

Special Legislative Seats for Nigerian Women in Politics: Penny Wise or Pound Foolish?

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Abstract

The gender gap in Africa's patriarchal political space has received significant investigative attention in recent times. Recently, Nigeria's Green and Red Chamber ratified the amendment of the constitutional provisions for advancing more legislative seats for women in politics. Yet, constraints which surround this phenomenon go beyond what the local legislative scorecard generates. This is neither an option that aligns with the existing first-past-the-post electoral arrangement nor gives more room to full implementation of the 30 percent Beijing affirmative action as entrenched in the country's National Gender Policy for 35% positions to women. Through a descriptive-qualitative research design and documentary analysis, this paper gives valuable pointers on the supposed inventions of the 9th Assemblies by exploring the fits and misfits of special legislative seats for women in inclusive gender space in Nigeria's democratic experiment and why the invention may add –up to the existing congested budgetary woes. The study concludes that enforcement of the ratified sections is still far below the global recommendable affirmative quota for women's inclusion, especially in Nigeria's 10th law laboratory. This underscores the dense patriarchy of Africa's political landscape, a feigned breach of the international gendered standard.

Keywords: Legislature, Gender, Politics, Nigeria, Women Inclusion, Women Empowerment, Law, Gender Equality

Introduction

Long before now, advocacy for women's suffrage irrespective of race, colour or sex has always been momentous in human history. The geospatial variability in equaling the size and scope of women in government now receives more scholarship attention on the world stage (Lawrence and Lott, 1999). While studies on citizenship tend to overly emphasize un-gendered constructs and inclusionary force. Citizenship is essentially about exclusion in that it creates gendered, racialized, ethnicized, and aged “non or partial citizens” especially in developing democracies (Lister, 2003).

It is not difficult to see that as much as giving women the right to vote has become a universal standard and global human right element, a long-standing puzzle facing public choice has been why enforcement of the same has been partially resisted (Tullock 1995). In Africa, scholarship contention receives peculiarities on gendered political space while the new deal was an extension of the scope and size of women in governance (Holcombe 1996; Lawrence and Lott, 1999). The literature is littered with theories from the unbalanced growth of the participatory hypothesis, International polling data also found that women are no more relatively risk-aversed “almost” everywhere, especially in terms of the elasticity of their representation in government (Stark 2016).

For instance, Africa's Agenda 2063 commits to improving women's political participation through Aspiration three on Africa's good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law. This aspiration embeds a culture of gender equality and good governance. Such aspiration and accompanying framework, as necessary, make clear the fact that the continent needs the ground evidence to draw attention to gaps and to make evident progress on women in political participation (Africa Barometer, 2021). Thus densely, the patriarchalism of Africa's political landscape is still leaning on a feigned breach of the international gendered standard. In a bid to address the cultural and religious barriers of patriarchal constructs, special measures are put in place to correct historical gendered public space representation imbalances. Although many sociocultural practices have reinforced gender inequalities in developing countries. This paper draws insights on this phenomenon by specifically hinging on the proposed Special Legislative Seats for Nigerian Women in Politics as a litmus for Africa's most populous democracy.

Theoretical Framework

Gender

Gender is an interesting phenomenon which is rooted in biology but vehemently shaped by societal, cultural and religious expectations and beliefs. Science and biology reveal more and more about the biological and psychological complexity of gender just as society undergoes a gender revolution arising in the questioning, exploration and recognition of a broader spectrum of gender and sexual identities.

The term Gender is the social, cultural and psychological interpretations associated with masculinity or femininity which vary depending on other intersectional factors like race, ethnicity and culture.

Gender and the role expected of it are principally defined and apportioned by society. While the masculine gender is believed to be the head and apportioned responsibilities such as leadership, decision making, security, governance etc, the feminine gender is saddled with home front roles such as childbearing and rearing, cooking, cleaning etc.

In most religions, the masculine gender (men) is expected to be seen and heard whilst the feminine (women) is expected to be seen and not heard in Christendom. In Islam, the feminine gender is not to be seen nor heard as found in the Purdah provisions of the tenets of Islam. Quran 4vrs 34 for instance, speaks of men being protectors, caretakers and maintainers of women. 1 Timothy 2:12 forbids women from teaching or having authority over men, she is expected to be silent. 1 Corinthians 11:3 indicates that the head of a woman is the man. Several other portions of the Bible speak to the submission of women to men and discourage women from leading in public. This is the beginning of gender inequality as it derives legitimacy from religious tenets which are generally believed to be sacred and unchangeable.

