



IMBALANCED GENDER REPRESENTATION IN CABINETS

Reviewing women in presidential cabinets in the Fourth Republic

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Background to Women in Nigerian Politics	3
Women in Nigerian Cabinets	5
Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 – 2007)	6
Umaru Musa Yar’Adua (2007 – 2010).....	7
Goodluck Jonathan (2010 – 2015)	8
Muhammadu Buhari (2015 – 2023).....	9
Bola Tinubu (2023 – date).....	10
Unpacking trends in cabinet	12
Factors shaping women in cabinet	15
Nominating powers	15
Prominence prior to consideration.....	15
Challenges of women in cabinet	17
Differing images of women in power.....	17
Perception of portfolios.....	17
The Women Affairs Ministry.....	19
Career prospects post-Cabinet.....	19
Conclusion.....	21
References and Reading.....	22
Appendix – Women Ministers, Geo-Political Zones, Portfolio and Level	24

Introduction

For a country with a significant female population, Nigeria has been poor in ensuring gender parity in elected and appointed leadership positions. Since 1979, the country has practiced a presidential form of government, with a devolved form of government across three tiers—federal, state and local levels. Yet, despite the number of elective constituencies available, there has been little to no women elected to these positions. Nigeria has never elected a female president, vice-president or a governor in any of its thirty-six states. Women elected to the national legislature have been a scant percentage in any of the ten constituted sessions of either chamber, with none emerging as president of the senate and a roughly five-month stint for the only woman to emerge speaker of the house of representatives (Polgreen, 2007).

Cabinet positions have often been an interesting and quick way for presidents and parties to address imbalance in the political space. This is because the appointments are at the whim of the president and subject to confirmation by the senate. As a result, an easy assumption would be that politicians, aware of the significant female voting bloc, would utilise the option of naming other women to cabinet. Yet, women representation in cabinet has remained lower than the 35% affirmation that has been cited by different groups. This lack of representation has come with different reasons, but the sad reality is that cabinets have often met the country where it is, instead of leading it where it should be.

This paper overviews the history of political participation in women before reviewing the status of women in previous cabinets. It then highlights factors affecting appointments and challenges for women in post. Nigerian political literature is expanding on the covering the identity-based elements of its politics, but it is yet to properly address the role that cabinet appointments can play in correcting the gender imbalance in political leadership.

Background to Women in Nigerian Politics

Several factors have been put forward as reasons for Nigerian women being denied successes in elected contests, with some ranging from socio-cultural depictions of women not being in leadership roles to the restriction that decades of being denied electoral suffrage has caused. In Nigeria, as with many parts of the world, initial voting franchise was limited to men. In 1923, the Clifford Constitution granted voting powers to adult males who earned a minimum income of £100, were above the age of 21, were British subjects or natives of Nigeria and were residents in Calabar or Lagos for at least one year (Ayoade, 1980). From this initial application we can see that women and younger Nigerians have already been selectively disenfranchised from the electoral process, with mindsets and norms being put in place to relegate them when election discourse is taking place. Furthermore, as will become evident in subsequent sections, the income being stated would prove prohibitive even for younger men – engendering a skewed advantage for older ones.

The next stage in Nigeria's suffrage milestone journey was in 1946 under the Richards Constitution (Ayoade, 1980). The main difference here was not a reduction in age or an accommodation of women, but the reduction in income required to vote – from £100 to £50. The difference was that while £100 was required in minimum income, £50 was required in property. This marks the second constitutional change with these practices put in place. Nigerian women activists lobbied for women to be included in the process and to be given the right to vote and there was progress in batches. In May 1948, a bill to allow for 'every male and female over the age of twenty-one before 24 January 1950' to vote or be voted for was enacted in Lagos and allowed for candidates to stand in council elections. During the 1950 conference, before the adoption of the 1951 Macpherson Constitution, the issue of universal adult suffrage was put to a vote – but it was rejected by 42 – 6 votes among the 53 men that participated in the review meeting in Ibadan (Crater, 2020). Though the motion failed, the 1951 constitution included Adult Taxpayers Suffrage and allowed for male and female taxpayers in the West and East to vote, but not in the North. Despite this progress, because of the low number of women taxpayers, there were still few women who could take part. The 1954 Lyttleton Constitution made progress but in different jurisdictions. Women in the East could fully participate in elections – to vote or be voted for – while only male taxpayers could vote in the West and women could neither vote nor be voted for in the North. Women in the West would only receive universal suffrage in 1959 and their northern counterparts would only be eligible to vote or be voted for from the elections in 1979 after then General Obasanjo's No. 189 edict of 1976.

Understanding this process is important to see where the origin of such perceptions and mentality came from. For decades, most parties did not have women representation or consideration because there was no need to do so since they could not vote. Most men assumed a dismissive position towards women regarding politics and, tellingly, some of the frontline politicians in Nigeria today began their careers during an era when women were significantly marginalised. There was also a similar disconnect concerning young Nigerians – with young men getting votes first but still being

treated as apprentices to learn from more senior male politicians. This brings in the cultural perception of working arrangements and the perception that politicians have of young Nigerians. From the preceding, it is clear that contemporary marginalisation of Nigerian women in politics traces its roots to late colonial era. In understanding the role that the march and fight for universal adult suffrage has played in effecting Nigeria's politics, we are better placed to appreciate the active priorities that political parties then assumed in their formation, creation, and eventual evolution. This helps in further highlighting the challenge of looking at representation in cabinet.

Women in Nigerian Cabinets

A major avenue to advance women participation in politics has come from the power of presidents and governors to nominate members of their cabinets. This is because while winning elective positions might be difficult as a result of existing limitations—largely financial and socio-cultural—appointments are at the behest and pleasure of the president or governor. In focusing on federal cabinets, or the federal executive council as the term is in Nigeria, presidents appoint ministers who are required to be confirmed by the senate.

Presidents have historically used this power to reward party and campaign loyalists, as well as elevate well-known technocrats to their governments. Most have also sought to use the position to promote future party leaders by giving them a prominent position in the national limelight. Yet, all cabinet positions do not receive the same level of media scrutiny or attention. Some positions, by virtue of the strength of their budgetary allocation, are better known and others have lost their appeal after the departure of the president who created it – often for a specific officeholder. Regardless, cabinet positions are a way for presidents and their parties to spotlight future leaders and provide a platform for them to develop a following ahead of future campaigns.

