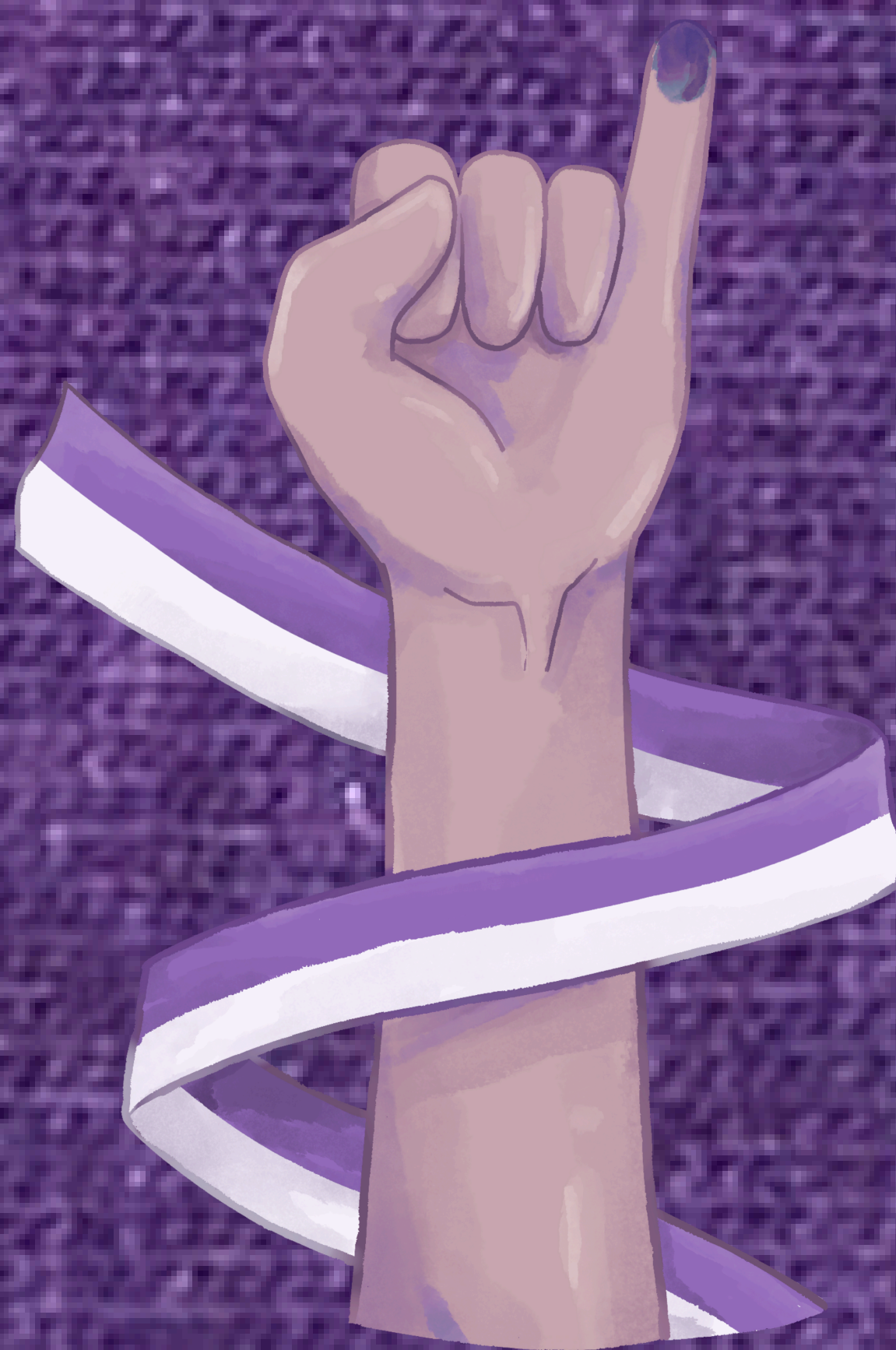




# Policy Brief: Making a Democratic Nigeria Work for Women

**Naija Feminists Media**



July 2025

<b>Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Problem Statement</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Contributors</b>	<b>21</b>



# Executive Summary

Nigeria's democracy is often described as a democracy which fails to serve its women, who experience disproportionately worse conditions than men and remain largely excluded from political power and decision-making.

