



ATHENA

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## GENDER



## Closing Gendered Governance Gaps in Nigeria Strengthening State Capacity

Chinaza Igwe • Juliana Kalu Ogba • Dabara Thankgod Jonah

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Our mission is to conduct rigorous research and provide evidence-based recommendations that contribute to the development of a prosperous and forward-looking society in Nigeria.

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# Executive Summary

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Nigeria's gender gaps are a state capability challenge, not merely a social issue. Women participate actively in the labour force (80.7%) but are concentrated in informal, low-protection sectors, limiting productivity, pension contributions, and fiscal capacity. Political pipelines remain narrow, with women holding just 4.2% of House of Representatives seats, constraining legislative oversight. Gender-based violence is widespread—31% reporting physical violence, 9% sexual—but low conviction rates signal weak enforcement. Collateral-based credit rules and limited land ownership (88.5% of women without titled assets) restrict access to formal markets and anchor enterprises at small scale.

Subnational variation is significant: Lagos and Ogun exhibit stronger enforcement, higher formal labour participation, and effective legal domestication, while northern states face higher informality, weaker enforcement, and limited access to credit.

This edition of Athena Perspectives recommends key policy interventions:

**1. Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB)** – Link MDAs' performance to gender outcomes and embed GRB in budget planning.

**2. Political Representation Incentives** – Require pre-primary disclosure and transparent party financing to expand women's legislative pipelines.

**3. GBV Enforcement Strengthening** – Digital case-tracking systems and annual VAPP scorecards to increase reporting and convictions.

**4. Women's Access to Formal Markets** – Group-guarantee credit schemes, digital financial inclusion, and public procurement support for women-owned enterprises.

Implementing these pathways strengthens allocative credibility, fiscal performance, and institutional legitimacy, positioning Nigeria to harness its demographic and economic potential ahead of the 2027 elections.

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## Why Gendered Gaps Matter for State Performance

Nigeria enters a period in which institutional performance will determine whether the state can manage tightening fiscal space, rapid demographic expansion and a politically competitive runway to the 2027 elections. Debt-service obligations absorb a sizeable share of federal revenues, while high informality and vulnerable employment constrain the tax base and pension contributions. In this context, gendered outcomes are not merely social disparities; they are signals of governance underperformance in budget systems, regulatory design, enforcement chains and political representation.

The labour market illustrates the point. Women participate actively in the labour force; the latest international series report [80.7 per cent female participation versus 84.4 per cent for men](#). Earlier national estimates placed women's participation at 48 per cent. This refers to the [share of women within the total labour force](#) rather than the rate among working-age women. The problem is thus not participation alone but concentration in informal, low-protection segments, where productivity is limited, and social insurance contributions are minimal.

In the National Assembly, women's representation remains exceptionally narrow. At [4.2 per cent in the House of Representatives](#), this is well below [global norms](#). Representation at this level shapes committee attention, budget scrutiny and oversight intensity in sectors with high developmental multipliers. On protection, the NDHS 2018 finds 31 per cent of women aged 15–49 report physical violence and 9 per cent sexual violence at some point; enforcement outcomes remain far below incidence, signalling weak case pipelines and [low conviction probability](#). These gaps affect fiscal capacity, service delivery, and state legitimacy, making them central to governance and state capability.

Subnational disparities underscore the need for targeted, state-sensitive interventions. Southern states such as Lagos and Ogun show higher [formal labour participation, better domestication of the Violence Against Persons \(Prohibition\) Act \(VAPP\)](#), and more efficient GBV case processing. Northern states exhibit higher female labour informality, weaker enforcement capacity, and limited access to credit due to cultural and structural barriers. Local legislative representation also varies, with some states (e.g., Ekiti, Kwara, Rivers and Akwa Ibom) demonstrating marginally higher inclusion at the state assembly level. These differences highlight the need for targeted, state-sensitive interventions.

