

## Policies, Strategies, and Pathways for Enhancing Women's Representation in Nigeria's Federal Legislature

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**Abstract:** Women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature remains persistently low despite the existence of multiple gender equality policies, advocacy initiatives, and institutional commitments. This article assesses the effectiveness of existing policies and strategies to increase women's political representation and explores pathways to enhance women's inclusion in the National Assembly. The study adopts a mixed methods design, drawing on survey data from thirty-five National Assembly staff as well as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with institutional actors who routinely engage with legislative and committee processes. Quantitative analysis using Spearman correlation reveals that policy awareness and educational attainment are positively associated with perceptions of progress in women's representation. In contrast, institutional barriers, such as weak enforcement and party-level gatekeeping, significantly undermine perceived policy effectiveness. Qualitative findings corroborate these results, showing that gender policies are widely regarded as well-intentioned but poorly implemented, with voluntary party commitments and unenforced quotas yielding limited outcomes. Mentorship, advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives were identified as more effective but remain fragmented and dependent on external support. Interpreted through Critical Mass and Critical Actors Theory, the findings highlight how low numerical representation and weak institutional frameworks constrain the emergence of actors capable of driving sustained change. The article concludes that enhancing women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature requires enforceable policy frameworks, strengthened party accountability, institutionalised monitoring mechanisms, and sustained support for leadership development.

**Keywords:** Gender Policy, National Assembly, Political Parties, Critical Actors, Gender Equality and Legislative inclusion.

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### Introduction

Women's representation in national legislatures has become a central indicator of democratic quality, inclusive governance, and sustainable development in both developed and developing contexts. Across the globe, the underrepresentation of women in political decision-making continues to attract scholarly and policy attention, not only because it reflects persistent gender inequality, but also because it has implications for policy responsiveness, social equity, and institutional legitimacy (Paxton, Hughes, & Barnes, 2021; Schwindt-Bayer, 2018). Comparative research demonstrates that legislatures with higher proportions of women are more likely to prioritise social welfare, education, health, and gender-responsive legislation, thereby enhancing governance outcomes beyond symbolic inclusion (Clayton, Josefsson, & Wang, 2023). Despite decades of advocacy, international conventions, and policy experimentation, progress toward gender parity in political representation remains uneven and fragile, particularly in many low- and middle-income democracies.

Globally, women held approximately 26 per cent of parliamentary seats in 2024, reflecting gradual improvement but still falling far short of parity (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

This slow pace of change has prompted renewed scrutiny of the effectiveness of policies and strategies aimed at promoting women's political inclusion. Legal quotas, voluntary party measures, financial incentives, and capacity-building initiatives have all been deployed with varying degrees of success across regions (Krook, 2020; Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2021; Dada et al., 2025; Magaji et al., 2025). Evidence increasingly suggests that the mere existence of gender policies does not guarantee improved representation unless they are supported by enforceable institutional mechanisms, political will, and a supportive socio-political environment (Paxton et al., 2021). As a result, attention has shifted from the adoption of gender policies to their actual implementation, effectiveness, and sustainability.

Within Africa, experiences of women's legislative representation reveal sharp contrasts. Countries such as Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa have achieved significant gains through constitutional reforms, legislated quotas, and party level enforcement, while others continue to record persistently low levels of inclusion (Tripp, 2019; Bauer & Britton, 2022). These differences underscore the importance of context-specific policy design and the interaction among institutional rules, party systems,

and political culture. Nigeria stands out in this comparative landscape as one of the lowest-performing countries in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of women's representation in national parliament, despite its size, democratic longevity, and formal commitments to gender equality (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

Nigeria's federal legislature, the National Assembly, remains overwhelmingly male-dominated. In the Tenth National Assembly, inaugurated in 2023, women occupied fewer than five per cent of seats in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, a pattern that has shown slight improvement over successive electoral cycles (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2023). This outcome is striking given that women constitute roughly half of Nigeria's population and have demonstrated increasing political awareness and voter participation over time (World Bank, 2024). The persistence of this representation gap raises critical questions about the effectiveness of existing policies and strategies intended to enhance women's political participation and the structural constraints that continue to undermine them.

Nigeria has adopted several national and international policy instruments to promote gender equality in governance. These include commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the National Gender Policy, which sets a benchmark of 35 per cent representation of women in public life (UN Women, 2023). In April 2022, a Federal High Court ruling further reinforced this benchmark for appointive positions. However, these commitments have not translated into meaningful gains in elective representation, particularly at the federal legislative level. Scholars increasingly argue that Nigeria's gender policies suffer from weak enforcement, limited institutional anchoring, and poor integration into electoral and party systems (Oloyede, 2021; Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade, 2021).

