Guardian</i> 2007	<i>The Guardian</i> 2011	<i>This day</i> 2007	<i>This day</i> 2011	<i>Tell</i> 2007	<i>Tell</i> 2011	Total	%
Issue frame	31	9	15	15	0	1	71	11.0
Background frame (personal)	27	15	14	9	1	4	70	10.9
Background frame (professional)	72	17	33	52	0	3	177	27.4
Strategy frame (just winning)	34	7	14	7	1	2	65	10.1
Strategy frame (having ideas to govern)	42	15	17	28	0	3	105	16.3
Insignificant photos	6	2	4	2	0	0	14	2.2
Significant photos	46	27	23	34	3	10	143	22.3
Total							645	100

As shown in Table 2, the strategy frame (SF) sets out to find whether women candidates are framed as wanting to be represented in politics for the sake of the 35% affirmative action or having ideas and focused campaign targeted on accountability and the principles of good governance. The content analysis reveals that women candidates were framed as having ideas to govern with 16.3% while 10.1% represents media frame of women who just want to win without any programme for the electorates. The excerpts below show differences between "having ideas to govern" and "just winning".

Having ideas to govern	Just winning
<p>“She pledged to hold regular town hall meetings with them where they would provide her a list of their needs and the direction they want her” (<i>The Guardian</i> Feb. 1, 2011 p 6).</p>	<p>“I said I don’t want a particular family to form a cartel. What I mean basically is that one family has dominated PDP already...this is the time to start the struggle” (<i>This Day</i> March 20, 2007 p22).</p>

The last categories on strategy framing are frames of being ‘significant’ and ‘insignificant’. This was measured by counting the number of photos that represent female aspirants in a story and whether captions carry aspirants’ names in cases where photos of male and female aspirants were displayed. Findings show that 2.2% represents photos and captions that presented female aspirants as insignificant while 22.3% of photos and captions present the candidates as significant.

Issue frame (IF) constitute the last of the frames adopted. This looked at stories of women that were covered from the angle of issue based campaigns, that is, programmes and policies that are of advantage to the electorates. The findings show that 11.1% are issue based stories which is supported by the report in *The Guardian* (March 10, 2011 p 6):

The party’s deputy governorship candidate Mrs. Funmi Olayinka said the six point agenda include women and girls’ education, free health services to address the peculiar needs of women and encourage family planning, gender equity in appointments and promotion and policy formation and implementation.

In concluding this section, we would say that many of the women were framed as having ideas to govern and also from a professional background. This thus answers the question as to how female political aspirants are portrayed and framed by the print media.

Our findings do not support allegations of stereotyping that is often levelled against the mass media with reference to women and women issues (Tseyayo, 1996; Udegbe, 1996). Stereotypes held against women were not upheld in the majority of the stories that we analysed. Not only this, our findings do not support the mis-conferral of status also levelled against the media with reference to women in agriculture (Ojebode, 2006). It is proper to ask: what then are we learning about women and the media? It is important to note that this disagreement between our findings and those of others is not wholly unexpected. The status of women in Nigeria is changing for better and old traditional stereotypes are giving way even if only gradually. The media seem to also be reflecting this change in the society. With reference to Ojebode (2006), the current study is on women in politics and does not imply that the press coverage of women in agriculture has improved.

Researchers (Abdela, 2007; Tripp, 2003) are of the opinion that in this age of media power and influence, the perception of the public on female political candidates are influenced by what appears on TV and radio and what they read in the newspapers and magazines. Thus, when members of the public read news on women aspirants they are likely to find many of them as competent and skilled to govern.

