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The Impact of ICT-Facilitated Gender- Based Violence on Political Participation and Educational Attainment for Women and Girls

A Data Study of Nigeria

African Cultural Foundation/Organization Vienna

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In the digital age, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionized access to knowledge, civic participation, and economic empowerment. However, they have also given rise to new and insidious forms of gender-based violence, often referred to as ICT-facilitated gender-based violence (ICT-GBV). This form of violence involves the use of digital tools and platforms—such as mobile phones, social media, and messaging applications—to harass, stalk, intimidate, exploit, or harm individuals based on their gender. While ICTs can serve as powerful tools for liberation and inclusion, their weaponization against women and girls has become a major barrier to digital inclusion, education, and political participation.

Defined by UN Women and the Association for Progressive Communications, ICT-GBV includes a broad array of behaviors such as cyberstalking, online harassment, non-consensual image sharing, sextortion, doxing, gendered disinformation, and online surveillance. These forms of abuse not only mirror existing offline inequalities but often amplify them through the anonymity, speed, and reach afforded by digital technologies. Women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities, are disproportionately targeted, facing psychological trauma, reputational damage, economic exclusion, and withdrawal from public and virtual spaces. As a result, the digital environment—intended to be a space for innovation and opportunity—becomes a hostile arena for many women in Nigeria and across the Global South.

This report focuses on Nigeria, where ICT-GBV is becoming increasingly pervasive and is directly undermining women's and girls' capacity to benefit from online education and participate meaningfully in politics. With internet penetration now reaching approximately 45% nationally, stark regional and gender disparities remain. Women in Northern Nigeria face even greater exclusion due to patriarchal norms, limited infrastructure, and low digital literacy. Furthermore, many Nigerian women who do access digital platforms are deterred from engaging due to online harassment, sexual threats, or cyberbullying, which have become common deterrents to their continued presence in digital education platforms and political discourse.

The implications of ICT-GBV are far-reaching. In education, it deters women from enrolling in or completing online courses, with fear of harassment or image-based abuse driving many to withdraw altogether. In politics, ICT-GBV silences female voices, curtails digital campaigning, and discourages participation by subjecting women candidates and public figures to sexualized disinformation and targeted abuse. Notably, high-profile figures such as Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and activists like Aisha Yesufu and Dorothy Njemanze have faced sustained online abuse, further exemplifying how digital spaces in Nigeria are often weaponized to marginalize and silence women.

Despite the growing visibility of these issues, Nigeria's legal and institutional frameworks remain insufficient. While the Cybercrimes Act (2015) criminalizes some forms of online abuse, it lacks explicit provisions on gendered digital violence. Enforcement is weak, reporting mechanisms are underdeveloped, and victims often face stigma or are blamed for their victimization. This institutional vacuum exacerbates a climate of impunity, allowing perpetrators to act without fear of consequences and leaving women with few avenues for redress.

In this context, addressing ICT-GBV is not only a matter of personal safety but a prerequisite for achieving broader goals of gender equality, digital inclusion, and democratic participation. This report explores the forms, prevalence, and impact of ICT-GBV on Nigerian women and girls—particularly with respect to educational attainment and political participation.

Drawing on both quantitative data and qualitative case studies, it also highlights promising interventions such as the World Bank's "Gina Mata, Gina Al-Umma" digital skills program in Northern Nigeria, and the efforts of civil society organizations that are pushing for safer digital environments. Ultimately, the report advocates for a rights-based, gender-sensitive digital policy framework that addresses not only access but safety, inclusion, and empowerment for all women and girls in Nigeria.

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Information and Communication Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (ICT-GBV) refers to any act of gender-based violence that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified through the use of digital technologies, including mobile devices, the internet, social media platforms, messaging applications, and other forms of ICT.

Defined by UN Women and the Association for Progressive Communications, ICT-GBV is a gendered form of abuse that disproportionately affects women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals, mirroring and extending the structural inequalities of offline society into digital spaces. Perpetrators often exploit the anonymity, reach, and speed of technology to harass, threaten, intimidate, or manipulate victims across geographic boundaries, with little accountability.

Definition and Forms

ICT-GBV manifests in a wide range of interconnected forms, many of which may overlap or escalate into offline violence. Key forms include:

1. Cyberstalking

The repeated and deliberate use of digital technologies to monitor, follow, or harass an individual, often causing emotional distress or fear for safety. Cyberstalking frequently targets women in leadership positions, activists, or former intimate partners and may involve the use of spyware or GPS tracking.

2. Online Harassment and Trolling

This includes the use of threatening, degrading, or sexually explicit messages directed at individuals, especially women and gender minorities, via email, social media, or forums. Such harassment is often sustained and coordinated, sometimes involving large-scale attacks (e.g., “dogpiling”) that silence victims through volume and intensity.

