



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Women in Parliament: 20 years in review



Although Panama made significant gains in women's representation in 2014, getting more women into parliament from different backgrounds is a way to increase numbers.

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Twenty years of breaking records

The past 20 years have witnessed an impressive rise in the share of women in national parliaments around the world, with the global average nearly doubling during that time – and all regions making substantial progress towards the goal of 30 per cent women in decision-making.

In 1995, delegates to the United Nations (UN) Fourth World Conference on Women unanimously signed the Beijing Platform for Action. Described as a “new agenda for women’s empowerment,” its mission statement called for the removal of all “obstacles to women’s active participation in all spheres of public and private life.” The Platform set a 30 per cent target for women in decision-making, to be achieved through a wide range of strategies, including positive action, public debate, and training and mentoring for women as leaders.

Over the last 20 years, countries around the world have made substantial progress towards this 30 per cent goal. The global average of women in national parliaments has nearly doubled, from 11.3 per cent in 1995 to 22.1 per cent in 2015 (+10.8 points). 2014, however, saw little progress in the percentage of women in national parliaments worldwide, with the global average rising only by 0.3 points, begging the question: have we reached the glass ceiling?

HIGHLIGHTS

Globally

- Worldwide, women’s average share of parliamentary membership nearly doubled between 1995 and 2015, from 11.3 per cent in 1995 to 22.1 per cent in 2015. Their share gained ground in almost 90 per cent of the 174 countries for which 1995 and 2015 data are available.
- Over the same period, the number of single and lower houses with more than 30 per cent women parliamentarians grew from five to 42, and those with more than 40 per cent from one to 13. By 2015, four houses of parliament surpassed the 50 per cent threshold, one moving beyond 60 per cent women parliamentarians.
- The world’s highest ranking countries have become more diverse: the top 10, dominated by eight European countries in 1995, now include four in Sub-Saharan Africa and three each in the Americas and Europe.
- Far fewer single and lower houses elect less than 10 per cent women, dropping from 109 in 1995 to 38 in 2015. The number of all-male single and lower houses fell from 10 to five.
- In addition to shifting political circumstances, a crucial factor driving these changes has been the adoption of electoral gender quotas, which have spread from a small number of States in 1995 to more than 120 in 2015.
- After notable increases in recent years, growth in women’s average share of parliaments worldwide levelled off in 2014, rising only 0.3 points to 22.1 per cent. Women won 2147 of the 10,265 seats up for election or renewal in 2014.

HIGHLIGHTS

Regionally

- Americas: the share of women in parliaments (all houses combined) more than doubled between 1995 and 2015, reaching an average of 26.4 per cent and registering the greatest progress among all regions over the past 20 years.
- Europe: many States have made substantial progress, but East-West differences have emerged, with former members of the communist bloc, except the Balkan States – trailing the rest of the region.
- Africa: the region has achieved some of the most dramatic breakthroughs seen over the last 20 years, often in post-conflict contexts, but lost ground in 2014.
- Arab States: women's political rights and opportunities have expanded, but differences among countries remain strong and promises of the Arab "revolutions" have not fully materialized.
- Pacific: patterns in Australia and New Zealand have driven up the regional average, but progress among other Pacific Island States has been limited.
- Asia: the region has fallen behind many others; its rate of change in women's representation has been far slower than elsewhere in the world.

All regions registered some increase in their share of women in parliament, the greatest strides being made in the Americas. The countries that achieved the greatest progress between 1995 and 2015 in their single or lower houses are Rwanda (+59.5 points, achieving 63.8% by 2015), Andorra (+46.4 points with 50% in 2015), and Bolivia (+42.3 points with 53.1% in 2015).

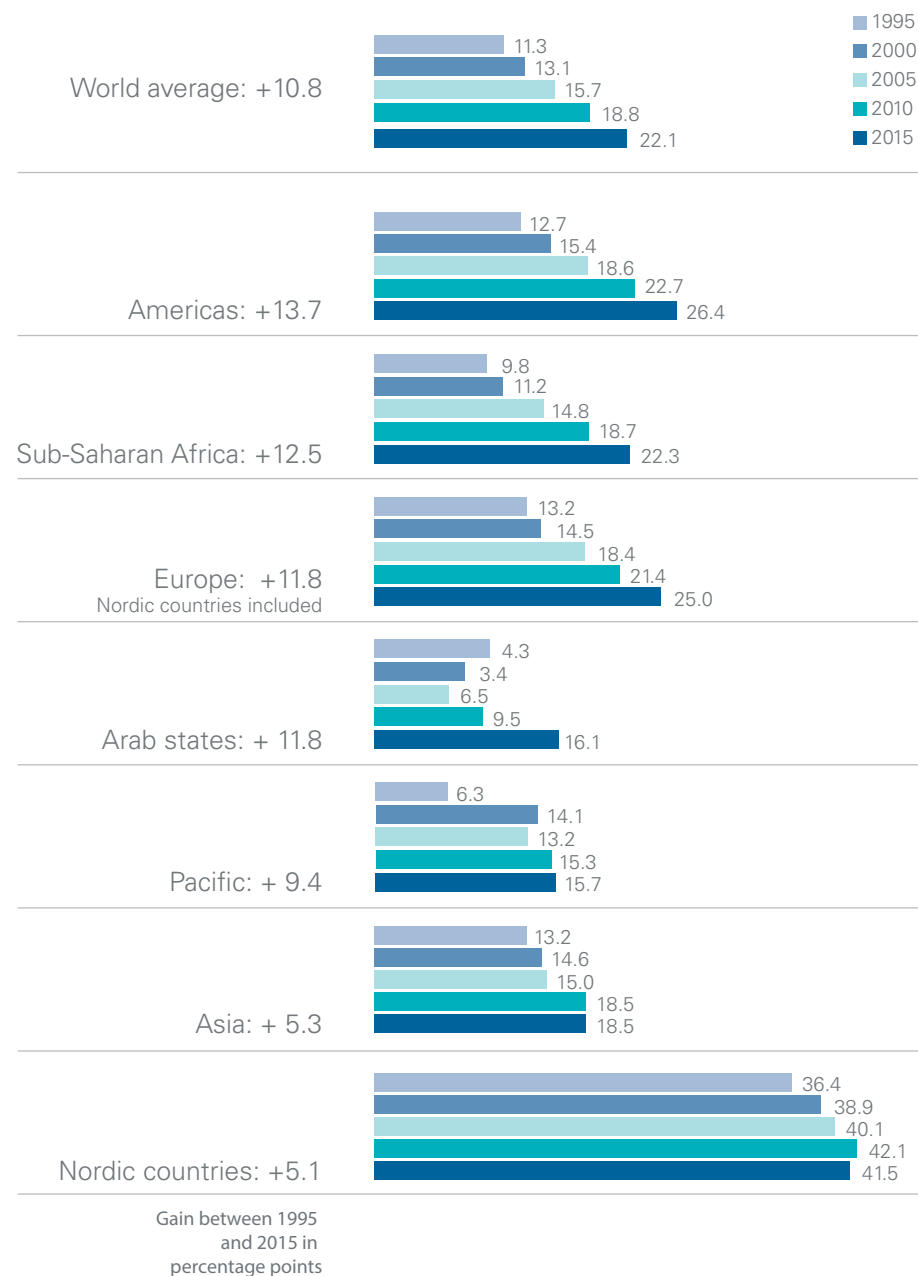
With these changes has come a remarkable diversification of the countries at the top of the world rankings in terms of the share of women in single or lower houses of parliament. In 1995, eight of the top 10 countries were European and five of those were Nordic, leading the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to create a separate category for this sub-region. In 2015, there is greater regional balance: four of the best performing countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa, and three are in the Americas. Only three States – Sweden, Finland, and Seychelles – made the top 10 in both 1995 and 2015.

At the same time, there has been a remarkable decrease in the number of single or lower houses of parliament with fewer than 10 per cent women. From 109 in 1995 (including 10 all-male chambers), that number has fallen to only 38 in 2015 (including only five all-male chambers).

Figure 1

Regional averages of women in parliaments, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015

Situation in July 1995, January 2000, January 2005, January 2010 and January 2015, both houses combined. Regional ranking in the order of the percentage point change.



Percentages do not take into account the situation of parliaments for which data was unavailable.

