



1916 -2011

Fort Hare Papers

Multidisciplinary journal
of the University of Fort Hare

Volume 17, 2011



University of Fort Hare

Together in Excellence

An appraisal of Nigerian newspapers' coverage of women's participation in the 2007 general elections

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Abstract

The professionalism of media is crucial at all times, especially during election periods, to promote fair, safe and professional media election coverage. It is a truism that the media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy. Discussion of the media's functions usually focus on their "watchdog" role: by unfettered scrutiny and discussion of the successes and failures of governments, the media can inform the public of how effectively its representatives have performed and help to hold them to account. Yet the media can also play a more specific part in enabling full public participation in elections by giving equal coverage to both men and women in politics. The study aimed to ascertain how well Nigerian newspapers cover women's participation in the 2007 general elections. There are many newspapers in Nigeria; however, this study makes use of two national newspapers, as the research is on a national issue. For the purpose of this study, two Nigerian daily newspapers were studied – *Punch* and *Guardian*. For the study period of eight months, 422 stories were gathered, of which only 56 stories were on women's participation. Also, the data analysis indicated that of the 56 news items, 50 (89.3%) were on the inside pages, while the back pages contained the least, 1 (1.8%). The media is encouraged to air their opinions on women's issues, especially when the turnout is as high as witnessed in the last general elections. Editorials allow the newspaper house to share their opinions on national issues; it will be stimulating to perceive different views of women's participation in politics. It will indeed be interesting and different to see editorials on women during elections and on women in general. It is therefore pertinent for media professionals to play their fundamental role in the quest to eradicate gender discrimination of all types.

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Keywords: Elections, Media, Newspaper, Participation, Politics, Women

Introduction

Election is one of the most important pillars of democracy. Indeed, it is a necessary condition for democracy, because it provides the medium for the expression of the core principles and purposes of democracy such as the sovereignty of the citizens, freedom, choice and accountability of political leaders. In order to serve these purposes of democracy, elections must be free and fair. The notion of free and fair election expresses several conditions, including absence of manipulation, violence and fraud, as well as impartiality of election management authority and effective participation by the electorate at all stages of the electoral process. An electoral process involves different stages at which decisions are made and activities are undertaken.

The stages include enactment of electoral laws; establishing electoral management authority and appointing its officials; constituency delineation; party formation and registration; voter registration; nomination of candidates and campaigns; procurement of relevant services and materials; determination of polling centres and provision of polling booths; polling, counting and declaration of results; and determination of election petitions. At all these levels, there must be transparency, fairness, and unhindered participation by every eligible person and group. Any government that emerges from any election that is not free and fair cannot be the true choice of the electorate and therefore represents the usurpation of the sovereignty of the citizens.

Successive elections in Nigeria since the colonial period lacked the essential ingredients of democratic electoral process: transparency, fairness and freeness. This failure is due to several factors: manipulation of the decisions and activities at the various stages of electoral process by the governments and politicians; corruption of officials and electorates, violence during campaigns, polling and collation; rigging through the stuffing, snatching and destruction of ballot boxes.

The general elections for electing the president, vice-president, senators and representatives in the federal bicameral legislature; state

governors, and the legislators in the unicameral legislatures in the respective 36 states of the Federation, were scheduled and conducted on April 14 and 21, 2007. Due to the various adverse political conditions enumerated above, there were concerns about the preparedness of the electoral body to conduct free and fair elections in 2007. Citizens were also concerned about the capacity of the security institutions to ensure a peaceful atmosphere. The avalanche of litigations occasioned by the manipulations of the electoral rules and processes; electoral administration lapses, and election-related campaigns fuelled public apprehension and cynicism. A total of 7 160 candidates participated in the April elections, of whom 628 were women. A breakdown of candidates is given below:

- Out of 25 candidates contested for president's office, only one was a woman;
- Five women contested for the vice-president's office;
- 474 candidates contested for governorship in the 36 states, including 14 women running for governor's office and 21 women running for deputy governor's office;
- 799 candidates contested for Senate; 59 were women;
- 2342 candidates contested for House of Representatives; 150 were women;
- A total of 5647 candidates contested for the positions in the assembly of whom 358 were women.
- Ninety-four women finally emerged as winners: 6 deputy governors, 9 senators, 27 national representatives, and 52 in various state Houses of Assembly. There were also notable increases in the number of women holding cabinet and ministerial positions.
- Although it failed to fulfil its promise of 30 percent of cabinet positions for women, the Yar'Adua government did place 7 women in these high offices (18 percent of the cabinet). The April 2007 elections also saw Nigeria receive its first female Speaker of the House, the Hon. Patricia Olunmi Etteh (<http://www.iri.org> 2007).