This exclusion is rooted in an entrenched patriarchal society, intensified by a complicit media, weak institutions, and a political landscape marred by corruption, bribery, intimidation, and divisive ethnic/religious sentiments. Women face significant cultural and religious biases, limited access to decision-making forums due to inconvenient scheduling, and even a lack of support from other women.

To address these systemic issues, a comprehensive approach is needed. Key recommendations include overhauling the media's portrayal of women, implementing affirmative action and reserved seats for women in politics, fostering a systemic transformation that separates personal biases from governance, and actively empowering women through financial support, political education, and mentorship.

Furthermore, there must be a profound shift in mindset across society to prioritise and support women in leadership roles, recognising their capacity and essential contribution to a truly democratic and equitable Nigeria.

# Introduction

Democracy Day in Nigeria typically centres conversations on male leadership, overlooking the challenges faced by women and girls. This policy brief addresses the critical question of ensuring that political power and participation are not exclusively male-centric, advocating for meaningful involvement of Nigerian women who are also citizens.

The current state of democracy in Nigeria is contentious, with some experts doubting its genuine practice and labelling it a democracy, where the ability to spend money can secure an election win. This situation highlights the urgency of making democracy truly women-friendly.



# Problem Statement

Nigeria's democratic system is fundamentally flawed and currently fails to empower women adequately. Several intertwined factors contribute to this:

- **Pervasive Patriarchy and Media Complicity:** Nigerian society is deeply patriarchal, with the media actively contributing to the marginalisation of women in politics. The media often misrepresents women, preferring to use unflattering images or sensationalise frivolities rather than focusing on their political platforms and qualifications. This shapes a negative public narrative, hindering women's political aspirations. Furthermore, media houses are predominantly male-dominated, limiting women's influence at management and decision-making levels.

- **Corrupted Electoral Process:** The concept of democracy is prevalent, where financial influence can sway elections, indicating a severe lack of values and morals. Instances of election rigging are facilitated by the populace's chop I chop mentality, and intimidation tactics, such as discouraging specific ethnic groups from voting, fosters political apathy.
- **Weak Institutions and Political Parties:** Critical institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) are perceived as weak, enabling exploitation by those in power. Political parties make the problem worse by allowing candidates to buy tickets without proper scrutiny, leading to a limited choice for voters.



- **Cultural, Religious, and Gender Biases:** Deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms often portray politics as a male domain, leading to the demonisation of women who contest elections. Women candidates face inappropriate questions about their marital status, and even when married, their husbands are often questioned instead of them. This inherent gender bias means that leadership is often solely perceived as male.
- **Exclusion from Decision-Making Spaces:** Women are frequently excluded from crucial political meetings, which are often scheduled at inconvenient times (e.g., late at night or during school pick-up hours), making it difficult for women with domestic responsibilities to attend. Even when present, women are often relegated to supportive roles like mobilisers or dancers, rather than being seen as strategic decision-makers.



- **Lack of Intra-Gender Support and Mentorship:** A significant challenge is the lack of solidarity among women themselves, with some women preferring male authority or exhibiting resentment towards other women in leadership. Some older female politicians are also hesitant to mentor younger women, perpetuating a cycle of limited support.
- **Political Apathy Among Women:** Many women exhibit political apathy, viewing politics as irrelevant to their lives or a dirty game. This disinterest is detrimental, as politics dictates daily life in Nigeria.

# Key Findings

- **Media's Narrative Power:** The media's portrayal significantly influences public perception, often undermining women's credibility and capacity for leadership.
- **Foundation of Democracy is Weak:** The underlying structures of Nigerian democracy are compromised by corruption, lack of institutional integrity, and a disregard for the separation of powers, which creates an uneven playing field for women.
- **Feminist Leadership is Crucial:** Simply having more women in politics is insufficient. There is a critical need for feminist women who possess a deep understanding of gender-specific issues (e.g., marital rape, child marriage, FGM) and are committed to advocating for them effectively.



- Grassroots Engagement is Fundamental: Encouraging women's participation at the local government and youth leadership levels is essential for building a robust pipeline of female leaders.
- Politics is Inescapable: Politics directly impacts every Nigerian's daily life, which emphasises the necessity for active engagement from all women.
- Proactive Engagement and Self-Development: Women aspiring to political leadership must proactively demonstrate their competence, continuously develop themselves, and engage strategically, rather than passively waiting for opportunities.