The constitution requires each president to appoint a member from every state in the country as members of the federal executive council to ensure federal character and representation. This has meant that each president has named at least 36 members of cabinet, with some opting to appoint an extra minister from each of the six geo-political zones or through other arbitrary means. On average, most presidents have had around 24 ministries, which has meant that several ministries have had two people assigned. The difference has often been through the term ‘minister’, denoting the ‘senior and substantive minister’ and ‘minister of state’, often referring to a ‘junior’ who deputises as required. This division of responsibilities has long been a source of consternation and frustration in Nigerian politics. In 2023, Festus Keyamo, then outgoing minister of state for Niger Delta, complained that the role was a ‘constitutional aberration’ because the constitution does not divide or classify ministers in this way (Nda-Isaiah, 2023). It is worth noting that because of the challenges in allocation, and appointment, several governments have allocated women to junior positions despite expertise warranting more senior assignments.

Prior to the Fourth Republic (instituted in 1999), there was scant representation of women in cabinet. From 1960 – 1966, there were no women, especially when considering women in a region did not have the right to vote. From 1966 to 1979, under the successive military regimes of J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi (January – July 1966), Yakubu Gowon (1966 – 1975), Murtala Muhammad (1975 – 1976) and Olusegun Obasanjo (1976 – 1979), cabinet was made up of senior army officials that were all men. The first set of women in cabinet were under Shehu Shagari, who was president from 1979 to 1983. Janet Akinriade was Internal Affairs Minister and Egun Oyabola handled the National Planning brief, both as senior ministers. In 1993, General Ibrahim Babangida appointed

Emily Aig-Imoukhuede and Laraba Daggash as members of the Transitional Council and, in Ernest Shonekan's short-lived interim national government, Kuforiji Olubi was culture and tourism minister. General Sani Abacha, who ruled as military head of state from 1993 till his death in 1998, appointed Onikepo Akande and Judith Attah to civilian posts within his government and General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who succeeded Abacha in 1998, retained Akande as commerce minister and designated Laraba Gambo Abdullahi as women affairs minister (Kolawole et al, 2013).

Of the five presidents in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 – 2007) and Muhammadu Buhari (2015 – 2023) served as former military heads of state and are the only two to serve two terms, the set limit by the constitution. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007 – 2010) died in office and was succeeded by his vice-president, Goodluck Jonathan (2010 – 2015) who won an election for a full term of his own, but lost his re-election bid to Buhari. Bola Tinubu (2023 – date) is the incumbent and has appointed members of his cabinet. Unpacking the various governments and their cabinet formations might help in understanding the challenges and state of women representation in the various cabinets.

Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 – 2007)

Olusegun Obasanjo's historic election in 1999 was the beginning of the fourth republic and also brought with it a lot of new opportunities for women participation in cabinet. For starters, because women were not in the senior echelons of military leadership, they could seldom aspire to senior administrative roles such as head of state or even military administrators in different states. A democratic form of government meant that women could aspire to elective positions and, seeing as the franchise to vote had finally been extended nationwide in 1979, this could be carried out across the various regions.

During his first term in office, Obasanjo appointed nine women to cabinet, with three occupying senior positions and several deputising. Among them were Kema Chikwe as transportation minister, Aisha Ismail as women affairs minister, Boma Bromilow Jack as culture and tourism minister, Aminat Ndalolo as minister of state for health, Pauline Tallen as the minister of state for Science and Technology and Modupe Adelaja as minister of state for defence. Of the substantive ministers, Chikwe could be seen as occupying a more senior role since it was a position that could easily have been occupied by a man, while Adelaja's posting at defence was the first for a woman in Nigeria. Yet, during a reshuffle in 2001, Obasanjo reassigned her to the Aviation Ministry, which could have been seen as a demotion considering she used to supervise the entire sector. Both Ismail and Tallen served out their full terms in their positions, but there remained a dearth of women in cabinet and, owing to their positions, a lack of acknowledgment of their work. Most prominent women in the administration at the time were largely special advisers and members of the president's office, which further added to the perception that Obasanjo's Villa sought to consolidate power at the centre.

Perhaps in response to these concerns, and other political calculations, Obasanjo significantly rejigged his cabinet when he was re-elected in 2003. While all women who were in cabinet during his first term were dropped, Obasanjo named five women at the formation cabinet of his second term. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was named as finance minister, with Nenadi Usman as the minister of state, alongside Rita Akpan as women affairs minister, Mobolaji Osomo as minister of housing, land and development and Bintu Ibrahim Musa as minister of state for education. The appointment of two women to handle finance represented the most senior portfolio assignments to women in cabinet history, with Okonjo-Iweala becoming the first Nigerian woman to serve as minister of finance and, later, foreign affairs in 2006. Obasanjo's penchant for reshuffling during this period led to more cabinet opportunities and, ultimately, more women were named to these positions.

In 2005, during a mid-term reshuffle, Obasanjo brought three more women to cabinet and replaced two of the earlier four. Chinwe Obaji became substantive education minister and Obiageli Ezekwesili was named solid minerals minister, while Halima Tayo Alao replaced Bintu Ibrahim Musa as minister of state for education, and Maryam Ciroma became minister of women affairs. At this time, there were three senior women ministers alongside the women affairs brief. Later, in 2006, Obasanjo moved Okonjo-Iweala to foreign affairs, promoted Nenadi Usman to finance minister, assigned Ezekwesili the education brief and named Helen Esuene as environment minister. Okonjo-Iweala would later leave cabinet that year and Joy Ogwu was named her replacement, along with Leslye Obiora receiving the mines and steel development brief. Before the end of his term, Obasanjo added the Housing brief to Esuene's portfolio.

At the end of his term in 2007, Obasanjo had named fourteen women to cabinet. Subsequent governments would make this one of the better performing administrations in that regard, but there were several milestones made during this period. Finance, Defence and Foreign Affairs are usually held by key officials in developed countries – they are among the first three cabinet posts in the United States line of succession and finance and foreign affairs are among the great offices of state in the United Kingdom – and women held them during his term. Education, environment and housing and resource-based ministries such as solid minerals & mines and steel development also saw senior women occupy positions during his term. There was also a zonal balance among the appointments, with all zones represented among the women named to cabinet and ten of 36 states seeing women named. Of the fourteen women named, three would later return to cabinet under later presidents and several would contest in presidential and senatorial campaigns.

Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007 – 2010)

In 2007, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua won fairly controversial elections to emerge as Nigeria's president. As part of an attempt to ease concerns, he pledged to form a government of national unity and actively sought to balance his appointments. Furthermore, as he was succeeding a president from

the same party, some politicians could have expected to return to key government roles. Among them was Halima Tayo Alao who was one of eight women named in his first cabinet.

Among these eight, Yar'Adua designated five to senior minister roles. Adenike Grange became health minister, while Diezani Allison-Madueke helmed transportation, Grace Ekpiwhre was in charge of science and technology and Saudatu Usman Bungudu was women affairs minister. In a reflection of a government succeeding one from the same party, Halima Tayo Alao returned as environment and housing minister. The three junior ministers were Fatima Balaraba Ibrahim, who handled power in the ministry of energy, Fidelia Njeze who was in the defence ministry and Aishatu Jibril Dukku who was in education.

Despite the increase in women appointed, and those named to senior positions, most lost their positions in 2008 when Yar'Adua carried out a cabinet reshuffle. Of the three retained, Dukku stayed in post, while Allison-Madueke became minister of mines and steel development and Njeze was minister of state of agriculture and water resources. Among the new additions was Salamatu Hussaini Suleiman becoming minister of women affairs and Dora Akunyili, well-known as the director-general of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) becoming minister of information and communication.

Yar'Adua's long ailment and subsequent death means that we are unable to determine if he would have had a similar change in cabinet assignments ahead of a possible re-election bid in 2011. There was also a reduction of women occupying major positions and, the mass removal of the women occupying senior portfolios, was also telling on representation agitation. Yet, Yar'Adua also followed Obasanjo's pattern in naming a woman from each geopolitical zone and from eight different states. The fact that his successor was his vice-president meant that, more than any two administrations in Nigerian history, there was significant overlap in personnel and that aided a lot of the women who were appointed in returning to cabinet.

Goodluck Jonathan (2010 – 2015)

Goodluck Jonathan rightly receives plaudits for appointing the most women to cabinet positions in history. However, his first cabinet, named after he became acting president, was not an early indicator of this eventual outcome. Jonathan retained three women from the Yar'Adua cabinet, with Akunyili staying in post, Njeze becoming minister of aviation and Allison-Madueke beginning her term as the minister of the powerful petroleum resources ministry. He also named Ruqayyah Ahmed Rufa'i, who was minister of education and Josephine Anenih, who handled the women affairs brief. Akunyili later resigned from cabinet as part of an unsuccessful bid for a senate seat.

After winning an outright term in 2011, Jonathan exercised more flexibility in naming women to cabinet and also elevating women to key portfolios. He lobbied and convinced Ngozi Okonjo-

Iweala to return to her former brief as finance minister, as well as maintaining Rufa'i and Allison-Madueke in their posts. He named six more senior women ministers in his initial cabinets, with former head of civil service Amal Pepple as housing, land and urban development minister, Stella Oduah as aviation minister, Omobola Johnson as communication technology minister, Hadiza Ibrahim Malaifa as environment minister, Sarah Ochekepe as water resources minister and Zainab Maina as women affairs minister. Alongside them were ministers of state with Olusola Obada at defence, Zainab Kuchi at Niger Delta, Viola Onwuliri at foreign affairs and Olajumoke Akinjide at the FCT. This allocation of posts meant that there were women handling major portfolios or deputising at strategic ministries.

In 2012, Jonathan elevated Obada to become the first woman 'senior' defence minister, before dropping her a year later. Lawrencina Mallam joined cabinet in 2014 as environment minister, alongside Asaba Asmau Ahmed as minister of state for Agriculture and Akon Eyakenyi replacing Amal Pepple at housing, land and urban development. After suffering defeat in his re-election bid, Patricia Akwashiki at information and Hauwa'u Lawan Bappa as minister of state at Niger Delta served for a couple of months.

Jonathan named the most women to his cabinet and often in strategic positions. This represented significant progress in the clamour for more gender parity in cabinet and also elevating the voice of women in government. This also continued a pattern of successive PDP governments naming women from all geo-political zones to cabinet and, with women from 17 states named to cabinet, saw more representation among women in this government.

Muhammadu Buhari (2015 – 2023)

After contesting the presidency in 2003, 2007 and 2011, former military head of state Muhammadu Buhari was elected president in 2015 after a coalition of opposition parties merged to form the All Progressives Congress (APC) and defeated the PDP. It took Buhari nearly six months to form his cabinet and, more so than any president before, carried out very minimal changes to his cabinet.

Buhari's first cabinet saw Kemi Adeosun helming the sensitive finance ministry portfolio. Other senior portfolio holders were Amina J Mohammed who handled environment and Aisha Alhassan, the notable Taraba politician who had nearly won the governorship election, becoming women affairs minister. The three ministers of state were Zainab Ahmed for budget and national planning, Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim for foreign affairs and Aisha Abubakar for industry, trade and investment. Buhari's seeming aversion to change meant that whenever there were changes, replacements were sought in-house. When Adeosun resigned following a furore over a fake exemption certificate from the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) programme, Ahmed was moved to handle finance – a role she would hold till the end of the president's two terms. Also, when Mohammed was named deputy secretary-general of the United Nations, her successor was her

minister of state, while Abubakar moved to women affairs when Alhassan resigned ahead of a potential 2019 bid for governor. Ibrahim would later leave to successfully seek a seat in the federal house of representatives. The six women who served in this cabinet throughout the term would represent the smallest number for a full presidential term since the three in Obasanjo's first term (1999 – 2003).

