

Women in Parliament in 2012

The Year in Perspective

The Year in Review

2012 represented nearly a 1 percentage-point increase in the world average (20.3%).

With the exception of 2007, this is nearly double the annual rate of increase. By the year's end, 33 lower houses of parliaments and 17 upper houses had reached the 30-per cent threshold considered necessary for women parliamentarians to have an impact on decision-making. This is more than triple the number 10 years ago. While this is up from 30 lower houses in 2011, it is down from 19 upper houses. New to the 30-per cent plus group were Algeria (31.6%), Mexico (lower house: 36.8% and upper house: 32.8%), Senegal (42.7%), Serbia (32.4%) and Timor-Leste (38.5%).

There were also fewer parliaments at the other end of the scale: 40 lower houses have less than 10 per cent women in their ranks, compared with 69 ten years ago and 46 in 2011.

Six lower houses and one upper house did not include any women by the end of 2012, a total which has not changed since 2011. These parliaments were mainly in the two regions with the lowest representation of women: the Arab States and the Pacific and include Haiti, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Vanuatu.

In total, 1,711 women gained seats, accounting for 18.7 per cent of members elected or appointed to parliament in 2012.

More ups than downs in parliamentary chambers

In 39 of the 57 chambers renewed in 2012, the proportion of women increased, and in 15 of these chambers, the gain was of more than 10 percentage points.

Decreases in the number of women elected to parliament occurred in 14 chambers. The greatest setback occurred in the appointed upper house of the Bahamas, where the proportion of

▼ United States of America, 2012. © Reuters



HIGHLIGHTS

Globally

- 2012 - a year of overall continued progress: the global average of women in parliaments is now at 20.3 per cent, up from 19.5 per cent in 2011. This represents a gain of 5.3 percentage points in 10 years.
- 33 lower houses of parliament had 30 per cent or more women MPs by the end of 2012. This is more than triple the number 10 years ago and is up from 30 lower houses in 2011.
- Women won 18.7 per cent of all seats up for renewal in 2012 in 57 chambers across 48 countries.
- Women continued to fare better when either legislated or voluntary quotas were used. In 2012, electoral quotas were used in 22 countries holding elections. With legislated quotas, women took 24 per cent of seats and with voluntary quotas they gained 22 per cent. Where no quotas were used, women took 12 per cent of seats.

Regionally

- Sub-Saharan Africa: the highest electoral gain was achieved in this region in Senegal where women MPs reached 42.7 per cent.
- Firsts in the Americas: historic highs were reached in Jamaica, Mexico and the United States of America. The region boasts the highest average of women parliamentarians in the world.
- Asia: Women became the focus of elections when Park Geun-Hye became the first woman President of the Republic of Korea, and human rights activist Aung San Suu Kyi won a by-election in Myanmar.
- Arab States: Algeria became the first country in the region to hit the 30 per cent threshold while change remained slow in Libya and Egypt.
- The Pacific was the only region to stagnate over the past 10 years. Positive news were the election of three women MPs each in Papua New Guinea and to the Senate of Palau.



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TABLE 1
Parliamentary Renewals in 2012

A. Progress and Setbacks of Women in Lower or Single Houses of Parliament Renewed in 2012

The figures show the percentage point difference between renewals in 2012 compared with the previous legislature