Table 1

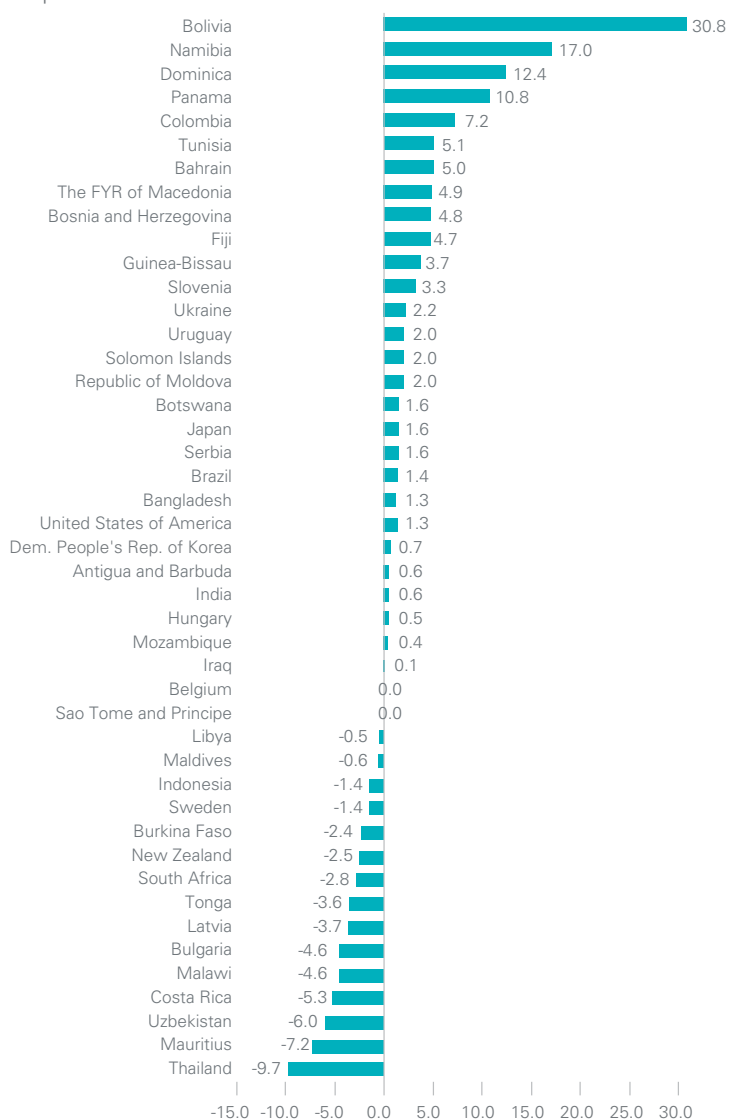
Top-ranking countries for single and lower houses of parliament, 1995 vs. 2015

1 January 1995			1 January 2015		
Country	Region	% women	Country	Region	% women
1. Sweden	Nordic/Europe	40.4	1. Rwanda	Africa	63.8
2. Norway	Nordic/Europe	39.4	2. Bolivia	Americas	53.1
3. Denmark	Nordic/Europe	33.5	3. Andorra	Europe	50.0
4. Finland	Nordic/Europe	33.5	4. Cuba	Americas	48.9
5. Netherlands	Europe	32.7	5. Seychelles	Africa	43.8
6. Seychelles	Africa	27.3	6. Sweden	Nordic/Europe	43.6
7. Austria	Europe	26.8	7. Senegal	Africa	42.7
8. Germany	Europe	26.3	8. Finland	Nordic/Europe	42.5
9. Iceland	Nordic/Europe	25.4	9. Ecuador	Americas	41.6
10. Argentina	Americas	25.3	10. South Africa	Africa	41.5

Figure 2

Parliamentary renewals in 2014

Progress and setbacks of women in lower or single houses of parliament renewed in 2014:



The figures show the percentage point difference between renewals in 2014 compared with the previous legislature.

The result of these changes has been a noticeable redistribution of countries according to their share of women parliamentarians. In 1995, nearly two-thirds of countries (61.6%) had less than 10 per cent women in their single or lower houses of parliament. Nearly all (88.1%) had less than 20 per cent. A mere 2.8 per cent of parliaments had attained 30 per cent or more. By 2015, only 20 per cent of countries had less than 10 per cent women parliamentarians. A majority (53.2%) still have fewer than 20 per cent. Yet nearly one in five (22.1%) of single or lower houses have achieved 30 per cent. Altogether, among the 174 countries for which 1995 and 2015 data are available, 89.7 per cent saw some degree of improvement, compared to 8 per cent where women's representation decreased and 2.3 per cent where there was no change at all.

With the results of elections in 2014, the proportion of women now exceeds 30 per cent in a record 42 lower or single houses of parliament, compared to 39 in 2013, and 17 upper houses, up from 16 in 2013. It exceeds 40 per cent in 19 chambers, 13 lower or single houses and six upper houses, and, for the first time, has achieved 50 per cent or more, in four chambers.

Both global and country-specific factors explain these changes. Women face a host of difficulties in gaining access to parliament: cultural norms, gender roles, party practices, lack of financial support, and a traditionally masculine work environment – which together tend to favour and attract men and discriminate against and discourage the participation of women. These patterns have started to evolve as the issue of women's political participation has reached the political agenda in countries around the world. A growing number of global and regional declarations have highlighted the need for women's participation and the share of women in parliament has become a key indicator of a State's progress toward gender equality.

Table 2

Top 5 factors that deter men and women from entering politics

Deterrents for women	Deterrents for men
Domestic responsibilities	Lack of support from the electorate
Prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the roles of women in society	Lack of finance
Lack of support from family	Lack of support of political parties
Lack of confidence	Lack of experience in “representative functions”: public speaking, constituency relations
Lack of finance	Lack of confidence

Women face greater obstacles entering politics. Prejudice and cultural perceptions about the role of women, together with a lack of financial resources, are among the greatest obstacles to women entering politics. For male respondents, perceived lack of support from the electorate is the most important deterrent. Women parliamentarians cite domestic responsibilities as the greatest impediment to a life in politics, which is a far less significant challenge for men.

Source: IPU, Equality in Politics: A survey of Women and Men in Politics, 2008.

One path to change has been through broader social, economic, and political transformations that have gradually eroded patriarchal values, offered greater opportunities for women to assume different roles, and opened the way for new political institutions. A second, more proactive path has been to challenge existing bottlenecks, including political parties’ traditional resistance to recruiting women, through the adoption of “temporary special measures” – in particular electoral gender quotas – as a way to achieve gains within a short period of time. Prior to 1995, only a small number of States had quotas for women – in most cases adopted voluntarily by individual political parties. By 2015, quotas have spread to all corners of the globe, existing in one form or another in more than 120 countries.

Regional Trends

All regions of the world have seen growth in the percentage of women elected to single or lower houses of parliament, with most regions doubling or tripling their levels of women’s representation over the last 20 years. One exception is the Nordic sub-region, whose already high average increased only 5.1 percentage points, to 41.5 per cent.

Americas: taking the lead

As a region, the Americas witnessed the greatest aggregate changes over the past 20 years. Women’s average share of the region’s parliaments rose from 12.7 per cent in 1995 to

26.4 per cent in 2015 (+13.7 points). In 1995, none of the region’s countries had surpassed the 30 per cent mark in their single or lower houses of parliament. Argentina and Cuba came closest with 25.3 and 22.8 per cent, respectively. By 2015, women’s share of lower houses has surpassed 30 per cent in nine countries, 40 per cent in three countries and 50 per cent in one (Bolivia, with 53.1%).

Parliamentary gains follow the widespread introduction of gender quotas across Latin America, primarily in the late 1990s but also more recently. The latest adopters include Chile (January 2015), Colombia (July 2011), and Uruguay (March 2009). Most quotas

The USA has witnessed a modest increase in the percentage of women in the House of Representatives over 20 years, now standing at 19.3 per cent. ©Reuters/J. Ernst, 2014



in the region are mandated by law, requiring political parties to nominate a minimum percentage of female candidates. In the 1990s and 2000s, the quota in nearly all Latin American countries was 30 per cent. In the late 2000s, however, the concept of “parity” began to take root. The first State to increase its 30 per cent quota to 50 per cent was Ecuador in 2008, followed by Costa Rica in 2009, Bolivia in 2010, Nicaragua and Panama in 2012, and Mexico in 2014. The 2015 electoral reform in Chile establishes “flexible parity,” allowing neither sex to exceed 60 per cent or fall below 40 per cent of all candidates.

Women’s share of parliament made the greatest gains in Ecuador, rising from 4.5 per cent in 1995 to 41.6 per cent (+37.1 points), and Mexico, from 14.2 per cent to 38 per cent (+23.8 points). In Ecuador, a 20 per cent quota passed in 1997 was raised to 30 per cent in 2000 and 50 per cent in 2009, leading to the election in 2013 of more than 40 per cent women to its National Assembly – including the first woman speaker of parliament and two women deputy-speakers.