Political parties remain central actors in shaping legislative outcomes, yet party-level strategies for promoting women's inclusion have largely been voluntary, inconsistent, and symbolic. Measures such as fee waivers for female aspirants and women's wings have not substantially altered nomination outcomes or access to competitive seats (Ohman, 2018; Itodo, 2024). At the same time, the high cost of politics, monetised primaries, and weak campaign finance regulation continue to undermine gender-inclusive policy intentions. These dynamics suggest that the challenge facing Nigeria is not simply the absence of policies, but also the limited effectiveness of existing strategies and the lack of coherent pathways to translate commitments into representation.

There is growing recognition that improving women's representation requires moving beyond diagnostic accounts of barriers toward actionable, context-sensitive strategies. International experience shows that effective pathways often involve combinations of legislated quotas, party-level enforcement mechanisms, gender-responsive political financing, protection from political violence, and sustained leadership development pipelines (Krook, 2020; Clayton et al., 2023). For Nigeria, identifying which of these strategies are feasible, legitimate, and politically sustainable within the federal legislative context is a pressing scholarly and policy task.

Against this background, this article focuses on the effectiveness of existing policies and strategies to increase

women's political representation in Nigeria and on potential pathways to enhance women's representation in the federal legislature. Rather than revisiting the full spectrum of barriers to women's political participation, the article interrogates how current policy instruments perform in practice and what reforms are required to make them impactful. Drawing on empirical evidence from the National Assembly and situating the findings within the broader comparative literature, the article contributes to ongoing debates on gender, institutions, and democratic inclusion in Nigeria.

The central aim of the article is therefore twofold. First, it assesses the effectiveness of Nigeria's existing gender related policies and strategies in promoting women's representation in the National Assembly. Second, it explores empirically grounded and theoretically informed pathways for enhancing women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature. By doing so, the article seeks to bridge the gap between normative commitments and institutional outcomes, offering insights that are relevant to scholars, policymakers, political parties, and gender advocacy actors working toward more inclusive governance.

## Literature Review

### Effectiveness of Gender Equality Policies in Legislative Representation

Gender equality policies in political representation refer to formal and informal measures adopted by states and political institutions to correct historical exclusion and promote women's access to decision-making positions (Chukwurah et al., 2020). These policies typically include legal frameworks, affirmative action measures, party-level strategies, and institutional commitments designed to reduce gender gaps in elected office. The effectiveness of such policies is commonly assessed not by their existence but by their capacity to translate normative commitments into measurable representation outcomes (Agaigbe & Akuraga, 2024). Across democratic systems, research increasingly demonstrates that policy intent alone is insufficient without enforcement mechanisms, institutional alignment, and political incentives that sustain compliance over time (Savitha, 2018).

Globally, the most widely studied gender equality policies in legislative representation are gender quotas. These may take the form of legislated candidate quotas, reserved seats, or voluntary party quotas. Comparative evidence shows that legislated quotas embedded in electoral law, accompanied by sanctions for non-compliance, are the most effective in increasing women's representation (Hughes et al., 2022). Countries that have adopted such measures have experienced rapid and sustained gains in women's legislative presence, particularly where quotas are integrated into party nomination processes and electoral administration (Piscopo, 2020). Conversely, voluntary or weakly enforced measures tend to produce symbolic compliance without substantive change (Bush & Zetterberg, 2021).

Beyond quotas, gender equality policies often include broader frameworks such as national gender policies, constitutional equality provisions, and international treaty commitments. These instruments establish normative standards and signal political intent, but vary significantly in their practical impact. Research indicates that when gender policies lack clear implementation pathways, monitoring structures, or institutional ownership, they remain aspirational rather than transformative (Schwindt-Bayer, 2018). This disconnect between policy design and outcomes has

prompted scholars to emphasise policy effectiveness as a function of institutional integration rather than of policy proliferation.

In the African context, policy effectiveness has been closely linked to institutional design and political will. Countries that have embedded gender equality objectives into constitutions or electoral laws have generally outperformed those relying on executive directives or party discretion (Tripp, 2019). Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa illustrate how binding legal frameworks, combined with party enforcement mechanisms, can help normalise women's legislative presence. These cases demonstrate that policy effectiveness is maximised when gender inclusion is treated as a structural requirement rather than a discretionary goal (Bauer & Britton, 2022).

Nigeria presents a contrasting case where gender equality policies exist but have produced limited legislative outcomes. The National Gender Policy sets a 35 per cent benchmark for women's participation in public life, and Nigeria has ratified major international conventions on gender equality. However, these commitments have not been operationalised within the electoral or party systems that determine access to legislative office (Oloyede, 2021). Scholars argue that Nigeria's gender policies suffer from weak legal status, lack of enforceability, and limited integration into electoral governance, thereby undermining their effectiveness in shaping legislative representation (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade, 2021).

