



African Women in Media



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2024

**Research Report on the:**

*Media Toolkit on the  
Visibility of Young  
Women in Politics in  
Nigeria*

# RESEARCH

REPORT

2024

## *Media Toolkit on the Visibility of Young Women in Politics in Nigeria*

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COLONIALISM  
IS INDIGENOUS  
GENOCIDE



THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

# *Introduction*

The toolkit aims to provide guidelines to aid media professionals in providing optimal visibility to young women in politics in Nigeria. It draws on the findings from a larger report into the visibility that young female politicians have in the Nigerian media. Aimed at journalists, editors, and media practitioners broadly, the toolkit serves as the first known attempt to compile an evidence-based checklist of actions that journalists can take to promote the visibility of young female politicians in the media. It is based on figures which show that women's participation in Nigerian politics has consistently remained low since the return to democracy in 1999 (Oluyemi, 2015; African Development Bank, 2015; Kelly, 2019; Lopez-Claros et al., 2022; Okoye et al., 2022).

Oluyemi (2015), for instance, shows that women's representation in the legislature, whether at federal or state levels, has not exceeded 7.3%. Figures have remained worse in the 2023 elections, where only 3% of those elected to the Senate and 4% to the House of Representatives were women (Nkereuwem, 2023). Similarly, low figures are also noticeable in the data on media visibility of women in politics. For instance, Omojola and Morah (2014) found that only 21.2% of political stories published in the newspapers between 1999 and 2003 were about women.

Ette (2017) also highlights issues of low media visibility for female politicians and the disadvantaged pattern of coverage that the media renders to them. Our base report builds on these studies by investigating the visibility of female politicians and young women in politics, thus making a unique contribution. The outcome of the report shows that the visibility for young female politicians is even lower – a negligible 3.45% of all stories across four national newspapers that consider women in politics in the 2023 elections.

Having outlined our findings in that larger report, this toolkit carries the discussion forward by presenting guardrails that media professionals can follow to address the underrepresentation of young women in politics. Achieving this goal will contribute to fulfilling aspirations set out in documents such as the National Gender Policy of Nigeria (2006), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979).

It also has the potential to balance the discrepancy between women's representation and media visibility, where outcomes for the latter are proportionally lower than outcomes for the former (Courtney et al., 2020; Rosset al., 2020) – a finding also reflected in the larger report. Increasing media visibility for young women in politics, therefore, is crucial in ensuring that these young women have a presence and a voice in society. This is the goal of the toolkit.

## 1.1. OUTLINE

The document begins with a summary of the methodology and findings of the larger report. Following this is the presentation of the toolkit, which comprises ten items, each with its checklist. Next is a discussion, based on the focus group findings, of training programmes and courses aimed at young female politicians. The document concludes with a list of resources for media professionals and young women in politics.

## 1.2. METHODOLOGY

The research questions of the larger report were threefold. To start with, we aimed to gauge the extent to which the media showcases young women in politics. The second was to identify the reportorial styles and thematic representations in news reports of these young women. Third was to highlight how young female politicians conceptualise their visibility in the media. The report used content analysis and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to answer these questions. For the content analysis, the report reviewed four national newspapers: The Punch, Vanguard, The Guardian, and Daily Trust. The review period lasted from 1 November 2022 to 30 April 2023 to coincide with the 2023 general elections held in February and March 2023. For the FGD, the report analysed the perspectives of six young women active in Nigeria's political and policy spaces. They were all between the ages of 18 and 35.

# 1.3 ANALYSIS OF THE REPORT

The findings of the report were divided into two sections. The first section contained the content analysis, where the report showed that 232 editorial items featured women in politics during the six months across the four newspapers. Out of this figure, eight items were devoted to young women in politics, highlighting negligible visibility for young female politicians. The report analysed the eight stories qualitatively because of how few they were.

### 1.3.1. MEDIA MONITORING AND CONTENT ANALYSIS

#### REPORTORIAL STYLES

In the first section of the content analysis, the report focused on reportorial styles in the stories, along the lines of sensationalism, human face, objectivity, source variation, fact-checking, varying perspectives, and bias in language. Overall, the analysis showed that the media reported young women in politics using positive reportorial styles. For instance, the stories were objective, had little or no sensationalism, had human faces, utilised varying sources to a large degree, and had no bias in language. The major drawback was the lack of fact-checking in the reports.

## THEMATIC PORTRAYALS

The report yielded five themes as follows.

