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Women in parliament in 2020

The year in review



2020 elections in New Zealand saw an unprecedented increase in the numbers of women and traditionally under-represented groups both in parliament and in government, reflecting people's demand for due representation of all sectors of society in a time of pandemic. The female Prime Minister was widely considered to have competently and efficiently managed her country's response to COVID-19, which may have boosted her bid for reelection. © Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images via AFP

Introduction

Elections in 2020 were profoundly marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in delays and cancellations, logistical challenges for candidates and election administrators and often low turnout. Women's leadership was frequently in the spotlight during the pandemic. The pandemic raised complex and deeply gendered challenges for citizens and created obstacles for MPs to communicate and engage directly with their constituents. It changed the ways parliaments operate, introducing flexibility and new technologies. A substantial number of MPs across the globe were infected, many lost their lives.

Women's participation continued to grow by 0.6 per cent in 2020, passing the 25 per cent mark for combined upper and lower/single chambers worldwide for the first time (+0.7 points for lower/single chambers and +0.2 points in upper chambers). This is a similar rate of growth to the past decade. Several parliaments, such as Mali's and Egypt's, overcame remarkable

HIGHLIGHTS

Globally

- 2020 was marked by continued gradual progress for women in parliament (+0.6 points) despite the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and its impact. The global average for the proportion of women in parliament reached an all-time high of 25.5 per cent. Women won 22.6 per cent of all seats up for renewal in 2020 in 70¹ chambers across 57 countries. Women took 22.9 per cent of the unicameral or lower chamber seats up for renewal, and 21.6 per cent of the upper chamber seats.
- COVID-19 created extensive challenges for elections and campaigning (especially online violence and harassment against women in politics) but raised public awareness and debate about many gendered aspects of governance and political leadership, such as the ability to combine private and public life, as well as the need for gender-awareness in recovery planning.
- Of the 57 countries that held elections in 2020, 25 implemented legislated quotas (either reserved seats or candidate quotas). On average, parliaments with legislated quotas elected 11.8 per cent more women to single and lower chambers than parliaments with no legal quotas (27.4 per cent v. 15.6 per cent), and 7.4 per cent more women to upper chambers (25.6 per cent v. 18.2 per cent).
- Quotas continued to act as a shield against backsliding in most cases but once quotas are introduced, women's participation often plateaus for multiple election cycles.
- Electoral systems play a role in the adoption – but not the effectiveness – of quotas. Quotas were much less likely to be used in countries with majoritarian electoral systems during parliamentary renewals in 2020. But when they were in place, quotas in majoritarian electoral systems performed

¹ Elections in the Central African Republic and Venezuela are excluded as results had not been validated or confirmed at the time of publication.

HIGHLIGHTS

as well as quotas in proportional or mixed electoral systems.

- Political party configuration has a significant impact. Women running for office in states with dominant parties experienced strong outcomes. Likewise, where dominant parties that have been championing gender parity experience setbacks or major change, women's representation followed suit.

Regionally

- In sub-Saharan Africa, Mali and Niger made significant gains in women's representation, despite grave security challenges. New or revised quota policies helped protect these gains against instability. Burkina Faso saw the most significant setback of the year, as weakened quota rules and a lack of implementation resulted in backsliding to its weakest outcome in over 30 years.
- Of 14 parliamentary renewals in Europe in 2020, in four countries women exceeded thirty per cent of parliamentary representation in at least one chamber (Ireland, Serbia, North Macedonia and France). In three countries women failed to account for at least 20 per cent of parliamentary seats (Azerbaijan, Czech Republic and Romania).
- In the MENA region, although Egypt reached historic highs for women in parliament thanks to a new quota law for the House of Representatives, the proportion of women in parliament in the region was the lowest among all regions (17.8 per cent, all chambers combined).
- Gains in Asia were driven by women's representation in the upper houses in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Of parliamentary renewals in 2020, only Nepal exceeded 30 per cent women, sustaining a strong track record on women in parliament over the past decade.
- With the exception of New Zealand, women's representation in parliaments in the Pacific remained consistently low or entirely absent following elections held in 2020. New Zealand's new government made history with more women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ people and Maori MPs than at any time in the past as well as the election of MPs of African, Latin American and Sri Lankan descent for the first time.

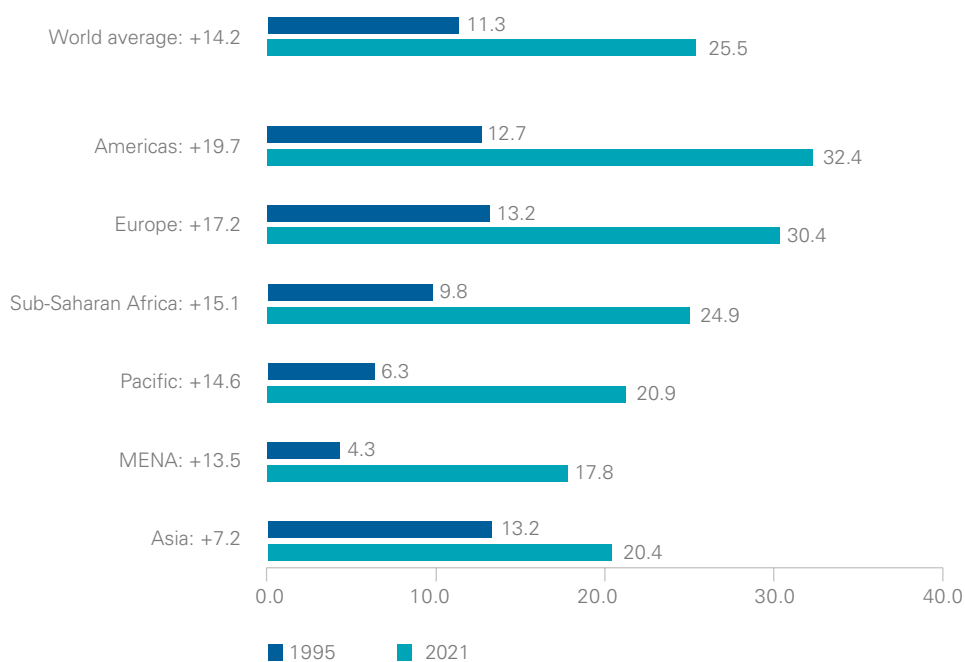
challenges to introduce or enhance electoral quotas.¹ Burkina Faso's loosening of quota rules and subsequent rollback of gains marked one of the year's notable setbacks. Kuwait also saw a setback, with no woman being elected, as compared to one woman previously. Despite political unrest and upheaval in Latin America, women's representation remained intact at existing levels while women's activism and engagement in reform may presage future growth. In the same year as the first female vice president took office in the U.S., there was continued incremental growth and the U.S. made important gains in closing partisan gaps and enhancing diversity in the legislature. New Zealand's elections also heralded an era of unprecedented women's representation and diversity as a whole, in the legislature. Syrian women overcame extraordinary challenges to participate in constitutional reform.

Violence against women in politics, including many forms of online harassment and abuse, continued to be a major barrier. While quotas prevented backsliding, many countries with quotas failed to make significant progress beyond quota levels in 2020. Countries with majoritarian electoral systems were far less likely to use a gender quota, but those that did achieved equivalent success as countries with proportional and mixed systems using quotas.

Regional trends

Figure 1

World and regional averages of women in parliaments, 1995 and 2021



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data for all houses combined, figures correct as of 1 July 1995 and 1 January 2021 respectively.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Consistent highs and lows, Mali and Niger make gains

Women represented 24.9 per cent of parliamentarians in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020 (+0.5 from 2019), the world's third ranking region after the Americas and Europe. During parliamentary renewals in 2020, sub-Saharan African countries that had previously attained comparatively strong levels of women's representation (30 per cent or higher) held the course. They included Burundi (both chambers), Tanzania (unicameral) and Cameroon (lower chamber). States with low levels of women in parliament (less than 15 per cent) had divergent outcomes. Representation remained very low in some countries, including Liberia (upper chamber), Madagascar (upper chamber) and Ghana (unicameral). Burkina Faso

¹ In the case of Mali, the elections were nullified following a coup d'état in August. However, the Transitional National Council that was appointed following the coup maintained a similar level of representation of women.



Mali saw the largest progress in terms of the number of seats held by women among all countries holding parliamentary elections in 2020. The percentage of women MPs tripled from 9.5% previously to nearly 28% thanks to a new quota law. Later in the year, Parliament was replaced by a Transitional National Council where women hold 26% of the seats. © Souleymane Ag Anara/AFP

requiring at least 30 per cent of elected and appointed officials to be women.⁵ The introduction of the quota was a major step forward for women's rights in Mali.

Women parliamentarians experienced further backsliding. Other countries which had previously had 15 per cent or lower women representation took a different path and made gains. Comoros, Niger and Mali were notable exceptions. All three recorded double-digit increases in women's representation in their parliaments.² Several elections were postponed to 2021 in some countries, including Chad, Ethiopia, Gabon and Somalia, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stand out elections – Mali and Niger

Greater women's participation in parliament was a common thread through **Mali's** tumultuous electoral year, which saw not one, but two new legislatures seated. Mali's two-round parliamentary elections took place in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, on 29 March and 19 April. They resulted in women winning 41 out of 147 seats in the unicameral parliament (27.9 per cent), nearly tripling their previous representation (9.5 per cent). The parliamentary elections were due to take place in late 2018, but were postponed due to security concerns related to rebel and jihadist factional violence in the north and central parts of the country. Security was still a major concern at the time of the 2020 polls: Mali's first COVID-19 death was made public early in the day of the first poll. Also, the lead opposition candidate, Soumaila Cisse, was kidnapped days before the election.³ Women voters and candidates' campaigns were especially impacted by security concerns and the public health risk, which further limited their movement. Women reportedly had less access to accurate information about COVID-19 and less means to protect themselves.⁴

Building off the success of the quota used in local elections in 2016, the 2020 elections were the first national elections to be held since Mali passed a gender quota law in 2015,

and civil society organizations were instrumental in ensuring the adoption and due implementation of the quota law. Women's representation in Mali had been slowly decreasing since the late 1990s, hovering just below 10 per cent for over a decade. Years of instability triggered by a military coup in 2012, severe drought and the occupation of northern regions by armed groups further limited women's participation owing to economic hardship and insecurity.