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## Institutional Diagnosis

Nigeria's constitutional and statutory frameworks articulate equality and protection, but persistent gendered gaps arise from structural weaknesses across four domains:

### Legal and implementation gaps

The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) provides statutory tools against domestic and sexual violence, but its effectiveness varies by state. Where domestication, resourcing and inter-agency coordination are weak, prosecution rates fall and trust declines. The national-subnational split in enforcement responsibilities exacerbates inconsistency: [national law without subnational capacity yields thin deterrence](#).

### Political and representational barriers

Women's share of seats is 4.2 per cent in the House of Representatives, with similarly [low figures in the Senate](#). This is not primarily voter preference; it reflects institutional gatekeeping: nomination fees, opaque financing rules and network-based selection that reward resource-rich aspirants. Without disclosure and oversight of internal nomination rules, [parties rationally prioritise candidates who can self-finance, narrowing pipelines long before ballots are cast](#).

### Economic institutions and market access

Women are over-represented in informal work (data suggest 82 per cent of employed women), with minimal contracts or [contributory protections](#). Informality is reinforced by property-rights and collateral rules: the credit architecture is collateral-centred; women hold fewer titled assets (e.g., land ownership among women is low), constraining access to formal finance and anchoring enterprises at small scale.

### Protection systems and enforcement capacity

High prevalence with low convictions implies a pipeline failure, investigation, case building, evidence standards, prosecutorial practice and adjudication timelines. Where expected enforcement is low, reporting drops and impunity rises, further corroding [institutional credibility](#).

The pattern. Across domains, binding commitments meet weak incentives and thin enforcement, producing a structural capability gap.

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## What The Evidence Shows

To focus policy attention, the table below summarises institutional indicators that matter for fiscal capacity, productivity and legitimacy. (Earlier estimates are acknowledged where relevant and current series are used as anchors.)

**Table: Nigeria's Key Gendered Governance Indicators**

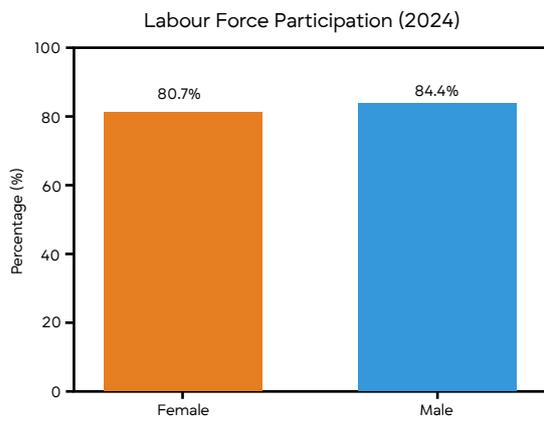
Indicator	Latest Value	Governance Implication
<b>Female Labour Participation</b>	<a href="#">80.7% (2024)</a>	High participation exists, but gendered segmentation limits overall productivity and social contributions.
<b>Male Labour Participation</b>	<a href="#">84.4% (2024)</a>	While the headline gap is small, structural segmentation remains the primary binding constraint.
<b>Women's Share of Total Labour Force</b>	<a href="#">48.4% (2024)</a>	This is a composition share.
<b>Women in House of Reps</b>	<a href="#">4.2% (2023)</a>	Extremely narrow legislative pipelines reduce policy bandwidth and effective oversight.
<b>Physical Violence (Reported)</b>	<a href="#">31% (2018)</a>	High prevalence coupled with low conviction rates indicates significant
<b>Sexual Violence (Reported)</b>	<a href="#">9% (2018)</a>	Weak enforcement mechanisms reduce deterrence and institutional protection.
<b>Women Without Land Ownership</b>	<a href="#">88.5% (2018)</a>	Massive collateral gaps limit access to credit and hinder formal enterprise growth.
<b>Informal Employment (Women)</b>	<a href="#">82% (Indicative)</a>	Low protections depress productivity, long-term pensions, and tax

**Labour market quality:** Despite high participation, segmentation into informality drives three governance consequences: (i) lower productivity and weak technology diffusion; (ii) limited pension and tax contributions; (iii) heightened [household vulnerability](#).