Back to the reflective projective theory of the media, it is plausible to describe the Nigerian print media as fairly accurate mirrors of the society. From the quantitative evidence presented, we can say the media reflect the numerical reality with reference to gender composition of the political actors in the country. The portrayal of women as professional, competent and independent can also be said to be a reflection of the reality judging by growing increase in the number of women holding down professional and leadership positions in the country. Examples of such positions include chair of important commissions and committees such as the National Economic Team; the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Conclusion

To return to our title, we ask: are women politicians underrepresented and/or misrepresented? There is clear evidence from our analysis that the media did not negatively portray the female political aspirants. They are portrayed as competent, capable political leaders who have their own independent worth. Rather than being poor substitutes for men, they are equal substitutes. The print media want their audience to know that there are female political aspirants with fairly good images but there exists an imbalance in coverage between the male and female aspirants.

There is the tendency to interpret our data as suggesting underrepresentation. This is because the number of stories on women was little, compared with that of the stories on men. Yet, it would be unfair to blame the media for the lopsided coverage of men and women. Female political aspirants are few, compared to male political aspirants. So also, stories on female political aspirants are few. It is illogical to expect that stories of the few will stand at par with, or even exceed, stories on the many. Any allegation of underrepresentation must have overlooked proportionality and is thus short of logic. Allegations of misrepresentation are also difficult to sustain in view of our findings.

The portrayal of women politicians reflect the ongoing change advocated by international and local organisations who are challenging the gendered traditional roles with the aim of sharing responsibilities based not on sex of an individual but on ability. This therefore suggests that the print media are partly on the path of contributing positively to the growth of women's political role in Nigeria. Consequently, it is advised that the print media should intensify fair, objective and balanced coverage to female aspirants because the participation of women in the electoral process is important in a democratic society.

Hindrances to women's active participation in politics need to be addressed. Nocturnal meetings, political violence, incredibly high costs of buying nomination forms in some political parties, and many clandestine and cultic activities such as oath-taking are some of the major hindrances to women's active participation in politics. If these are addressed, in fact, eliminated, more women will contest elections and the proportion of the stories on women will also go up.

References

- Abdela, L. (2007) "Anyone Here Been Raped and Speaks English: Workshops for Editors and Journalists on Gender based Violence and Sex Trafficking" *Journal of Gender and development* 15(3) 387-398
- Akiyode-Afolabi, A. (2011) *2011 Election: Gender Ranking of Political Candidates and other Issues in Women's political participation*. Lagos: Women Advocates Research and documentation centre (WARDC)
- Bystrom, D.G; Banwart, M.C; Kaid, L.L and Robertson, T. (2004) *Gender and Candidate Communication: Video styles, Web styles, News styles*. New York: Routledge