3. Non-Consensual Image or Video Sharing

Also known as image-based sexual abuse or "revenge porn," this involves sharing intimate or sexual images without the subject's consent, often as an act of punishment, control, or humiliation. Deepfake technology has exacerbated this by enabling the manipulation of images to falsely depict individuals in compromising situations.

4. Sextortion

A form of sexual exploitation in which perpetrators threaten to release sexual information or images unless the victim complies with demands (often for more images, money, or sexual favors). Victims may be minors or adults, and such acts often involve coercion through hacking or deception.

5. Doxing

The intentional publication of personal, private, or identifying information (such as home addresses, phone numbers, or workplace details) with malicious intent. Doxing can result in threats, stalking, or real-world violence, and is frequently used to intimidate women journalists, political figures, or activists.

6. Gendered Disinformation and Hate Speech

The spread of false or manipulated content, often sexualized, to discredit women in public life or activism. This may include fabricated quotes, fake news stories, or digitally altered images designed to erode credibility or incite public backlash. Hate speech targets women based on gender, sexuality, race, or a combination of identities (intersectionality).

7. Online Surveillance and Control

In abusive relationships, perpetrators may use technology to control a partner's actions, access to communication, or location. This includes reading private messages, restricting internet access, or installing tracking apps. Often invisible, such control contributes to broader patterns of coercive behavior.

8. Impersonation and Identity Theft

Malicious actors may create fake social media profiles or email addresses in the name of their victims to damage reputations, defraud contacts, or engage in sexual solicitation. This is particularly harmful to young women and LGBTQI+ persons whose identities may be weaponized to target them socially or professionally.

ICT-GBV not only causes emotional and psychological harm—including anxiety, depression, PTSD, and social isolation—but also leads to economic and educational exclusion. Victims often withdraw from online platforms, abandon professional opportunities, or disengage from political participation due to fear of continued abuse. In contexts with limited legal protections or gender-sensitive law enforcement, reporting mechanisms are often inadequate, and perpetrators enjoy impunity.

As digital access expands across the Global South, particularly in African contexts, there is an urgent need to recognize and address ICT-facilitated GBV as a serious barrier to gender equality and inclusive digital development.

ICT-facilitated gender-based violence (ICT-GBV) presents a significant barrier to women's and girls' political participation and educational attainment, both by discouraging their active engagement in digital spaces and by reinforcing existing gender inequalities. Online harassment, cyberstalking, and hate speech are commonly deployed against women in politics or public life to discredit, shame, and silence them, often through gendered insults, sexualized disinformation, or threats of violence.

According to research by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women (2016), over 80% of female parliamentarians globally have experienced psychological violence, including online threats, sexist content, and humiliating images, with many indicating that such abuse undermined their ability to carry out their duties effectively and discouraged younger women from pursuing political careers.

In the African context, studies conducted by organizations like the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) and CIPESA highlight how women candidates in countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa routinely face coordinated online attacks during election periods, including doxing and character assassination through manipulated images or fabricated scandals, resulting in reputational damage and withdrawal from public discourse (FEMNET, 2023; CIPESA, 2022). This creates a chilling effect, discouraging women's online political engagement and diminishing their visibility in democratic processes.

Similarly, ICT-GBV undermines women's and girls' educational outcomes by creating hostile digital learning environments and limiting their access to educational content. The rise of online learning platforms, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, exposed many girls to cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and sextortion in virtual classrooms or educational forums. UNESCO (2021) reports that fear of online abuse leads some girls—especially in conservative or rural settings—to avoid digital platforms altogether, thus reducing their participation in e-learning and digital skill-building opportunities that are critical for academic and career advancement.

Victims of image-based abuse, such as non-consensual pornography or sextortion, often experience psychological trauma, social isolation, or school dropout, particularly when content circulates within school or community networks. In Nigeria, for example, qualitative interviews from UNFPA's #BodyRight campaign (2023) revealed that adolescent girls subjected to such abuses were often blamed rather than supported, leading to disengagement from digital spaces and reluctance to seek help.

Moreover, the gender gap in access to ICT resources—fueled by cultural norms, affordability, and digital illiteracy—further compounds the impact, particularly in regions where online education and civic engagement are increasingly mediated through technology. As emphasized by the World Bank (2023) and ITU (2022), addressing ICT-GBV is not only a human rights imperative but also essential for achieving Sustainable Development Goals related to quality education, gender equality, and inclusive institutions.