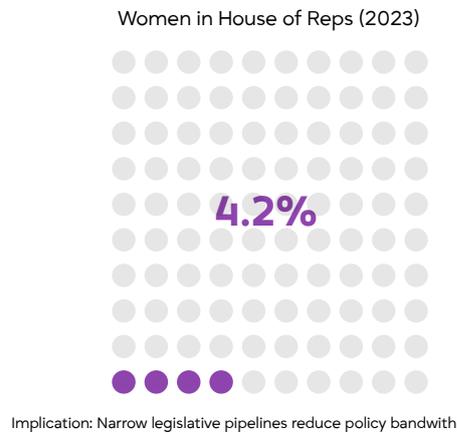
**Political representation:** 4.2 per cent in the House of Representatives places Nigeria among the world's lowest; narrow pipelines compress committee bandwidth and reduce scrutiny [of high-return social sectors](#).

**Assets, credit and firm growth:** Land and titled asset gaps limit collateral eligibility, constraining women-owned firms' scale and [formalisation](#).

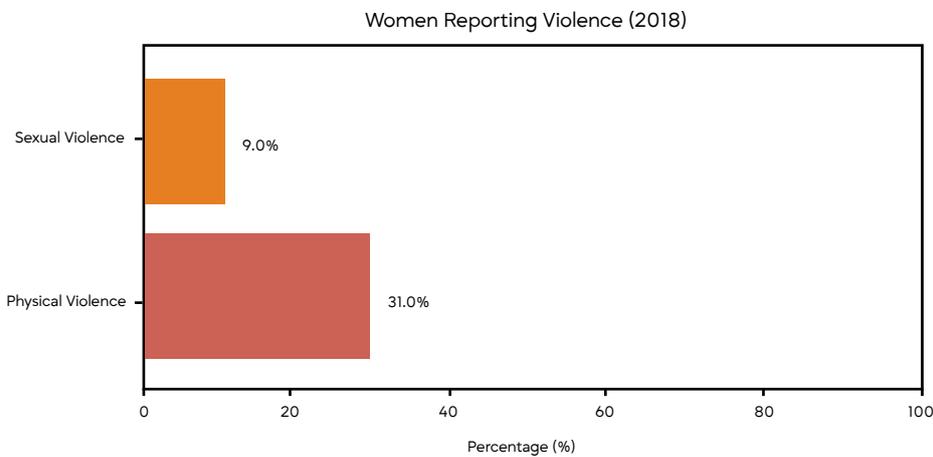
**Protection and enforcement:** Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey prevalence juxtaposed with thin convictions indicates weak enforcement certainty, a core determinant of legal [compliance and trust](#).



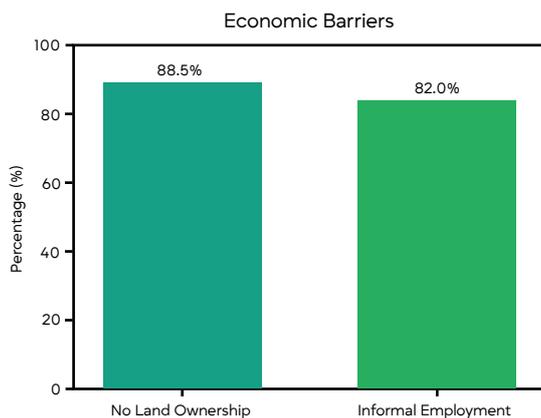
Implication: High Participation; segmentation limits productivity



Implication: Narrow legislative pipelines reduce policy bandwidth



Implication: High prevalence & low conviction indicate enforcement gaps



ImEconomic Impact:  
Limits credit access and depresses tax/pension contributions.

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## Drivers Of Persistent Gender Gaps

Persistent gender gaps in governance in Nigeria stem from a combination of institutional barriers, entrenched social norms, and unequal access to political and economic resources that continue to constrain women's participation and leadership.

The main drivers include:

- **Party Gatekeeping**

Internal rules (fees, opaque finance, patronage) create rational incentives to prefer resource-rich aspirants. Without transparency and oversight, parties internalise immediate electoral calculus over [representational diversity](#).

