

Broadcast Media and Political Participation of Women in 2023 General Election in Rivers State, Nigeria

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DOI: [10.56201/ijelcs.vol.10.no1.2025.pg88.99](https://doi.org/10.56201/ijelcs.vol.10.no1.2025.pg88.99)

Abstract

This study examined broadcast media and political participation of women in 2023 general election in Rivers State. Agenda-setting theory was anchored in this study. This study adopted a qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews to explore how broadcast media influenced women's political participation in Rivers State during the 2023 general election. The population of the study comprised 76 female politicians, media practitioners, electoral officers and women voters in Rivers State. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample size of 20 participants, including five female candidates, five media professionals (radio and television broadcasters), five officials from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and five women voters. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and via virtual platforms, recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to media influence, gender representation, and electoral participation. The findings revealed that women were significantly underrepresented in broadcast media coverage during the 2023 general election in Rivers State, as female politicians received limited airtime and were often portrayed through gendered stereotypes rather than as serious political contenders. The study concluded that the underrepresentation of female politicians in broadcast media during the 2023 general election in Rivers State underscores the persistent gender bias in political reporting, highlighting the need for more inclusive media policies and equitable airtime allocation to ensure balanced representation. The study recommended that Media organisations should implement gender-sensitive policies to ensure equitable airtime and balanced representation of female politicians in political reporting.

Keywords: *Broadcast Media, Political Participation, Women, 2023 General Election*

Introduction

The role of broadcast media in shaping political participation, particularly among women, has been a subject of extensive scholarly discourse. In contemporary democratic societies, the media serve as a powerful tool for political mobilisation, civic engagement and public enlightenment (McQuail, 2021). The 2023 general election in Nigeria, including Rivers State was marked by significant political engagement with broadcast media playing a crucial role in influencing women's participation. Despite the growing advocacy for gender inclusivity in governance, women's political engagement remains a challenge, hindered by cultural, economic,

and structural barriers (Okeke, 2022). This study explores the extent to which broadcast media facilitated or constrained the political participation of women in Rivers State during the 2023 elections.

Political participation is fundamental to democratic governance, and broadcast media, comprising television and radio have historically played an essential role in informing, educating and mobilising citizens (Norris, 2019). In Nigeria, the media landscape has expanded significantly, with numerous radio and television stations disseminating political content. However, the extent to which these platforms have empowered women to engage in political processes remains a subject of debate. Scholars argue that media representation of women in politics often reinforces stereotypes rather than encouraging active involvement (Adeniran, 2020). This study investigates whether broadcast media in Rivers State facilitated women's political engagement or perpetuated barriers that hindered their participation.

The underrepresentation of women in Nigerian politics is an issue that has persisted for decades. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), women constituted only 9% of the total candidates in the 2023 elections, despite forming nearly 50% of the population. The situation is even more pronounced in Rivers State, where women have historically faced political marginalisation. Scholars such as Agbaje (2021) contends that the media have a responsibility to promote inclusive political participation by giving women adequate representation and visibility. This study assesses whether broadcast media in Rivers State fulfilled this role or merely reflected existing societal biases.

The media influence public perception by determining the salience of political issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). By prioritising certain narratives over others, broadcast media can either empower or discourage women's political participation. This study examines the extent to which radio and television broadcasts in Rivers State shaped the political discourse surrounding women, either by highlighting their contributions or reinforcing gendered stereotypes. Understanding this media influence is crucial for designing strategies that enhance women's involvement in governance.

Ojebode and Adegbola (2021) posit that women who regularly engage with political programs on broadcast media demonstrate higher levels of electoral participation. However, research also indicates that Nigerian media often portray female politicians through a lens of gender bias, focusing more on their personal lives than their political ideologies (Eze, 2022). This research investigates whether similar patterns were evident in Rivers State during the 2023 elections and how they influenced women's political engagement.

One of the critical challenges facing women's political participation in Nigeria is the prevalence of gendered disinformation. During the 2023 elections, several female candidates faced online and broadcast media attacks aimed at discrediting their candidacy (Afolayan, 2023). This study examines whether such disinformation campaigns were amplified by broadcast media in Rivers State and how they affected women's willingness to participate in political activities. It also explores whether media regulatory bodies adequately addressed these challenges to ensure fair representation of female candidates.