Nigeria's internet penetration (~45% overall) hides a large gender gap. Only 33% of adult Nigerian women use mobile internet versus 52% of men (businessday.ng). Mobile phone ownership is also lower for women (88%) than men (93%) (businessday.ng). Smartphone ownership shows a 19-point gender gap (32% women vs. 51% men) (businessday.ng). Mobile internet is the primary online gateway used by Nigerians rather than Laptop or Computer use in other countries (businessday.ng).

These gaps are driven by affordability, literacy, and socio-cultural barriers furthermore there is a clear gap between regions in Nigeria. Showing that women in the northern and muslim dominated areas of nigeria have even less access to digital devices than the Southern parts of the country (businessday.ng).

The World Bank's, Digital Development Partnership report from 2023, called "Gina Mata, Gina Al-Umma: A rights based approach to digital skills training for women and girls in FCV settings" training over 1,000 northern Nigerian girls in digital and freelancing skills (blogs.worldbank.org). With funding from the Digital Development Partnership (DDP) and the Human Rights, Inclusion and Empowerment (HRIE) Umbrella Trust Fund, the World Bank launched an inclusive digital skills training initiative in Northern Nigeria titled Gina Mata, Gina Al-Umma—a phrase in Hausa meaning "Build up women, Build the community."

This pilot program adopts a rights-based approach to digital capacity-building, targeting disadvantaged adolescent girls and unemployed women who are particularly vulnerable to unemployment and gender-based violence (GBV). The initiative provides beneficiaries not only with foundational digital and life skills but also with access to digital devices and internet connectivity—tools essential for enhancing socio-economic agency in an increasingly digitized world.

The pilot was implemented across four Northern Nigerian states—Kano, Borno, Gombe, and Jigawa—and is structured around three interlinked pillars: improving instructional capacity and reducing gender bias among educators; engaging and empowering adolescent girls through technology; and creating pathways for online employment tailored to young women.

This multi-dimensional framework explicitly centers principles of non-discrimination, equality, and prioritization of marginalized groups, aligning with global commitments to inclusive digital development. By addressing structural barriers that hinder women's digital participation—such as access, literacy, and socio-cultural norms—the program aims not only to reduce the gender digital divide but also to contribute to broader human capital development, peacebuilding, and resilience.

The initiative underscores the critical need for development interventions to anticipate and mitigate the potential of digital technologies to exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly in post-pandemic recovery contexts.

ICT-Facilitated GBV Trends in Nigerian women increasingly report online abuse. UNFPA Nigeria's Bodyright campaign (June 2023) notes common forms of TFGBV including non-consensual image sharing, doxing, online harassment, sextortion, gendered misinformation, and surveillance nigeria.unfpa.org. Victims face severe offline consequences (fear, trauma, social exclusion) nigeria.unfpa.org. Civil society (e.g. Paradigm Initiative) documents that online gendered harassment is common, especially on social media, but systematically under-reported and under-prosecuted in Nigeria. Female journalists, activists and politicians are often targeted with sexist insults and threats (e.g. Nigeria's female deputy governor and MPs have faced viral smear campaigns and intimidation online). Such abuse deters women from public life and civic engagement.

Legal and Policy Responses: Nigeria's Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 criminalizes some online harms (child pornography, cyberstalking) but requires demonstrating fear of harm, making prosecution difficult nigeria.unfpa.org. In 2024 the Act was amended to address general cybercrimes, but has still been used to intimidate critics. There is no specific law defining technology-facilitated GBV in Nigeria. The federal government has instituted an SGBV Response Unit and drafted action plans, but enforcement is weak nigeria.unfpa.org. The 2023 Bodyright initiative (UNFPA) and civil society campaigns (e.g. "Stop the Hate on Twitter") aim to raise awareness of online GBV and promote digital safety.

Impacts on Political Participation: Women's political participation in Nigeria is already low (women hold ~9% of National Assembly seats). TFGBV exacerbates this: female candidates and office-holders report pervasive online insults and defamation, often discouraging others from running.

For example, during elections women have been taunted with sexist memes and accused of immoral behavior on social media. Such abuse undermines women's credibility and silences their voices. (Globally, women politicians routinely face online gendered slurs that focus on appearance or alleged moral failings ([isdglobal.org](https://www.isdglobal.org/).)

In Nigeria, the lack of safe digital platforms means many women avoid online political debate altogether.

Impacts on Educational Outcomes: Nigeria's gender gap in ICT access also affects girls' learning. Remote schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic largely benefited urban and male students. Girls in poor or rural areas often lacked devices and connectivity. Ongoing TFGBV (e.g. harassment in online classrooms or on forums) can make girls fear using digital tools. UN Women notes that unless girls are educated in digital literacy and online safety, ICT initiatives risk reinforcing existing inequalities.