- **Bureaucratic Incentives**

Budget offices and MDAs are judged on procedural and cash-management compliance, not on gender-differentiated outcomes. Without binding budget rules or performance consequences, gender analysis remains optional.

- **Market Constraints**

Collateral-based lending is rational for banks under current regulation; when women lack titled assets, exclusion is a by-product of the property-rights system, not necessarily of [discriminatory intent](#).

- **Enforcement Tolerance**

With limited investigative tools, slow case management and inconsistent evidence standards, expected conviction probability is low. Citizens rationally under-report; deterrence erodes; institutions become less informative and [less credible](#).



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## Global Lessons for Gendered Governance in Nigeria

Comparative experience from Rwanda, South Africa, and India shows that durable improvements in gendered governance outcomes emerge when institutional rules reshape incentives in political representation, financial systems, and enforcement capacity.

Country	Outcome	Mechanism	Policy Implication
Rwanda	63.8% women in Parliament (Chamber of Deputies)	Constitutional quotas; rule-bound pipelines	Automatic compliance drives legislative diversity and strengthens <a href="#">attention to social sectors</a>
South Africa	45.1% women in the National Assembly	Party list quotas	Persistent GBV and inequality show that high representation alone cannot substitute for enforcement capacity
India	<a href="#">Self-Help Groups</a> -backed credit	Group guarantees bypass collateral constraints	Expand women's access to formal finance despite slow legal reforms

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## Policy Pathways: Strengthening Gendered Governance in Nigeria

Closing gendered governance gaps requires reforms that adjust incentives, improve enforcement, and expand economic inclusion. The following pathways are prioritised by impact, feasibility, and urgency, with estimated fiscal and implementation considerations.

### 1. Strengthen Gender-Responsive Budgeting (High Priority)

**Problem Addressed:** Commitments to gender equality not translating into allocations or execution.

**Actions:**

- Embed gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) in the MTEF and annual budget call circulars.
- Require gender budget statements specifying beneficiaries, outputs, and risks.
- Link MDAs' performance compacts to gender-disaggregated indicators tied to service outputs.

**Implementation Considerations:** Pilot in Health, Education, Justice over 0–12 months; scale nationwide within 36 months.

**Risks:** Resistance from MDAs prioritising cash compliance over gender outcomes; mitigated through KPIs and public disclosure.

**Budget Implications:** Integration primarily uses existing budget office resources; minor costs for training and data systems.

**Potential Fiscal Gain:** Improved targeting of programmes could increase effective use of allocations by 5–10%, enhancing service delivery efficiency.

### 2. Improve Political Representation Incentives (Medium-High Priority)

**Problem Addressed:** Party gatekeeping and opaque nomination finance rules limit women's entry.

**Actions:**

- Mandate pre-primary disclosure of gender-segregated nomination lists and fees; require post-primary reporting.
- Publish party transparency dashboards monitored by INEC and parliamentary committees.

**Implementation Considerations:** Introduce ahead of 2027 primaries; compliance monitored over 0–18 months.

**Risks:** Parties may superficially comply; mitigated through civil society oversight and public reporting.

**Budget Implications:** Minimal; leverages INEC and parliamentary monitoring capacity.

**Potential Impact:** Increasing women's representation could expand legislative oversight bandwidth, enhancing social sector policy scrutiny by 15–20%.

### 3. Enhance GBV Enforcement Pipeline (Medium Priority)

**Problem Addressed:** High prevalence of GBV with low convictions reduces institutional credibility.

**Actions:**

- Publish annual VAPP scorecards by state (domestication status, filings, convictions, case duration).
- Implement a digital case-tracking platform linking police, prosecutors, and courts; integrate basic forensic capacity standards.

**Implementation**

**Considerations:** Pilot in five states (0–12 months), scale to all states (12–36 months).

**Risks:** Limited judicial and police capacity; risk of incomplete reporting; mitigated through phased roll-out and training.

**Budget Implications:** Initial investment for digital platforms and training; could be partly funded from existing justice reform allocations.

