Gender, youth and social inclusion, Nigeria

# Would reserved seats lift Nigeria off the bottom of the women-in-parliament ranking?

Nigeria ranks 176th of 183 countries for women in parliament, the lowest of any ranked African country. The reserved seats proposed in 2026 would take the House of Representatives to about 13% women, still below Ghana.

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## In short

- Women hold 15 of 356 seats in the House of Representatives (4.2%) and 4 of 107 in the Senate (3.7%). Nigeria ranks 176th in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's August 2026 ranking, below every other ranked African country; the averages are 26.6% for sub-Saharan Africa and 27.2% worldwide.
- The proposal has shrunk. The 2024 bill added 37 Senate, 37 House and 108 state assembly seats, filled by direct election; the version described by the Minister of Women Affairs in July 2026 adds 12 Senate, 37 House and 108 state seats, filled through electoral colleges, for 16 years. As of 22 September 2026 it had not been sent to the State Houses of Assembly, the step that follows passage by both chambers.
- Added to today's seats, the 2026 version would take the House to 13.2% women and both chambers to 13.3% (our calculation). Nigeria would rise to about 154th, still below Ghana, closing less than half the gap to the sub-Saharan average.

## The evidence

Each figure carries its source, its date and a label for how much weight it can bear. Open 'How we know this' for the method.

Record or count

1 August 2026

# 176th

of 183 ranked countries for the share of women in the lower chamber. Only seven rank lower, none of them in Africa.

Inter-Parliamentary Union, monthly ranking of women in national parliaments

**How we know this**

The IPU ranks countries by the share of women in the lower or single chamber, using members currently seated. Nigeria's figures were last updated in January 2025.

Record or count

1 August 2026

# 4.2%

of members of the House of Representatives are women: 15 of 356 seated. In the Senate, 4 of 107 (3.7%).

Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parline

**How we know this**

The House has 360 seats and the Senate 109; the IPU divides by members currently seated. The IPU recorded 14 women elected to the House in 2023; counts differ with the date and with court decisions after the election.

Modelled or projected

Scenario

# 13.2%

of the House would be women if the 37 reserved seats proposed in 2026 were added to today's seats: 52 of 393.

Probatio Africa calculation from IPU data and the 2026 proposal

**How we know this**

Assumes women keep exactly the open seats they hold today and every reserved seat is filled by a woman. Senate: 16 of 119 (13.4%). Both chambers: 68 of 512 (13.3%), against 19 of 463 (4.1%) today.

Record or count

2025

# 30.9%

women were elected or appointed in chambers with some form of quota in 2025, against 23.3% in chambers with none.

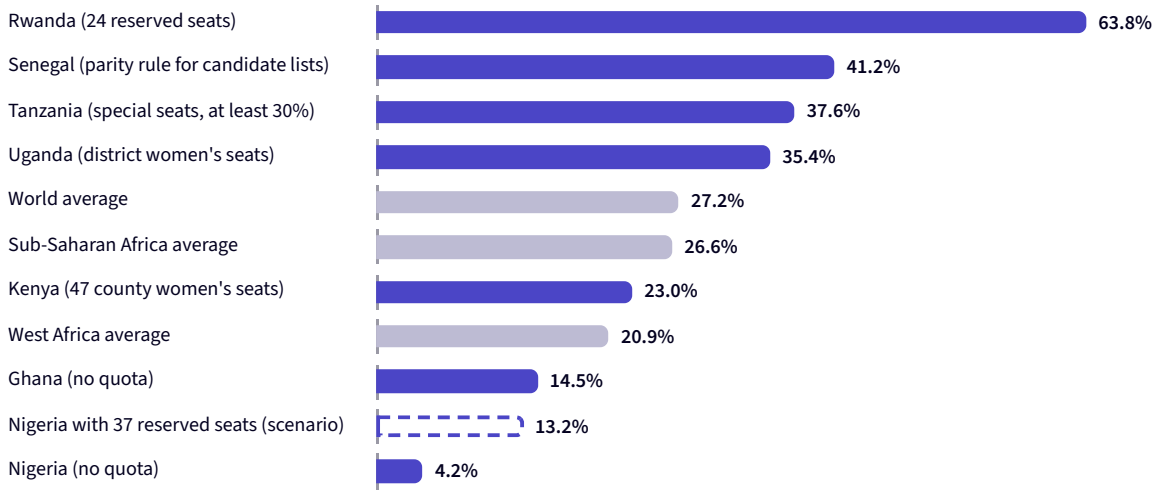
Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in parliament in 2025

**How we know this**

Covers only the 62 chambers in 49 countries renewed in 2025. 'Some form of quota' includes both legislated and voluntary party quotas; chambers with both elected 37.3% women.