Two of the three major political parties in Mexico introduced quotas for their own parties’ candidates in the early 1990s. The first quotas mandated by law were introduced in 2002, requiring that party lists not include more than 70 per cent and not less than 30 per cent of candidates of the same sex – which was raised to a 60/40 stipulation in a revision to the electoral code in 2008. Both laws, however, contained loopholes, exempting parties from applying the quota when they utilized internal primaries (2002) or “democratic election processes” (2008) to select their candidates. This exception was closed via a 2011 decision by the Federal Electoral Tribunal, resulting in the election of nearly 40 per cent women in 2012. In 2014, the Mexican constitution was reformed, and a new electoral law passed, establishing gender parity.

Quotas are not widespread, however, in the Caribbean or North America. The gains in these sub-regions have been smaller, with the exception of upper houses in some Caribbean countries. Typically appointed, these chambers have seen greater participation of women than their respective lower houses. Already in 1995, Saint Lucia and Belize boasted more than 30 per cent women in their respective senates. In 2015, the contrast between houses remains striking: the lower house in Belize has only 3.1 per cent women, compared to 38.5 per cent in the upper house. This pattern is repeated elsewhere in the Caribbean islands.

In the United States of America, women’s representation in the lower house has risen more modestly from 10.9 per cent to 19.3 (+8.4 points) over the last 20 years. Although both major parties have various quota regulations for internal party positions, quotas for women in elected positions have never been on the political agenda. Yet this case is also, in some sense, the exception that proves the rule: the rise in women’s representation seen in recent years is the outcome of deliberate and concrete strategies to recruit women and support their candidacies – most notably in the form of fundraising networks like EMILY’s List and training programs and awareness-raising done by a host of civil society groups and university institutes.

Brazil offers a counter-example: despite the existence of a quota since 1997, women’s share in the lower house grew from 7 to only 9 per cent. This quota, however, was accompanied by an

increase to 150 per cent of the total number of seats available in the number of candidates a party could nominate. In requiring parties to “reserve” 30 per cent of their slots for women, the law was interpreted as allowing parties to nominate men for 120 per cent of their candidacies. As a result, when the quotas were first applied, the share of women actually decreased. In 2009, women parliamentarians lobbied successfully for a “mini-reform”, replacing the word “reserve”, in respect of the 30 per cent quota, with “fulfil.” Inadequate financial support, however, together with the challenges of running in an open-list proportional representation (PR) system, yielded only minor increases in the numbers of women elected in 2009 and 2013.

In 2014, the Americas continued to inch towards gender equality. Four of the world’s top countries in 2014, in terms of the greatest gains in women’s parliamentary representation, are located in the Americas: Bolivia, Colombia, Dominica and Panama. Results in Bolivia, Colombia and Panama are linked to new or revised quota policies. The remarkable jump in women’s share of Bolivia’s lower house, from 22.3 per cent in 2009 to 53.1 per cent in 2014 (+30.8 points) can be directly attributed to its revised quota law, which in 2010 raised the existing quota from 30 to 50 per cent and required alternation between male and female names on party lists.

On the other end of the spectrum, Costa Rica registered a sizeable 5.3-point decrease in the share of women elected to parliament, from 38.6 per cent in 2010 to 33.3 per cent in 2014. While still high from a global perspective, this result was surprising given that the quota had been raised from 40 to 50 per cent when the electoral law was revised in 2009. All nomination lists must comply with the rules of parity and alternation between men and women, failing which they are rejected. The decrease in 2014 can be attributed to the fact that only 22 per cent of the lists were headed by women.

Europe: sustained progress but emerging East-West differences

Countries in Europe also saw a notable jump in the share of women elected to national parliaments between 1995 and 2015, from 13.2 per cent to 25 per cent (+11.8 points). In 1995, women’s share of the single or lower house exceeded 30 per cent in five European countries and 40 per cent in one – Sweden. The rise in these figures by 2015 is remarkable: women’s share has surpassed 30 per cent in 17 countries and 40 per cent in five, having achieved equal representation in one country, Andorra. Alongside newcomer Andorra, Europe’s top-ranking countries still include two Nordic countries, Sweden (43.6%) and Finland (42.5%).

The Nordic countries continue to stand out both regionally and globally for the relatively high share of women in their parliaments, although their rates of change vary somewhat. Their aggregate 5.1-point increase masks the fact that three of them – Norway (+0.3), Sweden (+3.2) and Denmark (+4.5) – have seen very little change over the past two decades. In contrast, Iceland (+15.9 points) and Finland (+9 points) have made more substantial progress. Prior to 1995, Iceland was the only Nordic country below 30 per cent. Iceland saw large jumps from election to election in the 1980s and 1990s, as women formed their own party, the Women’s Alliance, and mobilized inside the traditional parties to get more women selected as

parliamentary candidates. In Sweden, the 2014 elections saw a small drop in the proportion of women elected, to 43.6 per cent from 45 per cent in 2010. Yet the country has elected more than 40 per cent women to every parliament since 1994. This result stems from women's mobilization to ensure that Swedish parties nominate roughly equal numbers of male and female candidates, whether through formal or informal quotas. Small variations over time, therefore, tend to be linked to the electoral strength of parties less committed to gender parity, like the Sweden Democrats who won 14 per cent of the seats in parliament in 2014.

From a regional, and indeed global, perspective, Andorra has made particularly impressive gains, increasing the share of women in its national parliament from 3.6 per cent to 50 per cent over the last 20 years (+46.4 points). This increase – from one to 14 of Andorra's 28 parliamentary seats – may have been partly facilitated by the small size of the country's parliament. In contrast, the number of women in Andorra's local councils dropped by half between 2007 and 2012, indicating that gains at one level may not necessarily be replicated elsewhere.

Other countries in Southern Europe also made notable progress. Between 1995 and 2015, the share of women grew in Spain from 16 per cent to 41.1 per cent (+25.1 points), in France from 6.4 per cent to 26.2 per cent (+19.8 points), in Portugal from 13 to 31.3 per cent (+18.3 points), and in Italy from 15.1 to 31 per cent (+15.9 points). During this time, all four countries introduced legislative quotas – in some cases building on quotas previously adopted by one or more political parties. In Italy, however, constitutional changes have yet to be translated into a revised national electoral law. Although the legal measures taken in Spain, France, Portugal, as well as Belgium, refer to "parity," the proportions specified in their policies range between 33 and 50 per cent. The interpretation is strongest in France, but progress has been limited by a loophole imposing a financial penalty on parties failing to nominate equal numbers of women and men.

Trends in Eastern and Western Europe differ substantially. The only European country to have fewer women in 2015 than in 1995 is Hungary, where women's proportion dropped from 11.4 to 10.1 per cent (-1.3 points). Their share is 20 per cent or less in Eastern European States – largely because quotas, seen as a relic of the former regimes, have been unpopular in many of these countries since the change in political systems.

Notable exceptions include several Balkan States, where legislative quotas were adopted in the wake of the civil wars and ethnic conflicts of the 1990s. Slovenia, for example, has seen women's representation rise to 36.7 per cent from 14.4 per cent in 1995 (+22.2 points), owing to a 2006 electoral reform mandating that neither sex constitute less than 35 per cent of political party candidates. Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have nearly identical quota laws and similarly high levels of women in their national parliaments – 34 per cent and 33.3 per cent, respectively. Balkan States also registered the greatest progress among European States in the share of women elected to parliament in 2014.

Sub-Saharan Africa: new opportunities and new gains

Women's representation made substantial progress in the Sub-Saharan African countries, where their average share of parliament grew from 9.8 per cent in 1995 to 22.3 per cent in 2015 (+12.5 points). In 1995, no States in this region had elected more than 30 per cent women to their single or lower houses. Seychelles and Mozambique fell just below that mark, at 27.3 and 25.2 per cent, respectively. By 2015, the regional tally had shifted dramatically: 12 countries have elected more than 30 per cent women to their lower or single houses; five have elected more than 40 per cent; and one (Rwanda) has elected more than 60 per cent. Four of the world's top 10 countries, in terms of women's share of single or lower houses of parliament, are in Sub-Saharan Africa: Rwanda, with 63.8 per cent; Seychelles, with 43.8 per cent; Senegal, with 42.7 per cent; and South Africa, with 41.5 per cent.



With every election since the genocide, Rwanda has seen the number of women MPs rise. It now ranks first in the world. ©Reuters, 2003

Attracting by far the most attention in this regard is Rwanda, the first country ever to elect more women than men to its lower house of parliament (56.3 per cent in 2008). Women's share increased again in 2013, to 63.8 per cent (+59.5 points higher than in 1995). Quotas tell only part of the story. Women were not only elected to the seats reserved for them by Rwanda's 2003 constitution, one-third of seats in the lower house, but they *also* won nearly half of the non-reserved seats. The women elected to the reserved seats are far younger on average than those elected to the open seats, suggesting that reserved seats may provide an opportunity for women to gain experience before moving on to contest open seats.