B. Women in Lower or Single Houses after Parliamentary Renewals in 2012

Country	Total seats	Total women	Percent women	Quota
SENEGAL	150	64	42.7%	YES**
NETHERLANDS	150	58	38.7%	YES*
TIMOR-LESTE	65	25	38.5%	YES**
MEXICO	500	184	36.8%	YES***
ANGOLA	220	75	34.1%	YES**
SERBIA	250	81	32.4%	YES**
ALGERIA	462	146	31.6%	YES***
FRANCE	577	155	26.9%	YES***
BELARUS	109	29	26.6%	NO
EL SALVADOR	84	22	26.2%	YES*
LESOTHO	120	30	25.0%	NO
LITHUANIA	139	34	24.5%	YES*
KAZAKHSTAN	107	26	24.3%	NO
GREECE	300	63	21.0%	YES***
SLOVAKIA	150	28	18.7%	YES*
USA	434	78	18.0%	NO
SAN MARINO	60	10	16.7%	NO
LIBYA	200	33	16.5%	YES**
BURKINA FASO	127	20	15.7%	YES**
REPUBLIC OF KOREA	300	47	15.7%	YES***
MONTENEGRO	81	12	14.8%	YES**
SOMALIA	275	38	13.8%	YES#
MONGOLIA	74	10	13.5%	YES**
ROMANIA	412	55	13.3%	YES*
BAHAMAS	38	5	13.2%	NO
SIERRA LEONE	121	15	12.4%	NO
GEORGIA	150	18	12.0%	NO
SYRIAN ARAB REP.	250	30	12.0%	NO
ARMENIA	131	14	10.7%	YES**
GHANA	275	28	10.2%	NO
UKRAINE	445	42	9.4%	NO
JAPAN	480	38	7.9%	NO
GAMBIA	53	4	7.5%	NO
CONGO	136	10	7.4%	NO
KUWAIT	65	4	6.2%	NO
BELIZE	32	1	3.1%	NO
IRAN	290	9	3.1%	NO
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	111	3	2.7%	NO
PALAU	16	0	0.0%	NO
VANUATU	52	0	0.0%	NO

* ONE OR MORE POLITICAL PARTIES ADOPTED A VOLUNTARY MEASURE TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF WOMEN CANDIDATES
 ** LEGISLATED CANDIDATE QUOTA
 *** LEGISLATED CANDIDATE QUOTA AND VOLUNTARY PARTY QUOTAS
 # SEATS RESERVED FOR WOMEN

women dropped from 60 to 25 per cent. In the other 13 chambers where women lost ground, however, the setback did not exceed 5.2 percentage points. No change was recorded in the upper houses of Belize, Cambodia and St. Lucia and the lower house of Palau.

In the 2012 elections, two chambers – the single chamber in Vanuatu and the lower house of Palau – returned no women at all to parliament.

A look at the regions

The Americas reaching historic highs

By the end of 2012, parliaments in the Americas had 24.1 per cent women MPs on average, up from 16.5 per cent in 2002. This places the region first in IPU's world ranking, excluding the Nordic countries sub-region. Historically high numbers of

women were elected in 2012 in El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico and the United States of America (USA).

In Mexico, which uses a mixture of first-past-the-post and proportional representation (PR) to elect its 500-member Chamber of Deputies, the news for women was good. More than 30 per cent of the 300 directly elected MPs were women, nearly double the number from the 2009 elections. A similar result was achieved through PR, bringing the total of women deputies in the Chamber to 184, or 36.8 per cent of the lower house.

This historic high is the result of two decades of lobbying that culminated in a legal obligation requiring political parties to fill at least 40 per cent of their candidate lists with women. Although the law has been in place since 2008, activists from across the political spectrum took their case to the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judicial Branch (TEPJF) to force parties to comply with the 60-40 quota when nominating candidates for parliament in these elections. On 30 November 2011, the electoral tribunal ruled to enforce full compliance with the quota provisions, ordering parties to nominate women in at least 40 per cent of their candidatures (including alternates) for the 2012 elections. Parties not complying with the law had 48 hours to rectify their lists or face a public reprimand. If the list was not changed within 24 hours, the General Council of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) would refuse to register it.

The record number of women elected to both the US House of Representatives (18%) and the Senate (20%) has been attributed to an unprecedented number of women

running for election. The Center for American Women in Politics noted that by July 2012, 294 women had filed papers to run for the House, surpassing the previous high levels of women candidates seen in 2010. In the Senate, where 11 of the 33 newly elected members were women, the Democrats fielded women candidates in some of the most competitive races and were rewarded by having each of their six women incumbents returned, as well as four new women elected. In two of the Senate races (Hawaii and New York), women competed against other women. Despite this success, the USA's position in the world rankings rose by just one place to 77th.