Statement of problem

Women attempting to enter into politics in Nigeria face numerous obstacles. Those who have aspired to office must often deal with a lack of funds to run an effective campaign, a discriminative use of party zoning, low education and a slew of cultural and religious barriers. The marginalisation of women in politics is certainly not new to Nigeria, having dated back to colonial times. In fact, women did not gain the right to vote until 1976.

Although there was improvement in the participation of women in the 2007 general elections, in Nigerian politics, sexism has become a major predicament. Women have been politically considered as an endangered species, and their low participation in Nigerian government and politics is often associated with cultural, religious and economic constraints, and male chauvinism (Umechukwu, 2004).

The mass media provide perspectives, shape images of candidates and parties, help highlight issues around which a campaign would develop, and define the unique atmosphere and areas of sensitivity with any particular campaign (Lang and Lang 1999). This research therefore seeks to find out how well Nigerian newspaper covered women's participation in the 2007 general elections. In this study, 'participation' here refers to all women's issues in 2007 elections whose activities and events influenced the electoral process.

Media and elections

Elections can be a key element either in both conflict resolution and conflict escalation. Therefore, free and fair elections are essential for democracy consolidation and conflict prevention. The professionalism of media is crucial during election periods, to promote fair, safe and professional media election coverage (Iwu, 2007). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) supports advocacy to encourage full, fair and efficient disclosure of information to journalists covering the elections; training to enhance professional election reporting; training on the safety of journalists and their right to work without threat; and the production and distribution of election guidelines reflecting principles of professional

reporting during elections, journalists' rights, election processes and safety information, as well as briefing notes on international human rights law with emphasis on freedom of expression.

It is a truism that the media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy. Discussion of the media's functions usually focuses on their 'watchdog' role: by unfettered scrutiny and discussion of the successes and failures of governments, the media can inform the public of how effectively its representatives have performed and help to hold them to account. Yet the media can also play a more specific part in enabling full public participation in elections, not only by reporting on the performance of government, but also in a number of other ways:

1. By educating the voters on how to exercise their democratic rights;
2. By reporting on the development of the election campaign;
3. By providing a platform for the political parties to communicate their message to the electorate;
4. By allowing the parties to debate with each other;
5. By reporting results and monitoring vote counting;
6. By scrutinising the electoral process itself in order to evaluate its fairness, efficiency, and probity.

However,

Studies of media coverage of political campaigns have covered some disturbing trends; journalists function as a pack; there is seldom any really distinctive political reporting during elections. Furthermore, journalists treat fore-runners differently than they do the remainder of the candidate pack. Fore-runners are the objects of closer scrutiny, but those examinations are seldom about issues, it is issue oriented reporting that tends to provoke political interest and public participation. Electoral reporting therefore focuses on personality, a key component of political leadership, but certainly not the only one. (Pettersen and Wilkins 1994:149)

There is a bewildering variety of possible systems for regulating political advertising or free direct access coverage and reporting. This refers to that portion of election reporting that is under the editorial control of the parties or candidates themselves. There may be obligations on some sections of the newspapers to carry such material, and there will almost certainly be conditions that they must abide by if they do.

Research questions

1. What prominence was given to the reports on women's participation in the Nigerian 2007 general elections?
2. What was the volume of coverage given by Nigerian newspapers to female candidates as opposed to their male counterparts?
3. Did *Punch* newspaper show greater commitment to the coverage of women's issues in the 2007 general elections than *Guardian* newspaper, or vice versa?
4. What category of stories has the highest report in the Nigerian newspapers?
5. What slant or tone was used to report women's participation in the 2007 general elections?

Significance of the study

The findings of this study will serve as additional literature on media coverage of political issues. It should also be of immense value to the media, as it will enlighten and educate media professionals on how to play their role in the quest to eradicate gender discrimination of all types, since the media can help to change harmful images and stereotypes.