This progress in women's rights appears to be holding despite ongoing instability: in August 2020, President Keita resigned and dissolved the parliament following a military coup. The Transitional Charter (1 October 2020) only contained general provisions regarding women's political participation rather than a specific quota target.⁶ Women's rights remained part of the public consciousness as a large rally was held in Bamako on 26 September to protest violence against women following revelations on social media about intimate partner abuse involving a famous Malian artist. When the transitional authorities announced the names of 121 members of a new legislative body on 5 December, the National Transitional Council (CNT), it included 32 women (26.4 per cent). Despite the weakened quota provision, the level of women's representation continued to reflect the previous target of 30 per cent.

In addition to conflict-related sexual violence, Malian women in politics also face gender-based violence. According to national data (2018), one in two Malian women aged 15 to 49 has suffered acts of physical or sexual violence, and nearly 80 per cent of women considered

2 However, the +13.6 point gain in Comoros is attributable to the very small size of the parliament.

3 Cisse was subsequently held hostage by an armed group for 6 months and then died of COVID-19 less than four months after his release.

4 <https://minusma.unmissions.org/trois-fois-plus-de-femmes-%C3%A9lues-aux-%C3%A9gislatives-2020%C2%A0-un-progr%C3%A8s-%C3%A9norme-vers-une-repr%C3%A9sentation>.

5 The percentage of women elected in municipal elections increased from 9 per cent in 2009 to more than 25 per cent in 2016 with the application of the quota law. The IPU has been supporting the work of parliament to promote gender equality and ensure the adoption and implementation of the quota law, including at national level. See <https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2019-03/malian-parliament-working-increase-gender-equality>.

6 CHAPITRE IV : DES AUTRES DISPOSITIONS Article 17 : L'accès des femmes aux fonctions électives et nominatives peut être favorisé par des mesures particulières prévues par la loi. La composition des différents organes de la Transition prend en compte le genre. <https://www.journaldumali.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/mali-jo-2020-17-sp.pdf>.

physical violence by a man against his female partner to be normal and justifiable.⁷

Rising from a low of just 1.2 per cent in 1996 and 14.6 per cent in the previous election, **Niger's** level of women's representation in the single-chamber parliament jumped 11 points to reach 25.9 per cent in 2020. The elections were held despite threats of Jihadi violence in many parts of the country. The growth in Niger is attributed to the reform of the gender quota in 2019, which increased the quota target from 10 per cent for elected positions and 15 per cent for nominated offices, to 25 and 30 per cent, respectively.

Women's representation in the **Comoros** remains low (16.6 per cent in the unicameral legislature). However, women won more parliamentary seats in 2020, going from a single seat to four following the January elections. Those elections were boycotted by the main opposition parties. Prior to the election, a women's political protest, the "Mother's March", was violently disrupted by police, and dozens of women were arrested. The small size of the parliament (24 of the 33 seats were up for election in 2020) accounts for the statistical significance of the gain in seats.

The high performers: Burundi, Tanzania and Cameroon

Once again, Burundi, **Tanzania** and **Cameroon** all elected women to at least one-third of parliamentary seats during elections held in 2020. Burundi and Tanzania both have a 30 per cent quota of reserved seats. All three countries are dominant party states.⁸

In Tanzania and Cameroon, the dominant parties have implemented voluntary party quotas in addition to the legislated quotas. Tanzania's Revolutionary Party (CCM) set forth a goal of 50 percent in 2015, while Cameroon's People's Democratic Movement introduced a 25-30 per cent quota on electoral lists in 1996. Tanzania uses an unusual reserved-seat quota system, known as PR-tier, where the seats specially set aside for women are distributed among the political parties in proportion to the number of seats won by them in parliament.

Among the African countries that held parliamentary elections in 2020, **Burundi** is the highest ranking in terms of women's representation (38.2 per cent in the lower house, 41 per cent in the upper house). The year 2020 marked the 15th anniversary of the implementation of gender quotas in Burundi and the introduction of a new constitution. The new constitution maintains the minimum 30 per cent gender quota for women's representation in the legislature and the executive branch and extends it to the judiciary (article 213). As a result, women will have at the minimum a critical mass in the three branches of state power during the period 2020-2027.

7 <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/time-tackle-violence-against-women-mali>.

8 Dominant party systems are defined as "democratic polities which are dominated by one party or a bloc of parties which control government for long periods". Boucek, F. (1998). Electoral and parliamentary aspects of dominant party systems. *Comparing Party System Change*, 103-124.

Setbacks and stagnation: Liberia, Burkina, Madagascar, Namibia and Ghana

Women's representation in four of sub-Saharan Africa's weakest performing states slid even further below the 15 per cent in 2020 and was close to static in Ghana. The Liberia elections led to women's representation of only 3.3 per cent in the upper chamber (-6.7 points); Burkina Faso elected just 6.3 per cent women to the single chamber (-3.1 points), and Madagascar elected 11.1 per cent to the upper chamber (-7.9 points).

Although **Namibia's** National Assembly (lower chamber, not up for election in 2020) has a high level of women's representation (43 per cent), the indirectly elected National Council (upper chamber) dropped from 23.8 per cent of women to 14.3 per cent after the December 2020 election. This may reflect a historic level of pluralism in these elections. For the first time since the early 1990s, the dominant party, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), suffered numerous defeats at local and regional levels of government in elections (in which the National Council is elected by indirect vote). At least one opposition party has recently implemented a voluntary party quota, but for years, SWAPO was the only political party to do so. SWAPO's share of the vote at the regional councils dropped from 83 per cent in 2015 to 57 per cent in 2020. This outcome was reflected in the National Council indirect elections, which saw six parties gain seats apart from SWAPO, up from only two in all past elections since 1992.

Burkina Faso's elections were a notable setback in progress for women in parliament, as their numbers shrank to a mere 6.3 per cent of seats (-3.1 points). This is the weakest outcome in Burkina Faso since Blaise Compaoré overthrew Sankara's socialist government in 1987. Women's representation topped out at 15.7 per cent of parliamentary seats in 2012, and their representation has been in steady decline for nearly a decade.

Burkina Faso's 2009 legislated candidate quota law⁹ was revised in January ahead of the 2020 elections. The revision included a legislated 30 per cent candidate quota for party lists of both primary and secondary elected positions ("*titulaires*" and "*suppléants*") using a zebra placement system. The lack of such placement rules had been identified as a factor in the low success of quotas in previous elections. However, a trade-off was made on sanction rules. Sanctions for non-compliance (loss of 50 per cent of public funding) were removed and only incentive measures were retained (20 per cent additional funding for parties that met the target). According to the National Independent Electoral Commission, just 23 out of more than 100 parties complied with the target. This reflects past patterns where parties failed to comply and electoral authorities omitted to enforce quota rules: during the 2015 elections when stronger legal sanctions dictated nullifying non-compliant lists, the electoral commission nonetheless validated 98 (out of 101) lists that had no women candidates and three lists with

9 <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Quota-Law-BF-FRE.pdf>.

no male candidates.¹⁰ In 2020, parties failed to respect the new zebra placement rules for national lists. None of the parties placed women in the first spots for the *titulaire* (titular or substantive) positions. Women were overwhelmingly placed on the lists for the secondary *suppléant* (alternate or substitute) positions (80 per cent).¹¹ Only one female candidate, Yeli Monique Kam, was among the 12 candidates challenging President Roch Marc Kabore. She finished in last position, receiving seven votes fewer than the candidate immediately ahead of her and receiving just 0.53 per cent of the vote.

The failure of the Burkinabé quota system is attributed to a lack of political will on the part of political parties to respect quota laws and to non-enforcement of those laws by the electoral authorities. These factors are compounded by poor design of sanctions, embedded exclusion within political parties and women's marginalization during the transition. Financial sanctions are the weakest form of penalty, and incentives are only helpful when they meaningfully influence the financial calculations of political parties. In Burkina Faso, where political parties have deeply entrenched patriarchal networks, the opportunity costs of reconfiguring internal power distribution to comply with the quota did not outweigh the benefits of the incentive offer.

Despite widespread awareness campaigns in 2020,¹² the implementation of the quota mirrored the lack of political will that has characterized the Burkinabé approach to women's political empowerment for decades. This was left unchanged after the 2014 popular uprising that unseated long-time President Compaoré. Despite women's active participation in the uprising, the women's movement was relatively weak and disorganized¹³ and the "rushed, violence-prone transition process left them without much time to coordinate and forge alliances with reform-oriented political actors". This resulted in their low representation in the National Transitional Council (CNT). Since that time, women have lacked the influence to press political party leaders for greater commitment to gender goals. The women's wing of the ruling MPP party lacks the resources to support women's leadership, and women in politics continue to face intimidation, violence and resistance from relatives and male party members.¹⁴

Liberia's upper house saw a 6.7 point drop, bringing women's representation to just 3.3 per cent or a single female senator, Madam Botoe Kanneh. This marks a 22-year low for Liberia, making it the lowest performing country in the region for women in the upper house of parliament and the world's 3rd lowest upper chamber, after Yemen's and

Haiti's. Only 18 women contested 12 of 15 counties out of 118 total candidates.¹⁵ Senatorial candidate Botoe Kanneh faced a dramatic situation of violence against women in elections. The election in Gbarpolu county was re-scheduled twice (from 8 to 15 December 2020, and then moved to 7 January 2021), initially because of youth groups seizing ballot boxes. Ahead of the new 15 December date, Botoe Kanneh was reportedly beaten, harassed and threatened with politicization of a traditional cultural practice, the Poro Master, commonly known as the "country devil".¹⁶ Part of traditional authority practices, "country devils" are able to impose an instantaneous curfew in communities, and violators face severe consequences. This specially applies to women, as they are prohibited from viewing the "male devil". The "devil" was allegedly deployed strategically to prevent Botoe Kanneh and supporters from entering the town to campaign, leading her to hide in the bush from where she was ultimately rescued by a team of women's rights advocacy organizations, who moved her to a safe location.¹⁷

Whereas support to train women aspirants and candidates has been spearheaded by local civil society organizations and a coalition of women in political parties for decades, it has produced little progress. Also, while Liberia had Africa's first female head of state (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, 2006-2018) and current President George Weah has affirmed his feminism,¹⁸ efforts at legal reform in 2014¹⁹ and 2010²⁰ failed to secure quota provisions.

In the 2020 elections, **Madagascar's** Senate witnessed the election of the fewest women into office in the country since 1965. The Senate was substantially reduced in size in 2020, from 63 to 18 members, six of whom are appointed by the executive. While the National Assembly is dominated by the President's Young Malagasies Determined party, prior to the 2020 election opposition parties controlled the Senate, which is elected indirectly by local elected officials. Both of these factors likely influenced the number of women elected in the 2020 Senate election. First, the opposition parties boycotted the election,²¹ resulting in a sudden shift in existing representation. Second, women's representation at the local level was extremely low, with only 5 to 7 per cent of women local mayors and councillors elected in 2019.²² Although quota laws have been repeatedly proposed for over a decade,²³ Madagascar has not adopted any of the proposed measures.