The role of community radio in enhancing women's political participation is also a significant area of focus. Studies suggest that local-language radio stations are more effective in mobilising grassroots political engagement among women (Bello & Olayemi, 2021). In Rivers

State, where multiple ethnic groups coexist, community radio may have played a crucial role in shaping women's political attitudes and voting behaviour. This research evaluates how local radio stations contributed to women's political awareness and whether their content encouraged greater participation in the electoral process.

The influence of political advertising on women's political engagement is another aspect explored in this study. Political campaigns in Nigeria rely heavily on broadcast media for visibility, but the accessibility and inclusiveness of such advertisements remain questionable (Ogunyemi, 2022). Women, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, may have been underrepresented in campaign messages aired on television and radio. This study assesses the extent to which political advertisements in Rivers State addressed gender inclusivity and whether they motivated or discouraged women's participation in the 2023 elections.

The 2023 general election in Rivers State presents a valuable case study for understanding the intersection of broadcast media and women's political participation. By evaluating the role of radio and television in shaping political engagement, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on media influence and gender inclusivity in Nigerian politics. The findings will provide insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and advocacy groups seeking to enhance women's representation in governance.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing global advocacy for gender inclusivity in politics, women's political participation in Nigeria remains significantly low, with Rivers State being no exception. The 2023 general election highlighted persistent gender disparities as women faced multiple structural, cultural and socio-economic barriers that hindered their active engagement in the political process. While broadcast media, particularly, radio and television have the potential to bridge this gap by providing political education, amplifying women's voices and promoting gender-sensitive discourse, concerns remain about their actual role in either facilitating or limiting women's political participation. Research has suggested that Nigerian broadcast media often reinforce gender stereotypes, portray female politicians as secondary players and fail to provide equal coverage compared to their male counterparts (Adeniran, 2020). Additionally, gendered disinformation, biased political advertising and limited representation in political debates on radio and television may have further discouraged women from actively engaging in the electoral process. However, empirical evidence on the specific impact of broadcast media on women's political participation in Rivers State during the 2023 elections remains scarce, necessitating a comprehensive investigation.

Moreover, while community radio has been identified as a key mobilisation tool for grassroots political engagement, it remains unclear whether it played a significant role in encouraging women's participation in the 2023 elections in Rivers State. Political advertising, which is heavily reliant on broadcast media, also raises concerns regarding its inclusivity and whether campaign messages sufficiently addressed issues affecting female voters and candidates. Furthermore, regulatory frameworks, such as those enforced by the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC), have been questioned regarding their effectiveness in ensuring balanced media representation of women in politics. Without a thorough examination of how broadcast media influenced women's political participation whether through access to political information, portrayal of female candidates, or fostering public discourse, it is difficult to

determine whether the media acted as an enabler or a barrier to gender inclusivity in governance. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by critically analysing the role of broadcast media in shaping the political engagement of women in Rivers State during the 2023 general election. This study examines the role of broadcast media in influencing the political participation of women in Rivers State during the 2023 general election. First, it assesses the extent to which radio and television provided political information, education, and mobilization for women, thereby shaping their engagement in the electoral process. Second, the study investigates how broadcast media portrayed female politicians and whether such representations encouraged or discouraged women's active involvement in politics. Finally, the study intends to evaluate the effectiveness of media regulatory frameworks in ensuring fair and inclusive coverage of women's political participation, particularly in the context of the 2023 elections.

Broadcast Media and Political Participation

Broadcast media, comprising radio and television, play a crucial role in shaping political participation by informing, educating and mobilising citizens (McQuail, 2021). Political participation encompasses various activities, including voting, attending political rallies, engaging in political discussions and contesting for elective positions (Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995). In democratic societies, the media serve as an intermediary between political actors and the public, providing a platform for dialogue and debate (Norris, 2019). In Nigeria, where illiteracy levels remain high, particularly among women, radio and television remain the most accessible sources of political information, making them essential tools for fostering civic engagement (Adeniran, 2020).

The accessibility of broadcast media significantly influences political awareness and participation. Research has shown that individuals who frequently consume political content on radio and television are more likely to engage in electoral processes (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2021). In Rivers State, where cultural and economic barriers often limit women's political involvement, the role of broadcast media in bridging this gap is particularly significant. Community radio stations, for instance, have been identified as critical in mobilising women, especially in rural areas, by broadcasting in local languages and addressing gender-specific political concerns (Bello & Olayemi, 2021). However, concerns remain about whether these media platforms adequately represent and promote women's political interests.