Senegal is a second African success story, increasing its share of women in parliament from 11.7 per cent in 1995 to 42.7 per cent in 2015 (+31 points). In 2012, it was the country in the world that had made the greatest gains in women's representation in a single election. Unlike many of the other top countries elsewhere in the region, Senegal is not a post-conflict country. These substantial gains were made possible, however, through gender quotas as well. Amendments to the election law, approved in 2012, mandate full gender parity, stipulating that all party lists must be composed of equal numbers of women and men. Lists are also required to alternate between women and men; otherwise, the lists are deemed ineligible to contest the elections.

Progress in Uganda has been more gradual. Since 1989, after the country emerged from years of civil war, one seat per electoral district has been reserved for women. As the number of districts has increased over the years, so, too, has the number of such reserved seats. Women are also guaranteed representation among the seats reserved for other groups, including the military, youth, people with disabilities, and workers. As a result, 35 per cent of the country's parliamentarians are women, nearly twice the share they enjoyed in 1995.

Kenya has made more moderate progress: from 3 per cent in 1995 to 19.7 per cent in 2015 (+16.7 points). This proportion was expected to rise in 2014, when elections were held under the country's new constitution, approved in 2010. Under that constitution, no more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies may be of the same sex. To this end, 47 seats are reserved for women. In addition, party lists for other special interests – including youth, workers, and people with disabilities – must alternate between women and men. Charged with translating these guarantees into law, but unable to come to an agreement, legislators referred the issue to the Supreme Court, which decided that the quota would be implemented in stages, rather than all at once. In addition to serious problems with violence against female candidates, these battles explain why women's share still falls below 20 per cent in 2015.

Overall, progress has been steady in Sub-Saharan Africa. For the first time since 2006, the region's average share of women in parliament dropped, from 22.5 per cent in 2014 to 22.3 per cent (-0.2 points).

Two countries achieved significant progress further to elections held in 2014. Namibia, for the first time ever, surpassed the 40 per cent mark in its lower house. In Guinea-Bissau, women's

share of parliament rose 3.7 percentage points, from 10 per cent in 2011 to 13.7 per cent in 2014. There is no gender quota in place, but the number of seats in the single house of parliament was raised by two, possibly opening opportunities for women to stand as candidates.

In Mozambique and Botswana, the proportion of women in parliament remained relatively stable. In Mozambique, the 2014 elections saw women's representation rise by 0.4 points to 39.6 per cent from 39.2 per cent in 2009. This result is largely due to the seats held by the governing Liberation Front of Mozambique, which has applied a 40 per cent quota for its candidates since 1994. In Botswana, women's share rose a little more, from 7.9 per cent in 2009 to only 9.5 per cent in 2014 (+1.6 points). This modest progress can be traced, among other factors, to Botswana's "first-past-the-post" electoral system, to cultural norms regarding gender roles, and to the difficulties women face in raising campaign funds.

Despite having had a woman president between 2012 and 2014, Malawi witnessed a 4.5-point fall in the share of women parliamentarians, from 21.2 per cent in 2009 to 16.7 per cent in 2014, leading the female deputy speaker to call for gender quotas. The drop was more dramatic still in Mauritius, from 18.8 per cent in 2010 to 11.6 per cent in 2014 (-7.2 points). Although a one-third gender quota for parliament was included in a draft white paper on electoral reform, no legislation was approved prior to the 2014 elections. For local elections, in contrast, a new local government law passed in 2011 instituted a one-third gender quota, boosting women's representation at that level from 6.4 per cent to 26.2 per cent.

Arab States: women's expanding political rights have yet to deliver

The rate of change in the Arab States has been similar to that in Sub-Saharan Africa, but starting from a lower baseline: from 4.3 per cent in 1995 to 16.1 per cent in 2015 (+11.8 points). No Arab State elected more than 30 per cent women to its single or lower house in 1995. The best performers at that time were Iraq, at 10.8 per cent, and Syria, at 9.6 per cent. By 2015, however, two have surpassed 30 per cent: Algeria, at 31.6 per cent, and Tunisia, at 31.3 per cent.

Developments have been striking in terms of access to rights. Until recently, not all Arab States had granted women political rights. Women gained suffrage in Oman in 2003, Kuwait and Qatar in 2005, the United Arab Emirates in 2006, and Saudi Arabia in 2011.

In terms of women's representation, the regional leader is Algeria, where their proportion in the lower house increased from 6.7 per cent in 1995 to 31.6 per cent in 2015 (+24.9 points). Most of this gain occurred in 2012, when women's share grew from 8 to 31.6 per cent. A new quota law was introduced that year requiring that women form between 20 and 50 per cent of parliamentary candidates, depending on the number of seats in each electoral district. Parties are also awarded state funding based on the number of women candidates they elect.

Saudi Arabia constitutes a second striking case. Women's representation in parliament rose to 19.9 per cent in 2013, following a royal order reserving 20 per cent of the seats for

Following elections in 2014, Iraq is joint 44th in IPU's world rankings.
©Reuters/T. Al-Sudani, 2014



women – prior to which the parliament was an all-male body. Women only gained the right to vote in 2011 and will have their first opportunity to exercise it in 2015 – but only for local government, the only level of Saudi government determined by elections. Other Arab States have seen few if any changes in women's representation over the last two decades. In Lebanon, women's share increased by only 0.8 points, from 2.3 to 3.1 per cent – equivalent to only one more woman in Parliament in 2015 than in 1995.

After significant gains in 2012 and 2013, elections held in 2014 in the Arab region yielded very little change: women's share rose from 16 to 16.1 per cent (+0.1 points). Tunisia saw some of the most sizeable gains, as women's share of parliament grew to 31.3 per cent, linked to a requirement in the 2014 constitution to achieve equal representation in elected councils for women and men. That commitment followed on a 2011 decree to establish parity in elections to the Tunisian Constituent Assembly – the first such law in the Arab world – requiring that political parties nominate equal numbers of women and men and alternate their names on candidate lists. The share of women elected in 2011 was far less than 50 per cent due to the large number of parties winning single seats after placing men at the top of their lists. Proposals to institute vertical and horizontal alternation – down each party list but also at the top, across the lists for different districts – were not successful. The share of women at the top of candidate lists, nonetheless, grew significantly, from less than 3 per cent in 2011 to 15 per cent in 2014.

In other countries, such as Iraq, the numbers of women elected in 2014 were roughly similar to those in previous election years, holding steady at 25.3 per cent. The reason lies in a 25 per cent quota in the constitution and the electoral law, which includes procedures to ensure that women hold 25 per cent of the seats in parliament even if they do not win that many in the elections. This mechanism has been crucial in overcoming resistance to voting for women. According to

the electoral commission, only 22 of the 83 women members won their seats outright. Yet the growing share of votes won by female candidates is a positive development, as voters are increasingly casting their ballots for women.

Pacific: uneven gains and lingering resistance

Like the Arab States, the Pacific region has long lagged behind other regions in terms of women's share in parliament. The regional average increased from 6.3 per cent in 1995 to 15.7 per cent in 2015 (+9.4 points), but due primarily to gains made in Australia and New Zealand. Women's share grew more slowly in the Pacific Islands: from 2.3 per cent in 1995 to 4.4 per cent in 2015.

In 1995, no Pacific country had more than 30 per cent women in its single or lower house of parliament; the regional leaders were New Zealand and Australia, with 21.2 and 8.8 per cent, respectively. At 7.7 per cent, Tuvalu was the Pacific Island State with the most women's representation at that time. By 2015, only one country – New Zealand, at 31.4 per cent – has more than 30 per cent women parliamentarians. Fiji, at 14 per cent, has taken the lead among Pacific Island States. In 2014, the biggest setbacks as a region occurred in the Pacific, where women's parliamentary representation declined from 16.2 per cent in 2013 to 15.7 per cent in 2014 (-0.5 points).

The most significant advances over the past 20 years have been made in Australia's lower house, where women's share has risen from 8.8 per cent in 1995 to 26.7 per cent in 2015 (+17.8 points). In 1994, the Australian Labor Party committed to achieving the pre-selection of women for 35 per cent of winnable seats at all parliamentary elections by 2002. When applied to elections in 1996, this voluntary quota resulted in a doubling of women's share in the lower house, to 15.5 per cent. The party quota was raised to 40 per cent in 2002. The proportion of women in the lower house has remained relatively stable over the last decade, around 25 per cent, but with notable differences across parties:



No women were elected to Tonga's parliament in 2014 despite a concerted effort to get more women into politics. © IPU, 2014

women constituted 38 per cent of Labor parliamentarians in 2012, but only 20 per cent of those representing the Liberal and National parties. The first female prime minister, Julia Gillard, held office from 2010 to 2013. Inspired by her experiences, her famous October 2012 "misogyny speech" detailed incidences of sexism in Australian politics. Once posted on the Internet, the speech attracted worldwide attention and resonated with women in many other countries.