Stereotyping

Humans grow within cultures with gender curriculum which prescribes what it is to be a male or a female including gender roles and stereotypes. Stereotyping overgeneralises attitudes, traits and behavioural patterns of men and women. For instance, the masculine is expected to be brave and assertive While the feminine is expected to be shy and reserved. The stereotype is harmful if it limits the capacity of either gender or violates their rights or freedoms. The Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women reported that traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men are responsible for a widespread practice involving violence and coercion. Investigations by the United Nations on the cases of violence against women revealed that violence is rampant because of a strong belief in Patriarchy and stereotyping. Stereotyping is a generalized belief about a category of persons. It is an expectation that people nurture every person of a particular group. Stereotypes are most times overgeneralized, inaccurate, and resistant to new information. Stereotyping may be implicit or explicit.

Gender Equality

The differences in the roles apportioned to genders have immense implications on how each participates in public life. The differences embody social and power relations that constitute the setting for the implementation of development programmes and outcomes. For example, analysis of stabilization on structural adjustment policies showed that gender inequalities have an impact on the attainment of microeconomic objectives. The concern with gender relations in development has strengthened the affirmation that equality in the status of men and women is fundamental. The concept of gender equality is based on the belief that the distribution of opportunities, resources and responsibilities should not favour a group to the detriment of the other. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a major foundation for a peaceful prosperous and sustainable world. Women and girls represent half of the world's population and invariably half of its potential which the world can not afford to waste away. Different solutions have been propounded to ensure gender equality especially as it concerns

governance or public space leadership one such is the provision of special legislative seats for women.

Arguments on Previous Standpoints on Women's Representation in Politics

Recently, gender norms have become an essential component of political participation studies and public choice theoretical standpoints because of the increasing awareness of the roles they can generally play in the processes and outcomes of political decisions (Tulloch, 1995). The practice of gender itself is rooted in sociocultural norms and the ways and manner that gender manifests in development cannot be separated from this space. While culture, religion and their trappings are known to be the enduring foundation of society, developed societies have used culture to improve on other aspects of their development by modifying cultural practices, often through legislation. Gender norms analysis of feminism has proved to be a critical factor in the study of political representation. This is because masculinity is culturally, socially and religiously constructed and interpreted and manipulated including the expectations and roles that drive public representation, not through traditional but modern institutions. Previous discourses are no more on deeply entrenched patriarchy in African society which has posed many barriers for women in political participation.

In this vein, the generic upturn of political space in Africa has been challenged by feminist scholars as historically male-centric and inherently exclusionary because women were not included in the original social contract instituted by Western enlightenment but were instead "generally subsumed under male heads of households with no legal rights of their own" (Tickner, 1997). While political representation in most advanced democracies has been presumed to be genderless, it is still "based on male-defined norms which deny the complexities of female experiences" (Seely, Diouf, Malischewski, Vaikath, & Young-Burns, 2013). In the same way, most feminist scholars have questioned the primacy of maleness as a referent of citizenship, so to have internationalist and Africanist scholars challenged whiteness as a referent of citizenship by centring the experiences of so-called Global South subjects in their analysis of citizenship and geopolitical hierarchies of power (Palley, 2020).

Adopting a feminist lens of analysis, this article demonstrates that contestations over women's equality in contemporary Africa have centred around the fulfilment of citizenship rights embedded in law, practice, and lived experience. It examines structural, institutional, and cultural barriers to ensuring full citizenship for women in policy and praxis, including an evaluation of how African women's political, economic, social, and cultural rights have transformed over the post-independence period. To that end, this article narrowed the global contentions on the expansion of scope and size of women's representation to Nigeria's efforts at essentially equalizing access to rights, resources, and representation by drawing on the activities of Nigeria's 9th Assembly's proposition on the recent bills adopted on creating special legislative seats for women in Nigeria to improve women's role in governance if the timing of its implementation or enforcement is still in sight as enunciated by public choice scholars (Buchanan, 1986; Arrow, 1972; Becker, 1992; Smith, 2002; Ostrom, 2009).