Political parties play a critical intermediary role in determining whether gender equality policies influence legislative outcomes. In systems without legislated quotas, parties act as gatekeepers and policy translators. Research shows that party-level gender strategies are effective only when supported by binding rules, transparent nomination processes, and incentives that reward inclusion (Ohman, 2018). In Nigeria, party strategies such as fee waivers and women's wings have not significantly altered nomination patterns because they are voluntary, inconsistently applied, and disconnected from competitive seat allocation (Itodo, 2024). This weak translation of policy into practice highlights a core limitation of Nigeria's current approach to gender equality in politics.

Policy effectiveness is also shaped by institutional coherence across governance levels. Gender policies that target appointive positions but exclude elective offices create fragmented inclusion outcomes. Empirical studies note that Nigeria's emphasis on appointive benchmarks has had little spillover effect on legislative representation, where electoral competition and party control dominate access (Schwindt-Bayer, 2018). This fragmentation reinforces the argument that effective gender policies must be explicitly designed to address electoral processes rather than relying on indirect institutional diffusion.

Another critical dimension of policy effectiveness is implementation capacity. Even where supportive policies exist, inadequate monitoring, lack of sanctions, and weak accountability mechanisms limit impact. Comparative research shows that gender policies are most effective when oversight bodies have enforcement authority and when civil society actors can monitor compliance and mobilise political pressure (Paxton et al., 2021). In Nigeria, the absence of institutionalised monitoring of gender commitments in party nominations and electoral administration has allowed persistent non-compliance to go unaddressed.

Conceptually, therefore, the effectiveness of gender equality policies in legislative representation depends on three interrelated factors. First, the policy's legal status and enforceability. Second, the degree of integration into party and electoral institutions. Third, the presence of monitoring and accountability mechanisms that sustain compliance. Where these conditions are absent, policies function primarily as normative statements rather than transformative instruments. This conceptual framework provides a foundation for evaluating Nigeria's existing strategies and for identifying pathways that move beyond symbolic commitment toward substantive representation.

### **Institutional and Party-Level Strategies for Enhancing Women's Legislative Representation**

Institutional and party-level strategies are central to enhancing women's legislative representation because political parties control access to candidacy and structure electoral competition. Comparative scholarship consistently identifies parties as the principal gatekeepers whose internal rules, norms, and power relations shape who is nominated and supported for legislative office (Kenny & Verge, 2016; Lovenduski, 2005). Even where national gender policies exist, their influence on representation outcomes remains limited unless parties institutionalise inclusion within their recruitment and selection processes (Piscopo & Kenny, 2020). As a result, institutional reform within parties has emerged as a critical pathway for translating gender equality commitments into legislative outcomes.

Political recruitment processes are deeply institutionalised and reflect both formal rules and informal practices. Kenny and Verge (2016) argue that recruitment systems reproduce existing power relations unless deliberately redesigned to disrupt exclusionary norms. These systems determine who is encouraged to contest, who receives party backing, and who ultimately emerges as a candidate. Lovenduski (2005) further demonstrates that party organisations operate as gendered institutions, embedding masculine norms of leadership and competition that disadvantage women even in the absence of explicit discrimination. Together, these studies suggest that effective strategies must address institutional design rather than relying solely on individual capacity building.

Gender quotas are among the most prominent party-level strategies for increasing women's representation, yet their effectiveness depends heavily on design and enforcement. Krook (2016) shows that voluntary or weakly specified quotas often fail to alter nomination outcomes because parties retain discretion over placement and compliance. In contrast, quotas that are clearly defined and linked to enforceable rules are more likely to reshape recruitment patterns. However, Piscopo and Kenny (2020) caution that quotas alone are insufficient if parties do not also provide material and organisational support to women candidates. This highlights the need for integrated strategies that combine formal rules with practical enforcement mechanisms.

Beyond formal regulations, informal dimensions of candidate selection significantly influence women's access to legislative office. Bjarnegård and Kenny (2015) demonstrate that political recruitment often occurs within informal networks and elite bargaining arenas that are largely invisible but highly consequential. These informal practices tend to privilege long-standing party insiders, who are disproportionately male. Kenny and Verge (2016) similarly note that informal gatekeeping can

neutralise formal inclusion measures by redirecting power away from official procedures. Addressing informal institutions is therefore essential for party-level strategies to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Party financing and resource allocation further shape the effectiveness of institutional strategies. Women's legislative representation is strongly influenced by access to campaign finance, party infrastructure, and organisational backing (Piscopo & Kenny, 2020). Even when women secure nominations, limited financial support can undermine their electoral viability. Krook (2016) emphasises that inclusion strategies must extend beyond nomination rules to address material inequalities that structure competition. Without financial reform, party-level gender strategies risk producing descriptive inclusion without electoral success.

In African and hybrid democratic contexts, institutional strategies are often constrained by the coexistence of formal rules and powerful informal institutions. Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2019) show that informal party practices frequently override formal gender inclusion measures, particularly in systems characterised by personalistic politics and weak internal democracy. Lovenduski (2005) similarly argues that institutional culture can undermine formal reforms when gender equality is not embedded in core organisational values. These insights underscore the importance of context-sensitive strategies that recognise the interaction between formal and informal institutions.