In the Pacific Island States, women were largely absent from parliament in 1995: 10 of the 12 parliaments had one or no women. The two exceptions, Fiji and Samoa, had some of the largest parliaments in the region. In 2015, eight Pacific Island parliaments have one or no women, and four now have three or more. One of these is Papua New Guinea, where women were not represented at all in 1995. Women's current share of PNG's parliament, still only 2.7 per cent, was gained on the strength of extensive grassroots organizing among women in support of female candidates. More recently, a 2011 constitutional reform requires that 22 seats be reserved for women. The legislation needed to implement this reform, however, requires a super majority of votes, and has yet to be adopted.

Fiji saw notable growth in women's representation: from 11.3 per cent in 2006 to 16 per cent in 2014 (+4.7 points). The elections had originally been scheduled for 2009 but were delayed until 2014 due to various political disagreements. In the interim, a new constitution was signed (2013) and women's groups came together to create a platform (2012) for increasing women's participation in politics and in other leadership positions that included the use of gender quotas at national or political party level. Women also gained leadership positions in numerous parties, including the ruling Fiji First Party, whose president became the first female speaker of parliament.

Other Pacific Islands have fared less well. Micronesia and Palau had no women in their single or lower houses in 1995 and continue to have no women in 2015, though, Palau has women in its upper chamber. Tonga and Vanuatu have experienced reversals: each had one woman in parliament in 1995 but none in 2015 (representing declines of -2.2 and -3.3 per cent, respectively). Since independence, only five women have been elected to parliament in Vanuatu. The one woman elected in 2008 was not re-elected in 2012. In 2013, however, the parliament

unanimously approved a new law establishing a 30 per cent quota for women in local elections, reserving seats for women on municipal councils for four terms. Legislators, the government, and women's groups are working together to provide support and training to help these elected women be effective.

Tonga lost its only woman member of parliament in 2014, erasing what had amounted to a 3.6 per cent share for women since 2010. This result came despite a record number of female candidates, a "practice parliament," and a campaign and leadership training program specifically aimed at women. This was part of an effort, according to the then speaker of parliament, to encourage and empower women, who have not traditionally been viewed – or viewed themselves – as political leaders. As elsewhere in the Pacific Islands, politics is seen as a largely male domain, despite a large pool of well-educated women.

Asia: remaining constant as the world progresses

On average, Asian countries elect more women to their national parliaments than do Arab or Pacific countries, but their aggregate rate of change – from 13.2 per cent in 1995 to 18.5 per cent in 2015 (+5.3 points) – has not kept pace with the rest of the world. In 1995, no Asian State had attained 30 per cent women's representation in its single or lower house of parliament. The regional leaders, China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, elected 21 and 20.1 per cent of women, respectively. By 2015, only one country – Timor-Leste, at 38.5 per cent – has surpassed the 30 per cent threshold. Other States came close, however: Nepal, with 29.5 per cent, and Afghanistan, with 27.7 per cent. Overall, small gains and frequent setbacks have resulted in Asia losing ground relative to other regions. In 1995, Asia ranked second, tied with Europe. By 2015, it dropped to fourth place among the six regions, having lost momentum as other regions gained it.

In Afghanistan, which had no parliament in 1995, women's share of the lower house, as of 2015, is 27.7 per cent. The country's 2004 constitution, in fact, reserves 27 per cent of the lower house for women; if women candidates do not win enough seats outright, those receiving the most votes fill seats as necessary to reach the 27 per cent mark. This policy stems from strong international pressure to include women in the interim and new governments established following military intervention to remove the Taliban in 2001. A woman was elected outside the quota in 2010 because one seat had been reserved for a woman but two women gained the highest vote totals in that province. Violence and intimidation of women candidates, on the other hand, continue to plague Afghan elections, as do attempts to remove women parliamentarians once elected, through assassination, kidnapping, threatening phone calls, and other means. As a setback in 2013, parliament revised the electoral law to reduce the share of reserved seats at the subnational level from 25 to 20 per cent.

In Singapore, women's share of parliament has also increased substantially over the last 20 years, from 3.7 per cent in 1995 to 25.3 per cent in 2015 (+21.6 points). A 1988 electoral reform requires that at least one ethnic minority candidate be fielded in the multimember constituencies of its mixed electoral system, but there is no quota for women. An analysis of party list composition in recent years suggests that increasing the district magnitude (the number of seats) in these constituencies has

The overall number of women MPs remains disappointingly low in India, despite elections in 2014.

©Reuters/D. Ismail, 2014



had a positive impact on the nomination and election of women candidates, as party lists have attempted to convey a greater sense of inclusiveness and balance overall.

More modest changes have been seen in Mongolia, where women's share increased from 3.9 per cent in 1995 to 14.9 per cent in 2015 (+11 points), and Bhutan (0 per cent in 1995; 8.5 per cent in 2015: +8.5 points). In Bhutan, the ruling party made an election promise to institute a 20 per cent quota once elected but has not yet followed through. Barriers to women's candidacies include the requirement of a university education and the disqualification of civil servants for elective office (given that many university-educated women work as civil servants). To remedy some of these problems, a network of elected and aspiring women politicians was created in 2012 to strengthen women's skills and confidence and to encourage more women to participate in politics.

Japan made the greatest gains in 2014, electing 9.5 per cent women to its lower house, up 1.6 points from 7.9 per cent in 2012. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attracted international attention over the last year for his efforts to rethink the role of women in the Japanese economy, proposing ways to keep women in the labour market while also stimulating the country's birth rate. Stating that women should occupy 30 per cent of leadership roles in the government and private sector by 2020, he appointed five women in a cabinet reshuffle, tying the record for women in a Japanese cabinet. Two of those women soon resigned, however, and in a snap election called in late 2014, a mere 12 per cent of the governing party's parliamentary candidates were women. The main opposition party had announced its intention to introduce quotas prior to the next general elections, but did not anticipate elections until

2016. So, while the election returned Abe's coalition to power, no quotas were applied – although some parties, like the Japanese Communist Party, nominated as many as 25 per cent women candidates.

Progress in India was also modest: between 2009 and 2014 women's share rose 0.6 points in its lower house (from 10.8 to 11.4% and 2.1 points in its upper house (from 10.6 to 12.8%). These weak figures stand in stark contrast to the dramatic increases witnessed at local level where, since 1992, one-third of all of the seats – as well as the leadership positions in these councils – have been reserved for women. In recent years, several States have enhanced this provision to 50 per cent. Bills to institute a similar measure for seats in the national parliament have been introduced in every legislative session since 1996 but have made little headway. Although millions of women have gained experience in Indian local government as a result of quotas, parties continue to view women as less likely than men to win elections. The vast sums required to run a campaign for parliament also remain prohibitively high for many women.

Indonesia, in contrast, registered a drop from 18.2 per cent in 2009 to 16.8 per cent in 2014 (-1.4 points). At face value, this result was surprising. The country's quota law, adopted in 2003 but expanded and strengthened in 2008, requires parties to include at least 30 per cent women on their electoral lists. In 2014, a record 37.3 per cent of parliamentary candidates were women, the electoral commission having forced parties to redo lists not in compliance with the quota. The country's open-list electoral system, however, undercut these gains as votes were disproportionately cast for men.

Lessons learned

During the last 20 years, there has been notable progress in the percentage of women members of single or lower houses of parliaments around the world. By 2015, the vast majority of countries have moved closer to the 30 per cent target for women in decision-making identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. A growing number of States have not only met this goal but exceeded it. The advances as well as the setbacks witnessed between 1995 and 2015 are due to a variety of factors. At least six lessons can be drawn from country experiences with women's representation over the past two decades.

Progress is not inevitable

While there has been overall progress, the past year has not marked a continuation of that forward movement across all countries. Two of the six regions saw their average share of women in parliament decline. Such decreases were not confined to countries with few women parliamentarians: countries like Sweden and South Africa, where women's representation exceeds 40 per cent, also saw declines. Progress thus is not a given; it requires constant effort, action, and political will.

Changing political opportunities

Some of the most impressive changes have occurred in countries where existing political arrangements have been challenged, creating moments of instability, a willingness to experiment, and crucial windows of opportunity to move women's representation onto the political agenda. This has occurred, for example, in many post-conflict countries. The end of genocide and civil war provided an opportunity in many countries to write new constitutions and establish new electoral systems. Efforts to include women have been

aided by United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, of 2000, highlighting the need for equal representation – and for women to be involved in all aspects of maintaining and promoting peace and security.

In other contexts, mass protests have led to the fall of authoritarian regimes – opening up conversations over how to devise new political arrangements. A parity law in Tunisia required the inclusion of women in the Constituent Assembly formed to write a new constitution, leading in turn to the inclusion of a parity guarantee. Popular protest in Morocco inspired legislators to formalize a “gentlemen's agreement” that had been applied in the country since 2002, doubling the number of seats for women and reserving, for the first time, 30 seats for men under the age of 40. And yet, mass demonstrations do not always lead to women's inclusion. In Egypt, reserved seats for women had been introduced during the last years of the Mubarak regime, and have since been discredited. With parties instead being required to include one woman on their lists, women's representation fell to 2.2 per cent. New protests in 2013 ushered in a second round of reform, resulting in a constitution stating that an “appropriate” level of women's representation would be guaranteed in the new electoral law.