10 https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/eueom/missions/2015/burkina-faso/pdf/moe-ue-burkina-faso2015-rapportfinal-version-light_fr.pdf.

11 <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article100214>.

12 See https://www.matd.gov.bf/accueil/actualites/details?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=112&cHash=a2d6c8551b37db9faca1e21c8d1ad9e3 and <https://www.burkina24.com/2020/10/24/respect-du-quota-genre-aux-legislatives-ligd-pose-le-debat/>.

13 Brechenmacher & Hubbards, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/24/breaking-cycle-of-gender-exclusion-in-political-party-development-pub-81345>.

14 Ibid.

15 <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-18-women-100-men-will-vie-for-15-senate-seats-in-midterm-elections/>

16 <https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/country-devil-in-election-abuse-of-cultural-symbol/>

17 <https://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/news/world-news/liberian-women-demand-security-female-senatorial-candidate-ahead-rescheduled>.

18 <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200812-liberia-s-self-proclaimed-feminist-president-weah-fails-to-nominate-woman-candidate-politics-africa>.

19 https://necliberia.org/doc_download/New%20Elections%20law%20Amendments.pdf.

20 <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/liberia-proposal-to-increase-womens-participation-in-politics/>.

21 <https://www.foreignbrief.com/daily-news/madagascar-to-hold-senatorial-elections/>.

22 <https://genderlinks.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/50-50-PB-MADA-NOV2020rev3.pdf>.

23 CEDAW Shadow Report 2015.

Finally, in **Ghana**, Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang was nominated on 6 July 2020 as the presidential running mate for the National Democratic Congress (NDC) for the December 2020 general elections. She became the first female running mate among Ghana's two major political parties. The NDC lost to the incumbent New Patriotic Party. There is evidence of increased awareness of gender issues: according to a recent report by the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), 66 per cent of voters are willing to cast their ballot for a female presidential candidate, and 76 per cent a female member of parliament.²⁴ However, the lack of political will on the part of leading parties to adopt the Affirmative Action bill (after nearly 10 years of debate), and the 59 per cent increase in the cost of running for political office between 2012 and 2016²⁵ have been a further impediment for women seeking to break through. Harassment and abuse of women in politics are widespread, and include targeting women with insults, ridicule and rumour.²⁶

The Americas: Plateaus in LAC, Diversity in the USA

Once again, the Americas outpaced other regions with women accounting for 32.4 of parliamentary seats in 2020. Latin America entered 2020 shaken by the region-wide political upheaval which had marked the previous year, including massive and unexpectedly violent protests in Chile, Colombia and Ecuador, the abrupt resignation of Bolivian president Evo Morales following a disputed election and the disbanding of congress in Peru. By mid-year, the region was considered to be the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic²⁷ with devastating outbreaks in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Peru.²⁸ The pandemic took a uniquely huge toll on Latin American economies, which contracted at roughly double the rate of other emerging market regions and are expected to recover more slowly.²⁹ This will only lead to further inequality in what is already the world's most unequal region.³⁰ Despite the pandemic, feminist social movements played a significant role in shaping the region's political landscape in multiple countries.

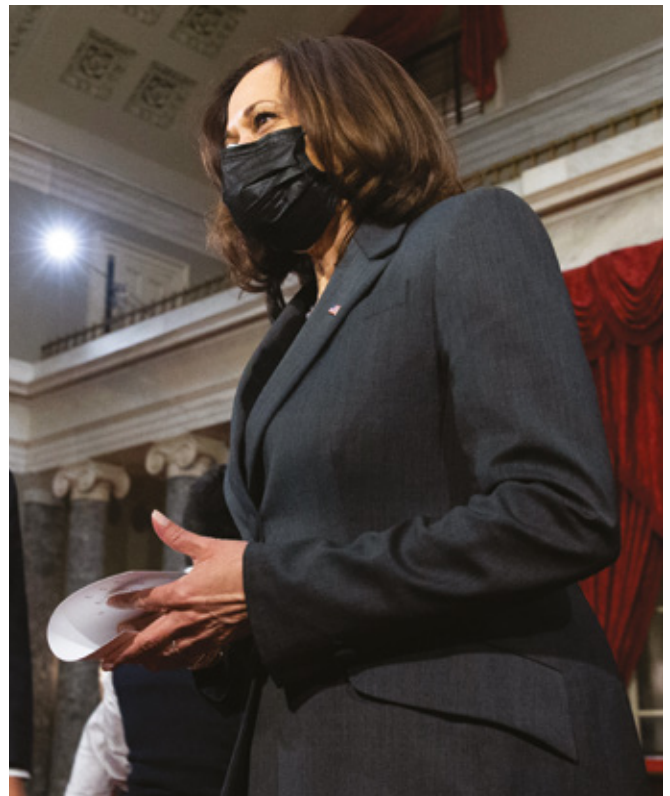
Among the single and lower chambers of parliament, the greatest improvements in women's parliamentary representation occurred in Jamaica (+11.1 points) and Guyana (+5.2 points). The small parliaments of Saint Kitts and Nevis (15 members) and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (23 members) also registered significant percentage gains (+11.7 points and +5.1 points respectively), reflecting the election of three more women MPs over the previous elections. In upper houses, the most notable gains were

achieved in Jamaica (+14.2 points), Belize (+13.2 points) and Trinidad and Tobago (+8.4 points).

In **Jamaica**, a record 30 women, 18 from the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and 12 from the People's National Party (PNP) contested the 3 September 2020 general elections. Eighteen were elected, bringing women's representation to 28.6 per cent in the lower chamber. The record number of women candidates was partially the result of the enthusiasm generated by Kamala Harris' candidacy in the US elections.³¹ Harris' father is of Jamaican descent.

Although progress was incremental, 2020 saw historically high levels of women's representation in the **United States** Congress³² (26.9 per cent chambers combined). In particular, Republicans (the "GOP") now have thirty-eight women lawmakers, or fourteen more than in the previous Congress, breaking the 2006 record. The partisan gender gap in American politics is attributed to several factors, including the fact that more American women identify as Democrats than as Republicans,³³ and that Republican women are less likely to have access to the social, recruitment and fundraising

The US made history in 2020 with the election of a woman as Vice President for the first time. Vice President Kamala Harris also constitutionally became President of the Senate. The US therefore has women presiding over both chambers of Congress.
© Michael Reynolds/POOL/AFP



24 Madsen, D et al. "A step forward but no guarantee of gender friendly policies." The Nordic Africa Institute. 2020.

25 Westminster Foundation for Democracy. http://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Cost_Of_Politics_Ghana.pdf.

26 Madsen et al.

27 BBC <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-52711458>.

28 BBC <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-52711458>.

29 CSIS <https://www.csis.org/analysis/effects-covid-19-latin-americas-economy>.

30 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/health/have-south-and-central-america-become-new-coronavirus-covid-19-epicenter> and <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/latin-americas-coronavirus-crisis-why-it-disproportionally-affects-the-poor/>.

31 <https://www.caribbeannationalweekly.com/caribbean-breaking-news-featured/women-surge-historic-number-of-women-elected-to-jamaicas-parliament/>.

32 US Congress is the bicameral legislature of the federal government of the United States and consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

33 Pew Research <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/18/men-and-women-in-the-u-s-continue-to-differ-in-voter-turnout-rate-party-identification/>.

networks that support Democratic women candidates.³⁴ Republican party actors set out to address the resource gap following the stark outcome of the 2018 midterm elections, where GOP women only won 13 seats, including only one non-incumbent seat. The creation of groups dedicated to recruiting and supporting Republican women candidates played an important role in this. Such groups include the Elevate Political Action Committee (E-PAC) and Winning for Women super PAC.³⁵

Despite the gains in the Republican party, a significant partisan gender gap exists in the US legislature. The GOP still counts roughly one third the number of Democrat women representatives and only one tenth the number of Democrat women of colour. A record fifty-one women of colour now serve in Congress (5 Republicans, 46 Democrats). Kamala Harris was elected as the first female and first black vice president, as well as the first person in this position of South Asian descent.

On a global scale, the US has been the country worst hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the impacts that the pandemic has had on Congress, including the partisan gender gap, are also gendered. In 2020, nearly one quarter of US legislators announced they had tested positive for COVID-19 or had been exposed to the virus through close direct contact with an infected individual.³⁶ Women in the House of Representatives (lower house) accounted for 24.4 per cent of representatives infected or exposed (+1.1 points higher than the proportion of seats they occupy), while women in the Senate (upper chamber) had proportionally lower impact rates (-12.5 per

cent impacted compared to percent seats held). Overall, Congresswomen in the US were less likely to test positive than their male counterparts (90 per cent of positive COVID-19 cases in the Senate were male Senators, and 86 per cent of positive cases in the House were male Congressmen).

Republican women in both the House and the Senate were significantly more likely to be exposed or infected than their Democrat counterparts (30.8 per cent of Republican women House representatives and 25 per cent of Republican women Senators were impacted, compared to 19.3 per cent and 11.8 per cent of women Democrats, respectively).³⁷ All women who were exposed or infected took action to self-isolate or other (3 per cent of exposed or infected male delegates took no action).

Among parliaments in the region surpassing 30 per cent women, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago plateaued, while **Bolivia** registered a relative decrease but remained within margins of parity.

The share of women parliamentarians in Bolivia's lower house dropped from 53.1 percent to 46.2 percent, a -6.9 point drop. This is the first time since 2014 that women's representation has fallen below 50 per cent, but it remains close to parity. Bolivia has ranked second in the world for women's representation in parliament since 2014, after Rwanda, and has parity quota in place. The 2020 elections were held after the sudden resignation of President Evo Morales and the annulment of a previous general election held in October 2019. Fresh elections were initially set for 3 May 2020 but were postponed twice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They took place amid an economic downturn

34 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/womens-representation-and-the-gendered-pipeline-to-power/8865503038A92830047B4DB0481787A1> and <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/698848>.

35 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/15/a-record-number-of-women-are-serving-in-the-117th-congress/>.