### Women in the lower or single chamber, selected countries and averages

Share of members who are women, as of 1 August 2026




Inter-Parliamentary Union data. The Nigeria scenario is our calculation and is drawn dashed; it assumes no other change in the House.

Sources: 1, 2, 3, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

## What the data show

On the Inter-Parliamentary Union's count, women hold 15 of the 356 seated members of the House of Representatives (4.2%) and 4 of 107 senators (3.7%) [1,3,4]. In the August 2026 ranking, Nigeria is 176th; only seven countries rank lower, none of them African [1]. The averages for the lower or single chamber are 26.6% in sub-Saharan Africa, 20.9% in West Africa and 27.2% worldwide [2].

The barrier is at winning as much as standing. INEC reported 92 women among 1,101 Senate candidates for the 2023 election and 288 among 3,122 House candidates [7]. Three women won Senate seats and 14 won House seats [5,6]. On those figures, 3.3% of women Senate candidates won, against 10.5% of men.

The reserved-seats bill has changed. As analysed in 2024, it created one additional Senate seat for each state and the Federal Capital Territory, 37 House seats and 108 state assembly seats, 182 in all, filled by direct election [10]. In July 2026 the Minister of Women Affairs described a proposal of 12 Senate seats, two per geopolitical zone, with 37 House and 108 state assembly seats, under a 16-year sunset clause [8,9]. Responding to concerns about the electoral college model proposed for filling them, she called for safeguards in the Electoral Act to protect it from political manipulation [8]. The bill was not called for a vote on 11 June 2026 and remained on the House order paper [9]. On 22 September 2026 the Clerk to the National Assembly said that only the state police alteration bill had been sent to the State Houses of Assembly [11].

Quotas and reserved seats are common elsewhere in Africa [13,16,17,18,19]. Worldwide, in the 62 chambers renewed in 2025, those with some form of quota elected or appointed 30.9% women on average, against 23.3% without [12]. Where seats are reserved, they supply much of women's representation: in Kenya, 47 of the 80 women in the National Assembly hold seats reserved for women [1,13]. Senegal reaches 41.2% with a rule that party lists alternate men and women, and no reserved seats [1,17]; Ghana, with neither, has 14.5% [1,20].

## Where sources disagree

Counts of women in the House differ with the source and the date: the IPU recorded 14 women elected in 2023 and counts 15 now [3,5]; our sector page quotes the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre's 2023 count of 17 of 360. The differences reflect court judgments, reruns and by-elections after February 2023, the date of each count and the IPU's update lag. All support the same conclusion: under 5%.

Public figures about the bill often mix its versions. Any figure should say whether it refers to the 2024 bill (182 seats, direct election) or the 2026 proposal (157 seats, electoral colleges).

# What this means for decisions

- In its 2026 form, the measure would more than triple the number of women in the National Assembly (from 19 to 68) but leave Nigeria below Ghana and about half the sub-Saharan average. The 2024 version would have taken the Senate to 28.5% women.
- The design shapes what the seats mean. Seats filled through electoral colleges answer to a different constituency from seats filled by direct election. The IPU warns that quotas risk becoming 'ceilings rather than floors'[12].
- Whether reserved seats change policy, budgets or women's influence is not well evidenced, in Nigeria or elsewhere. This is one of the open questions below.
- Women's share falls between nomination and election: they were about 8% of Senate candidates and under 3% of winners. Party nomination is a second lever, alongside seats.
- The next general elections begin on 16 January 2027[14]. A constitutional alteration needs the approval of two-thirds of the members of each chamber and of at least two-thirds of the State Houses of Assembly[15].

# Method

- Shares and ranking: Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline, ranking and averages as of 1 August 2026 (the latest month published when we checked), dividing women by members currently seated.
- Scenario: (15 + 37) ÷ (356 + 37) for the House and (4 + 12) ÷ (107 + 12) for the Senate, assuming women keep the open seats they hold and every reserved seat goes to a woman. Using constitutional seats (360 and 109) gives 13.1% and 13.2%.
- Rank under the scenario: the place 13.2% would take in the 1 August 2026 ranking, between Malaysia and Cambodia (13.6%) and the DR Congo (12.8%).
- Gap to the regional average: 26.6% of 360 seats is about 96 women, 81 more than today; 37 seats close 46% of that gap.
- Win rates: women elected ÷ women candidates, and men elected ÷ men candidates, from INEC's candidate figures as reported and the IPU's election results.

# Limitations

- Shares of seats show presence, not influence. These data cannot show whether reserved seats change policy or budgets.
- The IPU last updated Nigeria's figures in January 2025, so later changes in membership may not be reflected.
- We could not read the National Assembly's own records. The bill's content and status rest on official statements and a legislative monitor.
- The 2023 candidate figures are INEC's statement as reported; we found no INEC copy, and the totals differ from the sum of men and women by one or two.
- The scenario is arithmetic, not a forecast: other countries' shares will also change.

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