Contextualities on Scope(s) and Size(s) of Women in Government through Global and Domestic Legislations

African countries are still far from achieving women's "equal and effective" participation in political decision-making. According to the first Women's Political Participation (WPP) Africa Barometer 2021, women constitute 24% of the 12,113 parliamentarians in Africa - 25% in the lower houses, and 20% in the upper houses of parliament. While local government is often hailed as a training ground for women in politics, women constitute a mere 21% of councillors in the 19 countries. Corroborating this standpoint, the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap report (2021) used four key indicators (political empowerment, economic participation, education and health) to evaluate this and it was found that the widest gender disparity is seen in politics. Available evidence point towards a repeat of this headline in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria if drastic measures are not taken.

According to Agbalajobi (2021), Nigeria has very little women representation in politics. Only 7 out of 109 senators and 22 of the 360 House of Representatives members are women. And only

4 out of 36 deputy governors are women. The country has never had a woman state governor either.

The proposed Bill advocates a review of the constitution to create new 111 special seats for women in the National Assembly and 108 similar seats for women in the State Houses of Assembly through Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) to boost the numbers of women in the legislature.

Table 1: Women's Political Participation in Africa

Region	Subregion	Lower Chamber & Unicameral	Upper Chamber	All Chambers
Africa		25%	20%	24%
	Horn	33%	30%	33%
	East Africa	33%	29%	32%
	South Africa	28%	29%	29%
	Central Africa	19%	20%	19%
	North Africa	24%	11%	21%
	West Africa	16%	12%	16%

Source: Africa Barometer, 2021.

Table 2: Key Indicators on Women's Political Participation in Africa

Indicators	Horn	East	Southern	Central	North	West	Africa	Notes
% Women in lower houses of parliament	33%	33%	28%	19%	24%	16%	25%	1
% Women in upper houses of parliament	30%	29%	29%	20%	11%	12%	20%	2
% Women in local govt	N/A	35%	20%	27%	3%	2%	21%	3
% Women in political party leadership	17%	15%	14%	7%	0%	11%	12%	4
% Women in Election Monitoring Bodies	21%	45%	40%	20%	25%	24%	28%	5
% women Speakers	0%	33%	35%	18%	0%	16%	21%	6
% women mayors of capital cities	20%	0%	19%	43%	0%	20%	19%	7
% Women in top executive 9 positions	10%	12%	9%	7%	0%	7%	7%	8
% women in cabinet	23%	32%	26%	20%	13%	19%	22%	9
% Women in parliament overall	33	32	28	19	11	12	20	10

Source; Africa barometer, 2022; IPU website February 2021.

The above report reveals the top three officials in ruling and opposition Parties in each country, Updates on Electoral commissioners, Election Management Body, Speakers and heads of upper and lower chambers; data from parliament, accurate records of the Presidency, deputy presidents, prime ministers and deputy prime ministers are partially available in most countries in Africa (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). However, since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (twenty-seven years ago), women's representation in parliament has improved by only 10% from 15% to 25% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). With this spate of infinitesimal increment, achievement of equilibrium may wait till 2070 going to the Inter-parliamentary Union report. Conversely, goal 5 of the SDG commits the world government to achieve this feat; equalizing male participation and representation in political positions by 2030.

Table 3: Number of Women in State Houses of Assembly in Nigeria

S/N	State	No of Seats	No of Women	Overall %
1	Abia	24	-	0%
2	Adamawa	25	1	4
3	Akwa Ibom	26	2	8
4	Anambra	30	1	3
5	Bauchi	31	-	0
6	Bayelsa	24	3	13
7	Benue	30	2	7
8	Borno	28	-	0
9	Cross River	25	5	20
10	Delta	28	2	7
11	Ebonyi	24	3	13
12	Edo	24	-	0
13	Ekiti	26	4	15
14	Enugu	24	4	17
15	Gombe	24	1	4
16	Imo	27	2	7
17	Jigawa	30	-	0
18	Kaduna	34	1	3
19	Kano	40	-	0
20	Katsina	34	-	0
21	Kebbi	24	-	0
22	Kogi	25	-	0
23	Kwara	24	-	0
24	Lagos	40	3	8
25	Nasarawa	24	-	0
26	Niger	27	1	4
27	Ogun	26	4	15
28	Ondo	26	1	4
29	Osun	26	2	8
30	Oyo	32	1	1

31	Plateau	24	1	4
32	River	32	1	3
33	Sokoto	30	-	0
34	Taraba	24	-	0
35	Yobe	24	-	0
36	Zamfara Total	24 990	- 45	4.5%

Source: Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2021)