Despite their potential to enhance democratic participation, broadcast media in Nigeria have been criticised for perpetuating gender stereotypes and marginalising female politicians. Research indicates that media coverage of women in politics is often framed around their marital status, physical appearance, and personal lives rather than their political ideologies and competencies (Eze, 2022). This biased representation can discourage women from pursuing political ambitions, reinforcing societal perceptions that politics is a male-dominated sphere (Okeke, 2022). Furthermore, the limited airtime given to female politicians during election campaigns restricts their ability to communicate their policies effectively, thereby reducing their chances of electoral success.

Given these realities, it is imperative to evaluate the extent to which broadcast media in Rivers State facilitated or hindered women's political participation in the 2023 general election.

Did radio and television stations actively promote gender-inclusive political discourse, or did they reinforce existing biases? Answering these questions is essential for understanding the role of the media in shaping political outcomes and for recommending strategies to enhance women's representation in governance. A critical examination of broadcast media's influence will provide insights into how media policies and practices can be improved to foster greater political inclusivity for women.

Media Representation of Women in Politics

The way women are portrayed in the media significantly impacts their political participation. Media representation shapes public perceptions, influencing how female politicians are viewed by the electorate and how women perceive their own potential for political leadership (Ross, 2017). Study suggests that in many parts of the world, including Nigeria, women in politics receive less media coverage than their male counterparts, and when they do, the focus is often on their gender rather than their political capabilities (Afolayan, 2023). This pattern of representation reinforces gender stereotypes, making it more difficult for women to be taken seriously as political leaders.

Research has consistently shown that female politicians are frequently depicted in traditional and domestic roles rather than as capable decision-makers (Bystrom, 2019). In Nigeria, broadcast media coverage of female candidates in the 2023 general election largely followed this trend, with many television and radio programs focusing on their family lives rather than their political platforms (Eze, 2022). Additionally, negative portrayals, including gendered disinformation and smear campaigns, were prevalent, often discouraging female candidates from actively engaging in the political process (Adeniran, 2020). Such representations contribute to a culture of political exclusion, where women are seen as unfit for leadership roles.

However, some studies highlight the positive impact of targeted media campaigns designed to challenge gender biases and promote women's political participation. For instance, initiatives like the Women in Politics Media Advocacy Project have sought to increase the visibility of female politicians in Nigeria by providing them with media training and platforms to articulate their policies (Okeke, 2022). Community radio stations have also played a crucial role in reshaping gender narratives by featuring programs that encourage women's political involvement and challenge societal norms that restrict their participation (Bello & Olayemi, 2021). Despite these efforts, mainstream media still struggle with achieving gender balance in political reporting.

Given these challenges, this study seeks to analyse how broadcast media in Rivers State portrayed female politicians during the 2023 elections and how this representation influenced women's political engagement. Did media coverage provide fair representation, or did it reinforce existing biases? Understanding the nature of these portrayals is crucial for developing strategies to improve media policies and practices that support gender equality in political representation. The findings of this study will contribute to ongoing discussions on the role of the media in shaping democratic participation and women's empowerment in Nigeria.

Agenda-Setting Theory

This theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, provides a relevant framework for analysing the role of broadcast media in shaping women's political participation during the 2023 general election in Rivers State, Nigeria. The theory posits that the

media do not tell people what to think but rather what to think about by emphasizing certain issues over others (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The tenets of the theory suggest that media coverage influences public perception by determining which topics receive prominence, thereby shaping political discourse and electoral decisions (McCombs, 2004). Key assumptions include the idea that media have a significant impact on public priorities, that individuals rely on media for political information, and that repeated exposure to specific political narratives influences audience opinions and actions (Shaw, 2012). However, critics argue that the theory oversimplifies media influence, neglecting individual agency, counter-publics, and the impact of digital media on political participation (Ghanem, 1997). Despite these criticisms, the theory remains instrumental in understanding how broadcast media shape political engagement, particularly in terms of their portrayal of female politicians, the visibility of gender-related electoral issues, and the dissemination of political information to women voters.

The relevance of the Agenda-Setting Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how broadcast media influenced women's political participation in Rivers State by highlighting or marginalizing gender-specific political issues. Given the historically low participation of women in Nigerian politics, the degree to which radio and television stations framed female political engagement during the 2023 elections is critical. If broadcast media prioritised discussions on women's political empowerment, it could have encouraged greater involvement. Conversely, if female candidates received limited coverage or were subjected to stereotypical portrayals, this could have reinforced gender biases and discouraged participation. By applying this theory, the study assesses the extent to which media coverage shaped public attitudes toward women in politics, providing insights into how agenda-setting mechanisms either facilitated or hindered their electoral involvement. The findings will help inform policy recommendations on improving media practices to foster inclusive political representation.