1. The first was on young women as political leaders, where the reports portrayed young female politicians as political contenders, experienced political actors, major stakeholders, and people interested in politics.
2. Second was the portrayal of young female politicians as political actors, where the women were represented as citizens, voters, activists, and organic foot soldiers.
3. Third was the portrayal of young female politicians as people dependent on the older generation for electoral success.
4. Fourth was the portrayal of young female politicians as influential trailblazers. Here, the reports focused on Rukayat Shittu, the 26-year-old who won a House of Assembly seat in Kwara State, representing her as a role model for the next generation of female leaders.
5. Finally, there was a spotlight on intimidation and young women as victims of society. This theme centered around the pressure that young women face, for instance, in trying to take on older male politicians and the representation of young female politicians as victims of patriarchy, norms, and traditions.

### 1.3.2.FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The second section of the findings contained the FGD analysis. This also yielded five themes.

- First was sexism and bias in media coverage, which revealed the perception that the media focused is
1. proportionately on the personal lives and physical appearances of young female politicians rather than their experience, skill, and track record.
  2. Second was the perceived portrayal of young female politicians as incomplete without men, both in the private and public spheres.
  3. Third, the FGD participants highlighted inadequate mentorship and support from other women in politics.
  4. Fourth, the participants pointed to youth condescension and the influence of money politics, where young female politicians are looked down on because they are not thought to be likely to have the resources to bankroll patronage-based political campaigns.
  5. Finally, the participants suggested the need for media and strategic support on the visibility of young women in politics, where media outlets devote specific pages to the coverage of young women in politics.

# 2.0. MEDIA TOOLKIT ON THE VISIBILITY OF YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA

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## 2.0. MEDIA TOOLKIT ON THE VISIBILITY OF YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA

The media toolkit is presented below under ten itemised areas. Overall, the toolkit draws from outcomes in the findings backed by entries in the relevant literature.

### 2.1. DEVOTE GREATER VISIBILITY TO YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICS

The report's findings indicate that the visibility of female politicians is lower than the percentage of female participation in politics. The figures on media visibility for young women in politics are also lower, given the report's outcome, which shows that out of the 232 stories that focus on women in politics, only eight were devoted to young women in politics – pointing to an eligible focus on young women in politics.

To address this, the media should allocate newspaper space and broadcast airtime specifically to young women in politics.

- a. The media should be deliberate in giving greater spotlight to less known young female politicians who have potential, as opposed to high-profile politicians, who are likely to be older and male.
- b. Some reports on young women captured young people. We see this in headlines such as:

*“Not too young to run: Rookies set for the hallowed chamber” – **The Punch.***

*“2023: Inside the world of youths seeking elective positions” – **Daily Trust.***

To better spotlight young women in politics, the media should give greater attention to them, not just youths, as we see in these headlines. Some newspapers also have dedicated ‘Youth’ sections, which contain no reports on young female politicians. For instance, Daily Trust has a section called ‘Youth Ville,’ but it largely features items on youth innovation and education, with virtually nothing on politics.

- c. The media should give more substantial visibility to young women in politics. For instance, the report shows that news reports on young women presented biographical information and electoral figures. While this is appropriate, there is a need for the media to give attention to broader issues, such as the experiences of young women in politics, their perspectives on issues affecting society, and the factors that promote or hinder their participation in politics.

- d. The media should monitor the participation of young women in politics in every election cycle, including in off-cycle elections. An example of this kind of monitoring is noticeable in the countdown that newspapers did for the kidnapped Chibok girls and others who have been abducted either by terrorists or bandits. A similar practice can be instituted during election seasons for young women in politics to monitor their rate of participation and the issues that affect them.

- e. To increase visibility, more stories on young women in politics should be given front-page salience.

## 2.2. GENDER EQUALITY AND IMPLICIT BIAS IN THE MEDIA

More women should be employed as journalists and editors, given that the media is male-dominated, up to a ratio of 10 to 2 in some cases (Report Women, 2018). The aim is to correct the impression by Participant 1 in the FGD that “powerful people in the media over time have been men, and men have the power to tell stories.” Consequently, more women should be appointed to junior, middle, and top positions in the media so they can tell the stories of young women in politics.

Media managers should further deal with implicit bias against young female politicians in the media (Courtney et al., 2020). There is a likelihood that journalists, whether male or female, can unknowingly report young women in politics in ways that undermine them. Hence, media managers should institute training programmes and processes to check for bias against young female politicians and to monitor the rate and pattern of their representation in the media.