Reforming candidate selection methods provides a concrete pathway for institutional change. Hazan and Rahat (2010) propose an analytical framework that demonstrates how more inclusive and rule-bound selection systems reduce elite discretion and expand access to candidacy. When combined with gender-sensitive recruitment strategies, such systems can enhance women's legislative representation (Kenny & Verge, 2016; Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2015). This suggests that institutional reform aimed at increasing women's representation should prioritise transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability within party selection processes.

Conceptually, institutional and party-level strategies are most effective when they integrate formal rules, informal norms, and material support mechanisms. Strategies that rely on voluntary commitments or symbolic gestures are unlikely to disrupt entrenched patterns of exclusion (Krook, 2016; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019). By contrast, binding rules, transparent procedures, and resource-backed enforcement offer more sustainable pathways for enhancing women's representation in federal legislatures.

### **Policy Pathways and Strategic Interventions for Enhancing Women's Legislative Representation**

Policy pathways for enhancing women's legislative representation refer to the combination of legal, institutional, and strategic interventions that translate gender equality commitments into measurable electoral outcomes. Scholarly research increasingly emphasises that effective pathways must be multidimensional, addressing structural barriers, institutional incentives, and political behaviour simultaneously (Htun & Weldon, 2012; Franceschet, Krook, & Piscopo, 2012). Single policy interventions, when implemented in isolation, often fail to generate sustained improvements in women's representation, particularly in competitive electoral environments. As a result,

attention has shifted toward integrated policy strategies capable of reshaping both opportunity structures and political norms.

Legal and regulatory reforms constitute a foundational policy pathway for improving women's access to legislatures. Comparative evidence demonstrates that binding legal measures, particularly those embedded in electoral laws or constitutions, are more effective than voluntary guidelines or executive policies (Jones, 2009; Bush, 2011). Such reforms alter the rules of competition by constraining party discretion and redefining eligibility criteria. However, scholars caution that legal reforms must be contextually designed, as poorly tailored regulations may provoke resistance or symbolic compliance without substantive impact (Htun & Weldon, 2012). This underscores the importance of aligning legal frameworks with institutional realities.

Electoral governance reforms also play a critical role in shaping outcomes for women's representation. Independent electoral management bodies, transparent nomination processes, and credible dispute resolution mechanisms have been shown to enhance confidence in electoral participation and reduce exclusionary practices (Birch, 2011; Norris, 2014). In contexts where electoral institutions are weak, women candidates face heightened risks of marginalisation, intimidation, and procedural manipulation. Strengthening electoral governance, therefore, serves as an indirect yet essential policy pathway to enhancing women's legislative inclusion.

Political financing reforms represent another strategic intervention with significant implications for gender equality. Empirical studies indicate that high campaign costs and unregulated political spending disproportionately disadvantage women, who typically have less access to financial networks (Ismail et al., 2025; Abubakar et al., 2025) and elite sponsorship (Sacchet & Speck, 2012; Casal Bértoa & Rashkova, 2020). Policy pathways that introduce spending limits, public funding incentives, or gender targeted subsidies have been associated with improved nomination and election outcomes for women. These measures address material inequalities that undermine the effectiveness of broader gender policies.

Protection against political violence and harassment has emerged as a critical policy pathway in recent scholarship. Violence against women in politics, including intimidation, online abuse, and physical threats, has been shown to deter candidacy and undermine political participation (Krook & Sanín, 2016; Bardall, 2018). Policy interventions that criminalise political violence, strengthen enforcement, and provide institutional support mechanisms contribute to safer political environments. Without such protections, other inclusion strategies risk being neutralised by hostile political conditions.

Capacity-building and leadership-development programmes also feature prominently in discussions of strategic pathways. While critics caution against overemphasising supply-side interventions, evidence suggests that targeted training, mentoring, and political socialisation initiatives can enhance women's competitiveness when embedded within supportive institutional frameworks (Piscopo, 2016; Clayton, 2021). These programmes are most effective when they complement structural reforms rather than substitute for them. This reinforces the argument that capacity building should function as part of an integrated policy ecosystem.

Civil society engagement and monitoring further strengthen policy pathways by enhancing accountability. Research shows that women's movements, advocacy organisations, and policy networks play a crucial role in sustaining pressure for reform, monitoring compliance, and shaping public discourse on representation (Weldon, 2011; Tripp, 2016). Where civil society actors are institutionalised within policy processes, gender inclusion strategies are more likely to endure beyond electoral cycles. This highlights the importance of participatory policy design in advancing women's legislative representation.

Conceptually, effective policy pathways for enhancing women's representation combine legal enforcement, institutional reform, financial regulation, protection from violence, capacity building, and civil society engagement. Scholars increasingly agree that sustainable progress requires coherent policy packages rather than fragmented interventions (Franceschet et al., 2012; Norris, 2014). This conceptual framework provides a basis for identifying context-sensitive strategies to improve women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature.