Nigeria's overall internet penetration remains modest, with roughly 103 million users (45.5% of the population) as of early 2024 ([datareportal.com](#)). Connectivity is mostly via mobile networks: smartphones have become widespread (urban smartphone ownership ~59%, rural ~26% in 2023 ([businessday.ng](#)) and Nigeria saw 142 million mobile internet subscriptions by January 2025 ([businessday.ng](#)). However, a large gender gap persists, for example, only about 20% of Nigerian women use the internet, vs 37% of men ([banyanglobal.com](#)).

Likewise, while over 90% of men and 88% of women own mobile phones, only 34% of women use mobile internet compared to 54% of men ([banyanglobal.com](#)). Overall broadband coverage is improving – reaching 43.5% of the population by March 2024 but access and quality still lag, especially outside cities ([samenacouncil.org](#)).

Internet users (Jan 2024)

103.0 million (45.5% penetration)

Social media users (Jan 2024)

36.7 million; 41.7% were female
([datareportal.com](#))

Gender gap

37.2% of men vs 20.0% of
women use the internet

Smartphones

59% Urban adults vs 26% rural adults had smartphones (2023). Only 29% of Nigerians (58 million people) use the internet regularly, with cost and literacy cited as barriers.

Government policy (the National Digital Economy Strategy 2020–2030) and the National Broadband Plan have set ambitious targets for digital inclusion. Nigeria has now exceeded its earlier 30% broadband penetration goals ([amenacouncil.org](https://www.amenacouncil.org)).

But persistent rural/urban and gender divides remain: for example, 42% of urban Nigerians use the internet versus 22% of rural Nigerians ([banyanglobal.com](https://www.banyanglobal.com)). Ongoing efforts – from school IT labs to rural 4G rollouts – aim to raise nationwide connectivity.



Northern Nigeria suffers the greatest gendered digital divide. Most communities are poorer and more rural, and social norms severely restrict women's internet use. Surveys found that about 60% of Northern Nigerian women lack internet access, and about 55% of men in the North oppose their wives' internet use, with 61% of fathers explicitly discouraging their daughters from using the internet (equalaccess.org).

Literacy and language barriers deepen exclusion as 26% of women cite low literacy as a key barrier to mobile use (banyanglobal.com). For example, only 37% of adolescent girls own mobile phones, versus about 77% of boys in the North of Nigeria, reflecting social and cultural attitudes towards internet usage from girls and boys and reflective of how girls fall behind early.

As a result, female connectivity in northern states is extremely low. Oxford University researchers estimate that over 70% of women in Lagos (South) use the internet, but fewer than 20% do in northern states like Kebbi (sociology.ox.ac.uk).

In practice, most Northern women rely on basic feature phones or have no phone at all. To counter this, targeted programs have emerged like USAID-supported Tech4Families project uses radio dramas and family-group sessions to change attitudes about women using digital tools while the World Bank's new "Gina Mata, Gina Al-Umma" (Building Women, Empowering Communities) initiative has provided digital skills training to about 1,300 young women across six northern states (2023–25)(blogs.worldbank.org; equalaccess.org).

These programs combine ICT training with discussions on online safety and entrepreneurship, aiming to lift norms that keep Northern women offline. With a rights-based approach communities are persuaded to permit the access to the internet for women and girls.

Age and Usage Disparities

Digital access in Nigeria is strongly age-dependent considering that the Nigerian population is very young with a median age of 17.3 therefore internet use is concentrated among youth and young adults. Teenagers and young adolescents in their 20s – especially urban youth – are the most active online, while older generations and especially women over 60 use the internet far less (banyanglobal.com). In particular, elderly women and lower-literate adults are mostly offline. For example, USAID research notes that “older people, especially women over the age of 60, use the internet on a much more limited basis than younger women (banyanglobal.com).

Among adolescents, a steep gender divide emerges with only about 37% of adolescent girls own any mobile phone, compared to 77% of boys (banyanglobal.com). Fewer girls also have access to social media or online learning. To bridge this, programs like Nigeria’s all-girls JETS (Junior Engineers, Technicians & Scientists) STEM clubs have reached hundreds of schoolgirls; one initiative reported 400 girls introduced to STEM through JETS clubs in northern states particularly (blogs.worldbank.org). Such interventions target school-age girls to build skills early. But the gap remains: without intervention, older and rural women tend to stay offline.

	Youth	Very high uptake – e.g. 15–24 year-olds globally now 77% online and in Nigeria nearly all educated youth use mobile internet (ITU estimate).
	Adults	Usage declines with age – only a small minority of Nigerians 55+ go online (banyanglobal.com).
	Adolescents	Girls have markedly lower phone ownership (37%) vs boys (77%), contributing to lower internet use in teen girls (banyanglobal.com).
	Rural vs Urban youth	Even young women in rural areas are less connected than urban peers, due to coverage gaps and household restrictions.