Although the 1999 Nigerian constitution protects women's rights and grants them equal participation, women often find that their rights are secondary to prevailing traditional and religious laws. This is particularly true in the northern states, where Sharia law is widely practiced.

Women who seek public office find their political rights are sidestepped by political party manipulations of the system. For instance, although some political parties waive the nomination fee for women running for office, party members use this to claim that women lack serious commitment to politics and to their party. Women running for public office are also labelled 'cultural deviants' – they are said to be too assertive and independent to be team players. Opponents also use the power of the press to run smear campaigns against women candidates. They rely on abusive language to publicly demoralise and delegitimise women, ruining their reputations.

Political parties also often rely on the 'indignity clause' of the 1979 constitution to derail women's campaigns. The clause, initially created to provide for more equality in representation, distinguished between the indigenes of a state and the settlers. Therefore, women who marry men from other states and move out of their hometown are discriminated against.

Nigerian women, like many others in Africa, are also hindered by their lack of education, lack of economic independence, and often domestic violence as well. These factors of a lack of skills, financial means or family support combine to derail the campaigns of many women who would participate.

The concept of political participation

Political participation is an essential component of ensuring the stability and legitimacy of every political system. Political participation is one of the fundamental ideas of a democratic society. It is the *sine qua non* of democracy, because it involves a commitment to equal opportunity for men and women to develop their individual capacity (Agbaje, 1999).

Anifowose (2004) defines political participation as voluntary activities such as holding public and party office, attending election campaigns, voting and exposing oneself to political stimuli. Lewu (2005), however, defines political participation as a variety of ways in which people try to exercise influence over the political process.

This encompasses the involvement in decision making by which individuals acting singly or through group organisations' attempts to influence decision making or alter the manner in which power may be distributed and the principles by which it may be exercised in a particular society. Participation involves taking part in an event or activity. In this study, 'participation' refers to women whose activities and events influenced the electoral process either directly or indirectly.

Women and politics

Politics is very important in every human society. According to Omenugha (2007), it is a system of administration that ensures that there is orderliness and development in society. It ensures that human, natural and economic resources are managed by a few people who are versed in the acts of governance, on behalf of the generality of the people. These are, of course, positions of responsibility that confer on the holders certain rights, authorities and privileges above their peers, who willy-nilly have to submit themselves to the authorities of the politicians. In order to take care of all human interests, the two genders are supposed to be fully engaged in politics. The reverse is the case in Nigeria, where the political arena is largely dominated by men, often to the detriment of women. The result is a 'malevolent' militarisation of politics in Nigeria (Alemika and Omotosho, 2008).

Participation in politics refers to different ways in which people exercise their rights over the political process. It is seen as a means to an end, where the end may be referred to as political leadership. The concept of participation lies in the culture of democracy. The first principle of democracy adopted by the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Cairo, 16 September 1997, is stated as being:

a universally recognized ideal as well as a goal, which is based on common values shared by peoples throughout the world community irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic differences. It is thus a basic right of citizenship to be exercised under conditions of freedom, equality, transparency and responsibility, with

due respect for the plurality of views, and the interest of the polity.

This concept affords all human beings the right to share in the making of decisions that affect their lives and that of their community. This right was affirmed by the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women (to promote women's political and economic rights) by the United Nations in 1946. The year 1952 saw the adoption of the Convention on Political Rights of Women world-wide, and in 1967 the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was endorsed. This convention is upheld by all international, regional and national legal instruments that concern children and women, such as the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) and the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. It also includes the National Policy on Women (NPW) adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria in July 2000. With the ratification of CEDAW in 1985, Nigeria undertook to work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls in all fields, whether political, economic, social or cultural. Yet since the adoption of this policy by the government, very little improvement in the exercise of women's rights has been witnessed. The Beijing Conference of 1995 on women articulated some areas considered crucial to the empowerment of women. These include poverty, education, healthcare, violence against women, effects of conflict on women, power-sharing and decision-making mechanisms to promote the advancement of women and girls, as well as management of natural resources and the environment.

