# NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF WOMEN IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *THE SUN* AND*THE NATION*

**JUDE OGBODO**
Department of Mass Communication
Ebonyi State University
Abakaliki

## ABSTRACT

This study examined Newspaper Coverage of Women in Politics in Nigeria. Using content analysis, 28 editions of two national dailies:The Sun and The Nation were analyzed. It was found that the coverage of women was very low by the newspapers. Placement of stories about women was mostly in the inside pages, an indication that they were not fairly reported. Most of the time, women were seen and not heard in the newspapers. Based on the findings, the researcher recommendsthat the Nigerian Union of Journalists should re-define news values and the code of ethics of journalists to curtail the commodiftcation or commercialization of news which has led to this gender bias coverage. Media operators should apply the tenets of social responsibility theory. Also, Government was tasked to match words with action by removing all clogs that scare women aware from active politics.

**Keywords: Newspaper, Coverage, Women in politics.**

## Introduction

> A content analysis of mainstream media in Nigeria reveals one dominant orientation: women are largely seen and not hear. Their faces adorn newspapers. However, on important national and international issues, they fade out. Even when the news is about them, the story only gains real prominence if there is a male authority figureor newsmaker on the scene (Anyanwu, 2001:2).

The above view no doubt gives the picture of gender disparity in political participation and media reportage of women m Nigeria. If women are merely used to sellnewspapers as Anyanwu asserts then there is a big problem. From bedroom to boardroom and to the political sphere, many women have withdrawn or retired to their enclaves as many of them could not withstand the higgledy-piggledy that characterizes the Nigerian politics.

According to Ajao (2011), a feminist blogger of the "Gender and Me" fame, “during the last parliamentary term, only 7.3% of the representatives in Nigeria's upper and lower houses were women”. In 2011, 200 out of 2,400 (8.35%) candidates for the House of Representatives and 80 out of 720 (11.11%) candidates for the Senate were women. Over all, 909 out of 10,037 (9.06%) candidates for all elective positions were women. These positions include the presidency, governorship and parliamentary seats. There has been an overall regression in women's representation in political decision-making positions. For instance, seven out of 109 (6.42%) senators were elected in 2011 compared to 9 (10%) in 2007. While only 12 out of 360 (3.33%) members of the Houseof Representatives are women, down from 26 in 2007.

Ajao's revelation gives an overview of the woes of women in Nigeria. She said that those religious misconceptions and rigid mindsets about women roles, their lack of resources to run campaigns, and political violence work against their full participation in electoral processes.

Often times, analysts point to the fact that women are partly the reason for their unending woes in political participation. Even with the free2run initiative which has been adopted by most political parties in the country, some of them are still hiding and battling with their inferiority complex.

Sad to say, a recent survey conducted by the Independent Journalism Centre (IJC) in Lagos in conjunction with the Panos Institute of Washington and the Centre for War, Peace and New Media of New York, revealed that 80% of practising journalists in Nigeria are males. The domination of the news media by men and the preponderance of male perspective in the reporting of news have also brought about a situation where there is a little focus on the participation of women in the political and economic spheres of the country. Where women issues are covered by the media, they are treated from the male perspective (Anyanwu, 2011).

This is not to conclude that women, especially those in politics in Nigeria have not been given any attention in the media. The fact remains that there has been a pre-mediated skewed reportage of women in politics in Nigeria despite various attempts by some notable women politicians in Nigeria (Ogbodo, 2012).

For instance, on the 13$^{th}$ of June 1 985, the Federal Government signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).Subsequently, Federal Government began to initiate policies and programmes aimed at improving women's lives. This began with the emergence of Better Life forRural Women (BLRW) championed by the late Mrs. Maryam Babangida, Family Support Programme(FSP) by Mariam Abacha; the Ministry of Women Affairs overseen by the late Mrs Stella Obasanjo (Attoe, 2002). As if the above programmes were not enough, the present administration has also initiated the Women 4 Change andDevelopment Initiative (W4CDI) pioneered and championed byPatience Jonathan, the President's wife, as her pet project.

CEDAW, according to Njoba (2012:62) guarantees among other things "the right tooccupy public post as well as exercise all public functions at all levels of government." As a follow up to women empowerment, the Obasanjo administration in 1999, approved "The National Policy on Women which among other things requires an affirmation (sic) action of at least 30% (sic) representation of women in both elective and appointive positions".