36 The US is one of the only countries where data is available.

37 Source: <https://www.govtrack.us/covid-19> and https://cawp.rutgers.edu/data_element/data_page_archive/204.

Chile's referendum in October 2020 saw overwhelming support for reform of the country's dictatorship-era constitution, with young women among the supporters for such reform. The Constituent Assembly will include gender parity in its membership. © Martin Bernetti/AFP



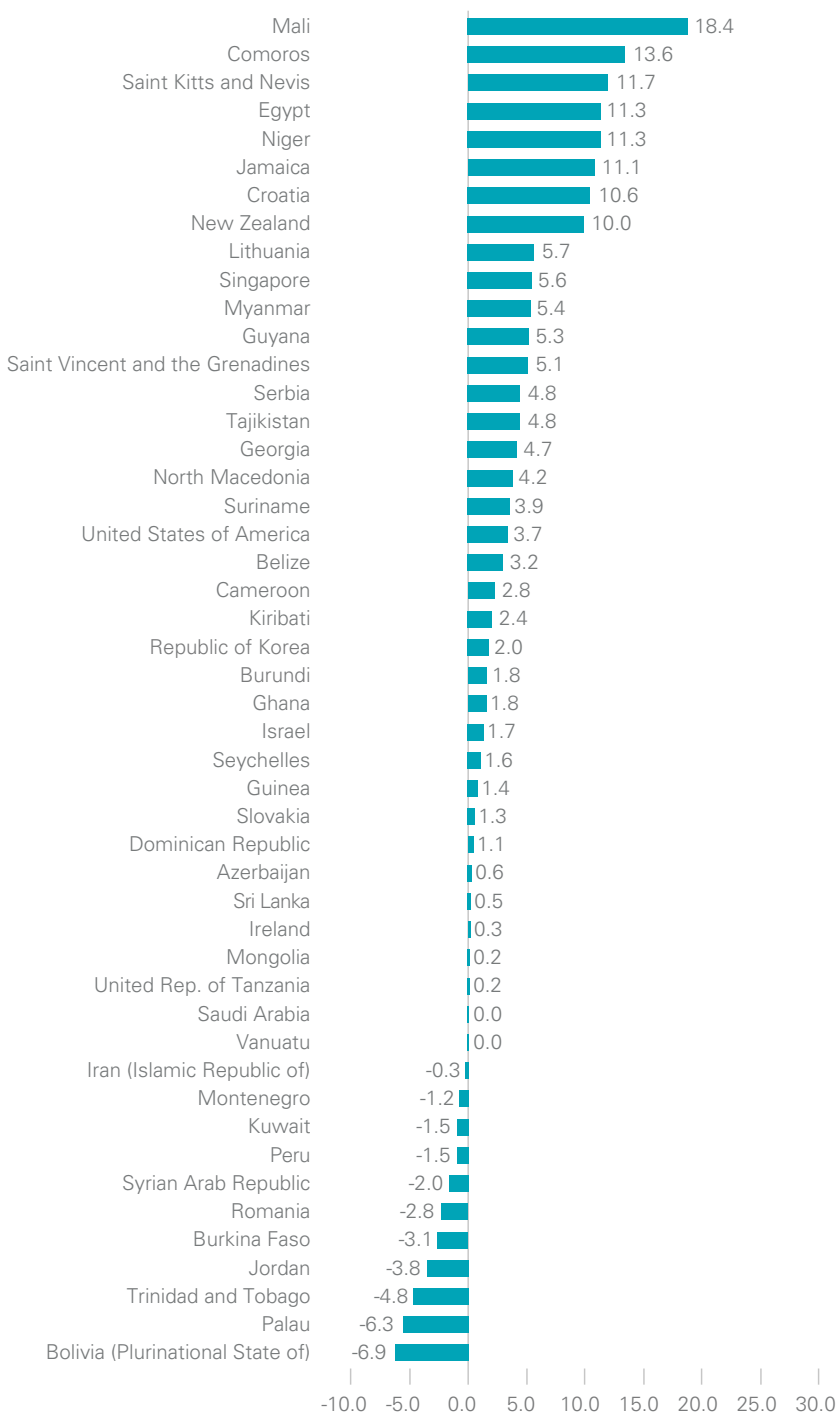
and a spike in unemployment triggered by the pandemic. Bolivia wrote a new constitution in 2008 recognizing itself as a multi-ethnic country which guarantees protection for indigenous languages, cultures and lands. The current decrease reflects regular annual adjustment rather than a backslide. Bolivia remains one of the world's most dangerous places for women, with among the highest rates of femicide on its continent, an estimated 70 per cent prevalence of gender-based sexual or physical abuse and ongoing violence against women in politics, despite the enactment of the groundbreaking Law 243 (2012) proscribing harassment of and political violence against women.

As other global cases suggest, women's participation in reform processes is critical to their future performance in electoral office. **Chile** is one such example. Nearly 80 per cent of its citizens voted in favour of drafting a new constitution as part of a referendum in October 2020. The drafting, due to begin in April 2022, is to be undertaken by a 155-member constitutional assembly comprising an equal number of women and men, with reserved seats for indigenous peoples. The inclusion of a historically diverse constitutional assembly lays the groundwork for future advances for women in politics.

Figure 2

Parliamentary renewals in 2020

Progress and setbacks (in %) of women in lower or single houses of parliament renewed in 2020



Mali: After the 2020 elections, due to a coup d'état, the National Assembly was replaced by the Transitional National Council (CNT). The appointed CNT has 32 women out of 121 members (26.5%), whereas the previously elected National Assembly had 41 women out of 147 members (27.9%). Data in the report corresponds to the previously elected National Assembly.



In 2020, Azerbaijan elected a woman Speaker of Parliament for the first time in the country's history. © Russian Foreign Ministry/Sputnik via AFP

Europe: Modest gains

The most significant overall gains in the region were registered in Croatia (+10.6 points) and Ireland's upper house (+10 points). Three chambers experienced minor setbacks in the following countries: Romania, Montenegro and the Czech Republic. Women's representation in Romania's lower house decreased by 2.8 points, to 17.9 per cent. Montenegro's single chamber and the Czech Republic's upper house both lost 1.2 points, reflecting the loss of one woman MP in each case.

Four countries exceeded 30 per cent women's parliamentary representation during elections held in 2020: Ireland (40 per cent women in the upper house), Serbia (38.8 per cent, unicameral), North Macedonia (35.8 per cent, unicameral) and France (33.3 per cent, upper house). Following the trend, these countries had reached the 30 per cent threshold several electoral cycles before 2020³⁸ and (with the exception of the indirectly elected Irish upper house) did not make any notable gains in this cycle. Among the European countries that held elections in 2020, only Azerbaijan (17.4 per cent, unicameral), the Czech Republic

(14.8 per cent, upper house) and Romania (upper and lower chambers, 18.4 and 17.9 per cent respectively) failed to elect at least a 20 per cent share of women to parliament.

Women gained 16 additional seats in **Croatia's** unicameral legislature in 2020, nearly doubling their previous level of representation in the 2015 and 2016 elections. The results brought Croatia back to a representation level similar to its previous record (from 2000 to 2011, women held between 17 and 24 per cent of seats). Following the formation of the government, the percentage of women in parliament reached the 30 per cent mark. A legislated candidate quota (40 per cent) was introduced in 2008. It was subsequently loosened to replace sanctions with financial incentives. The decision to revise the sanctions reflects a 2015 Constitutional Court decision which states that the disqualification of incompliant lists would be disproportionate given that the Law on Gender Equality provides for a fine. In 2020, thirty-nine party candidate lists (20 per cent) failed to respect the quota, including the governing party, resulting in fewer women candidates overall and fewer women at the head of the lists.³⁹ There is no placement requirement in the quota law and as a result the percentage of women included in the more winnable top five positions on lists ranged from 14 per

³⁸ France's Senate was nearly 30 per cent (29.3) in the previous election. The National Assembly is at 39.5 per cent.

³⁹ https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/4/465120_0.pdf.

cent to 52 per cent. Only two parties, Možemo! and Most, were fully compliant with quota rules, and only Možemo! has a voluntary party quota.⁴⁰

In **Ireland**, women's representation was static in the Dáil Éireann (lower chamber), which witnessed the election of nearly the same number of women as in 2016 when a record 35 were elected. The result was static despite a record share of female candidates.⁴¹ Although the 2016 quota resulted in an increase in the proportion of women in the Dáil Éireann, from 15.6 to 22.2 per cent, a significant regional disparity persisted, ranging from 40.9 per cent women elected in Dublin to just 4.3 per cent women in the south west. In 2020, women gained six additional seats in the indirectly elected Seanad Éireann (upper chamber), bringing the average to 40 per cent, up from the 30 per cent level at which it had stood since 2011. The outcome likely reflects major political shifts rather than gender-specific factors. The 2020 Irish elections were historic in that they marked the victory of a coalition of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael (who were on opposite sides of the 1922-1923 Irish Civil War and have dominated politics as opposing coalition leaders for nearly a century) and also brought Sinn Féin to the fore after it outpaced the two leading parties in the popular vote.

Two executive elections in the European region are of also note due to significant levels of violence against women in politics and political impact. Following the 2019 parliamentary elections, **Moldova** elected Maia Sandu as its first woman

40 https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/4/465120_0.pdf.

41 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/election-2020-record-share-of-women-running-for-d%C3%A1il-seats-1.4148409>.

president in a run-off election held in November 2020. She defeated incumbent Igor Dodon with 57.7 per cent of the run-off vote after facing severe misogynistic attacks throughout her campaign and putting her earlier unsuccessful bid in 2016 behind her.

In **Belarus**, the main opposition presidential candidate was a woman, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Although she did not win the election against incumbent Alexander Lukashenko, her campaign was one of the most significant challenges to Lukashenko, who has held the office since independence in 1992. The campaign was marked by a "deliberate targeting" of women activists and female family members of political opponents, threatening them with gender-specific reprisals, including threats to subject them to acts of sexual violence and to put their children into the custody of the state.⁴² The election triggered massive protests and a general strike. Following the election, Tsikhanouskaya and her children went into exile after threats were made on her life; her husband remained in jail.

Middle East & North Africa: Wide Divides

Women's representation in parliaments in the MENA region grew by 1.2 percentage points, reaching 17.8 per cent in 2020. Wide divides exist among parliaments renewed in 2020, ranging from no seats won by women in Kuwait⁴³ to a record high number in Egypt.

42 <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/belarus-authorities-threatening-women-political-activists-ahead-election>.