Evolving gender roles

In the 20 years since the Beijing conference, a host of social and political changes have contributed to evolving views of gender roles. Surveys in the United States of America, for example, indicate that more people than ever would vote for a woman as president. In France, where parties tend to run women candidates in the “lost cause” districts, district-level election data show that, taking into account the “winnability” of districts, women candidates tend to win at equal or greater rates than men. Viewing women as a liability thus appears to be a poor electoral strategy.



The adoption of a new constitution in Tunisia has led to the country being one of only two Arab nations with more than 30 per cent women MPs. ©Reuters/Z. Souissi, 2014

In India, exposure to women in politics appears to have changed public views regarding women as leaders. In 1992, one-third of the seats in local government were reserved for women, including one-third of all council heads. As these seats are chosen by lottery, some districts have never been headed by women, while others have been led by women once or twice. A survey was carried out to examine changes in views with regard to female leadership. In the districts that have never had a female leader, or where the position has been reserved for a woman only once, survey respondents considered men always to make better leaders. In districts where seats have been reserved twice for women, on the other hand, men and women were considered equally good leaders. The greatest change of view occurred among men.

Negative experiences for women politicians can depress the political ambitions of other women. In a survey conducted in Australia after Julia Gillard left office as the country's first female prime minister, 60 per cent of women aged 18 to 21 and 80 per cent of women over the age of 31 said they were less likely to run after seeing how negatively Gillard was treated by the media. In many other countries, however, quotas have inspired women to come forward who might never have thought about standing as candidates before.

Emerging discourse on women's empowerment

Efforts to promote women's political participation have been aided by a shift in the primary arguments used to justify greater representation for women. The "justice argument" focuses on fairness: since women are half of the population, they should be half of all representatives. This argument, often heard in the Nordic countries, is supported by cross-national surveys finding that both men and women consider political institutions more legitimate and democratic when more women are elected. This echoes the IPU Universal Declaration on Democracy in linking democratic governance with equal participation in decision-making of both men and women.

A more common and often very successful tactic around the globe in recent years has been to stress the "added value" of women's participation, suggesting that gender equality is good not just for women but for everyone. The UN and the World Bank, for example, emphasize the positive impact of women's participation on development outcomes. UN Security Council resolution 1325 highlights women's political participation as a way to bring peace and stability to war-torn societies.

These two arguments are not necessarily at odds with each other: women's inclusion can be a matter of fairness as well as one of making a positive contribution to society. There have also been efforts, particularly in Latin America, to reframe the debate as a question of rights. In Mexico, academics, activists, and electoral authorities use the language of "electoral-political rights" to describe what is at stake when gender quotas are not respected or when political violence is perpetrated against women candidates and elected officials.

Adopting gender quotas

The last 20 years have demonstrated, perhaps more clearly than ever, the need for concrete measures to spur changes in women's political representation. While countries without gender

quotas have in general seen fewer changes in the numbers of women elected, quotas in and of themselves do not guarantee a commensurate rise in women's representation. Their share may stagnate or even drop after quotas are introduced.

Experience with quotas around the world reveals three key lessons. First, policies are effective when they are clear and firm in their requirements. They should mandate a high level of representation. They need to specify that women must be placed in winnable positions. They must impose strong sanctions on parties that do not comply, rejection of the list being the most powerful and convincing. The language used should preclude any loopholes in quota application.

Second, to have an impact, quotas should be designed according to the institutional context, i.e. the electoral and political party systems in place. Since they are more easily applied to a list of candidates than in single-candidate districts, quotas are often most effective in countries with proportional representation (PR) electoral systems. In addition, when multiple positions are available in each electoral district, parties may feel pressure to "balance" their lists with candidates from different groups. Moreover, if designed appropriately, quotas can also be effective in majoritarian/first-past-the-post elections.

Third, if quotas are to be effective, there must be substantial political will behind their application, as well as close and detailed oversight and scrutiny. Evidence suggests that, given the opportunity, elites will tend to avoid or even subvert quota requirements. One strategy used to counter this tendency is "naming and shaming": drawing attention to disparities in the share of women elected from different parties. A second strategy is recourse to institutions like the electoral courts and commissions to clarify legal ambiguities surrounding quota implementation.

Resisting gender quotas

These dynamics are such that gender quotas do not, in and of themselves, level the political playing field. First, parties may nominate the requisite number of women but then find other ways to undermine the quota's purpose. One tactic is to nominate "fake" candidates: women with no intention of winning who do not campaign once nominated, or women who agree to resign their positions in favour of male alternates once elected. This has been a problem in several Latin American countries, to the extent that phrases like "Juanitas" and "candidatas laranjas" have been coined to refer to the phenomenon. Another strategy is to nominate women but then deny them the necessary financial resources to wage successful campaigns, while making such resources available to male candidates.

Another problem is that women who accede to political positions via gender quotas may be derided as "quota women," with supposedly no other qualifications for office than being female. Such myths are being dispelled by research comparing the backgrounds of male and female parliamentarians from countries as diverse as Argentina, France, Morocco, and Uganda: all of the studies are finding that women elected via quotas are equally – and in some cases more – qualified than their non-quota counterparts. Evidence from Sweden shows that quotas can also have a positive impact on the qualifications

of elected men who now face greater competition for a more limited number of spots. Resistance to quotas may thus be sustained in some instances by myths at odds with the empirical data.

Finally, in countries for which data are available, a dramatic rise has been recorded in the numbers of female candidates. Often, however, far more women run – sometimes twice as many – than actually win seats in parliament. In Brazil and Indonesia, for instance, women comprised approximately one-third of the candidates yet won much smaller shares of the

seats, only 9.9 and 16.8 per cent in the lower or single house, respectively. These patterns show that increasing the numbers of women contesting elections is not sufficient to guarantee change in women's representation. In both cases, the results were shaped by the use of an open-list PR electoral system, a method requiring voters to choose a single candidate on a party list. Open-list systems do not always work against women candidates – Denmark and Finland use them and still elect high numbers of women to parliament – but they can make it difficult to engineer outcomes via requirements like alternation.

Table 3

High representation countries and the use of gender quotas, 2015

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	Quota
1. Rwanda	80	51	63.8	Yes#
2. Bolivia	130	69	53.1	Yes***
3. Andorra	28	14	50.0	No
4. Cuba	612	299	48.9	No
5. Seychelles	32	14	43.8	No
6. Sweden	349	152	43.6	Yes*
7. Senegal	150	64	42.7	Yes**
8. Finland	200	85	42.5	No
9. Ecuador	137	57	41.6	Yes**
10. South Africa	400	166	41.5	Yes*
11. Iceland	63	26	41.3	Yes*
11. Namibia	104	43	41.3	Yes*
12. Spain	350	144	41.1	Yes***
13. Mozambique	250	99	39.6	Yes*
13. Norway	169	67	39.6	Yes*
14. Belgium	150	59	39.3	Yes**
15. Nicaragua	92	36	39.1	Yes***
16. Timor-Leste	65	25	38.5	Yes**
17. Denmark	179	68	38.0	No
17. Mexico	500	190	38.0	Yes***
18. Netherlands	150	56	37.3	Yes*
19. Angola	220	81	36.8	Yes**
20. Slovenia	90	33	36.7	Yes***

* Political party quota
 ** Legislated quota
 *** Legislated and party quotas
 # Reserved seats

Emerging Trends

Developments over the last two decades illustrate how remarkable gains in women's representation are possible within a relatively short time frame. These achievements have in turn inspired new global and regional discussions on ways to tackle continuing challenges to women's participation, support women's legislative work, and assess women's impact in parliament.

From 30 per cent to parity

The 30 per cent target identified in the Beijing Platform for Action inspired campaigns around the world to pursue the adoption of 30 per cent quotas. In the last five years, in multiple regions – Europe, the Americas, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arab States – efforts have shifted the target to 50 per cent, referred to as “parity”. This trend began in the early 2000s in

such European States as Belgium, France and Portugal. Bolivia, Costa Rica and Ecuador followed in the late 2000s. Although 50-50 campaigns have been active in Africa for at least 10 years, parity became law only recently in Senegal. A party regulation adopted in South Africa reflects the same principle. The first Arab State to adopt a parity law was Tunisia in 2011.