Possibly, women are scared of the political heat and the power of the unknown, hence the diversity of their dwindling political fortunes. Perhaps, Obasanjo (2002) was aware of this in his assertion that: "We fight and sometimes shed blood to achieve and retain political power because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for too long been the gateway to the economic kingdom".

Needless saying that naturally, womenhardly withstand anything that could be a threatto their lives. However, many years ago, women in Nigeria did something remarkable.That a woman made news in the early years of media development in the country was in itself news. Like "man bites dog", "womanstrips in protest against taxes": it had to be that unusual to attract news coverage.So, in the colonial era, women resorted to doing shocking things to grab media attention. In the case of Aba Women riots of 1929, it took bands of angry women rioting and chasing the colonial government officials there into hiding. This made news in the conservative national dailies. But those days are gone. That genre of women had all but disappeared. In their place have come a brand of new women doused, softened by education, modernity (Anyanwu, 2001).

To say that low women participation in politics in Nigeria is the bane of our developmental travail is to say the obvious. Commercialization of news and what Nzegwu (2000) argued convincingly as military incursion into Nigerian politics were very much on hand to interrupt women advancement in politics. In his exact words:

> Under past military regimes, women were hardly appointed to significant positions of leadership nor were

> they members of the National Armed Forces Ruling Council... As a matter of fact the only major public role reserved for women was housewives.

To worsen the whole situation, the National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) has continued to agitate for good governance and the 35% affirmative action, but only few female journalists care about covering events of their fellow women. All of them go for newsmakers who are predominantly men.

**Statement of the Problem**

"If you empower a man, you have just empowered one person, but if you empower a woman, you have empowered a nation" (Anonymous). Nowadays news commodification or commercialization has taken the psyche of most media owners so much that only those who pay could be heard. Women belong to the poorest of the society.Some analysts have also said that in Nigerian newspapers, women are seenand not heard. How true are these statements? It is against this backdrop that the researcher sought to objectively determine the level of attention, coverage or reportage given to Nigerian women, especially those at different political positions by Nigerian national dailies.

**Objectives of the Study**

i. To determine the level of coverage of Nigerian women in politics by the selectednewspapers,
ii. To identify the prominence attached to women in politics vis-a-vis theplacement of their stories in Nigerian newspapers.
iii. To determine the frequency of coverage of women in politics by the newspapers
iv. To determine how the newspapers portray women in politics.

**Research Questions**

In line with the objectives of the study, the following research questions were posed:

i. What is the level of coverage of Nigerian women in politics, by Nigeriannewspapers?
ii. What is the prominence attached to women in politics vis-a-vis the placementof their stories in Nigerian newspapers?
iii. What is the frequency of coverage of Nigerian women in politics by the newspapers?
iv. How are women in politics portrayed in Nigerian newspapers?

**Significance of the Study**

Without mincing words, this study will bebeneficial to policy makers, media managers,United Nations, and the Ministry of Women Affairs. Itwill also be an added literature to the already existing available literature in this area of study.

**Conceptual Framework**

**Newspapers' portrayal of women in politics in Nigeria: Where the pendulum swings**

Thomas Jefferson as American President once said he would rather have newspaper without government than government without the newspaper if it were left for him to choose. In the same vein, one-time French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, who nearly conquered the whole ofEurope once, said he would prefer to fight a battalion of soldiers than face the attack of a single newspaper.

In some places, the mass media have succeeded in carving niches for themselves so much in consonance with the Marshal Mcluhan "the medium is the message" (1966). Because of the credibility people attach to media messages, media managers and operators are often warned to be careful not to

misinform the people, especially those whose minds are susceptible to misinformation. Some people may not havethe opportunity or need of confirming media contents; and they regard the message as true.

In their study, "Mass Media Influence on Discrimination and Violence against Women in Delta State, Nigeria" Ezeocha and Mojaye (2011) sought to know among other things, the ways media influence discrimination against women in Delta State. They found that mass media expose women to the various areas in which they are discriminated against by their male counterparts. They believed that the fight against poor representation of women have been futile in the absence of the media. This, in a way is comparable to Anyanwu (2011:2) that:

> Media may have its major chunks of shortcomings in promoting gender equity, but the fact remains that women generally could have become a forgotten specie if the media were not there

In a related study, Kate Azuka Omenugha in a research published online by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) entitled "Power, Media and Gender in Nigeria (2003), painted the portrayal of Nigerian women in the media as biased. She says:

> The media in Nigeria seem to maintain the status-quo through excluding women, giving them little voice, demeaning them throughvarious forms of stereotypes and increasing their vumerability. In theseways, they contribute in trapping women in the vicious cycle of poverty.