43 The only woman in parliament is an ex-officio member, who sits in cabinet.

Egyptian women, mask-clad due to the COVID-19 pandemic, wait to cast their ballots outside a polling station near Cairo in August 2020. Elections to the House of Representatives led to an unprecedented number of seats held by women in the country thanks to a new quota law. © AFP



In June, the **Egyptian** parliament approved an amendment to an article of its constitution to allocate 25 percent of seats in the House of Representatives to women. An October 2020 presidential decree to appoint 20 women to the Senate (the upper chamber) doubled women's representation in the newly-created upper chamber, the Senate. The new law on the Senate provides for both a 10 per cent quota for the 100 appointed seats and candidate quotas for the 200 elected seats.⁴⁴ In all, Egypt's parliament reached historic levels in 2020 with 26.2 per cent women in the lower chamber – but only 13.3 per cent in the upper chamber. Women's representation in the Egyptian parliament has relied on quotas since 1956 (when women first became eligible to stand for office) and has fluctuated significantly as various quota laws have been introduced and repealed through the years. Quotas introduced in the 1979, 1984 and 2010 parliaments yielded female representation of 8 per cent, 7.8 per cent, and 12 per cent, respectively.⁴⁵ Repealed following the 25 January Revolution as part of the rejection of reforms passed by the previous regime, a quota was reintroduced in 2015 and led to a historic level of women's representation, at 14.9 per cent. Egypt's experience suggests the relevance of an incremental approach to quota implementation in the region.

Women's representation in **Jordan's** lower and upper chambers lost 3.8 points and 4.6 points respectively. Fifteen seats are reserved for women in the 130-seat House of Representatives (lower chamber). While the outgoing lower chamber had 20 women, the new one only elected the 15 required by law. Voter turnout decreased from 36 to 29.9 per cent. Voters chose from 1,674 candidates, of whom 360 were women (an increase of 0.4% from 2016). Reserved seats were introduced at the national and municipal levels (in 2003 and 2007, respectively). Also, a 2010 amendment of the Election Law raised the number of reserved seats from 6 to 15 (10 per cent of the House of Representatives at the time). During the previous elections in 2013 and 2016, five women made it to the lower chamber by vying for seats outside the quota system. Likewise, local government quotas raised women's representation to historic levels (28.8%) in municipal and governorate council elections held in 2017. However, the gains were not sustained in the 2020 parliamentary elections and the quota was the minimum threshold for women elected in the House of Representatives.

In **Syria**, parliamentary elections were held across government-controlled areas of the country on 19 July 2020 after months of delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the polls was to elect 250 representatives from among 1,656 candidates, including 200 women. Twenty-eight women were elected, constituting 11.2 per cent of the Assembly. This reflects a slightly lower average for women's representation since 2003, before the

outbreak of the war. There were restrictions on opposition groups, including those outside of Syria, barring them from taking part in the election.

Gender-based challenges for women in politics are extensive.⁴⁶ Civil documentation is in crisis status, specifically impacting Syrian women's ability to vote and stand for office. Customary voting practices, such as family voting and public voting, impact women's freedom of choice. Electoral insecurity and violence against women in politics are widespread. It includes harassment and abuse on social media. Exclusionary party structures and practices and lack of support prevent women from penetrating political party leadership. The economic impacts of COVID-19 exacerbate structural inequality. In areas controlled by opposition forces, women's representation is minimal and women are frequently compelled to run as independent candidates without party backing.

While progress on women's representation in parliament is slow, important gains have been made in the constitutional reform process underway in 2020. Syria's Constitutional Committee (convened under Security Council Resolution 2254 (December 2015) as part of the peace process) resumed in Geneva in late August 2020, following a nine-month delay. Women comprise 27 per cent, roughly one-third of all committee members, holding eleven seats (22 per cent) for women in the delegation nominated by the Government of Syria, seven seats (14 per cent) in the delegation nominated by the opposition Syrian National Council, and 23 seats (46 per cent) in the delegation representing civil society. One sitting woman MP (Nous Arissian) from the Government of Syria delegation to the full Constitutional Committee (the "large body") stood in the 2020 parliamentary election and won a seat. No women from the drafting committee ("small body") stood for office or held a seat in 2020. The proportion of women in the Constitutional Committee reflects a significant improvement from the talks process of the previous two years in which only two women in each delegation, government and opposition, consistently participated. Women's representation in the formal constitutional process is complemented by a Women's Advisory Board (WAB). Established in 2016 by the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria, the WAB is comprised of 17 women from across the political spectrum and from diverse ethnic, geographic and professional backgrounds.⁴⁷

44 <https://www.sis.gov.eg/section/228/9463?lang=en-us>.

45 <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/e2167238/bj-brief-090218-cme-carnegie-hassan.pdf>.

46 See UN Women, Research on the gender and women's rights aspects of the electoral framework of the Syrian Arab Republic, forthcoming February 2021.

47 Ibid.

Table 1

Women in lower and single chambers after parliamentary renewals in 2020

	Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	Quota
1	New Zealand	120	58	48.3	Voluntary party
2	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	130	60	46.2	Legislated + voluntary party
3	Serbia	250	97	38.8	Legislated
4	Burundi	123	47	38.2	Reserved seats
5	United Republic of Tanzania	384	141	36.7	Reserved seats
6	North Macedonia	120	43	35.8	Legislated
7	Guyana	70	25	35.7	Reserved seats
8	Cameroon	180	61	33.9	Voluntary party
9	Singapore	95	28	29.5	None
10	Suriname	51	15	29.4	None
11	Jamaica	63	18	28.6	None
12	Dominican Republic	190	53	27.9	Legislated
13	Mali	147	41	27.9	Legislated + voluntary party
14	United States of America	434	118	27.2	None
15	Lithuania	141	38	27.0	Voluntary party
16	Egypt	564	148	26.2	Reserved seats
17	Trinidad and Tobago	42	11	26.2	None
18	Peru	130	34	26.2	Legislated
19	Niger	166	43	25.9	Reserved seats
20	Israel	120	30	25.0	Voluntary party
21	Saint Kitts and Nevis	16	4	25.0	None
22	Tajikistan	63	15	23.8	None
23	Croatia	151	35	23.2	Legislated + voluntary party
24	Seychelles	35	8	22.9	None
25	Ireland	160	36	22.5	Legislated
26	Montenegro	81	18	22.2	Legislated + voluntary party
27	Guinea	114	25	21.9	Legislated
28	Slovakia	150	32	21.3	Voluntary party
29	Georgia	150	31	20.7	Reserved seats
30	Saudi Arabia	151	30	19.9	Reserved seats
31	Rep. Of Korea	300	57	19.0	Legislated
32	Saint Vincent and Grenadines	22	4	18.2	None
33	Romania	330	59	17.9	Voluntary party
34	Azerbaijan	121	21	17.4	None
35	Mongolia	75	13	17.3	Legislated
36	Comoros	24	4	16.7	None
37	Myanmar	425	65	15.3	None
38	Ghana	275	40	14.5	None
39	Jordan	130	15	11.5	Reserved seats
40	Syrian Arab Republic	250	28	11.2	None
41	Belize	31	3	9.7	None
42	Kiribati	45	4	8.9	None
43	Burkina Faso	127	8	6.3	Legislated
44	Palau	16	1	6.3	None
45	Iran (Islamic Rep. of)	286	16	5.6	None
46	Sri Lanka	223	12	5.4	None
47	Kuwait	65	1	1.5	None
48	Vanuatu	52	0	0.0	None

Table 2

Progress and setbacks of women in upper houses of parliament up for renewal in 2020*

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	% point change
Tajikistan	31	7	22.6	16.3
Jamaica	21	8	38.1	14.3
Belize	14	4	28.6	13.2
Ireland	60	24	40.0	10.0
Kazakhstan	48	9	18.8	9.1
Trinidad and Tobago	32	13	40.6	8.4
Uzbekistan	97	24	24.7	7.7
Myanmar	216	31	14.4	4.1
France	348	116	33.3	4.0
Romania	136	25	18.4	3.7
Dominican Republic	32	4	12.5	3.1
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	36	20	55.6	2.8
Nepal	58	22	37.9	0.6
United States of America	100	25	25.0	0.0
India	241	27	11.2	-0.2
Burundi	39	16	41.0	-0.8
Czech Republic	81	12	14.8	-1.2
Jordan	65	7	10.8	-4.6
Palau	13	1	7.7	-4.8
Liberia	30	1	3.3	-6.7
Madagascar	18	2	11.1	-7.9
Namibia	42	6	14.3	-9.5

*For countries where comparative data is available.

Asia: Maintaining the status quo

The average proportion of women in Asian parliaments rose slightly to 20.4 per cent in 2020 (+0.4 points). The 13 national level elections held in 11 Asian countries in 2020 resulted in an average of 15.1 per cent for women's parliamentary representation. Women constituted 14 per cent of single/lower chambers and 17.4 per cent of upper chambers in parliamentary renewals in 2020.

The most significant gains in the region were in the upper houses in Tajikistan (+16.3 points), Kazakhstan (+9.1 points) and Uzbekistan (+7.7 points). All of these bodies are chosen through indirect elections. As with the high performers in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020, these three dominant party states marked the most significant gains.

The overall highest performing countries in the region where elections were held were Nepal (37.9 per cent women in the upper chamber) and Singapore (29.5 per cent women in the unicameral parliament). Nepal's performance was static to its last election. Women gained six additional seats in Singapore's 95-member parliament.

Although several national policies and programmes are aimed at increasing the numbers of women in leadership positions, **Tajikistan** has no quota for women's representation in or

incentive for women's inclusion in political parties' candidate lists.⁴⁸ The number of female MPs in its upper chamber steadily decreased from a high of 23.5 per cent in 2005 to 6.3 per cent in 2015, while the lower chamber increased slightly (+1.5 points) over the same time period. In 2020, nearly 20 per cent of the 241 candidates for the elections to the upper chamber were women, leading to a 22.6 per cent gain in seats.

The year after long-standing Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev stepped down in March 2019, **Kazakhstan** renewed its Senate in an indirect election that saw women gain 9.1 points in that upper chamber. On 25 May 2020, in advance of the January 2021 Majilis (lower chamber) election, Kazakhstan introduced a number of measures aimed at democratizing the country and increasing the transparency of its electoral system and procedures. Those measures included a mandatory 30 per cent women quota.

While **Uzbekistan's** 2019 lower chamber elections resulted in a doubling of women's representation (32 per cent), the increase was more moderate for the upper chamber during the January 2020 election (+7.7 points, 24.7 per cent women total in the upper chamber).

48 <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/185615/tajikistan-cga.pdf>.

In **Nepal**, one-third of the upper chamber was up for re-election through an indirect vote. Women were elected to the seven seats reserved for them, but did not make additional gains beyond this.