Complementary legislation and initiatives

There has been work in recent years on complementary legislation and initiatives to bolster gender quotas – or substitute for them where quotas are not possible. In countries where parties are publicly funded, new laws have been introduced to regulate party access to public funds so as to create incentives for nominating or electing greater numbers of women. In

Georgia, a party that includes at least two members of both sexes for every 10 candidates on its lists receives an additional 10 per cent on top of its regular entitlement. In Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, Mali, and Niger, between 5 and 10 per cent of state funding is allocated to parties based on their share of women elected.

Other funding regulations encourage capacity-building for women inside political parties. Rather than seeking to influence nomination processes, these laws require that parties earmark a certain percentage of their public funding for activities that contribute to the political development of women. In Brazil, Italy, and the Republic of Korea, parties must allocate between 5 and 10 per cent of their state subsidies to such activities. Other laws further stipulate how funds must be used. Each party in Mexico must devote 3 per cent of its annual funding to the training, promotion, and development of women's leadership skills. In Panama, at least 10 per cent of the 25 per cent of party funding dedicated to civic and political education activities must be channelled solely towards the training of women.

Civil society groups and political parties have both sought to provide capacity building opportunities for women. These include training courses to foster motivation, improve public speaking, and demystify the campaign process. In countries like the United States of America, where public financing is not available, such training also focuses on fundraising strategies. In several countries, including Australia, Mexico, and the United Kingdom, parties and women's organizations have established mentoring programmes, pairing first-time as well as prospective candidates with more experienced politicians.

Diversifying the types of women elected to parliament

Global efforts to promote women in politics have until recently tended to treat women as a uniform category. Yet women, like men, are diverse – and some subgroups tend to be privileged over others. A global study of ethnic minority women's political representation calculates that minority women account for 11.2 per cent of the general population but only 2.1 per cent of parliamentarians. In contrast, the share of minority men is largely proportional, at 10.8 per cent of legislators versus 11.3 per cent of society. Similarly, a 2014 IPU [report](#) on young parliamentarians notes that women under the age of 45 were by far the least represented in national parliaments, at 8 per cent, compared to young men and older women, at 16 per cent each. Older men, on the other hand, were vastly over-represented, comprising 60 per cent of parliamentarians.

Such statistics highlight the need to map which groups of women are elected and devise strategies for reaching out to different subgroups. The beneficiaries of quotas for women tend to come from dominant groups, while quotas for ethnic minorities tend to benefit minority men. In the few countries with quotas for both groups, like Burundi, minority women have found greater electoral opportunities. Some youth quotas, reflecting that lesson, incorporate a gender rule as well. Kenya's 2010 constitution reserves two Senate seats for people aged 18 to 35, one man and one woman.

Aggression and harassment against women politicians as emerging challenges to women's political participation

Over the last few years, a growing number of international organizations and local networks of women politicians have convened seminars and published case studies on a rising tide of violence and harassment against female politicians. Attention has been drawn in particular to sexism in traditional media coverage, as well as the new social media, through the dissemination of demeaning messages and images of women in politics. Taking a variety of forms, such acts communicate the same message: women do not belong in politics.

One form consists of physical violence, including acts affecting a woman's bodily integrity or acts of bodily harm to members of her family. Examples have included murder, kidnapping, and beating. Psychological violence inflicts trauma on an individual's mental state or emotional well-being. This may include threats of physical violence or acts intended to socially harm women: death threats, rape, character assassination. Economic violence seeks to control women's access to, or behaviour in, the political realm by systematically restricting their access, though not that of male candidates, to available economic resources. Examples include denying women campaign funds or refusing to pay their salaries once elected. Symbolic violence, finally, operates at the level of portrayal and representation, to erase or nullify women's presence in political office. This may include sexual objectification, whether on social media or on the floor of parliament, or deliberately shutting off women's microphones to block their participation. These acts may be perpetrated by rival parties as well as members of a woman's own party or even family.

While arising in some form in all regions of the world, the issue of "political violence and harassment against women" has received by far the most attention in the Americas. Discussions began in Bolivia as early as 2000, when councilwomen met to discuss reports from all over the country regarding harassment and violence against women in local government. Over the next decade, they assembled more than 4000 claims from elected women. In 2012, a law was approved to criminalize such acts and establish appropriate punishment, including prison time, for perpetrators. Similar bills were proposed in Ecuador in 2011 and Peru, Mexico, and Costa Rica in 2013.

Supporting women's parliamentary work and building solidarity among women

Accessing parliament is the first hurdle. Once in parliament, women MPs face a new set of challenges: to carve out their own space and gain influence over policy-making processes. Simply electing more women, in other words, is not the same as empowering women in politics. Several strategies have begun to emerge to fulfil this latter objective. Considering that women often lack access to the same networks as men, special induction sessions may be held for recently elected women, alongside the traditional orientation training provided to all newly-elected parliamentarians, to help them navigate some of the more informal aspects of parliamentary life.

Establishing parliamentary caucuses for women is another way to support their legislative work, bringing them together across partisan lines and helping them connect with actors in civil society. The degree of formality and cooperation often depends on the strength of party politics: women are less likely to come together formally where partisan divides are strong. The Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians, established in 1996, is formally recognized and includes all female members of parliament. It engages in advocacy on behalf of women by identifying legislative priorities and reviewing legislation to ensure gender sensitivity. It also seeks to build the capacity of its members through training, administrative assistance, and expert technical advice. The Forum also includes, as “supporting members”, men parliamentarians, thereby building strategic partnerships for the advancement of gender equality.

Towards gender-sensitive parliaments

Emerging initiatives address parliament as a workplace. Many appear in the IPU publication on *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments*, mapping efforts to make parliaments more “women-friendly”. These initiatives include changing the timing of sittings so that parliamentarians can spend evenings with their families; establishing parental leave policies; developing alternatives for voting on bills in the absence of an alternate legislator; providing childcare facilities and breastfeeding rooms in parliament buildings, and making the language used in parliament more inclusive toward women. In Spain, the parliamentary standing orders were revised to require that both masculine and feminine forms be used in plenary and committee debates – rather than the masculine plural as the default for referring to both women and men.

The impact of women in parliament

Efforts to elect more women to parliament have often included claims that women will change how politics is done, bring new policy priorities, adopt a different style of interacting with constituents, and affect the political culture of parliament itself. Research on this topic has until recently been limited by the small number of women parliamentarians. The major changes witnessed over the last 20 years, however, provide a crucial opportunity to explore the validity of these claims.

Scholarly studies, supported by interviews with male and female parliamentarians in the IPU *Equality in Politics* survey, indicate that women’s presence has changed parliaments around the world in tangible ways. New issues like violence against women or women’s health concerns, which might not otherwise have received the attention they deserve, are making it onto the political agenda. Women in parliament also contribute, at least in some contexts, to a more collaborative political environment, both within and across parties. Their presence emboldens more women citizens to contact their representatives, enhancing democratic communication and accountability.

These questions are ripe for further investigation, especially as the share of women in many parliaments around the world has moved closer to the 30 per cent target identified in Beijing. Although this figure is often cited as the “critical mass” necessary for women to have a political voice, it is not yet clear if and how other aspects of the political context condition the impact that women as a group may have on the institutions and outputs of parliaments. The available evidence suggests that, in addition to their presence being a matter of basic political rights, women do change the way that politics is done. Further, participation by women and men enhances the likelihood of responsiveness to the needs of all citizens. Equality in politics, in other words, makes parliaments stronger.

Women speakers of parliament

Situation as of 1 January 2015:

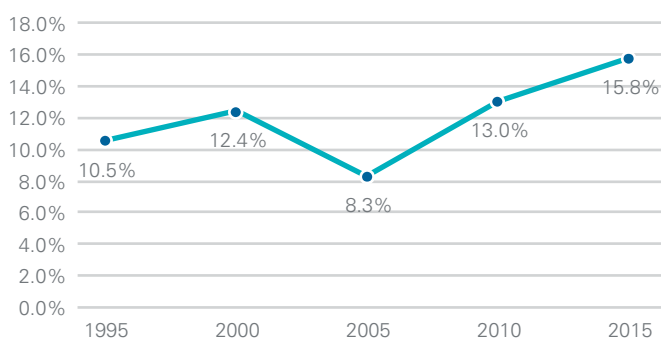
As of 1 January 2015, women hold 15.8 per cent of all presiding officer posts in the world, a one-point increase over the figure from 1 January 2014.

28 speakers in single or lower houses of parliament
Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bolivia*, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Dominica, Ecuador, Fiji, India, Italy, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Netherlands, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Serbia, Singapore, South Africa, Suriname, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania.
*President-elect

15 speakers in upper houses of parliament
Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Bahamas, Barbados, Belgium, Chile, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Netherlands, Russian Federation, South Africa, Swaziland, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe.