After gaining re-election in 2019, Buhari dropped roughly half of his cabinet but also retained Ahmed. He nominated Sadiya Umar Farouq, who would handle the new ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, after serving as National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI). Pauline Tallen, who had served as Obasanjo's first minister of state for science and technology and later as Plateau State deputy governor before a bid for the governorship, returned to cabinet after 16 years as women affairs minister. Buhari named four more women to junior positions – Gbemisola Saraki at transportation, Ramatu Tijani Bello at the FCT, Sharon Ikeazor at Environment and Mariam Yalwaji Katagum at Industry, Trade and Investment. Later, owing to some personnel changes ahead of the 2023 elections, Saraki was moved to Mines and Steel Development, while Ikeazor moved to Niger Delta Affairs.

Buhari's two terms did not move the needle and improve on the bar set by the preceding administration. Alongside a paucity of women in senior positions, except from finance and the customary women affairs portfolio, there was only one other position per term that was designated – environment, that did not last the full term, and the newly created humanitarian affairs brief. There was also no woman minister from the South-South zone, negating strides made by previous governments in zonal representation. Perhaps telling of a reversal of fortunes with this set of women ministers was the decision of the government not to promote fairly accomplished junior ministers, such as former senator Gbemisola Saraki and former Executive Secretary of Pension Transitional Arrangement Directorate, Sharon Ikeazor, when their substantive ministers resigned.

Bola Tinubu (2023 – date)

Bola Tinubu of the ruling APC was declared winner of the keenly contested 2023 general elections. He became the first person bound by a constitutional amendment that mandated presidents to name a cabinet within sixty days of inauguration.

Tinubu has so far named nine women to cabinet, improving on the record of his predecessor, and also naming six of them to senior portfolios. The senior ministers include Lola Ade-John at tourism, Uju Ohaneye at women affairs and Doris Uzoka-Anite at industry, trade and investment. The others are Hannatu Musawa, handling the art, culture & the creative economy brief, with Betta Edu at the renamed humanitarian affairs and poverty alleviation ministry and Jamila Bio Ibrahim as the first woman minister of youth affairs. Ministers of state in the cabinet include Nkiruka Onyejeocha,

former deputy house majority whip, for labour & employment, Imaan Suleiman-Ibrahim for police affairs and Mariya Mahmood Bunkure at the FCT.

Unpacking trends in cabinet

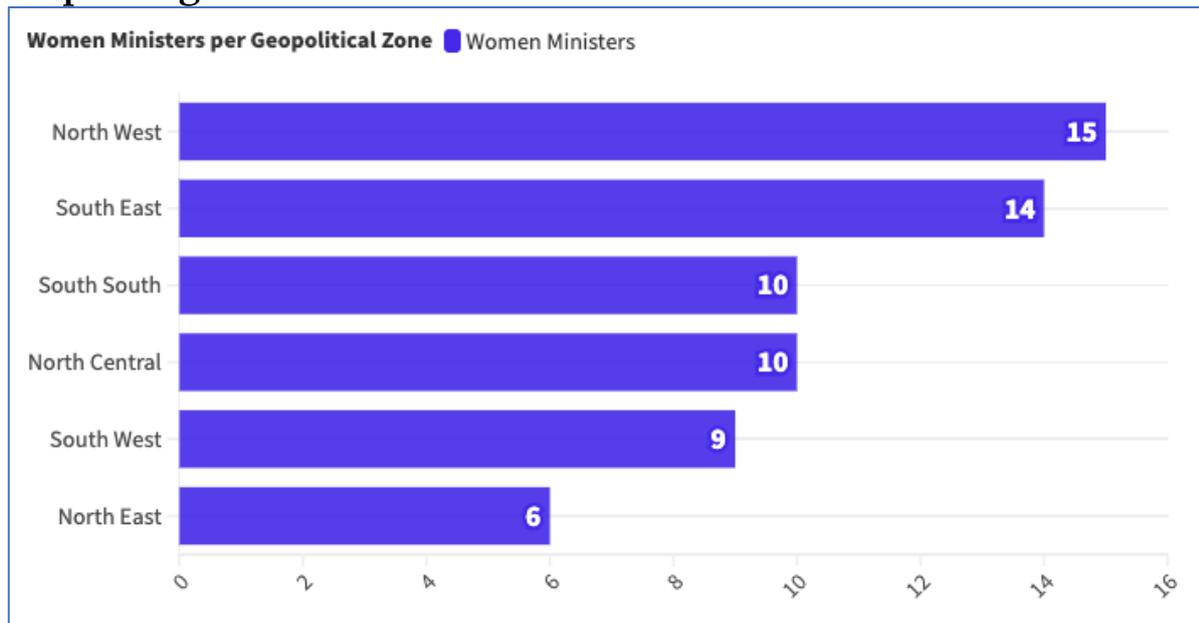


Fig 1 – Women ministers per geopolitical zone

There are several patterns and statistics to analyse from decades of women representation in cabinet since 1999. For starters, despite assumptions on socio-cultural dynamics significantly hampering women participation in the north, there is not a lopsided number of women ministers from both regions, with 33 from the south and 31 from the north. However, the leading geo-political zone is not from the south, but the North-West with 15 ministers, followed by the South-East with 14 and the South-South and North-Central with ten each. The South-West, with nine, and North-East with six bring up the rest of the zones. The North-West and North-East are also the only zones where all states have produced women ministers, with Benue (North-Central), Ebonyi (South-East), Edo (South-South) and Ekiti (South-West) the only states yet to produce a woman in cabinet.

A challenge in unpacking the data was the difference between state of origin and the state of nomination. This is a uniquely female challenge in Nigeria. Prominent examples of differences include Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who is from Delta, but has represented Abia in cabinet, Halima Tayo Alao from Lagos, who has represented Kwara and Josephine Anenih, born in Sokoto but representing Edo in cabinet. This is due to most assignments being tied to the state of origin of their husbands, rather than acknowledging their birth states.