While gains were registered in **Myanmar** (+6.9 points in the lower chamber, +5.3 in the upper chamber), the overall level of women's representation in parliament remained low (16.8 per cent and 15.5 per cent). The number of women candidates increased to 15.6 per cent of over 7,000 candidates (previously 13 per cent in 2015). Although Myanmar was one of the first countries in Asia to grant women suffrage (in 1935), women's ability to participate in political life was stifled by 50 years of military rule, coupled with conservative cultural norms. In the previous parliament, only 1 per cent of the military's appointed seats were held by women. At the time of publication of this report (February 2021), the parliament elected in 2020 had not been installed as a result of a military intervention and the declaration of a state of emergency.

In 2020, only 5.4 per cent of legislators in **Sri Lanka's** 225-member parliament were women. Women make up 56 per cent of registered voters. A 25 per cent reserved seat quota was introduced for local elections in 2016, resulting in a dramatic gain in women's representation (17,000 women candidates stood for local office and women elected rose from 89 to 2,300 in the course of a single election). However, no quota exists at the national level and women's representation has never exceeded 6 per cent.

Elsewhere in the region, the **Japanese** government announced that it would aim for a 35 per cent quota of female candidates for parliament and local government by 2025. Only 9.9 per cent of Japan's lawmakers are women (lower chamber).

Pacific: Diversity in New Zealand, Stagnation in the PICs

With the exception of New Zealand, women's representation in parliaments in the Pacific region remained consistently low or entirely absent in elections held in 2020. On average, women's representation accounted for only 6.4 per cent of newly elected houses in the three Pacific Island Countries (PICs) that held elections in 2020. Kiribati elected four women to its 45-member unicameral parliament. Palau elected one woman to each chamber of its parliament.

For the third consecutive election, **Vanuatu** failed to elect any women to parliament. Only 18 women contested the elections across 10 of Vanuatu's 18 constituencies and they were significantly outnumbered, as they represented only 6 per cent of all candidates. Although the five women who have been elected in Vanuatu since it won independence in 1980 were all backed by political parties, close to half the women candidates in the 2020 elections stood as independents. Two out of the top three ranking political parties, the Graon mo Jastis Pati and the Reunification Movement for Change, endorsed no women candidates. The country's second-ranked and oldest party, the Vanua'aku Pati, fielded two women out of 27 candidates. What is believed to be the Pacific's first ever woman-led party, the Leleon Vanua Democratic Party, was formed in 2018, but did not field any candidates in the 2020

elections. At its November 2019 meeting, the party's National Committee decided that it needed more time to prepare since it was newly formed. Candidates who had been endorsed by the party had the option to contest as independent candidates or to affiliate with a political party of their choice.⁴⁹

Local-level reserved seats for women were first introduced in 2013, but they remain controversial at the national level. The last time a woman was elected to parliament in Vanuatu was in 2008.⁵⁰ Alongside Vanuatu, two other PICs, Papua New Guinea and Micronesia, have no women in parliament.

Following the October 2020 elections, Jacinda Ardern now heads the most diverse government in **New Zealand's** history, with more women, people of colour, members from the LGBTQ+ community and Maori MPs than at any time in the past. Her government also includes New Zealand's first MPs of African, Latin American and Sri Lankan descent. Women MPs make up 48.3 per cent of parliament, a ten point increase from 38.3 in the previous elections. Nanaia Mahuta became the first Maori female foreign minister. Overall, eight of the 20-strong cabinet are women, five are Maori, three are Pasifika and three are LGBT. For the first time in New Zealand history, both major party candidates for prime minister were women.

Gender quotas & electoral systems

A gender quota was applied in some form in 25 of the 57 countries that had parliamentary renewals in 2020. On average, parliaments with quotas elected 11.8 per cent more women to single and lower chambers and 7.4 per cent more women to upper chambers. Several countries with quotas took steps to raise their quota provisions. Ecuador will henceforth apply a "horizontal" quota to heads of party lists. Peru and Serbia increased their quota targets. Ukraine introduced quotas at the local level. New quotas were applied successfully in Egypt and Mali.

Quotas acted as a shield against backsliding in 2020. Only two countries with quotas experienced a relapse in women's representation in 2020:⁵¹ Burkina Faso (-3.1 points) and Jordan (-4.6 points). Jordan's reversal reflects the broader trend that women's participation often plateaus at quota levels. Burkina Faso's experience in 2020 underscores the importance of adequate enforcement measures and sustained political will.

Six chambers without quotas saw declines in women's representation of 2 percentage points or more: Madagascar (-7.9 in the upper chamber), Liberia (-6.7 in the upper chamber), Palau (-6.3 and -4.8 in the lower and upper

49 https://dailypost.vu/news/leleon-vanua-democratic-party-will-not-contest-2020-general-election/article_80bf9660-4d17-11ea-9cea-f380b5412f8f.html.

50 <https://www.policyforum.net/how-did-women-fare-in-the-2020-vanuatu-elections/>.

51 This does not include countries with minor adjustments of less than 1.5 per cent or adjustments in countries within parity margins.

chambers, respectively), Trinidad and Tobago (-4.8 in the lower chamber)⁵² and Syria (-2 in the single chamber).

Countries with quotas significantly outperformed those without. Countries with legislated quotas in directly-elected legislatures saw an increase in women’s representation by 3.2 points on average (averaging 27.4 per cent overall). Directly elected chambers in countries with no legislated quotas (and no voluntary party quotas) only gained an average of 2.2 points. Appointed or indirectly-elected legislatures with no quotas made a remarkable gain, averaging 8.8 points in 2020, as did appointed or indirectly elected bodies with legislated candidate quotas (+8.4 on average). In contrast, appointed or indirectly elected legislatures with reserved seats lost an average of 1.8 points in 2020. This trend in 2020 suggests that quotas

continue to provide a notable advantage for women seeking election in direct elections. The broad variation in results for indirectly-elected or appointed bodies reflects various internal political dynamics, including dominant party systems.

Results of elections in 2020 indicate that electoral systems play a role in the adoption – but not the effectiveness – of quotas. Specifically, quotas were far less likely to be used in majoritarian electoral systems compared to proportional or mixed systems in countries that held parliamentary elections in 2020. However, countries with quotas performed equally well in both majoritarian electoral systems and proportional or mixed electoral systems. This suggests a need to eliminate barriers to adopting quotas in majority-based electoral systems.⁵³

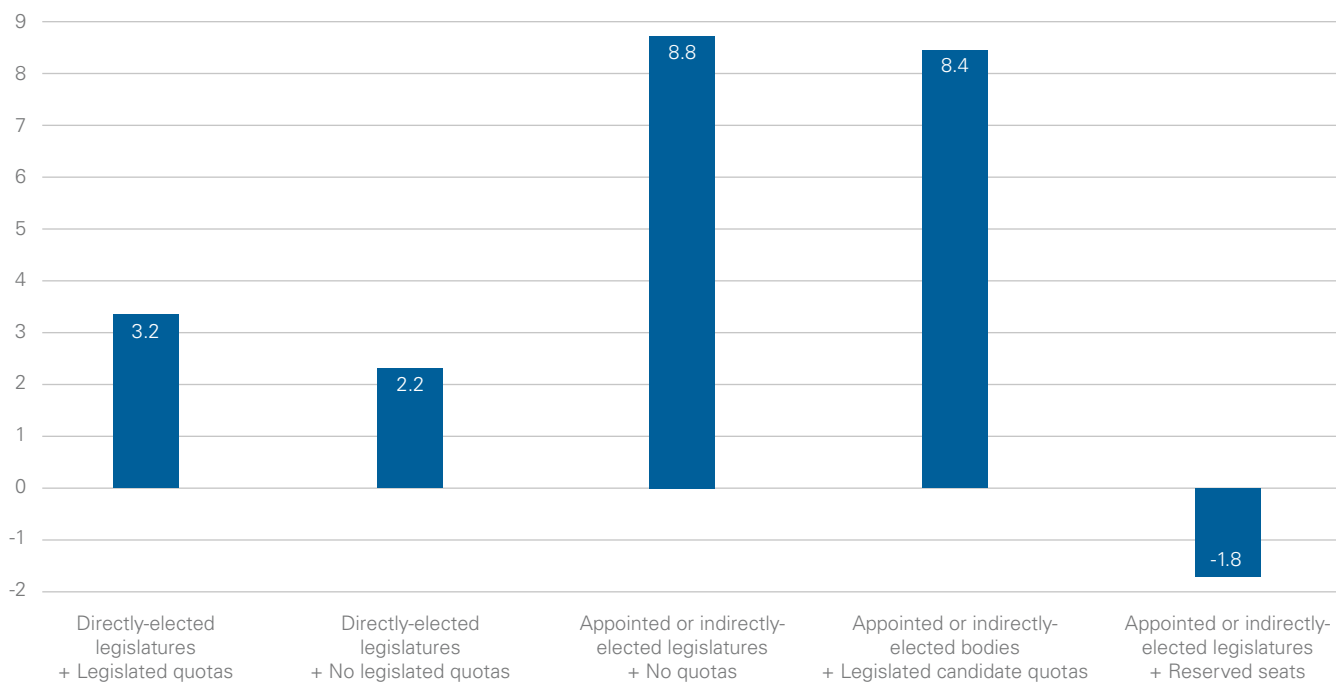
52 Note: the appointed upper house of Trinidad and Tobago increased women’s representation (+8.4 points).

53 See <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21565503.2015.1080615>.

Figure 3

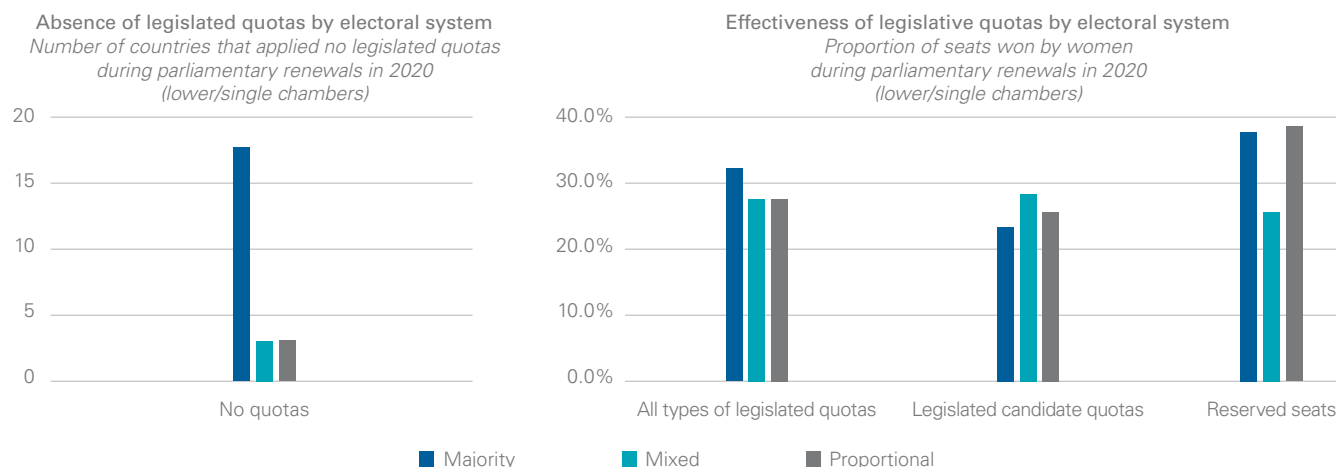
Election type (direct/indirect or appointed) & quota type

Average gains (in % point change) in seats held by women following parliamentary renewals in 2020



Figures 4 & 5

Adoption and effectiveness of legislated quotas by electoral system



Women in the top leadership of Parliament

Parliamentary speakers hold the position of highest authority in any given legislative body. Often among the parliamentarians most widely recognized by the public, they generally exercise powers to organize and oversee parliamentary business, to decide who may speak and also have the powers to discipline members for breaches of procedure.