**Potential Impact:** Expected conviction probability increase from current levels could deter 10–15% of repeat offenders, improving rule-of-law credibility.

#### 4. Expand Women's Access to Formal Markets (Medium Priority)

**Problem Addressed:** Collateral-based lending excludes women from formal finance, limiting enterprise scale.

**Actions:**

- Scale group-guarantee credit schemes within DBN/BOI frameworks.
- Accelerate digital financial inclusion through simplified KYC and mobile onboarding.
- Implement beneficial-ownership verification and open contracting to support women-owned firms in procurement.

**Implementation Considerations:** Pilot over 0–12 months; scale nationwide within 36 months.

**Risks:** Banking sector resistance, default risk; mitigated through risk-sharing and regulatory guidance.

**Budget Implications:** Programmes funded largely through DBN/BOI operational budgets and donor co-financing.

**Potential Impact:** Could increase women-owned SMEs' access to credit by 20–25%, boosting formal enterprise growth and expanding tax contributions.

#### Implementation Prioritisation Summary

Reform	Priority	Timeline	Risk	Potential Impact	Budget Implication
<b>Gender-responsive Budgeting</b>	High	0–36 months	MDA's compliance	Improved service targeting	Low
<b>Political representation</b>	Medium–High	0–18 months	Party superficial compliance	Increased legislative scrutiny	Minimal
<b>GBV Enforcement Pipeline</b>	Medium	0–36 months	Police /judicial capacity	Higher conviction, trust in law	Moderate
<b>Women's Market Access</b>	Medium	0–36 months	Banking resistance	Formal enterprise growth	Moderate

This prioritisation enables fast, high-impact interventions while laying foundations for systemic improvements in enforcement and economic inclusion.

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## Closing Gendered Governance Gaps: Institutional Stakes

Nigeria's gendered outcomes are state capability signals. Concentration of women in informal, low-protection work undermines productivity, pensions and tax revenue; narrow legislative pipelines reduce policy bandwidth and budget scrutiny; and high GBV prevalence with low convictions erodes rule-of-law credibility.

These are institutional performance problems, not peripheral social issues. The proposed pathways tighten rules, sharpen incentives, and increase enforcement certainty within existing mandates. In a tight fiscal cycle and an election-year accountability window, closing gendered governance gaps is statebuilding: it strengthens allocative credibility, enforcement legitimacy, and the state's ability to translate commitments into outcomes.

### Authors

**Chinaza Igwe** is a Research Fellow, specialising in Education Studies and Policy Research.

**Juliana Kalu Ogba** is a Research Assistant, Public Health Research and Policy Analysis.

**Dabara Thankgod Jonah** is a Research Assistant, Governance Research and Policy Analysis.





### FG Partners CSO to Boost Inclusive Healthcare Policies

The Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the civil society organisation Intersex Nigeria to integrate intersex perspectives into Nigeria's healthcare policies.

The agreement formalises a partnership that began in 2023 and includes the launch of a policy toolkit to guide inclusive healthcare practices. The initiative aims to improve awareness, protection, and access to care for persons born with variations in sexual characteristics.

<https://punchng.com/fg-cso-partner-to-boost-inclusive-healthcare-policies/>

### Rising Opposition Violence Fuels Pre-Election Concerns

Reports of violent incidents involving opposition leaders, party offices, and political gatherings have been recorded in several Nigerian states, including Kaduna, Kano, Lagos, Kogi, Edo, Rivers, and Oyo, ahead of the 2027 general elections. Opposition parties, including the Peoples Democratic Party, African Democratic Congress, Labour Party, and New Nigeria People's Party, alleged intimidation and attacks targeting their members and facilities. The All Progressives Congress denied involvement, stating that the incidents were unrelated to the ruling party and were attributable to other factors.

<https://punchng.com/rising-opposition-attacks-spark-concerns-ahead-o->

### UN Highlights Rising Threat to Schools Worldwide

United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif reported that attacks on schools worldwide increased by 166% between 2021 and 2024, with incidents particularly recorded in Sudan, Ukraine, Gaza, Myanmar, and Ethiopia.