Women and Girls use the internet for a number of different tasks. Usage is strongly concentrated on educational pursuits and a vital tool for educational advancement, similarly to massive open online courses and virtual learning platforms. Additionally, communication and social networking sites like WhatsApp and Facebook are used to maintain family ties. Women in Nigeria also use the internet to seek health information and expand entrepreneurial operations by leveraging e-commerce websites.

Communication and Social Networking

Communication and Social Networking across Nigeria, a significant number of women and girls use the internet primarily for communication purposes. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram are prevalent, facilitating the maintenance of familial and social ties, especially in urban areas. However, in rural regions, limited access to smartphones and internet connectivity restricts this usage.

Educational Pursuits

Educational Pursuits as a vital tool for educational advancement among Nigerian women and girls. They access online courses, educational materials, and e-books to supplement their learning. In Southern Nigeria, where internet penetration is higher, there's a notable engagement with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and virtual learning platforms. Conversely, in Northern Nigeria, socio-cultural constraints and limited infrastructure hinder similar engagement.

Health Information Seeking

Health Information Seeking as adolescent girls, particularly in urban centers like Enugu, utilize the internet to seek information on reproductive health, sexual hygiene, and preventive measures against sexual abuse. The anonymity and privacy offered by online platforms make them a preferred source for sensitive health information ([PubMed](#)).

Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship

Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship and using digital platforms that have opened avenues for Nigerian women to engage in entrepreneurial activities. They leverage social media and e-commerce websites to market products, ranging from handmade crafts to agricultural produce. Additionally, access to mobile banking and online payment systems has facilitated financial transactions, promoting economic independence (africa-womenconference.org)

Political Engagement and Activism.

The internet has become a medium for political expression and activism among Nigerian women. Social media platforms are used to mobilize support, advocate for women's rights, and participate in political discourse. However, online harassment and threats often deter active participation, especially among women in conservative regions. Phys.org

Entertainment and Leisure

Entertainment and Leisure as for many Nigerian women, the internet is a source of entertainment. They engage with content such as music, movies, and literature. Platforms offering e-books have seen higher engagement from women, particularly in genres like romance and thrillers (Worldreader.com).

Community Building and Support Network

Community Building and Support Networks as online platforms provide spaces for Nigerian women to build communities, share experiences, and offer mutual support. This is especially significant for marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, where digital spaces offer a semblance of safety and solidarity. [Teen Vogue](http://TeenVogue)

As access grows, a parallel concern is the safety of women online. Technology-facilitated GBV (harassment, cyberbullying, online stalking, etc.) is widespread in Nigeria. A national survey found that 61% of Nigerians reported experiencing online abuse or harassment (banyanglobal.com).

Young women are particularly vulnerable as a multi-country study including Nigeria found that about 58% of girls and young women (15–25) had been harassed or abused in online spaces (banyanglobal.com). These threats discourage many women from using the internet freely.



Risks to younger women:

Teen girls and women in their 20s, who are the heaviest social media users, often face sexist trolling, unsolicited sexual images, and harassment in comment threads. Many self-censor or avoid online spaces due to fear of abuse banyanglobal.com.



Regional patterns

In urban centers, women frequently report online stalking and bullying on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. In conservative regions, families sometimes cite “online safety” as a reason to limit girls’ internet use, reinforcing the exclusion.

Both government and civil society are increasingly addressing these issues. Digital inclusion programs now often include online safety and rights education. For example, Nigeria’s digital training curricula (such as Tech4Families and GinaMata) incorporate modules on cyber safety and gender rights. Campaigns by NGOs raise awareness of cyber-harassment laws.

Still, experts stress that without stronger legal protections and community dialogues on respectful online behavior, ICT-facilitated GBV will continue to intersect with the digital divide – deterring access especially for the most vulnerable women and girls (banyanglobal.com;blogs.worldbank.org).



The growth of digital learning platforms in Nigeria has created new pathways for women and girls to pursue education beyond the limitations of geography and infrastructure. However, the increasing prevalence of ICT-facilitated gender-based violence (ICT-GBV) has undermined the potential of these platforms to serve as inclusive educational tools.

Women and girls frequently experience harassment, cyberbullying, and other forms of online abuse that directly discourage their participation in virtual learning environments.

1. Safety fears deter e-learning

A key barrier for women is the perceived and real threat of abuse when engaging with digital learning platforms. According to a study by Banyan Global, online harassment and cyberbullying “act as a deterrent to women’s and girls’ technology use” (Banyan Global, 2023). The fear of being targeted by strangers or even known individuals online causes many women to opt out of online courses, digital study groups, or e-learning communities altogether.