Women held speaker positions in all regions of the world in 2020, albeit with deep regional variations. The global average (20.9 per cent) was pulled upwards by high rates in the Americas (29.1 per cent) and Europe (27.1 per cent). Meanwhile, Asia (15.9 per cent), the Pacific (6.3 per cent) and the Middle East (4 per cent) exerted downward pressure on the global average.

Globally, 58 women held speaker positions in 2020, one position up from the previous year. On average, women speakers were slightly younger (by 3.2 years, or 59 years of age) than their male counterparts. Globally, as at 31 December 2020, incumbent women speakers had held their positions

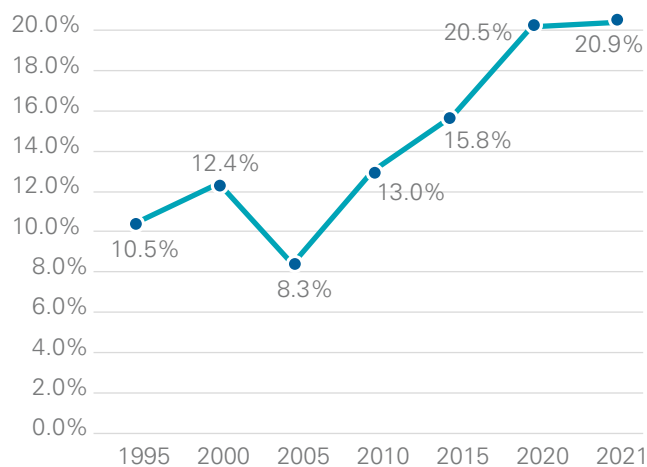
for a relatively shorter time than their male counterparts (male speakers averaged 39.4 months in the speaker's seat compared to 31.1 months for women). Length of time in the speaker role varied considerably by region, with the Americas, Europe, MENA and the Pacific averaging less than 25 months (7 months in the case of the Pacific). In sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, women had held that position for comparatively longer (43.2 and 50.4 months, respectively).

As at 1 January 2021, women occupied 259 out of a total of 934 positions of **chairs of five types of parliamentary committees** (foreign affairs, defence, finance, human rights and gender equality) included on IPU's Parline database.⁵⁴ This amounts to 27.7 per cent of committee chairs. The proportion drops to 18.5 per cent when gender equality committee chairs are excluded. Globally, on average, women chair between 12 per cent and 18 per cent of foreign affairs, defence and finance committees, 28 per cent of committees with a mandate to address human rights issues, and 69 per cent of committees with a mandate to address gender equality. However, wide disparities exist across regions.

54 Data extracted from Parline (data.ipu.org) on 9 February 2021.

Figures 6 & 7

Women Speakers of Parliament, all chambers combined Progress of women Speakers 1995–2021



Proportion of women Speakers per region, 1 January 2021

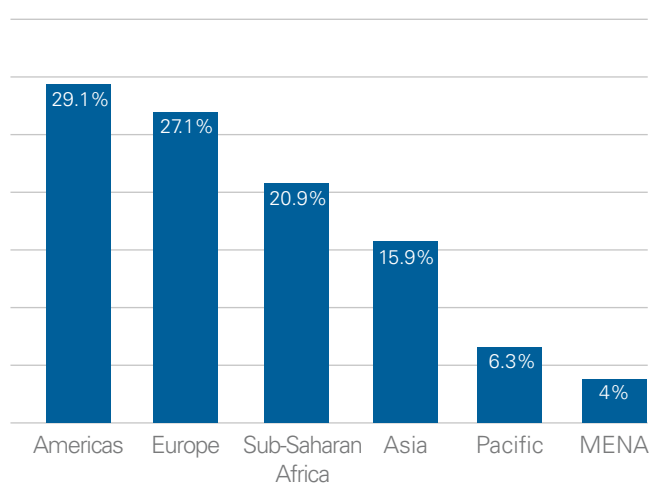
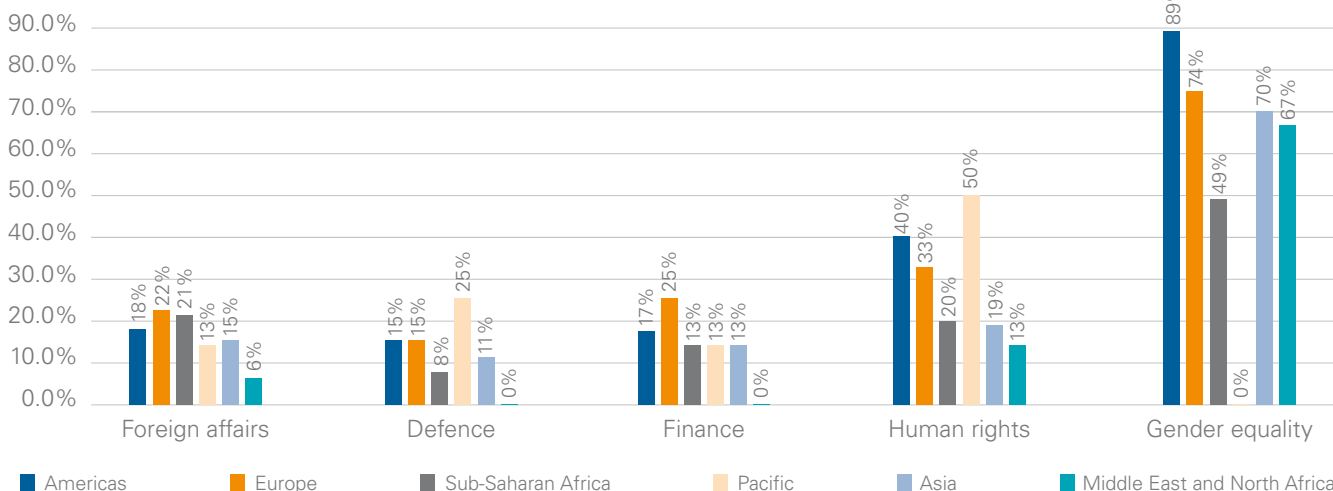


Figure 8

Regional proportion of women chairs of select parliamentary committees





In 2020, parliaments had to adapt to new ways of functioning, bringing new challenges and opportunities. © Toni L. Sandys/POOL/AFP

COVID-19 and Women’s Political Representation

No region in the world was left unaffected by the health, economic and political consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which infected over 87 million people and caused 1.9 million deaths in 2020. The pandemic affected virtually all sectors of life and had wide gender-based impacts, including on women’s political participation. While the pandemic triggered some changes in parliamentary practice and culture which could potentially enhance women’s representation and roles, the Secretary-General of the United Nations notes that overall “the pandemic is rolling back the limited progress made in the past 25 years with regard to women’s empowerment and gender equality, and measures to increase women’s leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts are urgently needed.”⁵⁵

The pandemic **changed the way parliaments operate**.⁵⁶ Most parliaments continued to function through the

pandemic and many rapidly adopted special operating measures such as regular testing, practising social distancing, mandating mask wearing and putting in place sanitizer stations. Others went into unscheduled recess or quickly adopted measures for remote work, including virtual and hybrid sittings. Voting measures to respect public health guidelines included a range of in-person options (queuing, shift voting, proxy voting, block voting, pairing of members) as well as electronic voting (email voting, web-based voting, application-based voting and video voting) and electronically tabling oral and written questions and signing motions. COVID-19 compelled the ascendance of virtual constituent engagement and political party practices, such as virtual town hall events and made-for-TV party nomination conventions and inauguration ceremonies.

In contexts like the UK, with low gender gaps in access to technology, the temporary use of a hybrid model had little impact on women MPs’ participation in Question Time and parliamentary debates.⁵⁷ However, in low-resource countries, women MPs faced steeper adaptation curves than their male counterparts. The shift to remote, technology-driven

⁵⁵ <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2021/3>.

⁵⁶ <https://www.ipu.org/parliaments-in-time-pandemic>; <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Covid-19-legislative-leadership-V5.pdf>.

⁵⁷ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/men-and-women-mps-in-the-hybrid-commons/>.

parliamentary practices has a potentially positive long-term impact for women in parliament. The use of new technology for debates resulted in new forms of personal interaction, breaking up “old boy” practices and curtailing some of the “clubbiness” that had previously excluded full participation by women.⁵⁸ Virtual voting and sittings helped promote participation by members for whom travel is onerous, including those with disabilities or with young children. The pandemic contributed positively to MPs’ relationships with their constituents “in that seeing members in their own homes and ridings brings to life that Parliament is not just one institution in the capital but is rather the coming together of hundreds of constituencies.”⁵⁹ Going forward, if legislatures retain these flexible workplace practices, including allowing remote sittings and voting, more women may be able to combine care-taking with political career aspirations. Likewise, peer-to-peer learning and greater engagement with virtual networks of women parliamentarians internationally can contribute positively to the resilience and empowerment of women MPs through the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted MPs to respond to profoundly **gendered needs among their constituents**. As to dealing with the pandemic, over 70 per cent of frontline healthcare workers worldwide are women.⁶⁰ Women’s disproportionately higher employment in the informal sector (up to 92 per cent of women’s employment in developing countries) often left them more difficult to reach through public relief policies and without having any protection through labour laws and social benefits, such as health insurance or paid sick leave.⁶¹ Differences in cellphone ownership, internet access and educational attainment meant that women were less likely than men to receive potentially lifesaving information about COVID-19, in Southeast Asia⁶² for example. The increased burden of unpaid care, domestic work and home-schooling/supervision overwhelmingly fell upon women during the pandemic. According to multiple country-level reports, the frequency and severity of domestic violence against women and girls surged during the pandemic, driven by isolation, restricted movement and stay-at-home measures to contain the spread of the infection. Intensified household stress related to health fears, childcare and potential economic or job loss fueled domestic violence against women.⁶³

In response, parliaments engaged gender-sensitive responses, including those identified by the IPU and by UN Women:⁶⁴

- Gender mainstreaming parliamentary decision-making on COVID-19 by ensuring balanced representation in key decision-making committees, units and/or task forces and ensuring that these units have a gender mandate.
- Gender-sensitive COVID-19 legislation for emergency assistance measures to ensure that gendered analysis and sex-disaggregated data is used to inform policy for the health and economy sectors, hospitals, doctors, workers, small businesses, the self-employed, families and the socially disadvantaged.
- Government oversight of COVID-19 responses from a gender perspective including use of gender budgeting tools to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and impact of COVID-19-related policy measures for women and girls.
- Communicating and raising awareness on COVID 19 and its effects.

