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DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT



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Dear Members of the Selection Committee:

I am writing to nominate Pamela Nwakanma for the dissertation prize of the Lagos Studies Association. I have known Pamela since she first arrived at Harvard and met with her regularly as the chair of her doctoral dissertation committee when she was in PhD program of the Government Department at Harvard. Pamela is a promising social scientist whose intellectual creativity, deep contextual knowledge, and strong academic training served her well as she carried out her important doctoral research. At present, she is a Leading Edge Fellow with the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), which is supporting her work on “decolonizing democracy” at a non-profit institution and next year she will take up a tenure-track faculty position the University of California, Irvine. As a post-doctoral fellow and as an assistant professor, I am confident that Pamela will transform her dissertation into a book manuscript, publish additional articles based on her doctoral research, and make important strides on exciting new projects, particularly on women’s political leadership in sub-Saharan Africa.

Pamela’s doctoral dissertation research focuses on how financial inclusion and entrepreneurship affects economic, political, and social engagement of women in sub-Saharan Africa, with a particular focus on Nigeria. In broad terms, she is interested in studying the ways in which economic and financial integration empowers women and affects their well-being and participation at the household and local community levels. The empirical focus is an in-depth study of market women’s associations, which sometimes operate as parastatal agencies, and gender-based empowerment initiatives in Nigeria. In her research, Pamela develops and test a theory of women’s political empowerment by focusing on the interaction of social networks and economic engagement -- two major factors that hinder or facilitate women's political participation within patriarchal political systems. Methodologically, her project is based a mixed methods research design, employing an original survey experiment, multivariate regression analysis of Afrobarometer data, participant observation, and in-depth interviews.

Pamela has already developed a steady publishing record that shows no sign of abatement. An article based on her doctoral research was published in *Politics, Groups & Identities* and she also published an important piece in *Perspectives on Politics* that compares women's political mobilization in Nigeria and the U.S. Pamela has also published two book chapters and has multiple other papers in the pipeline.

A second major research project, which she will undertake in collaboration with Harvard faculty and the UN Economic Commission on Africa, focuses on how women's political leadership affects the business environment for women entrepreneurs. I have no doubt that this project will yield valuable insights for academia and policy and will contribute richly to public engagement around women's economic and political participation in Africa.

Pamela's research addresses issues of enduring importance for women and one that continues to give rise to a steady flow of cutting-edge research among social scientists. What's more, she pushes this research agenda in important directions by integrating African and feminist perspectives – and particularly those of African women – more fully in development policy and pedagogy. Pamela's interest in this set of questions and her ambition to refine development thinking is a product both of her longstanding personal commitment to social justice and of her firsthand observations and experiences working in Rwanda several years ago and in other positions in the U.S., France, and Mexico prior to that.

Pamela is uniquely well positioned to continue to conduct innovative social science research on gender and development. First, as a PhD candidate in the Government Department at Harvard, she received world-class training in social science methods and theories. Second, her personal background as a Nigerian-American with extensive experience living in Nigeria, among other countries in industrialized and developing countries alike, has given her close familiarity with the nature of the challenges and opportunities for development in sub-Saharan Africa and in other regions. Third, her work experience at FXB Rwanda and her observations while living in post-conflict Rwanda have given her unique perspectives on development, which she views from a multidimensional perspective to include many factors beyond income-based measures. Pamela therefore recognizes that not only socioeconomic inputs and outcomes but also a sense of personal empowerment and efficacy are vital for development – particularly for sustainable development. Finally, Pamela enthusiasm and her passion to understand the drivers of sustainable development at both the micro- and macro-levels virtually ensure that she has the tenacity and drive to carry out her ambitious ongoing research agenda on a range of important questions.

Even as she completed the rigorous coursework and other requirements that are part of the PhD program in Government at Harvard, Pamela remained deeply connected to multiple communities at Harvard, Cambridge and beyond. These experiences attest to her strong contributions to the intellectual community at Harvard and beyond. For example, Pamela worked as a Freshman Proctor in the Harvard Freshman Dean's office, where she served as an advisor, mentor, and resource for first-year students. She was also a member of the Kuumba Singers of Harvard College, a group that expresses black spirituality through various art forms from different Africa cultures. Before coming to Harvard, Pamela had already exhibited her deep commitment to community and to aiding others. As a tutor, instructor, and community service

coordinator at a middle school in New York City, Pamela worked mainly with students of color, many of whom came from low-income backgrounds, to support them in their academic work and extracurricular activities. Pamela is a fine researcher and an effective mentor and teacher – a winning combination for an academic career – and I have no doubt that she will be an asset to your institution.

I urge to give the highest consideration to my nomination of Pamela Nwakanma for your dissertation prize. It is a pleasure to work with Pamela, whose scholarly contributions and intrepid approach to research indicate that she has a bright professional career ahead of her. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require additional information.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melani Cammett", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Melani Cammett