The presidential and congressional campaigns in the USA were fiercely fought on issues facing women, from reproductive rights to Medicare and jobs. The way these issues were discussed and reported in the media during the campaign underlined once again the necessity of having more women involved in politics to inform and shape the debate.

In Belize, the absence of electoral and political party support for women's inclusion in national decision-making led Prime Minister Deab Barrow to resort to political appointment. Five women were appointed to the Senate and two to the government after only one of three women candidates was successful in the election.

Yet by their very nature, appointments can be revoked. This point was brought home in the Bahamas when the Governor-General appointed a Senate with dramatically fewer women, dropping from 60 per cent of members to 25 per cent.

Europe: Abiding by gender equality quotas

European countries have also made substantial improvements over the past 10 years. The region now has an average of 23.2 per cent women MPs, up from 17.4 per cent in 2002. The few setbacks in Europe, such as in Belarus (down 5.2 percentage points), the Netherlands (down two percentage points) and the Czech Republic (down 1.2 percentage points) were relatively minor.

Significant advances were made in Serbia (up 10.8 percentage points), Kazakhstan (up 8.4 percentage points) and France (up 8.3 percentage points). In Serbia and France, gains were made thanks to quota legislation. The Serbian Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, for example, requires that one out of every three candidates on electoral lists must be of the "under-represented sex". Women now account for 32.4 per cent of the members of parliament.

In the 2012 elections, France achieved its highest participation rate for women, 12 years after the adoption of a gender parity law mandating every party to include between 49 and 51 per cent of women candidates, or have their public funding significantly reduced. Under this law, the number of women MPs has gradually increased from 12.3 per cent in 2002, 18.5 per cent in 2007, to its current record of 26.9 per cent.

One of the critical drawbacks of the French gender parity law was that it did not encourage political parties to place women in "winnable" seats and in single-member constituencies where (often male) incumbents are favoured. Moreover, while sanctions for non-compliance were foreseen, the larger parties preferred to lose millions of euros than to select more women candidates. It was estimated that in 2012, former President Nicholas Sarkozy's UMP Party lost over four million euros for fielding only 26 per cent women candidates.



▲ Mexico, 2012. © Reuters

The victorious left-wing parties displayed their political commitment to the gender parity law by adhering to the quota stipulations. Among the 280 Socialist Party MPs elected, 106 were women. Out of the 18 Green Party MPs elected, nine were women. Of the 221 deputies elected for the UMP Party (and its coalition partners), 27 (14%) were women.

In Kazakhstan, other factors came into play to support the increase in women's participation. In addition to the PR system, the President facilitated a gender equality legal framework that favoured women's inclusion. The implementation of the 2005 Gender Equality Strategy and the 2009 Gender Equality Law has been supported by collaboration between civil society and international organizations. In September 2011, for example, a number of women leaders in business, political parties and NGOs put together an action plan to help the government implement the Strategy.

Armenia showed that the strength and quality of a quota law is as important as having a law in the first place. The combination of its quota law setting low expectations and weak enforcement meant that women were unable to substantially increase their numerical presence. The electoral code only requires every fifth candidate on the list (roughly 20%) to be a woman. Election observers noted that the initial lists did not meet the criteria, with women making up 22 per cent of the total. However, seven women dropped out to make way for men candidates. In the end, 14 of the 131 MPs (10.7%) elected were women, two more than in the previous parliament. One unsuccessful woman candidate reported that she had been denied access to television and barred from campaigning by some local officials, while her relatives had received threats – both examples of other kinds of hurdles and pressures women candidates face in the political system.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Still the role model for quotas

Quotas have long been the measure of choice for improving women's parliamentary representation in Sub-Saharan Africa. By the end of 2012, the region averaged 20.4 per cent women MPs—seven percentage points higher than in 2002 (13.6%). Sub-Saharan African has four of IPU's top 10 ranked parliaments in the world. Significant strides made in Senegal (up 24.7 percentage points with 42.7% women MPs) were principally due to the enforcement of quota laws. Where minor or no gains were made in the region, legislative quotas did not carry sanctions for non-compliance.