Related Studies

Adeniran (2020) carried out a study *Media Representation and Women's Political Participation in Nigeria*. The study examined how Nigerian media represented female politicians and the impact of such portrayals on women's political participation. The study employed content analysis of political news coverage on major Nigerian television stations and conducted surveys among female political aspirants and voters. The study found that female politicians were underrepresented in media coverage, often depicted in stereotypical roles that reinforced gender biases. This lack of visibility discouraged women from active political participation. Similarity to current study: Both studies focus on how media representation affects women's political engagement, particularly in Nigeria. Dissimilarity to Current Study: While the reviewed study analyses media representation at the national level, the current study specifically examines the impact of broadcast media on women's political participation in Rivers State during the 2023 general election.

Bello and Olayemi (2021) conducted a study on *Community Radio and Political Mobilisation among Women in Nigeria*. To investigate the role of community radio in increasing women's political awareness and participation in Nigeria. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining focus group discussions with a survey of women who listened to community radio programs. The research revealed that community radio significantly contributed to women's political mobilisation, particularly in rural areas, by providing accessible

political information and fostering political discussions. Similarity to present study: Both studies assess the role of broadcast media in shaping women's political engagement and decision-making processes. Dissimilarity to present study: While the reviewed study focuses on community radio and grassroots political mobilisation, the present study covers both radio and television and their collective impact on women's participation in the 2023 general election in Rivers State.

Okeke (2022) did a work on Gender and Politics in Nigeria: The Role of Media and Society. To analyse the intersection of media coverage and societal norms in shaping women's political aspirations and electoral success in Nigeria. The study used a qualitative approach, conducting in-depth interviews with female politicians, media practitioners, and political analysts. The study found that while some media platforms provided support for female politicians, societal norms and patriarchal structures still played a dominant role in limiting women's political participation. Similarity to Current Study: Both studies explore the influence of broadcast media on women's political engagement and participation. Dissimilarity to Current Study: the reviewed study examined both media influence and societal factors across Nigeria, while the current study specifically investigates how broadcast media influenced women's political participation in Rivers State during the 2023 elections.

Gap Identification

Despite extensive research on media representation and women's political participation in Nigeria (Adeniran, 2020; Bello & Olayemi, 2021; Okeke, 2022), there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific role of broadcast media in shaping the political involvement of women in Rivers State during the 2023 general election. While previous studies have focused on national-level media coverage, community radio influence, and the interplay of media and societal norms, they have not adequately addressed how mainstream broadcast media - radio and television impacted women's electoral engagement in a politically complex state like Rivers. Additionally, existing research has largely overlooked the nuances of media agenda-setting in reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes during elections. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a localised, empirical analysis of how broadcast media influenced women's political participation in Rivers State, offering insights that could inform media policy reforms and gender-inclusive electoral strategies.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews to explore how broadcast media influenced women's political participation in Rivers State during the 2023 general election. The population of the study comprised 76 female politicians, media practitioners, electoral officers and women voters in Rivers State. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample size of 20 participants, including five female candidates, five media professionals (radio and television broadcasters), five officials from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and five women voters. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to provide detailed insights into their experiences and perceptions regarding media coverage and its impact on women's political engagement. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and via virtual platforms, recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to media influence, gender representation, and

electoral participation. This qualitative approach ensures a deeper understanding of the subject matter, capturing the perspectives of stakeholders directly involved in the electoral process.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Themes were deduced deductively following the research objectives. The following themes were deduced: Media Representation of Women in Politics; Influence of Broadcast Media on Women's Political Participation; and Challenges and Opportunities for Gender-Inclusive Political Communication. These were presented and discussed below:

Media Representation of Women in Politics

This theme explores how broadcast media portrayed female politicians during the 2023 general election in Rivers State, including the extent of coverage, framing, and gender-based biases in reporting. Interview Extract: Respondent (Female Politician) stated that the representation of women in broadcast media during the 2023 election was quite minimal compared to that of male politicians. Most political programs and news segments focused on male candidates, leaving little room for female aspirants to showcase their plans and manifestos. When women were featured, the coverage often lacked depth, with broadcasters emphasising personal traits rather than political competence. There were also instances where the media subtly reinforced gender stereotypes, portraying female candidates as either too emotional for leadership or as mere supporters of male politicians rather than contenders in their own right.