### Theoretical Framework: Critical Mass and Critical Actors Theory

Critical Mass Theory originates from the sociological work of Kanter (1977), who argues that minority groups within institutions experience structural constraints until they reach a threshold that allows them to influence norms, behaviour, and outcomes. Applied to political representation, the theory posits that women's ability to shape legislative processes and policy priorities is constrained when their numbers remain tokenistic. In male-dominated legislatures, women are often isolated, marginalised, and burdened with representational expectations that limit their effectiveness. This framework is particularly relevant for analysing women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature, where women's numerical presence remains extremely low and institutional influence correspondingly limited.

Subsequent political science scholarship has refined Critical Mass Theory by questioning the assumption that numerical thresholds alone produce substantive change. Beckwith (2007) argues that numbers matter primarily insofar as they interact with institutional power structures and political opportunity contexts. Women legislators may remain marginal even at higher levels of representation if institutional rules, party hierarchies, and leadership positions remain exclusionary. This refinement shifts analytical attention from representation as an end in itself to the conditions under which representation becomes politically meaningful. It provides a valuable lens for assessing the effectiveness of existing policies by examining whether they alter institutional power relations or merely increase descriptive presence.

Building on these critiques, Critical Actors Theory emphasises the role of strategically positioned individuals who advance gender equality despite numerical underrepresentation. Childs and Krook (2009) argue that substantive representation depends on the presence of actors who are willing and able to initiate, support, and sustain gender responsive change within legislatures. These actors may be women or men and operate

through formal positions, coalition-building, and agenda-setting. This theoretical perspective is especially valuable for exploring enhancement pathways, as it highlights how institutional reforms, party strategies, and policy interventions can create enabling environments for critical actors to emerge. Together, Critical Mass and Critical Actors Theory provide a robust framework for analysing both the limitations of Nigeria's current policy landscape and the strategic pathways required to enhance women's representation and influence in the federal legislature.

### Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to assess the effectiveness of existing policies and explore pathways to enhance women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature. Mixed methods designs are particularly well-suited to policy evaluation studies because they integrate measurable patterns with contextual and experiential insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches enables triangulation, thereby strengthening the validity of findings related to policy implementation and institutional practice.

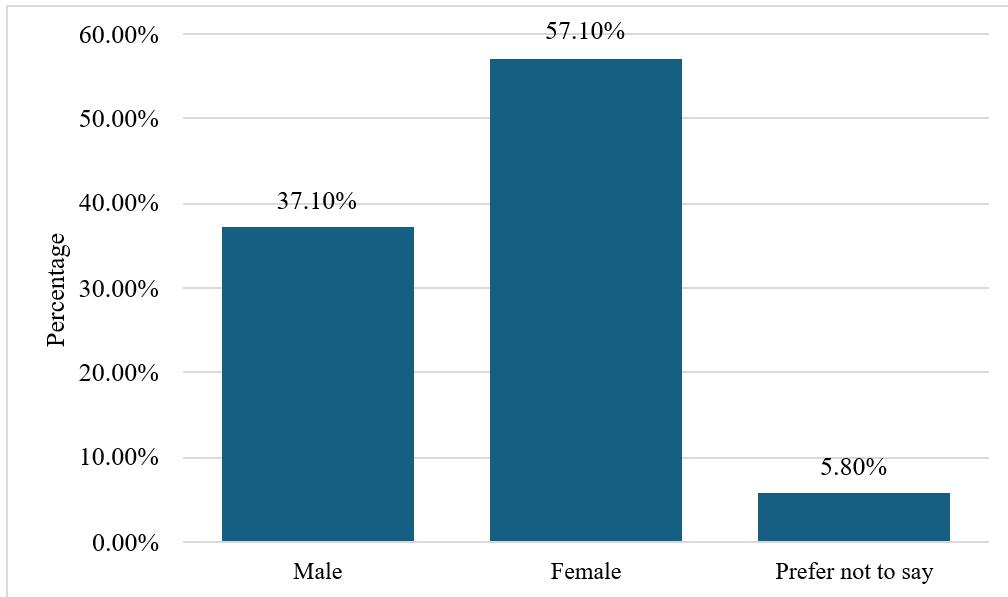
The quantitative component of the study consists of a structured questionnaire administered to staff of the National Assembly. A total of thirty-five respondents returned valid questionnaires, forming the quantitative dataset for analysis. Legislative staff were selected because of their routine interaction with members of the National Assembly and their familiarity with committee work, policy processes, and institutional practices. Descriptive statistical techniques were employed to analyse the data, focusing on patterns of perception regarding gender policies, party strategies, and institutional constraints within the federal legislature.