This is particularly concerning given that only about 45% of Nigerian women currently have any access to the internet (LSE, 2023). Among this already limited group, many choose not to fully engage in online education for fear of exposure to harassment. As UNFPA–Nigeria notes, “online discrimination, harassment and fear of online abuse” continue to compound the digital gender divide, resulting in a significant reduction in educational opportunities for women and girls (UNFPA Nigeria, 2023).

The psychological toll of anticipated or actual harassment—including anxiety, shame, and social withdrawal—creates an unsafe digital learning environment that prevents women from benefiting equitably from digital education.

2. Harassment drives withdrawal from digital spaces

For many Nigerian women, exposure to online abuse is not a hypothetical concern but a lived experience. A global survey by the Paradigm Initiative, which includes Nigerian respondents, found that 58% of girls and young women had been harassed online. This widespread exposure often leads to self-censorship or complete withdrawal from digital spaces (Paradigm Initiative, 2023). The impact on education is profound: women who might otherwise complete a certification or join a professional learning network increasingly retreat from these opportunities.

In Nigeria, this phenomenon disproportionately affects adolescent girls, many of whom already face structural barriers to education. Once subjected to online shaming, name-calling, or the non-consensual sharing of images, they may disengage entirely from e-learning platforms. This pattern echoes UNFPA Nigeria's warning that the fear and experience of online abuse directly undermine women's participation in digital spaces, including education (UNFPA Nigeria, 2023). As a result, potentially hundreds of thousands of women and girls may abandon digital education, even in cases where access and affordability are not the primary obstacles.

3. Persistent gender gap in digital learning outcomes

For women who manage to participate in online education despite these challenges, the learning experience and outcomes often remain inequitable. Data from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Coursera reveals that only 65% of Nigerian women intend to continue learning exclusively online, compared to 76% of men. Furthermore, only 33% of women reported positive job outcomes from online courses, compared to 42% of their male counterparts (IFC & Coursera, 2023). These disparities are not merely a result of different levels of engagement but reflect a deeper chilling effect caused by ICT-GBV.

In an environment where women are more likely to face harassment or privacy violations, the risk-benefit calculation skews heavily against continued participation. This fear is often exacerbated by the absence of protective policies on many platforms and the limited enforcement of Nigeria's cybercrime laws in cases involving online harassment of women.

In sum, ICT-facilitated GBV plays a critical role in widening the gender gap in online education in Nigeria. While access, affordability, and digital literacy remain core challenges, the under-acknowledged role of online violence—and its psychological and social consequences—demands urgent attention.

Without targeted interventions to make digital spaces safer, equitable access to education in the digital age will remain elusive for millions of Nigerian women and girls.



Digital platforms are increasingly vital for political communication and public participation. However, for Nigerian women in politics and activism, these platforms are double-edged swords—offering visibility and influence on one hand, and exposing them to online violence on the other. The rise of ICT-facilitated gender-based violence (ICT-GBV) has significantly suppressed women's ability to safely participate in political life, both online and offline.

Online harassment marginalizes women in politics. Globally, female politicians face disproportionate digital threats. A 2023 global survey reported that 81.8% of female parliamentarians experienced threats of death, rape, or physical violence via online channels (Premium Times, 2023).

Chatham House (2023) notes that women often reduce or abandon online political engagement in response to such abuse, which diminishes their ability to reach voters and compete effectively in the digital public sphere. This withdrawal reinforces structural inequalities, discouraging younger women from entering politics or speaking publicly.

A chilling environment in Nigeria. Nigeria reflects these global patterns, exacerbated by entrenched patriarchy and institutional neglect. The country ranks near the bottom globally for female legislative representation, with only about 4% of parliamentary seats held by women (International IDEA, 2023).

UNFPA Nigeria (2023) warns that online abuse deters women from civic participation and political discourse. Amnesty International's 2024 survey further identified Nigeria as among the countries with the highest online harassment rates targeting young female activists. Nearly one-third of those surveyed had stopped posting politically online or quit activism altogether due to fear and trauma (Amnesty International, 2024).

In March 2025, the case of **Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan** made national headlines when she publicly accused Senate President Godswill Akpabio of making inappropriate sexual advances toward her. Rather than receiving institutional protection or a fair hearing, Akpoti was summarily suspended from the National Assembly under controversial circumstances.

This action was widely condemned by civil society organizations and women's rights groups, who labeled the suspension a "stunning display of patriarchal impunity" that revealed the **deep-seated gender-based violence and misogyny** within Nigeria's political institutions (CBS News, 2025). Following her suspension, Akpoti faced an onslaught of online abuse, including sexually explicit content, character assassination campaigns, and viral misinformation that sought to delegitimize her credibility and silence her voice.