# Recommendation

To foster a truly democratic Nigeria that genuinely works for women, the following multi-pronged strategies and policy recommendations are crucial:

## Media Reform and Ethical Reporting:

**Promote Responsible Representation:** The media must shift its approach to representing women, focusing on their substantial contributions, political visions, and competence, rather than sensationalism or irrelevant personal details.

**Increase Female Leadership in Media:** Actively promote women to decision-making and management roles within media houses to ensure that narratives are shaped by diverse perspectives and benefit Nigerian women.



## Systemic Overhaul for Inclusivity:

- Advocate for a Systemic Overhaul: Support calls for a fundamental total overhaul of the system to address deeply ingrained cultural and religious biases within political structures. This involves separating personal beliefs from public policymaking.
- Combat Corruption and Intimidation: Strengthen institutions to curb electoral malpractice, bribery, and intimidation tactics that undermine genuine democratic participation.

## Enhance Women's Political Inclusion:

- **Enact Affirmative Action and Reserved Seats:** Lawmakers should pass legislation for affirmative action, such as special seats for women, reserving positions in legislative bodies (e.g., one seat per state for the House of Assembly and Senate). This provides a necessary platform given historical male-dominated practices.
- **Ensure Total Inclusion in Decision-Making:** Women must be at all decision-making tables, as their unique experiences enable them to advocate effectively for gender-specific issues.
- **Implement Flexible Meeting Schedules:** Political meetings should be scheduled at times conducive to women, such as daytime or after traditional work hours, to accommodate their family and domestic responsibilities.



- **Encourage Grassroots Participation:** Political parties should proactively create windows and encourage women to contest local government and youth leadership positions as an entry point into politics.

# Empowerment and Capacity Building for Women:

- Provide Financial Support for Female Candidates: Policies should be implemented to offer financial assistance to women contesting elections, as economic limitations are a major barrier to participation.
- Foster Women-Supporting-Women Networks: Actively encourage and cultivate a culture of solidarity and support among women in politics, overcoming internal conflicts and fostering collaborative mentorship.
- Promote Substance over Spectacle: Women in politics should focus on demonstrating their competence and leadership qualities, showing themselves as persons of substance who can deliver tangible benefits to their communities.



- **Boost Political Education and Engagement:** Encourage women to actively educate themselves about politics through various means, including political dramas, books, NGOs, and forums. Normalise political discourse in everyday conversations.
- **Cultivate Personal Principles and Strategic Focus:** Women should engage in politics with a clear purpose, continuously develop their skills, and be hardworking. They should learn to navigate the complexities of politics strategically, without waiting for free positions or allowing personal issues to derail their political focus.

## Shift in Societal Mindset:

- **Challenge Gender Stereotypes:** Actively challenge the cultural and religious biases that perceive political leadership as exclusively male, fostering a society that values leadership regardless of gender.
- **Adopt a Female-Centred Default:** Encourage a collective mindset where women are the default consideration for leadership roles, actively seeking to push female leaders forward.
- **Promote Collective Responsibility:** Foster a common mindset among all Nigerians that they must work together to strengthen the country's democracy, holding leaders accountable and resisting divisive tactics.



# Conclusion

To achieve a democratic Nigeria that works for women is a monumental, yet indispensable, task. It demands not only comprehensive legislative and systemic reforms but also a shift in society's attitudes towards women in leadership, coupled with women's proactive engagement and self-empowerment.

The challenges are daunting, encompassing media complicity, political corruption, and deeply ingrained cultural biases. However, through concerted efforts in media reform, systemic overhaul, targeted inclusion policies, and robust empowerment initiatives, Nigeria can move towards a future where women's full and meaningful participation in governance is not an aspiration, but a lived reality.

It's not enough to just pave one side (policies for men) or hope that a few brave individuals will jump the gap (women struggling alone). Instead, you need foundational engineering (systemic overhaul), strong supporting pillars (affirmative action and financial empowerment), clear guiding lights (responsible media representation), and active participation from all builders (men and women working together) to ensure the bridge is accessible, safe, and robust enough for everyone to cross, especially women, enabling them to confidently reach the decision-making tables.



# Contributors

Simbiat Bakare

Tinuade Mary, O.

Ms Favour Eboatu

Iwagun Temitope

Omolola Pedro

Kosisochukwu Charity Ani

Aworanti Salvation Grace

Nkechi Igwebiuke

Joy Funmilola Oke