Nigeria’s Electoral System Contributes to Women’s Under-Representation in the Legislature. According to Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU, 2021), Women occupied only 21 out of 469 seats in the National Assembly which makes the country one of the worst performers in the West African region in terms of the representation of women in parliaments and the second worst after Eritrea in the whole of the African continent. Drawing on the above report by PLAC, apart from the known political, socio-economic, cultural, and religious barriers to women joining politics and contesting elections, one important factor influencing the likelihood of women being elected to a legislature is the type of electoral system used in the country. The electoral system simply refers to how votes are translated into seats. The First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) /plurality electoral system is a simple majority system where a candidate with the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared the winner not minding the total number of votes obtained by other losing candidates which may be larger when combined. One major disadvantage of this is that it does not allow for fair representation of diverse voters or voices in a constituency since a candidate can win an election without winning the majority of the popular votes. However, a 2008 study of the National Assembly in Nigeria made projections of the composition of male and female legislators from 2011 to 2031 to be 2.3% per election cycle but this has not come to fruition revealing that gradual and incremental progress in numbers is unworkable and can be interrupted as such.

Table 4: Predicted composition of male and female legislators in Nigeria (2011-2031)

Gender	Predicted 2011- 2015	Actual 2011 - 2015	Predicted 2015 - 2019	Actual 2015 - 2019	Predicted 2019 - 2023	Actual 2019 - 2023	Predicted 2023 - 2027	Predicted 2027 - 2031
Male	89.7%	93.2%	87.4%	93.8%	85.7%	96%	83%	80.4%
Female	10.2%	6.8%	12.6%	6.2%	14.9%	4.5%	17.3%	20%

Source: NASS Statistical information (2008); PLAC (2021)

Bill Analysis: Current Concerns and Projections on the Bill for Special Legislative Seats For Women in Nigeria

- Temporary Special Measures (TSMs): According to the United Nations (UN), the word "special" refer to uncommon measures or mechanisms that are designed to serve a specific goal. The Bill is aimed at accelerating the improvement of the position of women to achieve substantial equality and to effect the structural, social and cultural changes necessary to correct past and current forms and effects of discrimination against women. These measures come in a wide variety of legislative, executive, administrative and other regulatory instruments, policies and practices, such as outreach or support programmes; allocation and/or reallocation of resources; preferential treatment; numerical goals connected with time frames; and quota systems. Although these are not

intended to confer some superior status on the beneficiaries. Special measures may also come TSMs in the following forms:

i. **Reserved seat quotas:**

This connotes that in the legislature, a certain number or percentage of seats (called a quota) is set aside for an under-represented group, such as women. This ensures that there is a guaranteed minimum number of underrepresented groups (women in this instance) in the legislature. Measures like seat reservations/special seats are typically enshrined in the constitution of countries adopting them to ensure that it is legally secured. However, to be considered a temporary measure, the legal provision has to indicate that it will only operate for a period or lapse at a prescribed time.

ii. **Legislated candidate quotas:** Requires political parties to field a certain minimum percentage of women candidates. These could either be constitutional or electoral. Again, a time limit has to be prescribed for it to be considered a temporary measure.

iii. **Voluntary candidate quotas:** These are not seen as TSMs in a strict sense as they are non-binding targets pledged by political parties on the number of women candidates they shall put on the ballot. They are legally unenforceable and require strong political will to work. For instance, many political parties in Nigeria adopt numeric targets for disadvantaged groups on paper i.e., party constitutions and manifestoes, but they are rarely if ever implemented. Political parties prefer to give free or reduced fees for nomination forms to women, which contributes little to get their names on the ballot.

Implications

Constitutional Amendment and Increase in the National Assembly Members' Composition

The proportional representation electoral system has been used for the National Assembly composition. In other words, numbers are based on the population of each State with a varying number of members/legislators representing different constituencies in each State. For instance, Lagos and Kano's states have the highest number of members in the House of Representatives with 24 representatives each. States like Ebonyi, Ekiti, Kwara and Gombe have 6 members each, Jigawa has 11, Delta and Imo 10, and Bayelsa 5. With 2 members, FCT has the lowest number of representatives in the House of Representatives. Section 49 of the Constitution however limits the total number of members to 360. The Bill proposes to amend this section to create two additional seats in the House of Representatives from each State of the Federation and the FCT to be occupied by only women. The implication is that each State will have two women added to its already existing number totalling 74 additional Women Representatives. 111 additional seats will be occupied by women which will be added to the existing 469 seats in the National Assembly.