Coordinated **trolling and digital smear campaigns** created a toxic environment that not only impacted Akpoti's political visibility but also served as a deterrent to other women contemplating entering public service. Although she continues to advocate for women's rights and remains politically active, Akpoti's ordeal has become emblematic of how institutional and digital reprisals converge to suppress women in leadership. Her case continues to be cited by scholars and activists as evidence of systemic ICT-facilitated gender-based violence in Nigerian politics.



Picture: Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan

Damilola Odufuwa and Odunayo Eweniyi, co-founders of the Feminist Coalition, rose to prominence during the 2020 #EndSARS protests by organizing financial and logistical support for protesters across Nigeria. Their visibility as feminist leaders drew admiration globally but also unleashed a torrent of online abuse. Both women were subjected to coordinated doxing efforts, where private personal information was shared online to intimidate them.

They were also **targets of disinformation campaigns that accused them of misusing funds** and undermining traditional gender roles. Sexist and sexualized attacks were a frequent feature of the abuse they received, particularly on Twitter and Instagram, where fake accounts and bot-driven trolling amplified the harassment.

This prolonged digital assault compelled them to **scale back their online engagement and reduced their participation in public activism**. According to Al Jazeera (2023), both women later reported experiencing emotional burnout and expressed concerns about their digital safety, choosing to adopt lower profiles in Nigeria's civil society landscape.



Picture: Damilola Odufuwa and Odunayo Eweniyi for TIME Magazine

Aisha Yesufu, a fearless human rights advocate and co-founder of the **#BringBackOurGirls** movement, has long been a symbol of resilience in Nigeria's civil space. Known for her vocal activism and critical stance on governance, Yesufu has repeatedly been the subject of online threats, religiously charged insults, and misogynistic harassment.

In 2023, **she disclosed in an interview that she had significantly curtailed her online commentary due to threats** made not only against her but also her family. The abuse intensified following her participation in pro-democracy demonstrations and her public criticisms of national leaders. The threats ranged from graphic rape and death threats to deepfake videos and altered images intended to defame her character.

Her experience exemplifies the emotional and psychological toll of ICT-facilitated GBV on outspoken women, particularly those who challenge entrenched power structures. Despite the abuse, Yesufu continues to be active, but she has emphasized the need for stronger protective mechanisms and accountability systems for online violence.



Picture: Aisha Yesufu, co-founder of the #BringBackOurGirls movement

Dorothy Njemanze, a prominent gender rights campaigner and founder of the Dorothy Njemanze Foundation, has faced persistent digital attacks since she began documenting and challenging violence against women in Nigeria. Njemanze's activism has led to several high-profile legal battles, including a landmark ECOWAS court ruling in her favor for state failures to protect her from gender-based violence.

Despite such victories, **she has continued to face digital harassment,** including attempted hacks of her foundation's online platforms, impersonation through fake social media profiles, and orchestrated smear campaigns aimed at undermining her credibility.

In 2023, Njemanze reported feeling increasingly unsafe online, which led her to limit her public-facing activities and avoid certain digital platforms altogether. Her case highlights the long-term vulnerability of women activists to ICT-GBV and the failure of both state and platform-based accountability mechanisms to provide sustained protection. Her story, like those of Akpoti, Yesufu, Odufuwa, and Eweniyi, reinforces the urgent need for legal reforms and digital safety policies that center women's experiences and agency in Nigerian civic life.

These cases demonstrate that the digital space in Nigeria—while theoretically open—remains a dangerous frontier for women challenging gendered power structures. Whether they are parliamentarians or grassroots organizers, women frequently retreat from digital platforms due to fear of harassment, thereby limiting their political visibility and undermining gender equity in governance.

Quantitative effects – suppressed participation. The impact of ICT-GBV is clearly reflected in political statistics. In Nigeria's 2023 elections, only 10% of the 15,336 candidates were women, and the proportion of elected female legislators remains between 3–4% (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023). While these figures also reflect broader structural barriers—such as patriarchal norms, economic exclusion, and party gatekeeping—the increasingly toxic digital environment is a significant additional deterrent. Every woman who witnesses another being attacked online for her views is a potential leader discouraged from speaking up.

The proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has ushered in transformative opportunities for education, political engagement, entrepreneurship, and civic participation. However, the digital realm has also become a site of intensified gender-based violence (GBV), manifesting in new, insidious forms that threaten the safety, dignity, and agency of women and girls. In Nigeria, where digital access is shaped by deep structural inequalities, ICT-facilitated GBV (ICT-GBV) constitutes a major impediment to gender equality and development. This challenge is particularly acute in sectors such as education and politics, where women and girls increasingly rely on digital platforms for participation, yet face disproportionate abuse, harassment, and marginalization.