The qualitative strand complements the survey data through three in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions, each comprising six participants drawn from National Assembly directorates that regularly interface with legislators. In-depth interviews provided detailed insights into policy implementation processes, while focus group discussions facilitated collective reflection on strategic pathways to enhance women's representation. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings enables a more nuanced assessment of policy effectiveness. It supports the identification of context-sensitive strategies for improving women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature.

## Results and Discussion

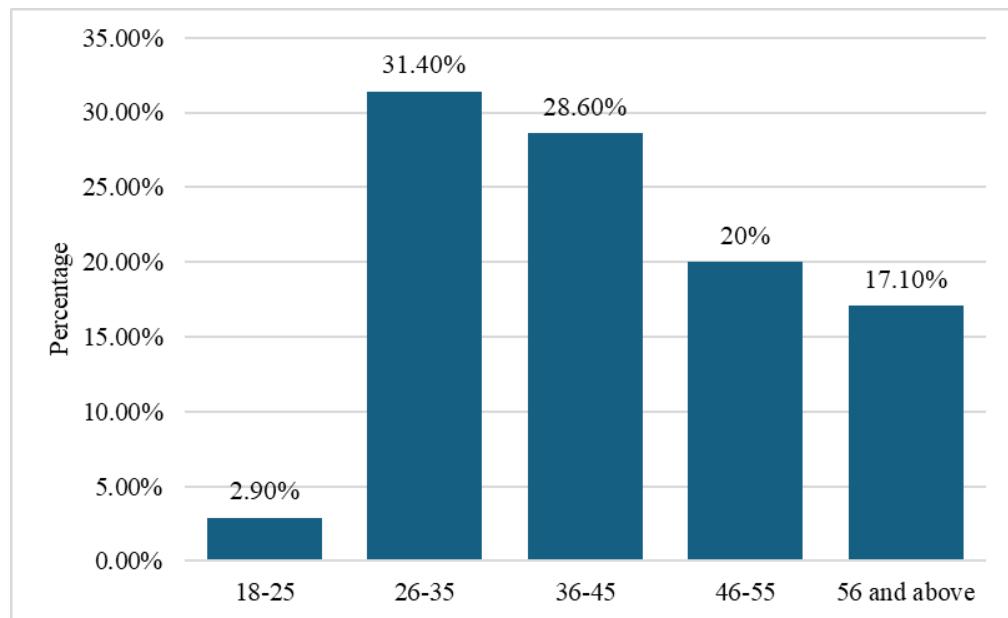
### Descriptive Statistics

Fig. 1 presents the gender distribution of survey respondents. Female respondents constitute the majority of the sample at 57.1 per cent, compared with 37.1 per cent male respondents, while 5.8 per cent preferred not to disclose their gender. The dominance of female respondents is notable, given the study's focus on women's political representation, and reflects the strong presence of women among National Assembly staff who engage directly with legislative and committee processes.



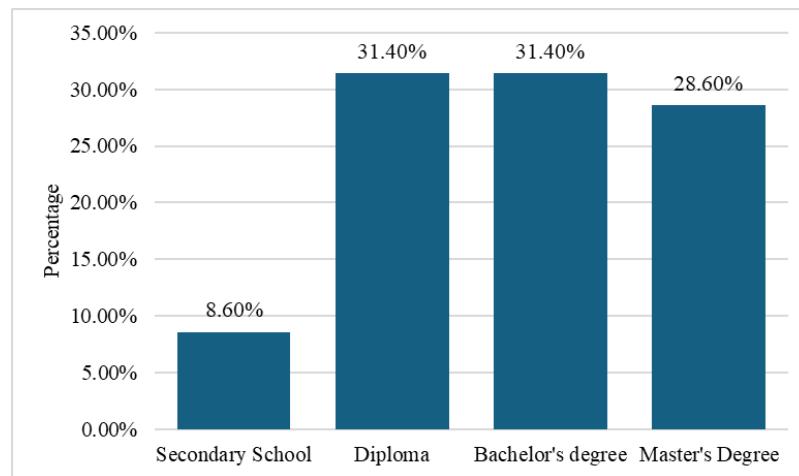
*Fig. 1 – Gender of Respondents*

As shown in Fig. 2, the sample is concentrated in the 26 to 35 age band at 31.4 per cent and the 36 to 45 band at 28.6 per cent, which together account for 60.0 per cent of respondents. Staff aged 46 to 55 make up 20.0 per cent, while those 56 and above represent 17.1 per cent, indicating a sizeable senior cadre in the dataset. Only 2.9 per cent fall within the 18 to 25 age range, suggesting limited early-career representation.