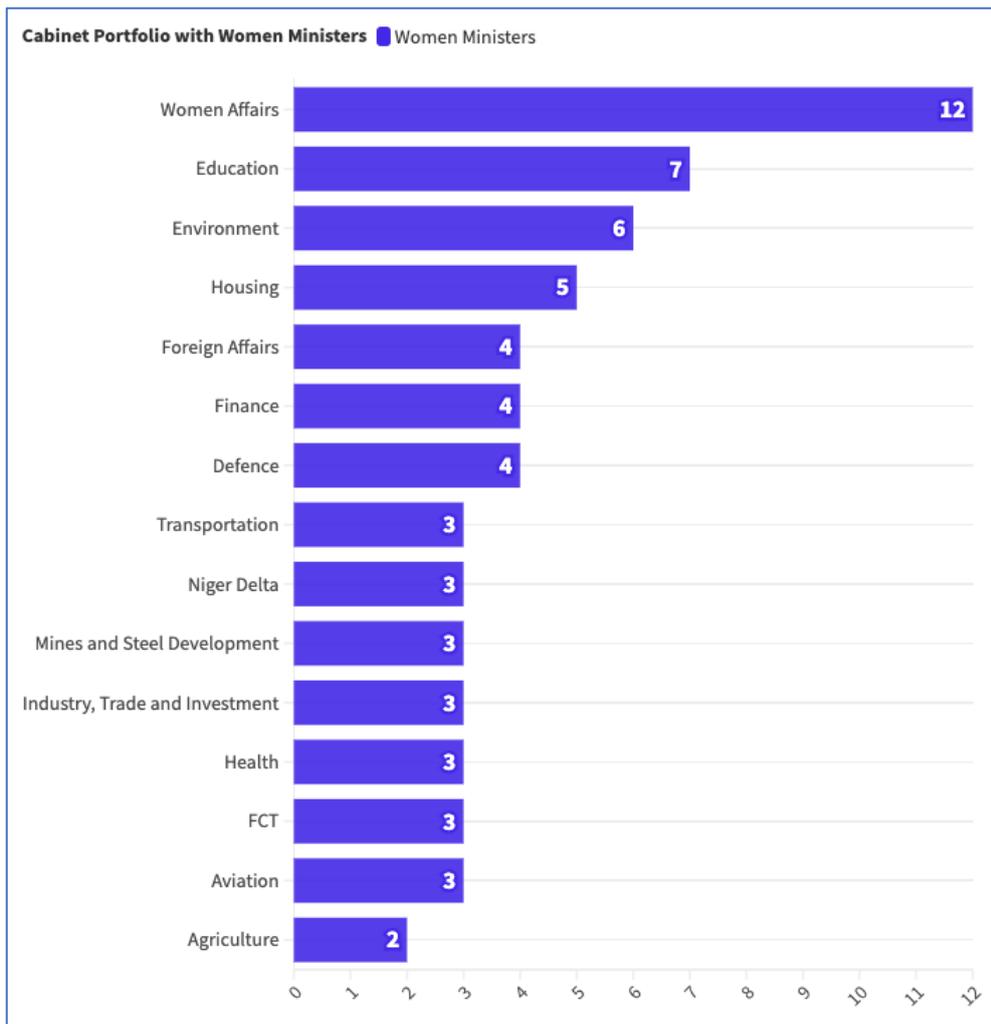


Fig 2 – Women ministers according to portfolios held

Perhaps there is no surprise that the portfolio most associated with women in cabinet is women affairs, with twelve women having held the brief since 1999. Education comes next with seven, and environment with six, with these accounting for both senior or junior ministers in those ministries. Following those is housing, with five, and a tie between defence, finance and foreign affairs with four ministers each. While presidents are at liberty to change ministry titles and functions, some constant portfolios that women have never held include attorney-general and works. The Housing portfolio has often been attached to environment or lands and urban development, which explains its prominence on the list.

Furthermore, among 87 portfolio assignments for women – which takes into account redeployments to other ministries – women have been named as ‘senior’ minister 56 times, compared to 31 times as minister of state and with eight women having served as both minister and minister of state at some point. While this might be surprising, it is worth noting that there are already eleven senior ministers of women affairs. Furthermore, five of the six women to serve as environment minister, and four of the five ministers were senior.

Finally, it is worth noting that the average length of women in the office varies depending on the different presidents. Because most ministers under Buhari served full terms, the average length of women ministers was 3.91 years, which is the longest of the four concluded presidencies. Subsequently, the average length under Jonathan was 2.66, owing to his relatively short period in office but the number of women he named during his full term, and under Obasanjo was 2.59, which was more a reflection of the several reshuffles that he carried out. Expectedly least, owing to his term length and the low number of women in his cabinet, was Yar'Adua with 1.7. These numbers reveal that even when presidents have been more supportive of nominating women to cabinet, the follow-through of backing their continued stay in post has not been consistent. Likewise, even when cabinets have had a low number of women, their stay in post and support could see a longer term in post. In fact, none of the few ministers Buhari dismissed from cabinet were women.

Factors shaping women in cabinet

There are several factors that can be inferred to explain why most presidents have taken a slow approach in carrying out gender parity in cabinet. For starters, the socio-cultural temperature has not reached a point where the optics of appointing women to cabinet would play out more favourably for politicians. Of note is the fact that Jonathan lost an election to Buhari following a term with record women in cabinet positions. While men are more visible and likely to be considered for leadership roles, women are still seen through different lenses and not readily considered for cabinet appointments. In a 2018 interview, Obasanjo revealed that when he was composing his cabinet in 1999, he sought nominations from state governors to populate his cabinet but only received two women as nominees, and had to source the other seven himself (Adebayo, 2018).

This is despite growing acceptability of women in public office and more examples of prominent women in government positions (Inglehart & Norris, 2005). But it is worth unpacking the prevailing factors that have played a role in shaping how women have featured in cabinet formation discussions.

Nominating powers

Most cabinet positions are seen as representatives of states in the federal executive council, and this has led to an outsized role for governors in the nomination process. Under the Jonathan administration, Ruquayyah Rufa'i, Sarah Ochekepe and Amal Pepple were considered as nominees from their home state governors whose influence was expected to follow through (Awofeso & Akinlolu, 2020). Where there have been little or no champions, strong linkages to established families has been noted among several appointees. Modupe Adelaja was the daughter of Pa Abraham Adesanya, a leader of Afenifere, a Yoruba socio-cultural group, while Olajumoke Akinjide was the daughter of a former attorney-general of the federation, Richard Akinjide. The relative influence of chieftains has always been a stronger route to getting names in front of the president and later in front of the senate for nomination.