Despite growing awareness, the legal and institutional response in Nigeria remains fragmented and under-resourced. Existing laws such as the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act of 2015 lack explicit provisions targeting ICT-GBV and are often weaponized to silence dissent rather than protect victims. Furthermore, digital literacy, affordable access, and culturally sensitive interventions remain insufficiently integrated into national policy frameworks. Against this backdrop, the following set of recommendations—divided into Legal and Policy Reform, Education and Digital Literacy, Institutional Strengthening, Platform Accountability, and Community Engagement—are proposed to address ICT-GBV holistically, with the aim of fostering safer, more inclusive digital spaces for Nigerian women and girls.

1. Legal and Policy Reform

- **Enact Specific Legislation on ICT-GBV:** Introduce and pass a comprehensive legal framework that explicitly defines and criminalizes ICT-facilitated gender-based violence. This legislation should include provisions addressing cyberstalking, online harassment, doxing, non-consensual image sharing, sextortion, and disinformation campaigns targeted at women.
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- **Amend Existing Laws:** Update the Cybercrimes Act (2015) to include gender-specific provisions and remove vague language that has enabled the suppression of free expression. Include gender sensitivity training for law enforcement and judicial officials.
 - **Implement National Digital Safety Policy:** Develop a National Digital Safety and Inclusion Strategy aligned with Nigeria's Digital Economy Policy to incorporate protections for women and girls in online spaces.
 - **Ratify and Enforce International Commitments:** Fully domesticate instruments such as the Maputo Protocol, CEDAW, and African Union declarations on digital rights and gender equality.

2. Education and Digital Literacy

- **Integrate Digital Safety in Curricula:** Embed online safety, consent education, and responsible ICT use into secondary and tertiary education curricula, with particular focus on girls.
- **Expand Gender-Responsive Digital Literacy Programs:** Scale up programs such as "Gina Mata, Gina Al-Umma" that combine ICT training with rights education, particularly in underserved northern regions.
- **Promote Safe Learning Platforms:** Invest in secure, moderated e-learning platforms that enable girls to report abuse and receive psychosocial support.

3. Institutional Strengthening and Support Systems

- **Establish ICT-GBV Reporting Mechanisms:** Create nationwide hotlines and online platforms for anonymous reporting of ICT-GBV incidents. Partner with local CSOs to ensure accessibility and trust.
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- **Train Law Enforcement and Judiciary:** Introduce mandatory training modules on ICT-GBV for police officers, prosecutors, and judges. These should include how to collect digital evidence, ensure victim confidentiality, and avoid secondary victimization.
 - **Develop Survivor-Centered Services:** Provide counseling, legal aid, and reintegration services for victims of ICT-GBV, integrated within Nigeria's Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Response Units.

4. Platform Accountability and Private Sector Engagement

- **Hold Social Media Companies Accountable:** Require major platforms operating in Nigeria (e.g., Meta, X, TikTok) to publish regular transparency reports on content moderation and abuse reporting related to gender-based violence.
- **Support Indigenous Innovation:** Encourage the development of Nigerian-owned platforms that prioritize user safety and reflect local norms and languages.
- **Establish Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborate with telecom providers to offer free or subsidized access to safety resources and online counseling services.

5. Community Engagement and Norms Change

- **Engage Traditional and Religious Leaders:** Work with community influencers to challenge harmful norms and promote positive narratives about women's use of technology.
 - **Launch National Awareness Campaigns:** Implement multimedia campaigns that challenge victim-blaming, promote digital respect, and educate users about ICT-GBV.
 - **Empower Male Allies:** Involve boys and men in anti-violence education and digital citizenship programs to promote accountability and behavioral change.
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6. Monitoring, Data Collection, and Research

- **Strengthen Data Systems:** Collect gender-disaggregated data on ICT usage, experiences of online abuse, and outcomes of reporting mechanisms. Ensure that this data informs policymaking.
 - **Support Academic and Civil Society Research:** Fund longitudinal studies on the impact of ICT-GBV on education and political participation. Promote participatory research involving affected communities.
 - **Create Monitoring Dashboards:** Use AI and digital tools to monitor trends in online abuse, detect coordinated attacks on women in public life, and assess the efficacy of policy interventions.
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Conclusion

Addressing ICT-facilitated gender-based violence in Nigeria requires a coordinated, multisectoral response rooted in human rights, gender justice, and digital inclusion. These recommendations, if implemented, offer a strategic roadmap for stakeholders—including government agencies, civil society, educators, private sector actors, and communities—to foster a safer, more empowering digital ecosystem for Nigerian women and girls. In doing so, Nigeria can not only bridge the digital gender divide but also unlock the transformative potential of technology for national development.

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