She told the United Nations Human Rights Council's annual meeting on children's rights that nearly one in six children globally (about 470 million) were directly affected by armed conflict in 2024. UN officials also stated that violence against children in conflict

settings remained at extreme levels in 2025, calling for stronger protection mechanisms.

<https://punchng.com/attacks-on-schools-worldwide-surged-166-between-2021-2024-un/>

### Firm Trains 623 Edo Teachers in Digital Skills

A total of 623 teachers and education inspectors graduated from the NNPC Exploration and Production Limited/Seplat Energy Joint Venture Teachers Empowerment Programme in Benin, Edo State. The programme provides training in critical thinking, leadership, digital literacy, and technology-enabled teaching methods. Organisers said 1,957 educators from Edo and Delta states have completed the programme since its launch in 2020.

<https://punchng.com/firm-trains-623-edo-teachers-in-digital-skills/>





### Cameroon Obtains CFA 108.4bn Loan to Boost Fibre-Optic Network

Paul Biya authorised the Minister of Economy, Planning and Regional Development to sign a loan agreement with the Export-Import Bank of China to finance Phase IV of Cameroon's fibre-optic backbone expansion. The loan amounts to 1,350,963,161.10 yuan (approximately 108.39 billion CFA francs) and is intended to expand national telecommunications transmission capacity in Cameroon. Cameroon's public debt stood at 14.24 trillion CFA francs at the end of 2024, representing about 45.6% of GDP, according to the Autonomous Sinking Fund. The International Monetary Fund projected Cameroon's fiscal deficit at 1.7% of GDP in 2026 and continued to classify the country as at high risk of debt distress.

<https://www.businessincameroon.com/finance/0903-15869-cameroon-approves-cfa108-39-bln-china-exim-bank-loan-to-expand-fibre-optic-backbone>

### UN Cautions Chad on Death Penalty

The United Nations Human Rights Committee raised questions regarding Decree No. 82 of 23 June 2025, which established a commission to examine the possible reinstatement of the death penalty in Chad.

The Committee also sought clarification on the implementation of compensation for victims of the regime of Hissène Habré, including the allocation of 10,000 million CFA francs. Additionally, the Committee requested information on medical, psychological, and memorial measures ordered by the Special Criminal Court of N'Djamena for victims of the former regime.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/meeting-summaries/2026/03/experts-human-rights-committee-welcome-eforts-chad-combat-traffic>

### Violence Escalates Across Niger, Benin, Nigeria

Violent incidents involving Islamist militant groups in the tri-border area of Niger, Benin, and Nigeria increased by 90% between 2024 and 2025, with reported deaths exceeding 1,000, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. ACLED reported that militants linked to al-Qaeda and Islamic State have expanded operations in Benin's Alibori and Borgou departments and Niger's Dosso region. The report also identified increased militant activity in Nigeria's Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, and Kwara states. Militant factions operating in the area include groups affiliated with

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Sahel Province.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/islamist-militant-attacks-niger-benin-nigeria-border-zone-soaring-research-shows-2026-02-26/>

### Niger Tightens Grip on Mining Sector

The government of Niger revoked mining concessions granted between 2017 and 2020 to the companies Comini, Afrior, and Ecomine, citing failure to meet contractual obligations such as tax payments, reporting requirements, and environmental compliance. Authorities also rejected a licence extension request from Savannah Energy for oil exploration in the Agadem Rift Basin, stating that the firm had not complied with the terms of its production-sharing contract.

The actions form part of policy steps taken by Niger's military government following the 2023 Niger coup d'état to increase state control over the country's strategic resource sectors.

<https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/markets/africas-top-uranium-producer-niger-revokes-gold-mining-concessions-for-three-firms/xcjm1pwch>

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-  Block A10, Phase 2, Sani Zangon  
Daura Estates, Kado, FCT.
-  [info.centre@athenacentre.org](mailto:info.centre@athenacentre.org)
-  [facebook.com/Athena Centre for  
Policy and Leadership](https://facebook.com/Athena_Centre_for_Policy_and_Leadership)
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