The Beijing Platform for Action made concrete plans to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures as one of its strategic objectives. It also affirms the need to increase women's capacity to participate in leadership and decision-making processes and bodies. One of the key initiatives in the ongoing process was the Security Council Resolution 1325, which urged member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international

institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict (UN, 2000As/1325).

On the African continent, the First Regional Conference on the Integration of Women Development was held in Nouakchott, Mauritania in 1977. The second Regional Conference on women took place in Lusaka, Zambia in 1979. The third Conference (1984) was held in Arusha, Tanzania, while the fourth Conference was held in Abuja, Nigeria in 1989. The 1989 conference adopted a declaration on participatory development with the theme 'The Role of Women in Africa in the 1990s'. In Dakar, Senegal, the fifth Regional Conference prepared the Agenda on African issues in 1995, preparatory to the Beijing platform. In 1994, the Pan-African Women's Liberation Organisation (AWLO) was established by the 7th Pan African Congress in Kampala, Uganda. At the national level in Nigeria, several conferences, workshops and organisations have been initiated to foster women's political participation and gender sensitisation.

Agenda-setting theory

According to agenda-setting theory, first developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their Chapel Hill study (Mathews, Lickert and Holiday, 1999), mass media sets the agenda for public opinion by highlighting certain issues. The agenda setting role of the media is expected to explain the mode of operation of the print and broadcast media in Nigeria. The agenda-setting theory states that the media (mainly the news media) tell the audience not so much what to think as what to think about. It says that the agenda of the media is basically the agenda of the people. The media sets an agenda for what the people should think about, and the order of importance of these thoughts. The agenda-setting theory focuses on the cognitive, indirect effects of the mass media. This theory has led mass communications researchers to study how media news coverage affects an issue's salience. Baran and Davis (2003), however, assert that the press does more than bring these issues to a level of political awareness among the public; agenda-setting affirms that the priorities of the press to some degree become the priorities of the public.

According to Mathews, Lickert and Holiday(1999), agenda-setting has three levels, which are:

- **First-level agenda setting:** This is the level most studied by researchers. In this level, the media use objects or issues to influence the public. On this level the media suggest what the public should think about (amount of coverage).
- **Second-level agenda setting:** On this level the media focuses on the characteristics of the objects or issues and suggest how the people should think about the issue. There are two types of attributes: cognitive (substantive, or topics) and affective (evaluative, or positive, negative, neutral). For instance, *the Guardian* newspaper, for over two weeks in 2007 made the abduction of Anambra governor its front-page story with banner headlines; several pages of the paper were devoted to news and issued related to the abduction.
- **Third-level agenda setting:** Agenda setting occurs because the press must be selective in reporting the news. The news outlets, as gatekeepers of information, choose what to report and how to report it. Therefore, that the public knows about the state of affairs at any given time is largely a product of gatekeeping.

In studying the way political campaigns were covered in the media, Shaw and McCombs (1972) in Mathews, Lickert and Holiday (1999) found that the main effect of the news media was to set an agenda, i.e. to tell people not what to think, but what to think about, as opposed to persuasion or attitude change. Agenda-setting is usually referred to as a function of mass media and not a theory (McCombs and Shaw as cited in Mathews, Lickert and Holiday, 1999). This term is used by media theorists to refer to the way in which the media:

- set the order of importance of current issues; and
- set the terms of reference for the debate on those issues.

Grabber further opines that, when the media make events seem important, politicians and the populace are likely to comment about

them and take action. This enhances the widespread belief in the importance of these events and ensures even more public attention on the events.

Description of study population

A population refers to all the cases or individuals that fit a certain specification. The universe in this study refers to Nigerian newspapers. The newspapers include *Punch* newspaper and *Guardian* newspaper.

Sample size

The sample size for this study is 192 issues of the newspapers under study. Twelve (12) issues were selected per month for each newspaper. The 12 issues were arrived at by selecting three papers per week for the study using simple random sampling and multiplying the three papers by four weeks in a month. The 12 issues are multiplied by the eight (8) months under study to arrive at a total of 96 issues per newspaper. 96 issues multiplied by the two newspapers give a total of 192.