Media organisations create and review staffing and editorial policies on gender equality

Parity exists between men and women in appointments into the media’s junior, middle, and senior editorial cadres

Media professionals are offered training on how to identify and address implicit bias against young female politicians in journalistic reports

Action is taken to continuously evaluate progress in helping journalists deal with implicit bias against young women in politics

### 2.3. ‘WOMEN’ PAGES SHOULD SPOTLIGHT YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICS

more to use their ‘Women’ sections as avenues to spotlight young women in politics. The report showed that these sections dedicated to women give attention to female professionals or businesswomen, not women in politics. Examples include T

he Guardian, which has a 'Women' section devoted largely to female professionals. The 'Women' section also focuses on beauty, lifestyle, and fashion. Journalists should also use 'Women' pages to highlight stories of solidarity between women political leaders across generations to contribute towards addressing the gap in mentorship and the "scarcity mindset" that the FGD participants described.

Dedicated 'Women' sections of newspapers give greater attention to young women in politics

Stories in the 'Women' section are more inclusive of reports of young women in politics and their civic participation, impact, and track record

'Women' pages highlight stories of solidarity between female politicians across generations

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## 2.4. SUBSTANCE, NOT SENSATION

Media reports on young women in politics should focus on their track record, skill, and achievement rather than their appearance, personal lives, or past scandals. This will help to curb sexist, sexualised, and objectified representation of young women in politics –something which the FGD participants highlighted. It also points to the need for the media not to be overly harsh or judgmental in their reports on young women in politics. Related also is the need for the media not to hold young female politicians to idealised standards – what one of the FGD participants called "cosmetised vulnerability."

In the content analysis, there were some cases where the media highlighted the impact of young women and their political

work, e.g. Cynthia Mbamalu, in the two stories that devoted an entire page each to capture her views before and after the election. The two stories had these headlines:

*"46 days to go: Elections threatened in Borno, Imo, Ebonyi, Rivers, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kaduna, Yobe, and others – Mbamalu, YIAGA boss" – Vanguard.*

*"Feb 25: Nationally, only 44 percent of polling units commenced election at 9:30 am – Mbamalu, YIAGA Africa Programme Director" – Vanguard.*

We also see some attempts made to give visibility to Rukayat Shittu, who won a House of Assembly seat in Kwara State, for example, in the story with the headline:

*"I know I'll make a change – 26-year-old female lawmaker-elect" – DailyTrust.*

This practice should be expanded to cover more young women in politics in impactful ways.

Young female politicians are not objectified or sexualised in media reporting

Media reports avoid highlighting physical appearances, personal issues, and sensational stories about young female politicians

Media reports consolidate the practice of portraying young female politicians in impactful ways by focusing on their potential, skill, competence, track record, and contribution

Media organisations monitor whether reports on young female politicians are harsher or more judgmental than reports on other political demographics e.g., older male politicians

Journalists are trained on how not to hold young female politicians to idealised standards

## 2.5. DE-EMPHASISE FOCUS ON FEMALE DOMESTICITY

The media should continue to de-emphasise focusing on the domestic roles of young women in politics. The report shows that the stories on young women in politics did not cover their roles concerning marriage, childbearing, or domesticity. The media should continue this practice.

This practice should be expanded to cover more young women in politics in impactful ways.

The media should build on the practice of not focusing on the domesticity of female politicians

Media reports promote and normalise the role of young female politicians in the public sphere

## 2.6. DIVERSITY IN EDITORIAL ITEMS

There is a need for diversity in the kinds of stories that portray young women in politics. Six out of the eight stories on young women in politics were either interviews or feature stories. This is commendable, but there were only two news stories and no editorial entries. Editorials and other opinionated articles are critical because these are avenues through which direct advocacy can be made on issues affecting young women in politics. The fact that there were no editorials or opinion articles implies editorial writers do not yet appreciate the salience of the participation and visibility of young women in politics.

Strategies are instituted to ensure that newspaper editorials and opinion pieces give greater visibility to young women in politics

These editorial and opinion pieces serve as avenues for advocating and promoting causes for greater participation of young women in politics

## 2.7. INSTITUTE FACT-CHECKING AND DRAW FROM VARYING PERSPECTIVES



Greater fact-checking is needed in media reports on young women. The report shows that there was no fact-checking in the stories. And there was a case in one of the stories, with the headline: “I know I’ll make a change – 26-year-old female lawmaker-elect” – Daily Trust. In the story, the journalist was unsure whether Rukayat Shittu was the youngest lawmaker in Nigeria’s history. This case required fact-checking, which points to the significance of presenting accurate information about young women in politics, as the media strives to do in other areas.