Increase in State Houses of Assembly Composition

The proposed Bill will lead to the amendment of section 91 of the Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria which will help in creating additional three seats to the number of seats for women in every State House of Assembly. The three additional women-only seats are to be in accordance with the three Senatorial districts already delineated for each state.

Presently, section 91 of the 1999 Constitution in Nigeria does not prescribe a uniform number of seats for State Assemblies. But it provides that it should consist of three or four times the number of seats that the State has in the House of Representatives divided in a way to reflect, as far as possible, a nearly equal population. It further prescribes a lower limit of 24 members and an upper limit or cap of 40 members per State.

As an example, Lagos and Kano state both have 24 Federal Legislative seats and 40 State Assembly seats each, which is the upper limit placed by the Constitution. Gombe has 6 Federal legislative seats and 24 State Assembly seats which is four times the number of its federal seats and the lower limit placed by the constitution.

To accommodate the three special women-only seats, the Bill proposes an increase of the upper limit from 40 to 43 seats. If the amendment passes, the total number of women-only seats added to the 36 State Assemblies would be 108.

Increase in cost of Governance

Of note is also the increase in the cost of governance which is a natural consequence of the creation of extra seats. For Nigeria, the cost has been alarmingly high and unsustainable as recurrent expenditure continues to significantly exceed capital expenditure. This has generated public concern and national discourse because of the negative implication it has on investment, industrial expansion, infrastructural development and growth of the real sectors of the economy. Many developing countries all over the world are making concerted efforts at reducing the cost of governance to conserve funds for infrastructural development that would impact positively the lives of the citizens. For instance, India introduced e-governance in administration to reduce the cost of running its government. Other countries like Ethiopia, Thailand, Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, etc. have further resorted to a reduction in the number of political appointees involved in the act of administration thereby making the Government efficient in the management of its scarce resources. For any society to have landmark progress, it must put in place a cost-effective management system capable of maximizing the nation's scarce resources for the benefit of all.

All government has as a primary responsibility, the duty to ensure that public fund is judiciously expended by making concerted efforts to reduce the costs of governance. India for instance, introduced e-governance in administration to reduce the cost of running its government. Other countries like Ethiopia, Thailand, Kenya, Ghana, and Rwanda resorted to a reduction in the number of political appointees.

At present, senators in Nigeria earn around \$450,000 per annum, over two and half times the \$174,000 per annum that their counterparts earn in the United States of America. Nigerian legislators are amongst the highest paid in the world. Specifically, a study shows that they are second to the highest in earnings globally.

The 109 senators have a combined 829 aides on payroll and a retinue of support staff who are also paid by the National Assembly. The average House of Representative member in Nigeria earn \$224,000 more than their counterpart in the United States, the Presidency also gulps a large chunk of revenue, and budget allocations to the National Assembly are between N125bn and N150bn every year which is more than 15 per cent of the combined budgets for education and health for 200 million Nigerians.

Franchise For Special Seats

The Special Seats for Women Bill (HB 1301) is a Bill sponsored by the Green Chamber. Despite its broad co-sponsorship by Hon. Onyejeocha (Chief Whip), Rt. Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila (Speaker of the House of Representatives) and 85 others and the popular support garnered by the Bill amongst feminists, the proposed provisions have to be adopted by at least 2/3rd majority of members of the House (at least 240 of 360) and a 2/3rd majority of the Senate (at least 73 of 109) in line with the constitutional requirement on alterations, it must thereafter be approved by a resolution of the Houses of Assembly of not less than two-thirds of all the States (at least 24 States of 36). Finally, it requires Presidential Assent to become a Law. To ensure implementation by the 2023 general elections, the proposal must be adopted speedily before the actual conduct of the Elections in 2023.

The creation of extra seats is believed to be an indication of greater responsiveness to citizens' needs and the need to formulate Citizen-centric Policies.

A UN Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 for instance, revealed a positive correlation between the inclusion of women in the policy-making process and improved conflict management and reduced armed violence (PLAC, 2021). The special measure enhance greater visibility for women and it is likely to normalize women's presence in the parliament moving rapidly away from the traditionally male-dominated legislature.