- Effah-Attoe, S.A (2002) "Women in the Development of Nigeria since Pre-colonial Times" www.onlinenigeria.com/dailynews/womeninnigeria Accessed, 6th February, 2011
- Fayomi, O.O (2009) "Women and Politics in Nigeria: Towards Participatory Democracy in Ogun State, Southwestern Nigeria" A Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Hotel Intercontinental, New Orleans http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p275124_index.html Accessed 6th February, 2011
- Folarin, B. (1998) *Theories of Mass Communication: An Introductory Text*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers
- Griffin, E.A (2003) *A First Look at Communication Theory*. Boston: Mc Graw-Hills
- Hoare, J. (2007) "Editorial" *Journal of Gender and Development* **15**(3) 357-368
- Iloh, E.C and Ikenna, M.A (2009) "Electoral Process and Gender Discrimination in Nigeria: A Case Study of 2003 and 2007 Elections" *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* **10**(4) 113-128
- Loevinger, L. (1968) "The Ambiguous Mirror: the Reflective-Projective Theory of Broadcasting and Mass Communications" *Journal of Broadcasting* **12**(2): 97-116
- Loevinger, L. (1969) "Mass Versus Media: Who Controls?" A Lecture delivered at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, February 11, 1969. Available at: <http://www.generalsemantics.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/articles/etc/26-3-loevinger2.pdf> (Accessed 18 November, 2011)
- Macaulay, T. (1828) "Hallam's Constitutional History" *The Edinburgh Review*, 48, page 165
- Matekaire, T. (2003) "Analysis of Coverage of Women Politicians by the Print Media in Zimbabwe" *Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU) Journal* **3**(1)1-7
- McCoy, C.A and Playford, J. (1967) (eds) *Apolitical politics*. New York: Thomas, Y Crowell Company
- Muhammad, M. (2010) "In the Shadows of Men: Women's Political Marginalization" <http://www.ipsnews.net/womeninpolitics> Accessed 6th February, 2011
- Murray, E. and Elesin, T. (1996) "Woman Palaver: A Discussion Paper" In Odejide, A. (ed) (1996) *Women and the Media in Nigeria*. Women's Research and Documentation centre (WORDOC) Institute of African studies, University of Ibadan: Book Craft Ltd. pp 100-104
- Nacos, B. (2005) "The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and Terrorism" *Journal of Terrorism and Conflict*, **28**(5): 435-451
- Nwagbara, U. (2010) "The Nigerian Press, The Public Sphere and Sustainable Development: Engaging the Post Amnesty Deal in the Niger Delta" *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* **12** (3) 14-27
- Ogidefa, I. (2008) "Women and Politics" <http://www.beyondjane.org/womeninpolitics> Accessed, 6th February, 2011
- Ojebode, A. (2007) "Silent Minority: Ethnicity and the Nigerian Media" *Research News*, Centre for Research in Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, University of Oxford, Issue Four; pp 1-2
- Ojebode, A. and Adegbola, T. (2008). "Steps to development-oriented radio broadcasting in Nigeria" in Akin Akingbulu (ed) *Rooting for community radio in Nigeria*, Lagos and Dakar: Institute for Media and Society and Panos Institute West Africa, Pp 14-17
- Ojebode, A. and Akinleye, L. (2009). "Nigerian Silent Majorities: Why the Search for Global Newsflow Balance should Begin at Home" *The Journal of International Communication* **15**(1): 26-36

- Ojebode, A. (2006) "Nigerian Mass Media Representation of Women in Agriculture and Agribusiness: A case study of Status Mis-Conferral" *Journal of Communication Studies* 5(1-2) 1-13
- Okpeki, J. (2000) *Media Coverage of Gender Issues in Covering Diversity: A Resource and Training Manual for African Journalists* Washington: The Panos Institute
- Pusnic, M. And Bulc, G. (2001) "Women in their own Reflection: Self-Presentation of Women Politicians in the Slovenian Press". *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 25(4): 396-413
- Ross, K. (2003). "Women Politicians and Malestream Media: A Game of Two Sides" Occasional Paper Number 1; Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, Queens University, Belfast
- Soola, E. O (1996) "The Media, Women and Internationalization of Culture" in Abiola Odejide (ed.) *Women and the Media in Nigeria* Women Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC), Ibadan pp. 39-45
- Steeves, H. L. (1993) "Gender and Mass Communication in a Global Context" in Pamela Creedon (ed.) *Women in Mass Communication* Sage Publications, Newbury Park, California pp. 32-60
- Tripp, A.M (2003) "Women in Movement: Transformation in African Political Landscapes" *International Journal of Politics* 5(2)233-255
- Tseyayo, L.E (1996) "Culture, Mass media and the Image of Women in Nigeria" In Odejide, A. (ed) *Women and the Media in Nigeria*. Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC), Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan: Book craft Ltd. pp 46-61
- Udegbe, B. I. (1996) "Portrayal of Women in Nigerian Media and the Psychological Implications" in Abiola Odejide (ed.) *Women and the Media in Nigeria* Women Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC), Ibadan pp. 130-137
- Wasburn, P. C. (2011) "Media Coverage of Women in Politics: The Curious Case of Sarah Palin" *Media Culture & Society*, 33(7): 1027-1041
- Wimmer, R.D and Dominic J.R (2000) *Mass Media Research: An Introduction* 5th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company
- Yusuf, B. (2009) "The Role of Women in Elections: Expanding the Political Space" *A Policy Dialogue Paper Commissioned by the Civil Society Coordinating Committee On Electoral Reform (CSCC) Under the Alliance for Credible Election* pp1-24