We find a similar case in the story about Oshaloto Abidemi, who was running for a seat in the House of Assembly in Kogi State (story headline: “2023: Inside the world of youths seeking elective positions” – Daily Trust). The report does not specify her age, pointing to the need for accuracy, which would aid media monitoring of young women’s political involvement. In addition, the media should draw from various sources in their reporting on young women in politics. The report shows that varying perspectives were presented to some extent, but more can be done to present the various aspects affecting the visibility of young women in politics.

Fact-checking is encouraged or mandated for reports on young women in politics to foster accuracy

Journalists make the effort to draw from varying sources and perspectives to present stories in a balanced way

## 2.8. A DIRECT MEANS OF EXPRESSION



The use of the interview format helped give young female participants a direct means of expression. This should be maintained, even though there remains the need for greater diversity in the kinds of stories focusing on young women in politics.

Media organisations uphold the interview format of reporting to give young female politicians a direct means of expression

In cases where journalists paraphrase or comment on young female politicians, this is done in a balanced and objective way

## 2.9. CONTINUED POSITIVE PORTRAYAL OF YOUNG FEMALE POLITICIANS

The media should continue with positive practices in the reportorial styles on young women in politics. For instance, the report shows that stories about young women in politics are not likely to be sensational. They also have a human face element, are likely to be objective, and have little or no bias in language. These positive practices should be maintained.

There is continual coverage of young female politicians in non-sensational and objective ways

Measures are taken to institute positive patterns of portraying young women in politics

## 2.10. THEMATIC PORTRAYAL OF YOUNG FEMALE POLITICIANS

The report finding shows that the media represent young women as political actors and contenders. This is a good practice that should be encouraged. The media should, however, make the effort not to represent young women in politics as people who are incomplete without men, either in the public or private sphere. The FGD participants had the perception that the media represented them in this way. There is a somewhat similar pattern in the content analysis, where the media portrayed young female politicians as dependent on the older generation. Hence, the media should do more to highlight young female politicians' strength in their own right.

# TRAINING FOR YOUNG FEMALE POLITICIANS ON DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

This section discusses training programmes and courses that can be designed for young women in politics so they can have fruitful engagements with the media. It is based on the responses of the FGD participants, who proposed the following training interventions.

## 3.1. STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT AND POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS

The objective of this course is to empower young female politicians with an understanding of media ownership and the influence that it has on representational patterns. Underscoring the political economy aspect of the media, it seeks to provide young women with the skills needed to engage with the media in transactional ways. This includes ascertaining the benefit of exposure to certain media outlets and the possible electoral outcomes that this will yield. Participant 5, in speaking to this, noted:

### [YOUNG] WOMEN NEED

to understand how to engage, in the sense that, so if I'm speaking to this media outfit, what value, what is the credibility and level of endorsement of the people, especially the people I'm canvassing support from? If, for instance, ABC TV station is inviting me for an interview and I'm going to speak there, how would that impact my chances of being voted for? Because again, we already understand that some of these media are affiliated to certain political parties.

## 3.2. POLITICS AND COMMUNICATION – A GUIDE TO STORYTELLING

This course helps young female politicians understand how to tell their stories in the media. Participant 6 outlined the relevance of the course, highlighting the need for these young women to grasp “how to use storytelling to tell their own stories of impact [and] what they are trying to achieve in an election.” The course includes elements of what makes a good story, knowledge of what an impactful news story should contain, what they are expected to say in interviews, the kinds of issues to spotlight, and the language to use in spotlighting them to achieve maximum effect.

Participant 6 said the media can help by developing a template that young women can refer to in knowing “how to sell themselves to the public” and enhance their visibility. Participant 6 added, “The main crux here is visibility. So, what can a woman say that will aid her visibility and how can she say it?” Participant 2 also saw the course as relevant in helping young women to project “the inner man, the strength, the ability to multitask, and reach your purpose.” Identifying and imbibing the techniques that are needed is what this training is aimed at.

### 3.3.MEDIA ATTACK AND DEFENCE

The course aims to equip young women in politics with the training needed to know when and how to be offensive and defensive in responding to criticisms or attacks in the media. Participant 2 highlighted the course, saying it was important for young female politicians to know how to answer criticism in a reasoned manner without being insulting:

#### I WILL SAY

we should not be [on] the defensive side always. Let there be room for me or any woman to attack back sometimes....There’s a way you can attack back and you being an attacker and same way, you are passing your message. So, when it comes to the media, once in a while, we should try to attack. It’s not every time that we keep mute. **(PARTICIPANT 2)**

Also related to the course is the guide that young female politicians require in selecting the right media team to help with their branding, promotions, and media relations.