Prominence prior to consideration

The Tinubu cabinet is made up of eight former governors and eleven former or sitting legislators, showing strong routes to cabinet visibility (Adekaiyoja, 2023). But most women have had to use alternative routes to gain the prominence to be considered for the role and the proximity to champions backing their nomination. Among the nine women in the Tinubu cabinet, there are several 'constituencies' catered to in the nominations. Nkiruka Onyejeocha, a former legislator, who lost a bid for re-election, was nominated. The same goes for Betta Edu, the national women's leader of the party. Edu was also a former commissioner of health in Cross Rivers and is one of three former commissioners, alongside Mariya Bunkure, who was Higher Education commissioner in Kano and Doris Uzoka-Anite, who was finance commissioner in Imo. Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim

was a government appointee, serving as Federal Commissioner for National Commission for Refugee, Migrants & Internally Displaced Persons (NCRMIDP).

A similar trend of existing government work and party proximity emerges when the Buhari cabinet is also reviewed. Zainab Ahmed was former executive secretary of the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), Sadiya Farouq was the national commissioner for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), Sharon Ikeazor was executive secretary of the Pension Transitional Arrangement Directorate (PTAD) and Mariam Katagum was a former ambassador to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Pauline Tallen was a former minister and deputy governor, Gbemi Saraki and Aisha Alhassan were former senators and Kemi Adeosun and Khadija Bukar Aba Ibrahim had been commissioners in Ogun and Yobe respectively. Finally, Ramatu Tijani Bello had also served as a party women leader prior to her nomination.

The most direct route for most women who have gotten to cabinet has been serving as state commissioners. This is often because most governors, when nominating members to cabinet, have found it easier to reward loyalists who have worked with them in the past, and who they are familiar with. This steps down the focus of this paper, taking it to state level and providing more interesting considerations for those who have served at state and federal cabinets. This follows research by Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson in Latin America where women with policy experience are more likely to be found in government than generic party politicians simply receiving positions as a result of patronage (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2009). It reinforces the notion that most women in public office have largely needed to be seen as more competent than average, compared to male counterparts who might easily scale through nomination processes.

Challenges of women in cabinet

An expectation is that parties name potential leaders to cabinet to maximise their visibility for subsequent electoral bids. The Fourth Republic is filled with many men who have used cabinet positions to shore up popularity ahead of bids for the legislature, state governorship and even the presidency. Despite this, few women have been able to achieve successful bids from cabinet – and none for governorship or presidential posts. This section explores those challenges.

Differing images of women in power

Of the over sixty women who have served in Nigerian cabinets, the two most familiar to Nigerians are likely Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Diezani Allison-Madueke. Both served under two presidents Okonjo-Iweala served under Obasanjo and Jonathan, and Allison-Madueke under Yar'Adua and Jonathan. Both women were also substantive ministers who were the first women to hold the senior positions in key industries – finance and foreign affairs for Okonjo-Iweala and petroleum resources for Allison-Madueke. Finally, their rise in the private sector also provided seemingly objective justification for their appointments – Allison-Madueke was an executive director of Shell Nigeria, while Okonjo-Iweala had worked at the World Bank.

Yet, these two women have had distinctly different perceptions in the years since. While Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala became board chair of Gavi, the vaccine alliance and is now director-general of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Allison-Madueke has been charged to court by the National Crime Agency in the United Kingdom (NCA, 2023). The perception of the all-powerful minister who bent rules and processes to accommodate prominent friends was used by many politicians who sought to castigate and paint the Jonathan administration as weak and feckless for failing to rein in a cabinet minister (Mojeed, 2023). Meanwhile, Okonjo-Iweala's bid for the WTO job was formally nominated by the man who defeated her former boss, a fact she acknowledged by thanking Buhari when she won the race (Premium Times, 2021). Perceptions like this have played a role in shaping the optics of women in power, with Okonjo-Iweala never particularly seen as being too close to Jonathan but Allison-Madueke needing to deny an intimate relationship with the president (Ikeke, 2015).

Perception of portfolios

Earlier in the paper, it was discussed that, aside from the women affairs ministry, portfolios such as education, finance, and environment have most been allocated to women. But a question comes from prominence and coverage and if these portfolios actually afford the women ministers the opportunity to effectively present themselves to the Nigerian public.

There are two ways to determine the 'level' of nature of a portfolio. The first way is through budgetary allocation, which often shows the level of investment and priority a government gives to a ministry. It also affords ministers the opportunity to handle senior clientele and access to government funds

for project allocation. The top ten ministries with allocations in the 2019 budget were, in order – Power, Works & Housing, Transportation, Defence, Agriculture, Water Resources, Trade & Investment, Education, Interior, Health, and Niger Delta (Ujah, Emmanuel & Bayegunhi, 2019). Yet, in these ten ministries, there were only two women and they were the ministers of state for transportation and trade & investment.

The second way is through size and public visibility. These positions are those that are often in the news or largely seen as stepping stones to higher office. In determining this for Nigeria, it is worth reviewing similar research on this point across literature. Rose categorised British ministries according to parliamentary attention, while others use designated points of succession to the presidency in the United States or the United Kingdom (Rose, 1987). Within the Nigerian context, there have been attempts by others to categorise portfolios, such as by Awofeso and Akinlolu who classify high prestige portfolios as Defence, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Works, Interior, Power, Petroleum and Justice (Awofeso & Akinlolu, 2020). Yet, while most of these positions are largely well-known and prominent, there are arguments for amending this categorisation in the light of subsequent officeholders and the new reality of the state of politics. It is also worth adding new ministries, and those not previously included such as the FCT ministry, in the list.

This proposed categorisation would consider high-profile ministries as defence, finance, foreign affairs, interior, justice, petroleum, power, works, as well as communications and the digital economy, because of regulatory oversight over a budding sector and the FCT, which is essentially another state governor. Of these ten positions, no ministry is led by a woman, with the only one in the list serving as minister of state for FCT. This buttresses the point that most prestigious portfolios are rarely reserved for women. In fact, women have only overseen affairs in four of these ten ministries, and not all at the same time.

Medium-prestigious positions would include a mix of statutory positions and those overseeing plum departments and budgets. These would include agriculture, aviation, education, health, information & communications, lands & housing, Niger Delta, police, trade & investment, commerce, transportation and the marine economy.