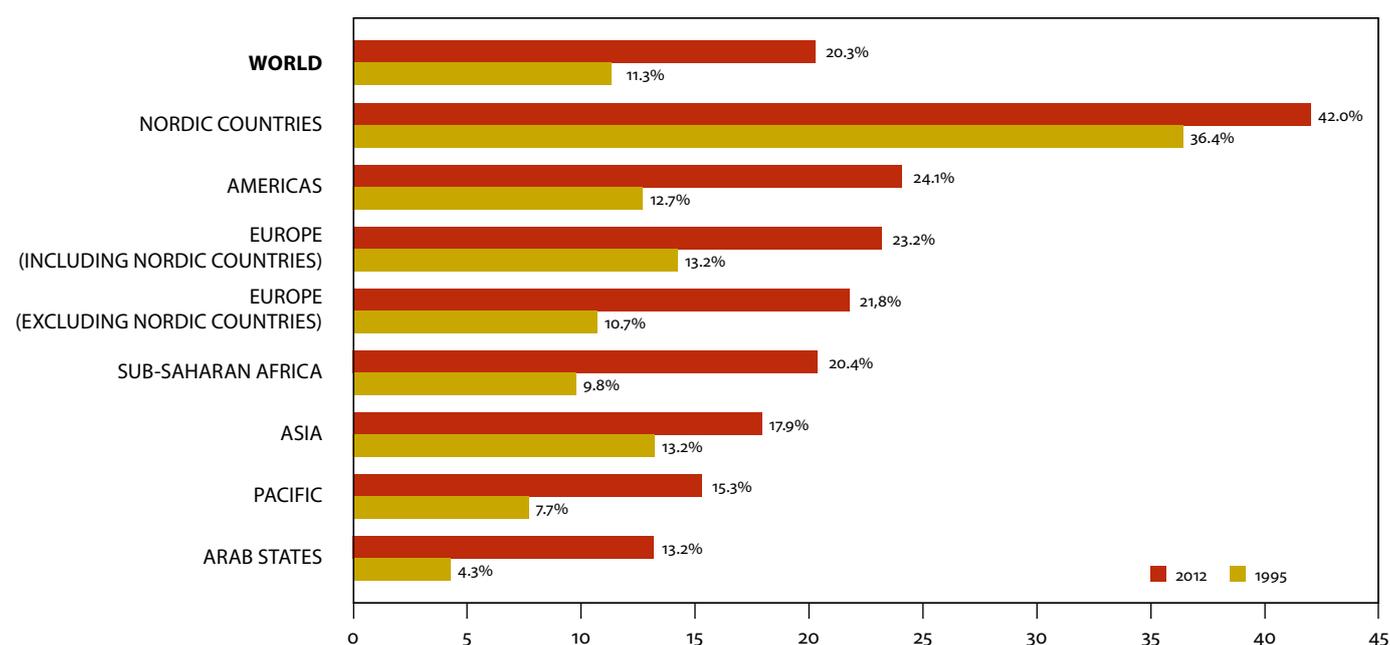
Senegal's 2012 elections were the first to be held since the adoption of a gender parity law in 2010. It requires that all candidate lists for legislative, regional, municipal and rural elections comprise equal numbers of men and women candidates, with men's and women's names alternated. Non-compliance with the gender parity requirement disqualified parties from the electoral process. In addition to enforcing the law, the government and women's organizations conducted a large-scale public awareness campaign and training sessions for women candidates.