Figure 3

Progression (%) of women speakers – 1995-2015



Annex

Women in single and lower houses of parliament, 1995 vs. 2015*

Country	% of women in 1995	% of women in 2015	% point change
1 Rwanda	4.3	63.8	59.5
2 Andorra	3.6	50.0	46.4
3 Bolivia	10.8	53.1	42.3
4 Ecuador	4.5	41.6	37.1
5 Senegal	11.7	42.7	31.0
6 The F.Y.R. of Macedonia	3.3	33.3	30.0
7 Angola	9.5	36.8	27.3
" Belgium	12.0	39.3	27.3
9 Cuba	22.8	48.9	26.1
10 Ethiopia	2.0	27.8	25.8
11 Mauritania	0.0	25.2	25.2
12 Spain	16.0	41.1	25.1
13 Algeria	6.7	31.6	24.9
14 United Republic of Tanzania	11.2	36.0	24.8
15 Tunisia	6.7	31.3	24.6
16 Mexico	14.2	38.0	23.8
17 Belarus	3.8	27.3	23.5
18 Namibia	18.1	41.3	23.2
19 Nicaragua	16.3	39.1	22.8
20 Slovenia	14.4	36.7	22.3
21 Lesotho	4.6	26.7	22.1
22 Singapore	3.7	25.3	21.6
23 France	6.4	26.2	19.8
24 Costa Rica	14.0	33.3	19.3
25 Cameroon	12.2	31.1	18.9
" Pakistan	1.8	20.7	18.9
27 Honduras	7.0	25.8	18.8
28 Kyrgyzstan	4.8	23.3	18.5
29 Philippines	8.8	27.2	18.4
30 Portugal	13.0	31.3	18.3
31 Burundi	12.3	30.5	18.2
32 Australia	8.8	26.7	17.9
" Croatia	7.9	25.8	17.9
34 United Arab Emirates	0.0	17.5	17.5
35 Trinidad and Tobago	11.1	28.5	17.4
36 Bosnia and Herzegovina	4.5	21.4	16.9
" Madagascar	3.6	20.5	16.9
38 Zimbabwe	14.7	31.5	16.8
39 El Salvador	10.7	27.4	16.7
" Kenya	3.0	19.7	16.7
" Saint Lucia	0.0	16.7	16.7
42 Equatorial Guinea	7.5	24.0	16.5
" Seychelles	27.3	43.8	16.5
" South Africa	25.0	41.5	16.5

Country	% of women in 1995	% of women in 2015	% point change
45 Morocco	0.6	17.0	16.4
" Togo	1.2	17.6	16.4
47 Lithuania	7.1	23.4	16.3
48 Sudan	8.2	24.3	16.1
49 Republic of Moldova	4.8	20.8	16.0
50 Iceland	25.4	41.3	15.9
" Italy	15.1	31.0	15.9
52 Iraq	10.8	26.5	15.7
53 Lao People's Democratic Republic	9.4	25.0	15.6
54 Monaco	5.6	20.8	15.2
55 Albania	5.7	20.7	15.0
" Greece	6.0	21.0	15.0
57 Guinea	7.0	21.9	14.9
58 Cambodia	5.8	20.3	14.5
59 Mozambique	25.2	39.6	14.4
60 Republic of Korea	2.0	16.3	14.3
61 Tajikistan	2.8	16.9	14.1
62 United Kingdom	9.2	22.8	13.6
63 Grenada	20.0	33.3	13.3
" Israel	9.2	22.5	13.3
65 Kazakhstan	13.4	26.2	12.8
66 Djibouti	0.0	12.7	12.7
67 Dominica	9.4	21.9	12.5
" Paraguay	2.5	15.0	12.5
69 Peru	10.0	22.3	12.3
70 Liechtenstein	8.0	20.0	12.0
" Turkey	2.4	14.4	12.0
72 Malta	1.5	13.0	11.5
73 Guyana	20.0	31.3	11.3
74 Malawi	5.6	16.7	11.1
" Poland	13.0	24.1	11.1
" Venezuela	5.9	17.0	11.1
77 Mongolia	3.9	14.9	11.0
" Panama	8.3	19.3	11.0
79 Argentina	25.3	36.2	10.9
" Sao Tome and Principe	7.3	18.2	10.9
81 Jordan	1.3	12.0	10.7
82 Germany	26.3	36.5	10.2
" New Zealand	21.2	31.4	10.2
84 Uzbekistan	6.0	16.0	10.0
85 Bangladesh	10.3	20.0	9.7
" Cabo Verde	11.1	20.8	9.7
" Fiji	4.3	14.0	9.7
" Niger	3.6	13.3	9.7
89 Romania	4.1	13.7	9.6
90 Switzerland	21.0	30.5	9.5
91 Dominican Republic	11.7	20.8	9.1
" Colombia	10.8	19.9	9.1

Country	% of women in 1995	% of women in 2015	% point change
93 Czech Republic	10.0	19.0	9.0
" Finland	33.5	42.5	9.0
95 Kiribati	0.0	8.7	8.7
96 Bhutan	0.0	8.5	8.5
97 United States of America	10.9	19.3	8.4
98 Chile	7.5	15.8	8.3
" Gabon	5.9	14.2	8.3
" Luxembourg	20.0	28.3	8.3
101 Ukraine	3.8	11.8	8.0
102 Turkmenistan	18.0	25.8	7.8
103 Burkina Faso	5.6	13.3	7.7
104 Canada	18.0	25.2	7.2
" Mali	2.3	9.5	7.2
106 Bulgaria	13.3	20.4	7.1
" Cyprus	5.4	12.5	7.1
108 Estonia	12.9	19.8	6.9
109 Japan	2.7	9.5	6.8
110 Barbados	10.7	16.7	6.0
" Uruguay	7.1	13.1	6.0
" Zambia	6.7	12.7	6.0
113 Suriname	5.9	11.8	5.9
114 Antigua and Barbuda	5.3	11.1	5.8
" Congo	1.6	7.4	5.8
" Viet Nam	18.5	24.3	5.8
117 Liberia	5.7	11.0	5.3
118 Bahamas	8.2	13.2	5.0
" San Marino	11.7	16.7	5.0
120 Indonesia	12.2	17.1	4.9
121 India	7.2	12.0	4.8
122 Netherlands	32.7	37.3	4.6
123 Denmark	33.5	38.0	4.5
124 Armenia	6.3	10.7	4.4
" Georgia	6.9	11.3	4.4
126 Ireland	12.0	16.3	4.3
127 Mauritius	7.6	11.6	4.0
" Slovakia	14.7	18.7	4.0
129 Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.0	8.9	3.9
130 Austria	26.8	30.6	3.8
131 Guinea-Bissau	10.0	13.7	3.7
132 Azerbaijan	12.1	15.6	3.5
" Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	9.5	13.0	3.5
134 Sweden	40.4	43.6	3.2
135 Swaziland	3.1	6.2	3.1
136 Latvia	15.0	18.0	3.0
137 Ghana	8.0	10.9	2.9
138 Syrian Arab Republic	9.6	12.4	2.8
139 Papua New Guinea	0.0	2.7	2.7
140 China	21.0	23.6	2.6
" Malaysia	7.8	10.4	2.6




Country	% of women in 1995	% of women in 2015	% point change
142 Benin	6.0	8.4	2.4
143 Brazil	7.0	9.0	2.0
144 Samoa	4.3	6.1	1.8
145 Gambia (The)	7.8	9.4	1.6
146 Kuwait	0.0	1.5	1.5
147 Cote d'Ivoire	8.0	9.2	1.2
148 Eritrea	21.0	22.0	1.0
" Jamaica	11.7	12.7	1.0
150 Guatemala	12.5	13.3	0.8
" Lebanon	2.3	3.1	0.8
152 Comoros	2.4	3.0	0.6
153 Sri Lanka	5.3	5.8	0.5
154 Haiti	3.8	4.2	0.4
155 Norway	39.4	39.6	0.2
" Russian Federation	13.4	13.6	0.2
157 Marshall Islands	3.0	3.0	0.0
" Micronesia (Federated States of)	0.0	0.0	0.0
" Palau	0.0	0.0	0.0
" Thailand	6.1	6.1	0.0
161 Solomon Islands	2.1	2.0	-0.1
162 Belize	3.4	3.1	-0.3
" Iran (Islamic Republic of)	3.4	3.1	-0.3
" Nauru	5.6	5.3	-0.3
165 Maldives	6.3	5.9	-0.4
" Yemen	0.7	0.3	-0.4
167 Botswana	10.0	9.5	-0.5
168 Tuvalu	7.7	6.7	-1.0
169 Hungary	11.4	10.1	-1.3
170 Chad	16.4	14.9	-1.5
171 Vanuatu	2.2	0.0	-2.2
172 Tonga	3.3	0.0	-3.3
173 Democratic People's Republic of Korea	20.1	16.3	-3.8
174 Saint Kitts and Nevis	13.3	6.7	-6.6

*Countries for which data for both 1995 and 2015 are available.



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