Finally, low prestige ministries would include those rarely sought after, with low budgetary allocations and often seen as subservient to other ministries. These include youth affairs, sport development, water resources, humanitarian affairs, environment, science and technology, arts and culture, tourism, mines and steel development, national planning and women affairs. It is worth noting that five of the six senior ministers, and two of the three junior ministers, in the Tinubu cabinet have portfolios in this category.

The Women Affairs Ministry

An argument can be made that efforts at inclusion can become increasingly restrictive. For starters, the assumption and guarantee of a ministerial post for a woman means that efforts at effectively carrying out inclusion are reduced because of the semblance of a 'quota' in the cabinet, a similar argument that covers the ministry of youth. Secondly, most women affairs ministry programs are supported by domestic and international donor groups, owing to a paucity of dedicated funds by the government. Thirdly, the presence of a 'catch-all' ministry to handle gender positions might lead to complacency on a cross-government effort at building gender parity.

This 'pseudo-quota' can be negating, as seen in political parties. These offices are seen as limiting positions and form ceilings for any party member who identifies in any of these categories. It is why, among the two major parties, there have never been any youth, women or people with disabilities occupying any of the senior executive positions and being in a position to actually effect any sustainable and long-lasting change. Lastly, as evidenced above, the lack of perceived prominence and prestige in the ministry means that it is unlikely to attract significant lobbying and talent. While most ministers have been strong and effective in post, these have often been as a result of the individuals and not necessarily the office or the ministry.

Career prospects post-Cabinet

As earlier alluded, most effective ministers have been able to utilise their positions to other lofty climes. Among recent examples include Obasanjo ministers such as Liyel Imoke (Cross River), Isa Yuguda (Bauchi) and Nasir El-Rufai (Kaduna) and Jonathan-era ministers such as Bala Mohammed (Bauchi), Nyesom Wike (Rivers) and Samuel Ortom (Benue) who served in cabinet prior to successful governorship races. Some ministers, such as Rabiu Kwankwaso (Kano) under Obasanjo and Kayode Fayemi (Ekiti) under Buhari, were able to use cabinet positions to maintain popularity, relevance and develop war chests before making second bids for re-election after initially losing out. There are also examples of men who have used cabinet roles to make successful bids for legislative appointments.

The same cannot be said about women who have been in cabinet, where the most prominent post-cabinet careers appear to be in the diplomatic space. Buhari's former environment minister, Amina J. Mohammed was named deputy secretary-general of the United Nations while in cabinet, prompting her departure. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, finance minister under both Obasanjo and Jonathan, was later hired at the World Bank, before her successful bid as director-general of the World Trade Organisation. Obiageli Ezekwesili, who was posted to the education and solid minerals ministries under Obasanjo, was named vice-president for the Africa Region by the World Bank after her term in cabinet. Salamatu Hussaini Suleiman, Yar'Adua's women affairs minister, was subsequently nominated and designated as commissioner for political affairs, peace and security of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) commissioner for political affairs,

peace and security between 2012 and 2016. Most recently, Zainab Ahmed, Buhari's finance minister, became alternative executive director of the World Bank in 2023 after leaving government. Within the domestic diplomatic service, there are examples in Fidela Njeze, who was posted to Switzerland and Liechtenstein after departing Jonathan's cabinet in 2012 and Joy Ogwu, who departed Obasanjo's cabinet as foreign minister and later served for nine years as permanent representative to the United Nations.

Expectedly, a number of women have bid for elective positions after serving in cabinet. Pauline Tallen, minister of state for science and technology under Obasanjo, became deputy governor of Plateau State in 2011 before an unsuccessful run for governor. Similarly, Patricia Akwashiki, who was a senator before joining cabinet, failed in her bid to win the governorship ticket for the PDP in 2019. Former cabinet members have also become party leaders, such as Kema Chikwe, transport and aviation minister under Obasanjo, and Josephine Anenih, women affairs minister under Jonathan.

While none has been successful in a governorship bid, a handful of female ministers have been able to transition to legislative positions. Between 2011 and 2015, two former ministers under Obasanjo served as senators – Kaduna's Nenadi Usman, a former minister and minister of state for finance and Akwa Ibom's Helen Esuene, a former minister of environment and minister of state for health. They joined the senate eight years after leaving cabinet. Among unsuccessful bids include Dora Akunyili, a minister under Yar'Adua and Jonathan, who left the party to seek a senatorial seat in Anambra. Stella Oduah, Jonathan's minister for aviation, served in the senate from 2015 to 2019, while Aishatu Dukku, Yar'Adua's minister of state for education, was elected to the house during the same session. Most recently, Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim, Buhari's minister of state for foreign affairs, won her election to the federal house in 2019 and Akon Eyakenyi, Jonathan's last Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, who was elected senator from Akwa Ibom in 2019 and was recently elected deputy governor in 2023.

As the above shows, while there are some positive examples worth holding hope with, most women who are named to cabinet have not remained as relevant in the mainstream political space after leaving the role. It can be argued that some have done so intentionally, with several going on to establish charitable foundations and joining corporate boards. Yet, if the best and brightest minds in the country have been nominated to serve in cabinet, there should be ample opportunities to retain their expertise and the worry is that this has not been the case.

Conclusion

A question that has no doubt fuelled much discourse is what makes a successful term in cabinet – the minister or the ministry? Does the personal capacity of a minister transcend the limitations, budgetary or perceptible, of a ministry or does a high-profile ministry force a minister to rise in the glare of the pressures of the role? These broad questions affect considerations around cabinet appointments, but there are more to be unpacked when looking at gender imbalance in Nigeria.

Successive candidates make strong impassioned pleas to Nigerian women to gain their votes. Spouses have often been associated with varying levels of influence over their husband's cabinets and prominent women leaders have endorsed candidates with the promise of better chances for women. This report shows that there has been no consistent progress on this front, with successive administrations failing to reach basic quotas for allocating portfolios to women. Furthermore, other opportunities in public service – ranging from state assembly and commissioner roles to federal agency management – shows that there is no shortage of qualified women to assume such roles. There are enough departments, agencies and parastatals under the different ministries, staffed with qualified women, to consider breaking the gender barrier for certain ministries. Parties and their presidential candidates would do well to consider the future of their parties in elevating the stature of women in the governing structures they have.