In Sierra Leone, the country's 10 parties had all agreed to seek more women candidates as part of a drive to increase the proportion of women lawmakers from less than 20 per cent in the outgoing parliament to at least 30 per cent. Of the 586 candidates, however, only 38 were women. Some newspapers reported that the 15 successful women scored the highest percentage of votes in the elections, beating all their male counterparts and illustrating that political parties may not be as supportive of women candidates as the electorate.

TABLE 2

World and Regional Averages of Women in Parliaments, 1995 and 2012

Situation for all chambers of Parliaments combined in December of each year



The percentages do not take into account parliaments for which data is not available.



▲ Sierra Leone, 2012. © Reuters

The gain made in Somalia (7 percentage points) is noteworthy despite the fact that the result did not reflect the 30-per cent target written into the Constitution. It did, however, place Somalia 95th in IPU's world rankings. Of the 202 names released by the Technical Selection Committee, 30 (roughly 15%) were women. This was reportedly achieved after “weeks of haggling where male clan leaders were cajoled to include women in their nominations¹”.

Asia: Women change the focus of elections

Asia epitomizes slow, incremental progress with only a 3 percentage-point increase over the past 10 years – from an average of 15.2 per cent in 2002 to 17.9 per cent by the end of 2012. Impressive gains were made in Timor-Leste (up 10.8 percentage points) and Mongolia (up 9.6 percentage points). Japan recorded a minor setback (3.3 percentage points). While the electoral results in the Republic of Korea and Myanmar did not prove inspiring, individual women won the hearts and minds of the electorate.

In the Republic of Korea, Park Geun-Hye led her conservative party to victory, becoming the country's first woman president. Far from downplaying her gender, television advertisements promoted Park as a woman president who understood female leadership and was characterized as

responsible and subtle. Park also made pledges appealing to women in the workplace and at home.

Some commentators have predicted that targeting women's interests in the 2012 election would further improve gender equality in a country where strong gender machinery and policy have been in place since 2005. The official election act requires political parties to nominate women candidates in half of the proportional representation seats and strive to allocate 30 per cent of other seats to women. A subsidy is provided to parties that nominate women candidates (established in 2005 and amended in 2006) and there is a fund for women in politics (established in 2005). Despite all of this, the increase in the Republic of Korea was a modest 2 percentage points (15.7%).

By-elections to both chambers of parliament in Myanmar were overshadowed by the participation in the election race of long-time human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi. Her National League for Democracy (NLD) party won 43 of 44 seats contested in the elections, including her own victory for the seat of Kawhmu. Most remarkably, all 13 women running on an NLD ticket won their seats, although women still represent a small minority (6%) in the lower house.

Ten women won seats in Mongolia's parliamentary elections in 2012, triple the number of women elected four years previously. They represent 13.5 per cent of members of parliament. The rise in the number of women elected was due in part to a new election law passed in 2012 that introduced the PR system for 28 of the 76 seats. It also specified that a minimum of 20 per cent of candidates must be women.

1 “Marginalising women in Somali politics” by Prof. Cawo Abdil, Al Jazeera English, 24 August 2012.

However, the law makes no mention of women's positioning on the ballot. As a result, very few women were placed at the top of the list in the elections. In Timor-Leste, a 2011 electoral law amendment led to the election of 25 women (38.5%) in 2012. It stipulated that one in every three candidates on party lists had to be a woman. All parties complied with the new legal requirements though only three out of 21 party lists were headed by women.

Arab States acting for change

Ten years ago, women in the Arab region held a mere 5.7 per cent of all parliamentary seats. By the end of 2012, this figure had jumped significantly to 13.2 per cent. A clear sign of continuing positive change in this region was the appointment in early 2013 of 30 women (20%) to the Shura Council of Saudi Arabia, a first for the conservative Gulf kingdom.