According to Omenugha (2003), news values as currently applied in Nigeria thrive onprominence, a situation that further marginalizes women. To her, women who make newsdo so as appendages of the men in power. The vicarious recognition of these womenmerely contributes to the glory of the men behind them. When women make news in theirown capacity, they are often portrayed as victims or criminals.In fact, the foregoing clearly indicates poor attention to women in Nigeriannewspapers and the media in general except in cases where their beautiful faces are used to enhance sale.Omenugha (2003) buttresses Mazrui (1991:2) in his published Guardian Lecture entitled "The Black Women and the Problem of Gender: Trials, Triumphs and Challenges", in which he said:

> A woman can be at the centre without being empowered, a woman can be liberated without being either centred or empowered...the strategy of redemption needs to go beyond liberation and beyond centeringtowards genuine power-sharing between the two halves of the blackworld, male and female... In real life, motherhood leaves the Africanwomen at the centre but not necessarily in power.

**Theoretical Underpinning**

This study is anchored on the social responsibility theory of the press. This is the offshoot of the libertarian theory of the press. It is a response to the perceived impasse of classical liberalism in the twentieth century. According to Wogu (2008), the socialresponsibility theory of the presspresupposes that freedom is concomitant with obligations.It owes its origin to the 1947 Hutchin's Commission in the United States of America. Women in politics deserve equal treatment with their men counterparts. This

theory stresses the need for the press to reciprocate this gesture (freedom) given to it by carrying everybody along irrespective of gender, creed, ethnic or political background.

**Methodology**

This study used the content analysis research method. A study such as this "Nigerian newspapers coverage of women in politics: Study of the Sun and the Nation"cannot be effectively studied without a design like contentanalysis. Content analysis is built on the core questions raised by Harol Laswell: "Who says what, to which channel, to whom, and with what effect"

All the above point to the fact that newspaper contents can be better studied using content analysis to measure, summarize, using scientific method paying more attention to objectivity and intersubjectivity to enable its validity, generalizability and replicability.

**Population of the Study**

The population of study consists of two newspapers, the Sun and the Nation.

**Sample Size**

From seven hundred and thirty editions of the Daily Sun and the Nation from April 2011 to April 2012, the researcher selected 14 editions each from the newspapers, making it 28 editions in all, using the simple random sampling method.

**Measuring Instrument**

The best instrument for this study is coding. The researcher coded every material on women in politics, laying emphasis on: depth of story, placement of story, frequency of story, direction of story, nature of story, source of story and subject matter as published in the sampled papers.

**Validity/Reliability of Instrument**

Intercoder reliability was used to validate the coding sheet to know the level of agreement between the two coders. To ensure objectivity, assistance of a check coder was enlisted. Subsequently, inter-coding agreement took place in order to test the reliability of the coding technique. It has 86% agreement.

**Method of Data Analysis**

This research adopted simple percentages to do the analysis. The issues in the newspapers were counted and their percentages worked out and presented as follows.

**Table 1: Depth of Story**

| **Inches** | **The Sun** | **The Nation** | **Total /%** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1-10 inches | 12 | 25 | 37(71.2%) |
| 11-20 inches | 06 | 07 | 13(25%) |
| 21-30 inches | 01 | 00 | 01 (1.9%) |
| 3 1 and above | 00 | 01 | 01 (1.9%) |
| **Total** | **19** | **33** | **52(100%)** |

**Source:** (Field work, 2012).

Table (1) above shows that 71.2% of all coverage on women issues occupied between 1 -10 inches, 25% of all the stories appeared between 11-20 inches; 1.9% represents the stories that appeared between 21-30 inches and 31 and above inches respectively.