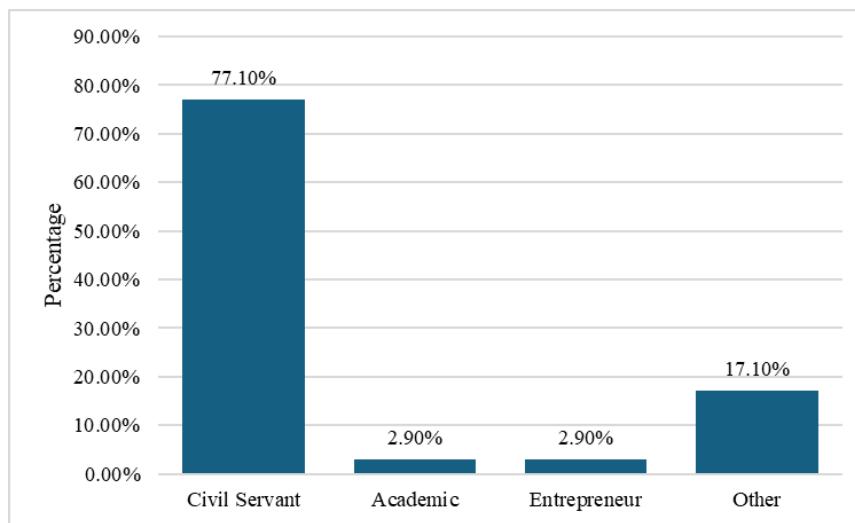
*Fig. 2 – Age of Respondents*

As shown in Fig. 3, respondents with Diploma and Bachelor's degree qualifications each constitute 31.4 per cent of the sample, while those with Master's degrees account for 28.6 per cent. Secondary school holders represent 8.6 per cent of respondents, indicating that the majority of participants have post-secondary education.



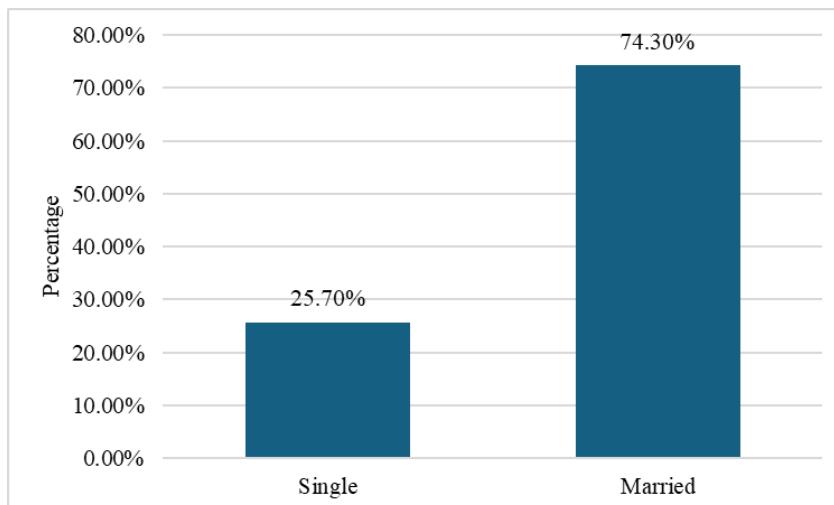
**Fig. 3 – Educational Qualifications of Respondents**

Fig. 4 illustrates the occupational distribution of respondents. Civil servants constitute the majority of the sample at 77.1 per cent, reflecting the study's focus on National Assembly staff embedded within formal legislative structures. Respondents classified under "Other" occupations account for 17.1 per cent, while Academics and Entrepreneurs each represent 2.9 per cent of the sample. The dominance of civil servants is consistent with the study's methodological emphasis on institutional insiders who routinely interface with legislators and serve on committees.



**Fig. 4 – Occupation of Respondents**

The marital status distribution is shown in Fig. 5. The majority of respondents are married, accounting for 74.3 per cent of the sample, while 25.7 per cent are single. This distribution reflects the respondents' mature age structure and provides additional context for interpreting perceptions of work, institutional culture, and policy environments within the National Assembly.



**Fig. 5 – Marital Status of Respondents**

## Data Analysis

The effectiveness of existing interventions, policies, and advocacy strategies is operationalised using survey measures that capture respondents' awareness of gender related political policies and their assessment of the effectiveness of current measures aimed at promoting women's representation. These measures are combined to form the Policy Effectiveness Index. Perceived improvement in women's representation is measured through respondents' assessments of progress in women's inclusion within the National Assembly and across political party structures.

The Spearman correlation results indicate statistically significant relationships between policy awareness, perceived effectiveness, and demographic characteristics. The Policy Effectiveness Index shows a moderate positive correlation with

education ( $\rho = 0.467, p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that respondents with higher levels of education tend to perceive gender equality policies as more effective or at least more visible. Gender exhibits a weak negative correlation ( $\rho = -0.284, p = 0.096$ ), indicating that female respondents are slightly more sceptical of policy outcomes than male respondents. There is also a strong positive relationship between policy awareness and perceived improvement in representation ( $\rho = 0.613, p < 0.001$ ), showing that awareness of interventions such as quotas, mentorship programs, and advocacy campaigns is associated with greater optimism about women's inclusion. Meanwhile, the Policy Effectiveness Index correlates negatively with the Institutional Barrier Index ( $\rho = -0.548, p < 0.01$ ), implying that persistent institutional bottlenecks diminish the perceived success of gender equality initiatives.