Women have increased the number of seats they hold in the Algerian and Libyan parliaments. Election results in Algeria put the country ahead of all others in the region, with 31.6 per cent women MPs in its lower house. A constitutional quota sets the minimum number of women candidates based on constituency size. Where political parties fail to fill this quota, the list is rejected. In a first for Algerian politics, an all-woman list of candidates was also formed. Despite a fatwa forbidding the nomination of women candidates, 7,500 women ran in the



▲ Libya, 2012. © Reuters

TABLE 3
Candidates and Quotas

	Candidates				Candidates Elected				Success Rate %		Quota
	Total	Men	Women	Percent women	Total	Men	Women	Percent women	Men	Women	
PLURALITY/MAJORITY ELECTORAL SYSTEM											
FRANCE*	6591	3950	2641	40	577	422	155	26.9	11	6	LC & VP
CZECH REPUBLIC~	233	191	42	18	81	67	14	17.3	35	33	VP
SIERRA LEONE^	586	548	38	6	121	106	15	12.4	19	39	LC
GHANA^	1332	1199	133	10	274	246	28	10	21	21	NONE
GAMBIA^	74	70	4	5	53	49	4	7.5	70	100	NONE
KUWAIT^	288	270	18	6	50	47	3	6	17	17	NONE
BELIZE*	74	71	3	4	32	31	1	3.1	44	33	NONE
PAPUA NEW GUINEA^	3435	3300	135	4	111	108	3	2.7	3	2	NONE
VANUATU^	346	336	10	3	52	52	0	0	15	0	NONE
MIXED ELECTORAL SYSTEM											
LESOTHO*	1043	786	257	25	120	90	30	25.0	11	12	NONE
KOREA, REPUBLIC OF^	1090	948	142	13	300	253	47	15.7	27	33	LC & VP
LIBYA^	3707	3077	630	17	200	167	33	16.5	5	5	LC
MONGOLIA^	544	370	174	32	74	62	10	13.5	17	6	LC
ARMENIA^	1141	902	239	21	131	117	14	10.7	13	6	LC
PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION ELECTORAL SYSTEM											
NETHERLANDS*	972	669	303	31	150	92	58	38.7	14	19	VP
SERBIA^	3065	1998	1067	34	250	169	81	32.4	8	8	LC
ALGERIA*	25800	18153	7647	30	462	316	146	31.6	2	2	LC
KAZAKHSTAN*	386	305	81	21	107	81	26	24.3	27	32	NONE
SLOVAKIA^	2967	2189	778	26	150	122	28	18.7	6	4	VP

Notes: * lower house; ^ Unicameral; ~ Upper house; VP Voluntary Party Quotas; LC Legislated candidate quotas

elections. This not only catapulted Algeria ahead of Tunisia (26.7%) and Iraq (25.2%) but also made the country the first and only Arab State to have more than 30 per cent women MPs.

In Libya, 33 women (16.5%) were elected to serve in Libya's General National Congress in the first free elections since 1969. Thirty-two of them belonged to political parties and one ran as an independent. The electoral law set a gender quota for 80 seats elected by PR. Women benefitted from the zipper system that required parties to alternate between men and women candidates not only within their lists, but also across the top of their lists. However, the lack of quota provisions for the remaining 120 majority elected seats resulted in the relatively low number of women MPs.

Despite the on-going call for political and democratic change and reform in Egypt, the Arab country witnessed a decline in the number of women parliamentarians for the second year running. In 2011, elections to its lower house had returned less than 2 per cent women MPs, down from 12.7 per cent. Elections in early 2012 to the upper house, the Shura Council, similarly returned fewer women – a mere 12 (4.4%). Women's parliamentary representation in Egypt has now dropped to the lowest level of any North African country. Prospects for changing this in the future look bleak. The new electoral law adopted in early 2013 provides for an obligation to include a minimum of just one woman candidate in party lists, with no mention of ranking.