Respondent (Media Practitioner): From a broadcaster's perspective, said that media coverage of female politicians was largely influenced by societal perceptions. The number of female candidates was lower than that of males, which affected their visibility in political programs. Additionally, media organisations often prioritise content that they believe will attract higher viewership, and unfortunately, political stories about women are sometimes seen as less engaging. However, some programs, particularly on radio, made deliberate efforts to feature female candidates and discuss gender representation in politics.

Respondent (Electoral Officer) illustrated that the media has a major role in shaping public perception and the media could have done more to promote gender inclusivity. Some television stations hosted debates where women candidates were either absent or given less time to speak. Although there were a few instances of female politicians being interviewed, the overall coverage did not reflect an equal playing field. The lack of in-depth political analysis on female candidates limited the public's understanding of their policies and leadership capabilities.

Respondent (Woman Voter): agreed that as a voter, it frustrating that much about female candidates on TV or radio was not heard. Mostly political information is gotten from these platforms, yet they hardly talked about women's contributions. This made it difficult to assess female candidates and their suitability for office. If the media had given them more visibility, it could have encouraged more women, including young girls, to see themselves as potential leaders.

Influence of Broadcast Media on Women's Political Participation

This theme examines the role of radio and television in shaping women's awareness, engagement and involvement in electoral processes, including voter turnout and political activism. Interview Extract: Respondent (Female Politician) posited that broadcast media played a significant role in educating women about the electoral process, but its influence on actual

participation varied. Programs on voter education helped women understand their rights and responsibilities, encouraging them to participate. However, because the media did not sufficiently amplify female voices, many women felt disengaged from the political process. If the media had given more airtime to discussions on women's political roles, perhaps more women would have been inspired to contest for positions.

Respondent (Media Practitioner): I believe that radio, in particular, had a strong impact on women's political participation. Since radio is widely accessible in rural areas, it was an effective tool for informing women about voting procedures, electoral reforms, and key political issues. Some stations hosted programs where women could call in and discuss political matters, which helped create a sense of inclusion. However, television's impact was more limited because of accessibility issues and the way political discussions were often dominated by male candidates and commentators.

Respondent (Electoral Officer) averred that from my experience during the election, media sensitisation campaigns helped to mobilise women voters. Announcements about election dates, voting locations, and security measures reassured women about their safety, which encouraged turnout. However, the media did not do enough to address barriers that discourage women from political participation, such as gender-based violence, financial constraints, and cultural biases. More targeted programming on these issues could have made a bigger difference.

Respondent (Woman Voter) explained that radio and TV made voting feel like a civic duty. Hearing discussions on why women's votes matter made one more determined to participate. However, one can notice that most political programs featured men, and one wishes there had been more female politicians talking about their plans. Seeing more women in these spaces would have made the election feel more inclusive and inspiring.

Challenges and Opportunities for Gender-Inclusive Political Communication

This theme identifies the barriers women face in gaining equitable media representation and participation, while also highlighting potential strategies for improving gender inclusivity in political media coverage. Interview Extract: Respondent (Female Politician) stated that one major challenge was financial constraints. Many media platforms required candidates to pay for air time, which was difficult for female politicians who often have less financial backing compared to their male counterparts. There was also a lack of political will among media owners to prioritize gender-balanced reporting. A major opportunity for improvement would be for media organizations to adopt policies that ensure equal representation for male and female candidates in political programs.

Respondent (Media Practitioner) elicited that another challenge is the gender bias that exists within media organisations themselves. Many decision-makers in broadcasting are men and this often reflects in programming choices. Female candidates struggle to get media coverage because political reporting is still largely male-dominated. However, one opportunity lies in digital media integration, social media platforms linked to radio and TV stations can be used to amplify women's voices without the constraints of traditional broadcasting structures.

Respondent (Electoral Officer) highlighted that the biggest barrier remains societal norms that discourage women from taking leadership positions. This indirectly affects media representation, as broadcasters reflect the biases of their audience. However, the media can play a transformative role by actively countering these biases instead of reinforcing them. One

opportunity is for media houses to introduce dedicated political programs focused on women in governance, ensuring consistent visibility beyond election periods.