The reason for this sample size is to have a manageable sample and to avoid thin data that could mar the analysis, thereby rendering the discussion and conclusion problematic. Below are the issues of the two newspapers studied:

- November 2006 issues: 1, 2, 8, 10, 11, 15, 19, 21, 23, 27, 29, 30
- December 2006 issues: 1, 3, 6, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 27, 28, 30
- January 2007 issues: 1, 5, 10, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 27, 30, 31
- February 2007 issues: 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 14, 19, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28
- March 2007 issues: 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 17, 20, 29, 30
- April 2007 issues: 2, 6, 8, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 27, 28
- May 2007 issues: 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 27, 29, 31
- June 2007 issues: 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 15, 17, 20, 22, 24, 28, 30

The two newspapers used for this study were selected for the following reasons:

1. They are national newspapers owned and run by Nigerians.
2. They appeal to both masses and the political class. Thus, they have a wide readership.
3. They are available in the market nation-wide to all levels of Nigerian consumers.
4. The copies of these newspapers are also available to the researcher for the purpose of this study.
5. They uphold a sound professional/ ethical practice.

Units of analysis

'Unit of analysis' here refers to the actual thing counted when coding, which were tested based on prominence, frequency of reports, quality of reports, tone of reports and source of reports.

Frequency is determined by the degree of the coverage of women in politics as against other women issues and political reports. The newspapers' stance can either be 'favourable', 'unfavourable', or 'neutral'. Favourable reports occur when the news stirs up positive reactions, while unfavourable reports occur when the news content stirs up negative reactions. A neutral report however, occurs when an indifferent reaction is stirred.

Prominence is determined by the placement of each item (in this case, on women's participation in the 2007 general elections) on the pages of the newspapers. Front-page appearance signifies that the news stories are the most important for that day, while those that appear on the back page are regarded as semi-important. The inside story pages are counted as least important stories and they usually appear from page 2 to the last page before the back page.

The source of a report can be 'identified', which refers to sources either within the Nigerian print media industry or news agencies. They could also be 'unidentified', which implies that the stories were written without a byline.

As for the quality of a report, it can be 'very high', which means those reports adjudged by the reporter as excellent in quality with regards to the content and language or presentation of reports. 'High' are those that are seen as very good with regards to the content, language or presentation of reports. 'Low' refers to those reports adjudged to be poor in quality, while 'very low' reports are those with very poor quality with regards to content, language or presentation of reports.

Content categories

Story types: News stories, feature stories, editorial, opinion articles, personality profile, cartoons and pictures

Prominence: Front page, inside page and back page

Quality: Very high, high, low and very low

Slant/ Tone: Favourable, unfavourable and neutral

Frequency of coverage: Women in politics and men in politics

Sources: Identified and unidentified

Intercoder reliability

Cohen Kappa's (2003) reliability test method was adopted for this study to calculate intercoder reliability. Six variables were examined and this includes: prominence, sources, quality, frequency of report, tone of report and story types. The values and the interpretation of the six variables examined are presented as follows:

- Prominence – 0.75, which shows there is substantial agreement between the two coders
- Sources of report – 0.71, which shows there is substantial agreement between the two coders
- Quality of report – 0.88, which shows there is almost perfect agreement between the two ratings
- Tone of report – 0.77, indicating that there is substantial agreement between the two coders
- Frequency of report – 0.84, which shows there is almost perfect agreement between the two ratings
- Story types – 0.85, indicating that there is almost perfect agreement between the two ratings

Instrument of data collection

The instrument of data collection for the study was the coding sheet, which contained the parameters of analysis. The coding sheet is an instrument peculiar to content analysis. Content analysis in respect to this research was designed to compare media content to the real world, i.e. coverage of media in issues related to women participation in the 2007 general elections in Nigeria. This technique is used to obtain data from the manifest content of the newspapers, thereby describing communication content. Content analysis was used in this study to determine the direction, prominence and frequency given to stories concerning women's participation in politics.

Results

192 issues from *Punch* and *Guardian* newspapers were sampled, giving rise to a total of 422 reports or news items on the 2007 general elections. From these reports, *Punch* reported only 23 items on women as opposed to 200 for men, while *Guardian* reported a total of 33 issues on women as opposed to 166 issues reported on men. This implies that for the study period of 8 months (November 2006 – June 2007), Nigerian newspapers reported only 56 issues on women out of 422 issues on the 2007 general elections. However, the ratio of this to the entire body of news reports in the Nigerian press in the study period is not within the scope of this study.