**Table 4.4: Spearman Correlation Results for Policy Effectiveness**

Variable Relationship	Spearman's $\rho$	Sig. (2-tailed)	Strength / Direction
Gender × Policy Effectiveness Index	-0.284	0.096	Weak Negative
Education × Policy Effectiveness Index	0.467	0.008	Moderate Positive
Policy Awareness × Perceived Improvement	0.613	0	Strong Positive
Institutional Barrier Index × Policy Effectiveness Index	-0.548	0.001	Moderate Negative
Party Support × Policy Effectiveness Index	0.384	0.023	Moderate Positive

*Source: Author's Computation, 2025*

Qualitative findings from interviews and focus group discussions complement the statistical results. Respondents across interviews agreed that, while policies promoting women's participation, such as the National Gender Policy (2006), the proposed Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, and party-level quota pledges, exist, their implementation remains weak. A senior research director noted that "*most gender-related policies sound progressive on paper, but there is little enforcement; even the 35 per cent affirmative action target is treated as optional.*" Another participant emphasised that "*parties mention inclusion during conventions but rarely follow up during nominations.*"

Participants also discussed the relative impact of specific strategies. Mentorship and advocacy programs were viewed as the most effective, particularly when supported by development partners or women's organisations. As one legal officer stated, "*the few women who made it into leadership often credit mentorship or external sponsorship rather than formal quotas.*" Focus group participants were divided on gender quotas: some saw them as "*a necessary temporary measure,*" while others cautioned that "*quotas without accountability simply create token representation.*" Another recurring theme was the lack of monitoring mechanisms and budgetary allocation to track the outcomes of gender policies, which weakens institutional memory and continuity.

The quantitative and qualitative findings point to a consistent pattern in the experience of gender equality policies within Nigeria's federal legislative environment. Higher levels of awareness and exposure to gender related interventions are associated with more positive assessments of progress in women's representation, indicating that visibility and communication are important in sustaining confidence in reform efforts. However, this optimism is significantly undermined where institutional barriers persist, particularly weak enforcement, limited party accountability, and the absence of monitoring mechanisms. These results suggest that the effectiveness of existing policies is largely perceptual and conditional, shaped less by policy design than by the institutional contexts in which policies are implemented.

Viewed through the lens of Critical Mass and Critical Actors Theory, the findings highlight why existing interventions have produced limited gains in women's representation. The persistently low numerical presence of women in the National Assembly reinforces tokenism, constraining the emergence of actors capable of advancing gender inclusive change. At the same time, weak enforcement structures and party-level discretion limit the ability of committed individuals to function as effective critical actors. Enhancing women's representation, therefore, requires pathways that move beyond symbolic policy adoption toward institutional reforms that strengthen enforcement, embed accountability within party structures, and support the emergence

of strategically positioned actors. Such pathways are essential for translating formal commitments into sustained increases in women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature.

## Conclusion

This article examined the effectiveness of existing policies and strategies to enhance women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature and explored pathways to strengthen future interventions. Drawing on a mixed-methods design that combined survey data from National Assembly staff with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study assessed institutional perceptions of gender policy effectiveness and identified key constraints shaping outcomes. The findings demonstrate that awareness of gender related policies and higher levels of education are associated with more positive assessments of progress, while persistent institutional barriers significantly undermine perceived effectiveness. Rather than a lack of policy, the core challenge lies in weak enforcement, party-level discretion, and limited accountability within the structures that govern legislative recruitment.

The study further shows that strategies such as mentorship, advocacy, and capacity building have produced more visible and credible outcomes than voluntary party pledges or unenforced quota commitments. However, these gains remain uneven and fragile due to their dependence on donor funding, fragmented coordination, and weak monitoring mechanisms. Low numerical representation continues to reinforce tokenism, limiting the emergence of strategically positioned actors capable of driving sustained change within legislative and party institutions. As a result, existing interventions have generated optimism and visibility but have not translated into consistent increases in women's representation at the federal level.

Based on these findings, the study recommends a shift from symbolic commitments toward institutionalised and enforceable strategies. First, gender targets should be embedded within binding electoral and party regulations, with clear sanctions for non-compliance. Second, political parties should be required to institutionalise transparent nomination processes and link public funding or regulatory incentives to demonstrated progress on inclusion. Third, mentorship and capacity-building initiatives should be integrated into state-supported frameworks to ensure continuity beyond donor cycles. Finally, a central coordinating and monitoring mechanism is needed to track implementation, evaluate outcomes, and sustain institutional memory. Together, these measures can create an enabling environment for critical actors to emerge and operate effectively, thereby translating gender equality commitments into tangible and sustained improvements in women's representation in Nigeria's federal legislature.

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