Pacific States take the long road

The Pacific region continues to have one of the lowest representations of women in parliament at 15.3 per cent – with almost no change from 10 years ago when it stood at 15.2 per cent. These figures, however, include the parliaments of New Zealand (32.2%) and Australia (lower house: 24% and upper house: 38.2%). Without these two, the region averages just 3 per cent.

Small changes mean a great deal in the Pacific, as evidenced in the course of 2012. The longstanding advocate for gender equality in Papua New Guinea and sole woman member of parliament, Dame Carol Kidu, resigned in 2012. Three new women, however, including the first-ever woman Governor, were elected to parliament. Despite a five-year debate on temporary special measures, Papua New Guinea does not have any kind of quota in place and the three women MPs-elect have ruled out support for reserved seats. They consider their own election as evidence that the electorate can see the merit of having women in parliament.

In the Solomon Islands, the election in a by-election of the wife of a former MP who had lost his seat resulted in the Parliament going from no women members to one. Prime Minister Gordon Darcy Lilo underscored his preference for women entering parliament through normal electoral processes rather than special measures. Winding up a special motion to adjourn parliament on 22 October, Prime Minister Lilo announced that his government had allocated increased funding and resources under the development budget through the Ministry of Youth and Women's Affairs to support the promotion of women.

Vanuatu, however, serves as a poignant reminder that in the absence of temporary special measures, there is a risk of regression. The Pacific Island nation has elected a total of five women since gaining independence in 1980. In 2012, none of

TABLE 4

Progress and Setbacks of Women in Upper Houses of Parliament in 2012

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	% Points change
MEXICO	128	42	32.8	15.6
JAMAICA*	21	5	23.8	9.5
PALAU	13	3	23.1	7.7
SLOVENIA*	40	3	7.5	5.0
USA#	100	20	20.0	3.0
ALGERIA##	142	10	7.0	1.6
ROMANIA	176	13	7.4	1.5
BELARUS*	57	20	35.1	1.2
INDIA##	245	26	10.6	0.3
BELIZE*	13	5	38.5	0.0
CAMBODIA*	61	9	14.8	0.0
SAINT LUCIA*	11	2	18.2	0.0
PAKISTAN#	104	17	16.3	-0.7
CZECH REPUBLIC#	81	14	17.3	-1.2
LESOTHO*	33	9	27.3	-3.0
EGYPT*	270	12	4.4	-3.1
BAHAMAS*	16	4	25.0	-35.0

The chamber was partially renewed in 2012. These figures refer to the overall composition of the chamber after the renewal.

* Includes indirectly elected or appointed seats

the 10 women who contested the election managed to win a seat, including the one woman incumbent, Eta Rory. According to one of the candidates, they failed to get the backing of women voters.

Quotas or electoral systems?

Women continued to fare better when either legislated or voluntary quotas were used. In 2012, electoral quotas were used in 22 countries holding elections. With legislated quotas, women took 24 per cent of seats and with voluntary quotas they gained 22 per cent. Where no quotas were used, women took 12 per cent of seats.

Overall, elections in 2012 demonstrate once again that quota laws are an important measure in fast-tracking women's political representation. However, quotas alone don't work. They need to be ambitious, ensure that women's names are placed in winnable positions on lists and carry sanctions for non-compliance, such as the refusal to register a party. There also has to be political commitment from all actors to include women in politics. These were some of the lessons learned in elections across the globe in 2012.

Electoral systems too play a significant part in women's election to parliament. On average in 2012, PR systems returned 25 per cent women to parliament. In this system, the electorate casts votes for a party, in some cases also for individuals, with seats in parliament allotted in proportion to the votes each party receives. This system provides an incentive for parties to broaden their appeal by adding women to their party lists. This kind of systemic encouragement was evident in the election results in Algeria, Kazakhstan and Serbia.

Proportional representation is also the best system for the enforcement of quotas.