Figure 1: Frequency distribution table on 2007 general election coverage

Newspapers	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Punch</i>	223	53%
<i>Guardian</i>	199	47%
Total	422	100%

A grand total of 422 stories were reported on 2007 general elections by the newspapers, with *Punch* leading with a total of 223 stories.

Figure 2: Coverage of men/ women in the 2007 general elections

Frequency	<i>Punch</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	Total	Percentage
Women in politics	23	33	56	13.3%
Men in politics	200	166	366	86.7%
Total	223	199	422	100%

Although *Punch* had a higher percentage of coverage of the 2007 general elections than *Guardian*, the reverse is the case in terms of coverage on women, as *Punch* reported only 23 issues on women compared to 200 for men. The *Guardian* reported a total of 33 issues on women compared to 166 issues reported on men.

Figure 3: Distribution of women in newspaper articles according to the content categories

Story type	<i>Punch</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	Total	Percentage
News stories	16	21	37	66%
Feature stories	3	9	12	21.4%
Editorial	0	0	0	0%
Opinion articles	0	0	0	0%
Personality profile	3	3	6	10.7%
Cartoon	0	0	0	0%
Pictures	1	0	1	1.7%
Total	23	33	56	100%

As could be deduced from Figure 3, news stories about women were reported most in the Nigerian newspapers, while they did not appear in editorials, opinion articles, cartoons and *Guardian* pictures.

Figure 4: Distribution of women's participation in the 2007 general elections according to slant given

Slant/tone	<i>Punch</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	Total	Percentage
Favourable	10	13	23	41%
Unfavourable	6	5	11	19.6%
Neutral	7	15	22	39.3%
Total	23	33	56	100%

The study also sought to find out the slant or tone of the reportage to the various news stories reported. To do this, the researcher classified reports that present or support the public opinion on the issues raised in the report as 'favourable'. Reports that do not support the public opinion on the issues raised, thereby generating a negative perspective of the issues are classified as 'unfavourable'. The reports that present women and men's participation equally were classified as 'neutral'.

It is also part of the study objective to find out if the Nigerian newspapers attach importance or give prominence to reports on women's participation in the 2007 general elections. To determine this, the researcher classifies the reports importance according to the page they appear. This implies that the stories that appeared on front pages were regarded as very important, followed by those that appeared on back pages, but those that appeared on inside pages were regarded as least important. Again, Figure 6 gives a breakdown of the data thus:

Figure 5: Distribution of women's participation in the 2007 general elections according to prominence

Prominence	<i>Punch</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	Total	Percentage
Front page	3	2	5	8.9%
Inside page	19	31	50	89.3%
Back page	1	0	1	1.8%
Total	23	33	56	100%

The above table shows that there was no story on women's participation in the 2007 general elections on the back page of the *Guardian* newspaper.

Figure 6: Distribution of women's participation in the 2007 general elections according to the quality of report

Quality	<i>Punch</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	Total	Percentage
Very high	1	6	7	12.5%
High	20	27	47	83.9%
Low	2	0	2	3.6%
Very low	0	0	0	0%
Total	23	33	56	100%

This study also attempted to determine the quality of reports on women's participation in the 2007 general elections. The researcher discovered, as can be seen in the above table, that most of the reports were 'high quality' in terms of content and language of presentation.

Discussion

The presentation and analysis of the data above showed in clear terms the level of coverage the Nigerian press gave to women's participation in the 2007 general elections. It is obvious that the Nigerian newspapers did not give women's participation the desired coverage it required as compared their male counterparts. For the study period of eight months, 422 stories were gathered, of which only 56 were on women's participation.

Also, the data indicated that of the 56 news items, 50 (89.3%) were on the inside pages while the back page recorded the least. Moreover, the data also indicated that 11 (19.6%) news items were unfavourable, compared to 23 (41%) that were favourable and 22 (39.3%) that were neutral. This is a pointer to the fact that when women's participation in the 2007 general elections was reported, the reports were mostly favourable.