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Appendix – Women Ministers, Geo-Political Zones, Portfolio and Level

Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 – 2003)

Number	Name	Geo-political Zone	Level	Portfolio
1	Kema Chikwe	South-East	Senior	Transport, then (senior) Aviation
2	Aisha Ismail	North-West	Senior	Women Affairs
7	Boma Bromilow-Jack	South-South	Senior	Culture and Tourism
3	Becky Kebetu-Igwe	South-South	Junior	Solid Minerals then (junior) Women Affairs
4	Pauline Tallen	North-Central	Junior	Science and Technology
5	Aminat Ndalolo	North-Central	Junior	Health
6	Modupe Adelaja	South-West	Junior	Defence

Olusegun Obasanjo (2003 – 2007)

Number	Name	Geo-political Zone	Level	Portfolio
1	Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala	South-East	Senior	Finance, then Foreign Affairs
2	Mobolaji Osomo	South-West	Senior	Housing
3	Obiageli Ezekwesili	South-East	Senior	Solid Minerals, then Education
4	Chinwe Obaji	South-East	Senior	Education
5	Joy Ogwu	South-South	Senior	Foreign Affairs
6	Leslye Obiora	South-East	Senior	Mines and Steel Development
7	Rita Akpan	South-East	Senior	Women Affairs
8	Maryam Ciroma	North-East	Senior	Women Affairs
9	Nenadi Usman	North-West	Junior	Finance, then (senior) Finance
10	Bintu Ibrahim Musa	North-West	Junior	Education
11	Helen Esuene	South-South	Junior	Health, then (senior) Environment/Housing
12	Halima Tayo Alao	South-West	Junior	Education

Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007 – 2010)

Number	Name	Geo-political Zone	Level	Portfolio
1	Halima Tayo Alao	South-West	Senior	Environment and Housing
2	Dora Akunyili	South-East	Senior	Information and Communication
3	Adenike Grange	South-West	Senior	Health
4	Diezani Allison-Madueke	South-South	Senior	Transportation, then Mines and Steel Development
5	Saudatu Usman Bungudu	North-West	Senior	Women Affairs

6	Salamatu Hussaini Suleiman	North-West	Senior	Women Affairs
7	Grace Ekpiwhre	South-South	Senior	Science and Technology
8	Fidelia Akuabata Njeze	South-East	Junior	Defence, then Education and Agriculture and Water Resources
9	Aishatu Jubril Dukku	North-East	Junior	Education
10	Fatima Balaraba Ibrahim	North-West	Junior	Energy (Power)

Goodluck Jonathan (2010 – 2011)

Number	Name	Geo-political Zone	Level	Portfolio
1	Dora Akunyili	South-East	Senior	Information and Communication
2	Fidelia Akuabata Njeze	South-East	Senior	Aviation
3	Diezani Allison-Madueke	South-South	Senior	Petroleum Resources
4	Ruqayyah Ahmed Rufa'I	North-West	Senior	Education
5	Josephine Anenih	South-South	Senior	Women Affairs

Goodluck Jonathan (2011 – 2015)

Number	Name	Geo-political Zone	Level	Portfolio
1	Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala	South-East	Senior	Finance
2	Diezani Allison-Madueke	South-South	Senior	Petroleum Resources
3	Ruqayyah Ahmed Rufa'I	North-West	Senior	Education
4	Stella Oduah	South-East	Senior	Aviation
5	Omobola Johnson	South-West	Senior	Communication Technology
6	Hadiza Ibrahim Malaifa	North-West	Senior	Environment
7	Amal Iyingiala Pettle	South-South	Senior	Housing, Land and Urban Development
8	Lawrencia Mallam	North-West	Senior	Environment
9	Zainab Maina	North-East	Senior	Women Affairs
10	Sarah Reng Ocheke	North-Central	Senior	Water Resources
11	Akon Eyakenyi	South-South	Senior	Housing, Land and Urban Development
12	Patricia Akwashiki	North-Central	Senior	Information and Communication
13	Zainab Ibrahim Kuchi	North-Central	Junior	Niger Delta
14	Viola Onwuliri	South-East	Junior	Foreign Affairs
15	Olusola Obada	South-West	Junior	Defence, then (senior) Defence
16	Olajumoke Akinjide	South-West	Junior	FCT
17	Asabe Asmau Ahmed	North-Central	Junior	Agriculture
18	Hauwa'u Lawan Bappa	North-West	Junior	Niger Delta

Muhammadu Buhari (2015 – 2019)

Number	Name	Geo-political Zone	Level	Portfolio
1	Amina J. Mohammed	North-East	Senior	Environment
2	Kemi Adeosun	South-West	Senior	Finance
3	Aisha Alhassan	North-East	Senior	Women Affairs
4	Zainab Ahmed	North-West	Junior	Budget and National Planning, then (senior) Finance
5	Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim	North-East	Junior	Foreign Affairs
6	Aisha Abubakar	North-West	Junior	Industry, Trade and Investment, then (senior) Women Affairs

Muhammadu Buhari (2019 – 2023)

Number	Name	Geo-political Zone	Level	Portfolio
1	Zainab Ahmed	North-West	Senior	Finance
2	Sadiya Umar Farouq	North-West	Senior	Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development
3	Pauline Tallen	North-Central	Senior	Women Affairs
4	Gbemisola Saraki	North-Central	Junior	Transportation, then Mines and Steel Development
5	Ramatu Tijani Bello	North-Central	Junior	FCT
6	Sharon Ikeazor	South-East	Junior	Environment, then Niger Delta

Bola Tinubu (2023)

Number	Name	Geo-political Zone	Level	Portfolio
1	Betta Edu	South-South	Senior	Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation
2	Doris Uzoka-Anite	South-East	Senior	Industry, Trade and Investment
3	Hannatu Musawa	North-West	Senior	Art, Culture and the Creative Economy
4	Lola Ade-John	South-West	Senior	Tourism
5	Jamila Bio Ibrahim	North-Central	Senior	Youth Affairs
6	Uju Kennedy Ohaneye	South-East	Senior	Women Affairs
7	Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim	North-Central	Junior	Police Affairs
8	Nkiruka Onyejeocha	South-East	Junior	Labour
9	Mariya Mahmood Bunkure	North-West	Junior	FCT

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