Many countries that adopted special measures to increase the number of women in parliament such as Rwanda have experienced women-sponsored legislation that is beneficial to communities in addressing issues around education, healthcare, violence, and poverty. For instance, Order Paper Nigeria report (2021), only two female senators and one federal house of representative

member have sponsored the highest number of Bills in the 9th Senate (Senators Stella Oduah and Uche Ekwunife).

To ensure gender parity, the Nigerian National Assembly ratified the constitutional amendment of the provisions of sections 48, 49, 71, and 91 which deal with the composition of the Senate, the House of Representatives and the State Houses of Assembly. The proposed amendments are targeted as a measure to reduce the long-standing and conspicuous gender gap in the legislature of Nigeria. The Constitution is expected to be leveraged as an enabling instrument for the creation of 1 additional Senate seat for women in each state of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory and two additional seats for women in each of the 36 states and the FCT totalling 111 additional legislative seats in the National Assembly to be occupied solely by women beginning from the next general election.

The proposed law also stipulates that these additional seats will be in addition to the existing seats in both the Senate, House of Representatives and State Houses of Assembly which women remain entitled to contest. While these are commendable and assurance or hope that women's synergy in agitations for a pride of place in public affairs is making the appropriate waves and impact, it has been criticised as belittling the feminine gender and speaking loud of the misogyny of the male gender. It is lazy and smirks at patriarchy. In the first place, political positions are a rightful entitlement of both genders. the human rights convention and the principle of Equality before the Law have equal rights with non-superiors over others. While Nigerian society has deeply entrenched patriarchy forestalling women from an equal share of political powers, there is no need for women to have their share by shortcut, especially because of the established 35% gender quota which has been widely embraced and applauded as dignifying.

Inquisitive minds continue to question why there must be extra seats for women when in fact both genders own the existing seats. Why is it difficult to give women the appropriate quota from the existing seats as against creating additional seats?

Nigerian women would be in a better position if the constitution was reviewed to provide and enforce the existing affirmative quota of political seats for women, ensuring that the breach of the provisions becomes justifiable.

For the Green Legislative House, for instance, adding the proposed 72 seats to the existing 360 is a huge burden to the ailing economy of Nigeria. Ironically, the percentage of women with the extra 72 is only about 16, leaving a deficit of 19% which is never likely to be compensated from the original 360. Whereas having the 35% Affirmative policy entrenched in the constitution would have turned in a minimum of 126 women occupying legislative seats out of the 360, which is a fair game. It is the first time in the history of Nigeria that a gender inclusion Bill came before the National Assembly, One must therefore salute the courage of the female legislator who drafted and sponsored the Bill. This further buttresses the need for women's inclusion as the proportion of women in the legislature has been found to impact the number and quality of social development and peace and security Bills. Whereas the crux and primary assignment of any government are to ensure peace, safety and security without letting down the social welfare and development of its people. Implying invariably, that the number of women in the legislature and other policy-making political positions has a direct connection and consequence on the quality of governance.

Conclusion

Should electoral gender quotas be implemented to make room for a specified percentage of women, barriers to the expansion of the political space would have been addressed and Nigeria's position on the gendered colouration of political space would have been reversed geometrically. This study concludes in the analysis of the Bill that the creation of additional or extra seats as a special measure to remedy the low number of women in political positions is being pennywise, pound foolish.

Measures which ensure the inculcation of a gender quota not below 35% in the Nigerian Constitution are more helpful in implementing, ensuring and enforcing the affirmative action policy targeted at having more women in appointive and elective positions.

Globally, a key democratic benchmark is the “representativeness” and inclusion of marginalized populations such as women. The level of women's composition in government is a major indicator of the inclusiveness and gender sensitivity of the government. It is therefore best practice for representative bodies like the National and State Houses of Assembly to have substantial representation of marginalized populations, for it to be able to fully fulfil its mandate and make impactful and far-reaching legislations and policy outcomes.

No doubt gender gaps exist in governance and there is a big need to introduce measures to fill the gaps and remedy the shortage of women in governance. Such measures however must be enduring, financially prudent and socially wise.

Gender advocates and stakeholders must be careful not to shoot themselves in the leg by introducing measures which shorten the lots of women, all measures must be targeted at fulfilling the barest 35% gender quota for women. Women advocates and legislators must learn to start to carry gender scholars and specialists along in their schemings to ensure smooth flow and navigation.

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