**Table 2: Placement/prominence of story**

| **Position** | **The Sun** | **The Nation** | **Total/ %** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Front page | 04 | 09 | 13(25%) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Inside pages | 13 | 18 | 31(59.6%) |
| Back page | 02 | 06 | 08(15.4%) |
| **Total** | **19** | **13** | **52 (100%)** |

**Source:** Field work, 2012.

Table 2 shows that 25% of the issues on women in politics were on the front page; 59.6% were in the inside pages while 15.4% were the back page.

**Table 3: Frequency per edition**

| **Frequency** | **The Sun** | **The Nation** | **Total /%** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1-10 times | 19 | 33 | 52(100%) |
| 1 1 -20 times | 00 | 00 | 00(--) |
| 2 1-30 times | 00 | 00 | 00(— ) |
| 3 1 and above | 00 | 00 | 00(--) |
| **Total** | **19** | **33** | **52(100%)** |

Source: Field "work, 2012.

Table (3) shows that none of the newspapers published more than 10 stories per edition on issues concerning women in politics.

**Table 4: Direction of Story**

| **Direction** | **The Sun** | **The Nation** | **Total/ %** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Favourable | 08 | 09 | 17(32.7%) |
| Unfavourable | 05 | 15 | 20(38.5%) |
| Neutral | 06 | 09 | 15(28.8%) |
| **Total** | **19** | **33** | **52 (100%)** |

**Source:** Field work, 2012.

Table (4) shows the direction of story, 32.7% of the stories were favourable; 38.5% were unfavourable, while 28.8% were neutral.

**Table 5: Nature of Story**

| **Variables** | **The Sun** | **The Nation** | **Total/ %** |
|---|---|---|---|
| News | 11 | 15 | 26 (50%) |
| Editorial | 00 | 00 | 00 (00) |
| Feature | 03 | 08 | 11 (21.2%) |
| Opinion/article | 00 | 02 | (3.8%) |
| Cartoon/picture | 04 | 07 | 11 (21.2%) |
| Advertori al/supplement | 01 | 01 | 02 (3.8%) |
| **Total** | **19** | **33** | **52 (100°/o)** |

**Source:** Field work, 2012.

The above table (5) shows that 50% of thejssues in the newspapers were news stories, none of them contained editorial; 21.2% were features; 3.8% were opinion articles; 21.2% were cartoons and pictures respectively, while 3.8% were either advertorial or special reports.

**Table 6: Subject Matter**

| **Subject** | **The Sun** | **The Nation** | **Total/ %** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Politics | 04 | 12 | 16(30.8%) |
| Education | 03 | 05 | 08(15.4%) |
| Finance/economic | 0.7 | 11 | 18(34.6%) |
| Human interest | 02 | 04 | 06(11.5%) |
| Law | 00 | 00 | 00 (00%) |
| Others | 03 | 01 | 04 7.7% |
| **Total** | **19** | **33** | **52(100%)** |

**Source:** Field work, 2012.

Table (6) shows that 30.8% of the stories were on politics; 15.4% of the stories were on education; 34.6% were on either finance on economy, 11.5% were human interest stories, none was on law while other stories outside the above subject matter were 7.7%.

**Table 7: Source of Story**

| **Source** | **The Sun** | **The Nation** | **Total /%** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 11 | 21 | 32(61.5%) |
| Female | 05 | 07 | 12(23.1%) |
| Undecided | 03 | 05 | 08(15.4%) |
| Total | 19 | 33 | 52(100%) |

Source: Field work, 2012.

Table (7) shows that 61.5% of the story source came from male, 23.1% were females while 15.4% were contributed by unknown sources.

**Discussion**

Research Question 1

The researcher investigated the level of coverage of women in politics by Nigerian newspapers. The answer to this question is contained in table 1. The study revealed that women in politics were poorly reported as none of the stories about them went beyond 10 inches. Again, when they are covered, the space given to the coverage is usually very minimal.

As it concerns Research Question 2, which is on the placement of story, table (2) revealed that it is only in rare case that women in politics in Nigeria have their stories or issues on the front page. Most of their issues appear in the inside pages.The knowledge of journalism tells one that stories placed on the front and back pages are those that sell the papers. This implies that the prominence attached to a newsmaker is the driven force behind where his picture or story is placed. The implication of this is that women are under-reported by Nigerian newspapers. This result is in line with the finding of Ezeocha and Mojaye (2011) that women were not given equal treatment with their men counterparts. Since news is now a rare commodity, poor women cannot buy it.