### 3.4.UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

This training seeks to enable young female politicians to engage fruitfully on social media. The focus is on understanding social media demographics, and knowing what category of people to target with each social media post:

## NOW AS A



woman who wants to use social media, you need to understand what demography is my message going to be reaching or who is my target demography. Am I going to be targeting people between the ages of 20 to 30, or people between the ages of 35 to 40 or 40 to 60? So, understanding your demography helps you as a woman to understand what kind of message you need to put out there. That's where training comes in. **(PARTICIPANT 6)**

In cases of attacks or opposition on social media, the course helps young female politicians manage negative comments and curate posts that have the potential to shift people's perspectives. This course is vital in today's world, where online vitriol and abuse against young women are rife.

## 4.0. FURTHER RESOURCES

Below is a list of additional resources for media professionals and young women in politics.

### TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS

1. [Media training to strengthen reporting on women's leadership and political participation](#). It summarises the key proceedings and outcomes of a media training workshop for media trainers and practitioners in how they covered women's leadership and political participation in Tanzania in 2021.
2. [Women in politics and the media workshop manual](#). A workshop aimed at empowering female politicians with skills for dealing with the media.
3. [A training manual for women in political leadership](#). A resource to enable women who hold leadership positions to know how to deal with the media, use media content, and write effective press releases.

### ACADEMIC RESOURCES

1. [Gender in media training: A Southern African toolkit](#). A book collection that compiles chapters on the basics of gender and media training, gender in media skills training, and gender in media beat training.
2. [Media representation of women politicians: The cases of Ghana and Nigeria](#). A doctoral thesis by Sally Osei-Appiah on media coverage and construction of female politicians, factors shaping the production of news about female politicians, and the self-representation of female politicians in Ghana and Nigeria.

### REPORTS

1. [Social media: Advancing women in politics? A report that underscores individual, societal, and political factors that affect social media use by women in politics](#).
2. [Women in decision-making: The role of the new media for increased political participation](#). It considers how new media may help to increase women's involvement at different levels of politics.

### ORGANISATIONS

1. [Women in Politics Forum](#): An organisation aimed at increasing the level of women's participation in political and leadership roles in Nigeria.
2. [Kudirat Initiative for Democracy](#): A non-profit that promotes leadership development for young women and aims to remove barriers to women's public participation and end violence against women.





## 7.0. Conclusions

This toolkit report was aimed at providing guidelines that the media can adopt to aid a greater visibility of young women in politics. It began with a summary of the larger study on the visibility of young women in politics in Nigeria, to highlight the evidence base that the toolkit drew from. Based on this, the toolkit itemised ten areas, under which there are checklists for the media to follow. The ten items are:

- Devote greater visibility to young women in politics
- Address gender equality and implicit bias in media coverage
- Spotlight young women politicians on “Women’s” pages
- Prioritise substance over sensation
- De-emphasise focus on women’s domesticity
- Increase diversity in editorial items and sources
- Institute rigorous fact-checking using varying perspectives
- Provide direct means of expression for young women
- Sustain positive portrayals of young female politicians
- Develop explicit strategies to ensure balanced thematic portrayal of young women politicians

The report also discussed training programmes and courses that the FGD participants identified as relevant for young women in politics in their dealings with the media. These include a training course on strategic engagement and political economy analysis; politics and communication – a guide to storytelling; media attack and defence; and understanding social media engagement. Further resources are also provided. By presenting the report in this way, the toolkit, it is hoped, will serve as a vital resource for media professionals as they endeavour to provide greater visibility to young women in politics in Nigeria.

In providing this visibility, media professionals should ensure that they pay deliberate attention to young women in politics. During election seasons, this attention should include regular monitoring of figures on the number of young women who are participating compared to the rate of coverage that the media renders to them. For young women who are running for political offices, media focus should be on the substantive issues such as skill and track record, rather than sensational and sexist content around physical appearances and scandals. Additionally, media attention should consistently spotlight issues around the low participation of young women in politics and how to correct them. The need to implement these actions, in line with the toolkit checklists, should be seen by journalists and other media professionals as a valuable and urgent contribution to addressing the low participation of young women in politics in Nigeria.





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# *Our Partners*



**Luminate**