Majority systems, conversely, can prove difficult for women to break through. In 2012, women won on average 14 per cent of the seats contested through the first-past-the-post system. It was the only system under which no women were elected at all, in Vanuatu. Majority systems are also rarely accompanied by a quota, with women competing directly with men in single-member constituencies. There is little incentive for parties to select women, particularly where men have long been the incumbent members of parliament.

Mixed systems, because they include a PR element, are more effective than majority systems alone in facilitating the election of women. During 2012, women won an average of 17.5 per cent of the seats contested under mixed systems. In the Republic of Korea, for example, women took 7 per cent of the first-past-the post seats elected, but 42 per cent of the PR seats. A similar story unfolded in Libya, where women won 3.4 per cent of the majority system seats and 45 per cent of the PR seats.

Towards more gender-sensitive parliaments - Developments in 2012

Despite the significant increase in the global average of women MPs in 2012, from 19.5 per cent to 20.3 per cent, it is clear across the world that a more targeted approach needs to be taken to change the status quo on women's political participation. The pace of change remains far too sluggish.

In 2012, several parliaments across the globe began making inroads with IPU support on becoming more gender-sensitive. The concept of gender sensitivity covers issues such as women's access to parliament, their equal representation across all parliamentary structures, including committees, the working culture within parliament as well as engaging political parties on gender equality.

The adversarial nature of party politics as well as the sexism and harassment within parliament have long acted as barriers to women running for election or continuing a political career. High-profile incidents such as Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's speech to parliament on the sexism of her political opponent or the heckling of French Housing Minister Cécile Duflot over her dress underlined the many painful challenges women face in politics.

The upside was the adoption of new legislation by the French National Assembly in August 2012 criminalizing sexual harassment, with prison sentences of up to three years and/or a fine of up to US\$ 55,000. "Sexual harassment" has also been given a much broader definition to encompass a range of situations including «intimidating, hostile or offensive» incidents. Malaysian MPs too approved a ban on sexist remarks in parliament with violators facing a reprimand or even suspension.

In Uganda, one of the five parliaments that carried out an IPU gender-assessment in 2012, and which boasts 35 per cent women's representation in parliament as well as a woman Speaker, has now changed its Standing Orders to allow for greater gender equality within its structures. Forty per cent of leadership positions in parliamentary committees must be held by women.

The decrease from 15.6 per cent to 14.2 per cent in the number of women Speakers of Parliament bears testimony to the existing glass ceiling and remaining challenges faced by women in parliament. It underlined evermore the need for parliaments to reform to embody and champion gender equality.

Women Presiding Officers in Parliament

Situation as at 1 January 2013:

39 of the 274 Posts (14.2%)

As at 1 January 2013, women hold 14.2 per cent of all presiding officer posts in the world, a slight decrease from the previous year's record of 15.6 per cent.

28 Presiding Officers in Single or Lower Houses of Parliament

Albania; Antigua and Barbuda; Australia; Austria; Bolivia; Botswana; Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Dominica; Estonia; Ghana, Iceland; India; Lao PDR; Latvia; Mozambique; Netherlands; Pakistan; Poland; Portugal; Rwanda; San Marino; Suriname; Switzerland; Turkmenistan; Uganda; United Republic of Tanzania; and Uzbekistan.

11 Presiding Officers in Upper Houses of Parliament

Antigua and Barbuda; Bahamas; Barbados; Bolivia; Belgium; Gabon; Grenada; Russian Federation; Swaziland; United Kingdom; and Zimbabwe.

In 2012, for the first time, a woman took up the position in the upper house of Bolivia.

Why statistics on women in parliament

IPU has been collecting data on women in parliament for more than 30 years. This indicator serves to track the quantitative progress of women and gauges the level of challenges and openness faced by women in politics in various countries. It is also a measure of progress in terms of gender equality and democracy. Having women in parliament has proven essential for ensuring that policy-making addresses the needs of women, girls, men and boys.

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Inter-Parliamentary Union

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