The quality and depth of the reportage on the basis of content categories left much to be desired, as the two newspapers concentrated more on news stories, giving inadequate coverage to important facts behind the news. Opinion pieces, editorials which could have given the news, facts and figures behind the news were not given adequate attention. They lacked good journalistic analysis. However, on a scale of comparative analysis, *Guardian* is rated highest of the two newspapers under study. It gave the highest quality reports in terms of news stories and features, while *Punch* gave the highest quality report in terms of photo news (see Figure 3).

The presentation and analysis of data aided in answering the research questions and satisfying the objectives of the study. The research questions also guided the direction of the study and the researcher used graphical illustrations to answer the research questions for further clarification.

Conclusion

The findings of this study support the argument that women's participation in the 2007 general elections was not adequately covered when compared to their male counterparts. Although it should be stated at this juncture that the print media have not done an entirely bad job, the researcher deduces that the print media did not give coverage of women's participation high prominence as expected. After all, it was the first time in the history of Nigeria since independence that there would be a large turnout of women participating in elections.

It was also observed that the reports on women in the elections tended to be news stories more than any other genre. Features, which give an in-depth coverage of the news behind the news, were relatively few and this implies that the readers were not given an in-depth analysis of the issues regarding women's participation in the elections.

There was no editorial in either newspaper, which was unexpected as editorials give readers the point of view of the newspaper's house on the issue. This would have been of great relevance as women turned

out en masse to participate in the elections. Therefore, the researcher is of the view that the subject of imbalance in reporting men and women issues should be tackled squarely.

It is noted that the print media in their agenda-setting role place stories that are important on the front page of the newspaper. However, women's participation in the Nigerian 2007 general elections occupied only 8.9% of the front pages. This suggests that the media do not count women's participation in elections as important.

The study also showed that the media, in terms of quality of news stories, are superb. The stories are usually of high and sometimes very high quality in both language and presentation. In addition, most news stories analysed were by in-house sources. This is a welcome development in the print media, showing that the Nigerian media are withdrawing their reliance on foreign news agencies for local stories.

Recommendations

A wise man once said, "The largest room on earth is the room for improvement." For the media to play a positive and meaningful role in reporting women's participation during elections there is a need for reorientation in news coverage and reportage.

Women in politics, whether during election times or not, must be on the agenda of the media coverage of national issues. Encouraging continued discourse in this area should also be a critical part of the curricula of higher institutions of learning. The students should also be trained in gender sensitivity and how the media shape the perception of men and women.

The media is encouraged to air their opinions on women's issues, especially when the turnout is much as witnessed in the 2007 general elections. Editorials allow the newspaper house to share their opinions on national issues; it will be stimulating to perceive different views of women's participation in politics. It will indeed be interesting and different to see editorials on women during elections and on women in general.

It is commendable that the media made sure most news items on women's participation in the 2007 general elections were favourable and of high quality. This should be a continued effort and could be improved on. The media has the power to build or destroy through the power of the pen, words and pictures. Ashimi (2008) asserts that:

The ability of the media to make or mar the image of women in the society cannot be denied or underestimated. In fact, the United Nations document recognizing the media as a critical area for women listed the media as one of the ten obstacles to women advancement.

It should be noted that this study is an extension of sexism or gender inequality: therefore, female stereotypes due to cultural, religious, moral and social beliefs as portrayed in the media should be eradicated, as they keep women's voices out of the media or sometimes, present caricatures of women. Women are not only wives, cooks or mothers, but people with dreams, visions and focus. Their one centred deed in life is not just to have a family like most media tend to portray, but to achieve fulfilment from self-accomplishment and actualisation.

The media is encouraged to continue its vigorous free debate, while tempering passionate reporting with the need to respect the truth and adhere to international standards of journalistic integrity. Media outlets should act in a non-partisan manner and remember their responsibility to provide the most accurate, unbiased information to the Nigerian electorate. To this end, media outlets must take seriously the need to avoid inflaming already tense situations with unbalanced, biased or partisan reporting.

The media must also recognise their role in mobilising women to greater heights and inspire them to achieve more. They should be mobilised to take up greater responsibilities like official appointments and managerial positions, and women should also gain confidence and the qualities required for such positions.

In all, the media must become agenda setters on the issue of women in electioneering and politics as a whole. Media professionals undergo training, workshops, and conferences on how to handle specialised reporting. Reporting women during elections should be a specialised area for the media.

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