But table (6) vindicates men who are often accused of sidelining women. This table shows that more men write or report women in politics and not the opposite. The implicationis that women often contribute to their poor reportage. This reinforces the assertion by Anyanwu (2010) that “even influential women journalists stay away from coverage of women in politics”.

A more disappointing revelation comes from table (3), Research question 3. It sought to know the frequency of coverage of women in politics by these newspapers. It was found that in all editions, none of the newspapers published more than 10 times on issues relating to women in politics. This result implies that women have suffered poor coverage. Nigerian women constitute 33% of President Goodluck

Jonathan's cabinet but their stories are treated with levity, one with less attention unless the story is about scandal.

Research question 4 was answered in table (4). It revealed that majority of the reports about women were negative (unfavourable). This reinforces the finding of Omenugha (2005) that "when women make news in their own capacity, they are often portrayed as victims or criminals". The skewed reportage of women in politics may not be unconnected with stereotypes against them.

**Conclusion**

This study analysed the newspaper coverage of women in politics in Nigeria. Two national dailies were used for the analysis. The whole exercise revealed that women generally and women in politics in Nigeria particularly have been marginalize in terms of coverage of their activities by the newspapers. Most often, their prestige is used to sell newspaper while little or no space would beused to hear what they have to say. Thissingular act is as a result of news commodification as media operators do not pay good atteniibn to what used to be news values.

To worsen the situation, women journalists constitute just a small percentage of reporters of issues of women in politics. This research should serves as a wakeup call to NAWOJ. Nigerian women in politics have also been badly portrayed. Those who venture into politics have not had it fairly. Some of them have withdrawn as a result of this.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Nigerian Union of Journalists, Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria and other relevant institutions should review the code of ethics of journalists in the country to redefine news values. The main actors irrespective of their gender should be at the epicenter of the news. This can entrench gender fair reportage.
2. Women should rise up above cultural impediments and other surrounding challenges to take their rightful places at various establishments in the government, media houses and others. Women journalists (NAWOJ) should do more than talking and agitating for 35% affirmative action.
3. NAWOJ should institutionalize an annual award for best female reporters on women in politics to encourage more reportage of women.
4. Government should in conjunction with the media intensify the campaign on*free2run* initiative. All clogs that impede active women participation inpolitics should beremoved. Hooliganism, thuggery and violence in politics which frighten women off politics should stop.

**REFERENCES**

Ajao, T. (2011).*Nigerian elections reflect slow progress for women.* Available @ www.free2run.net.

Anyanwu, C. (2001). In Nigerian newspapers, women are seen, not heard. In *Womenand journalism: International perspectives.* Harvard: Nieman Foundations.

Attoe, E.A. (2012). *Nigeria: problems militating against women in politics.* Retrieved from www.vouropinioncounts. June 12, 2012.

Ezeocha, J.C. and Mojaye, E.M. (2011). Mass media influence on discrimination and violence against women in Delta State, Nigeria. In Mojaye, E.M. and Imoh G.O. (eds) *Journal of Communication and Media Research* (Vol. 3 No. 1). Abraka: Delmas Communication Ltd.

Lasswell, H.D. (1948). The structure and function of communication in society. In W. Schramm and D.F. Roberts (eds.), *The process and effects of mass communication,* Urbana, University of Illinois Press.

Mazrui, A. (1991). The black women and the problem of gender: trials, triumphs and challenges. A paper presented at Guardian Lecture.

Ndolo, I.S. (2005). *Mass media and society,* Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.

Nwodu, L.C. (2004). *Research in communication and other behavioural sciences -principles, methods and issues.*Enugu: Rhyce Kerex publishers.

Nzegwu, N. (2000). *African women and the fire dance: West African Review* 2.http:// wwwicaap.org/iuicodeAccessed (May 10, 2012).

Ogbodo, J. (2012). *Repositioning the battered image of Nigerian women* (unpublished)

Ohaja, E.U. (2003). *Mass communication research and project report writing*. Lagos: John Letterman Ltd.

Omenugha, K.A, (2005). *Poverty, media and gender in Nigeria.*An article published online by world association on for christian communication (WACC).

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (7lh Edition). Oxford University Press.

Wogu, J.O. (2008). *Introduction to mass communication theories.*Enugu: University of Nigeria Press Ltd.