Respondent (Woman Voter) elucidated that one challenge is that many women still do not feel confident enough to engage in political discussions, even when the media provides platforms. Some women hesitate to call into radio shows or participate in debates because they fear backlash or intimidation. A possible solution is for media organisations to create more women-friendly political discussions where female voices are encouraged and protected from hostility.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that women were significantly underrepresented in broadcast media coverage during the 2023 general election in Rivers State, as female politicians received limited airtime and were often portrayed through gendered stereotypes rather than as serious political contenders. The relevance of the related studies to the findings of this research is evident in how Adeniran (2020) highlighted the underrepresentation of female politicians in Nigerian media, which aligns with the finding that women received limited airtime and were often portrayed through gendered stereotypes during the 2023 general election in Rivers State. The theory supports the finding by explaining how media framing and agenda-setting contribute to the underrepresentation of female politicians, reinforcing gender stereotypes that limit women's visibility and credibility in political discourse. The finding, which highlights the underrepresentation of female politicians in broadcast media, implies that persistent gender biases in political reporting may continue to discourage women from actively participating in electoral contests, reinforcing existing disparities in political leadership.

The study revealed that while radio and television played a crucial role in voter education and mobilisation, their influence on women's political participation was constrained by accessibility issues, male-dominated political discourse, and a lack of targeted programming addressing barriers faced by female politicians and voters. Similarly, Bello and Olayemi (2021) demonstrated that community radio played a role in political mobilization but was not fully effective in driving women's participation, supporting this study's finding that while broadcast media contributed to voter education, its impact was limited by accessibility issues and male-dominated discourse. The theory aligns with the second finding by demonstrating that while broadcast media can educate and mobilise voters, structural biases and accessibility barriers can diminish its effectiveness in fostering women's political participation. The second finding, which reveals the limited impact of broadcast media on women's political participation due to accessibility issues and male-dominated discourse, suggests that without deliberate efforts to create more inclusive and targeted media content, women's engagement in the electoral process may remain marginal, affecting overall democratic representation.

The study identified key challenges to gender-inclusive political communication, including financial constraints, gender biases within media organisations, and societal norms discouraging women's political involvement, though opportunities exist for improvement through policy-driven media reforms, digital media integration, and dedicated programming that amplifies female political voices. Okeke (2022) examined the intersection of media coverage and societal norms in shaping women's political aspirations, reinforcing this study's conclusion that

financial constraints, gender biases, and cultural expectations hindered women's political engagement, though media reforms and targeted programming present opportunities for improvement. Furthermore, the theory justifies the finding by highlighting how systemic media biases and societal norms interact to create challenges for women in politics, while also suggesting that strategic media interventions, such as policy reforms and gender-inclusive programming can help mitigate these barriers and promote equitable representation. The finding, which identifies financial constraints, media biases, and societal norms as barriers to gender-inclusive political communication, implies that unless structural reforms and supportive policies are implemented, female politicians and voters will continue to face significant challenges in accessing and influencing political discourse, ultimately limiting their contributions to governance and decision-making processes.

Conclusion

This study concluded that the underrepresentation of female politicians in broadcast media during the 2023 general election in Rivers State underscores the persistent gender bias in political reporting, highlighting the need for more inclusive media policies and equitable airtime allocation to ensure balanced representation.

The study established that the limited impact of broadcast media on women's political participation due to accessibility challenges and male-dominated narratives emphasizes the necessity for targeted programming and gender-sensitive content that actively encourages women's engagement in electoral processes.

In conclusion, the challenges of financial constraints, media biases, and societal norms in restricting women's political communication demonstrate the urgent need for media reforms, increased support for female politicians and strategic advocacy to foster a more gender-inclusive political landscape.

This study contributes to knowledge by providing empirical insights into the role of broadcast media in shaping women's political participation during the 2023 general election in Rivers State, Nigeria. Unlike previous studies that focused broadly on media and gender representation, this research specifically examines how radio and television influenced women's engagement in the electoral process, highlighting the challenges of underrepresentation, accessibility, and societal biases. It further expands the discourse on gender-inclusive political communication by identifying key structural barriers, such as financial constraints and media biases that limit female politicians' visibility and voter participation. Additionally, the study offers practical recommendations for policymakers, media practitioners, and advocacy groups to foster a more equitable media landscape that encourages women's involvement in governance. By bridging gaps in existing literature, this research serves as a valuable resource for future studies on media, gender and political participation in Nigeria and beyond.

Recommendations

In view of the findings from the work, the following recommendations have been made.

- 1) Media organisations should implement gender-sensitive policies to ensure equitable airtime and balanced representation of female politicians in political reporting.
- 2) Broadcast media should develop targeted programs that actively encourage women's political participation by addressing accessibility challenges and promoting gender-inclusive discussions.

- 3) Policymakers and media regulators should introduce reforms that provide financial support, reduce media biases, and challenge societal norms that hinder women's political engagement.

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