Looking forward, some jurisdictions, including Canada and the US State of Hawaii have recognized the need for an inclusive, gender-equitable recovery from the pandemic. They have put forward feminist economic recovery plans that examine and confront the root causes of inequality.⁶⁵

The gendered implications of the pandemic on **governance** were much debated in 2020. Pre-COVID-19 research shows that women governing during crisis face shorter tenures, harsher exits and disproportionate blame, compared with similarly situated men.⁶⁶ In terms of pandemic management by women political leaders, media attention during the year focused on essentialized assertions claiming that women were more effective political leaders through the pandemic, a message that was absorbed by many public audiences. However, emerging scientific research is more nuanced. Both women and men leaders were better able to respond to the pandemic in wealthy, liberal democracies with high state capacity and good governance.⁶⁷ The gender of executive leaders and legislators was not a factor in determining gender-sensitive issues, such as how rapidly stay-at-home orders or school closures were implemented or their duration, according to a study of 132 countries.⁶⁸ However, greater gender equality in legislatures and female-headed health agencies were connected to earlier adoption of stay-at-home orders,⁶⁹ reflecting sensitivity to the perceived risk of transmission in schools.

Furthermore, the global pandemic also offered some opportunities to enhance women’s political participation. During the pandemic, traditionally female attributes, such as competency/dedication in health care, honesty and

58 See comments by Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, M.P. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/431/PROC/Reports/RP10833363/procrp07/procrp07-e.pdf>.

59 See comments by Ms. Harman. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/431/PROC/Reports/RP10833363/procrp07/procrp07-e.pdf>.

60 <https://www.who.int/hrh/events/2018/women-in-health-workforce/en/>.

61 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_protect/-protrav/-travail/documents/publication/wcms_711798.pdf; <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy#notes>.

62 <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/surveys-show-covid-19-has-gendered-effects-asia-and-pacific>.

63 <http://www.emro.who.int/violence-injuries-disabilities/violence-news/levels-of-domestic-violence-increase-as-covid-19-pandemic-escalates.html>.

64 <https://www.ipu.org/gender-and-covid-19-guidance-note-parliaments> and <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/a-primer-for-parliamentary-action-gender-sensitive-responses-to-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3610>.

65 Solomon, A., Hawkins, K., and Morgan, R. (2020). *Hawaii and Canada: Providing lessons for feminist pandemic recovery plans to COVID-19*. The Gender and COVID-19 Working Group.

66 O’Neill, Pruyers, and Stewart 2019; Reyes-Housholder 2019; Thomas 2018, in Piscopo, 2020.

67 Piscopo, Jennifer M. “Women Leaders and Pandemic Performance: A Spurious Correlation.” *Politics & Gender* (2020): 1-9.

68 Aldrich, A., & Lotito, N. (2020). Pandemic Performance: Women Leaders in the COVID-19 Crisis. *Politics & Gender*, 16(4), 960-967. doi:10.1017/S1743923X20000549

69 Ibd; Shay, L. (2020). Closing Time! Examining the Impact of Gender and Executive Branch Policy Makers on the Timing of Stay-at-Home Orders. *Politics & Gender*, 16(4), 935-942. doi:10.1017/S1743923X20000264.

trustworthiness, were on greater display in the media and in greater demand by the public worldwide, which may generate increased public support for female political candidates down the road.⁷⁰

Elections and campaigns were equally impacted.⁷¹ Parliamentary elections were postponed in nearly 20 countries, mostly as a result of COVID-19. The pandemic negatively impacted women's ability to campaign for office and to access campaign funding.⁷² The economic precarity caused by the pandemic exacerbated existing gendered socio-economic inequalities. Women lost their jobs at higher rates than men, and more women left (or considered leaving) the workforce entirely due to pandemic-related stress.⁷³ This curtailed access to campaign resources and compelled many women to interrupt or abandon professional career paths and return to traditional roles as primary caregivers. Interrupted career paths and diminished professional achievement might possibly deepen existing gaps and negatively impact the future supply of women's candidacies post-pandemic.⁷⁴

Inequalities in access to online platforms impacted women candidates, as well as MPs. The shift from in-person to virtual campaigning drove a deeper wedge between elite and non-elite women in politics, favouring those men and women with existing networks, resources and name recognition.⁷⁵

It also increased women candidates' exposure to online harassment and violence, as campaigns shifted much of their outreach to online spaces and as entire populations were required to stay indoors, increasing home internet time exponentially.⁷⁶ Although cross-national baseline data is still limited, reports from all regions indicate that women faced intense online abuse and incivility during campaigns or, more generally, in public life in 2020. Online sexual harassment of women has doubled in the US over the past three years⁷⁷ and attacks on women politicians were extensive (especially women of ethnic minorities).⁷⁸ In Quebec, Canada, police reported a 450 per cent increase in reported online threats against politicians between March and September 2020.⁷⁹ Reports from Kenya

indicate increased online violence and attacks against women in relation to the pandemic⁸⁰. In a 2020 survey of Australian women in politics, 65 per cent of 1,000 respondents reported being exposed to internet abuse, and one in five feared for their physical safety.⁸¹ Reports of online violence against women in politics continued to surge worldwide, despite increasing awareness and response on social media platforms.

Other COVID-19 impacts on women candidates are inconclusive. Some researchers suggest that the pandemic has "made [political] women less publicly visible and pushed debates over women's rights off the political agenda."⁸² Others argue that the greater amount of time spent in home constituencies and the intimacy of seeing MPs in their homes via Zoom events has strengthened the bonds between representatives and voters. Likewise, the popular feminist street protests in many countries, such as Belarus, Chile and Mali and others, and the successful introduction or strengthening of quotas in Egypt, Mali and Kazakhstan indicate that women's rights and advocacy continue to move ahead.

Similarly, the pandemic-related disruption of formal political processes and norms in favour of ad hoc, informal practices has mixed interpretations. Crisis-driven informal rules and institutions tend to favour dominant groups.⁸³ This occurs when political gatekeepers take short-cuts by reverting to past, exclusive practices and to breaking down procedures and protections to ensure women's representation (for example, oversight for quota implementation or inclusive party primary procedures). Yet the disruption of in-person *status quo* politicking has also contributed to weakening common "old boy" practices. COVID-19 also upended historic labour patterns that have isolated men from their children in the past. Although women overwhelmingly bore the increased burden of childcare during the pandemic, when schools and care centres closed, "the COVID-19 crisis may have put some men into primary caretaker roles if they've been laid off and their partners have not, which may accelerate the erosion of gendered norms about the household division of labour."⁸⁴ Finally, the pandemic has raised the world's attention to the fact that women represent 70 per cent of the global healthcare and social care workforce, but only 30 per cent of the leaders.⁸⁵ This has prompted more women to capitalize on women's crucial roles as first responders during the pandemic and further motivated them to stand for office so as to address the unfolding social and economic crises.⁸⁶

70 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7467657/>; Johnson, C., & Williams, B. (2020). Gender and Political Leadership in a Time of COVID. *Politics & Gender*, 16(4), 943-950. doi:10.1017/S1743923X2000029X.

71 https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/elections-and-covid-19-how-election-campaigns-took-place-2020?fbclid=IwAR1HCvwsVniMw1hd2eviild5kShRcZqq_QUDyIFOk4ZiwlS7q4KfNjEO2Og.

72 Gatto, M., & Thome, D. (2020). Resilient Aspirants: Women's Candidacies and Election in Times of COVID-19. *Politics & Gender*, 16(4), 1001-1008. doi:10.1017/S1743923X20000537; also Carter Center – Myanmar, forthcoming.

73 <https://voxeu.org/article/shecession-she-recession-2020-causes-and-consequences>; <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/canadian-women-continue-to-exit-the-labour-force/>.

74 <https://www.queensu.ca/gazette/stories/will-coronavirus-help-or-hinder-women-s-candidacies>.

75 See <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/11/17/how-coronavirus-risks-exacerbating-women-s-political-exclusion-pub-83213>.

76 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markbeech/2020/03/25/covid-19-pushes-up-internet-use-70-streaming-more-than-12-first-figures-reveal/?sh=288b1223104e>.

77 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/13/qa-what-weve-learned-about-online-harassment/>.

78 <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Public-Figures-Public-Page-4.pdf>.

79 https://democracv2017.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2020/10/Trolled_Oct-28.pdf.

80 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/take-five-cecilia-mwende-maundu-online-violence>.

81 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/oct/05/online-violence-against-women-flourishing-and-most-common-on-facebook-survey-finds>.

82 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/11/17/how-coronavirus-risks-exacerbating-women-s-political-exclusion-pub-83213>.

83 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/11/17/how-coronavirus-risks-exacerbating-women-s-political-exclusion-pub-83213>.

84 https://theconversation.com/the-coronavirus-could-either-help-or-hinder-women-s-candidacies-136166?utm_source=halifaxtoday.ca&utm_campaign=halifaxtoday.ca&utm_medium=referral.

85 https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response?gclid=CjwKCAiAouD_BRBIEiWALhJH6LuQ_MxORvn2VC_NlhZsA5GfC99SVjnEuVvXZMVh14zGU1p3HW0L_2xoCol4QAvD_BwE.

86 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/11/17/how-coronavirus-risks-exacerbating-women-s-political-exclusion-pub-83213>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/us/politics/doctor-politicians-coronavirus.html>; <https://doctorsinpolitics.org/whowhere>.

Lastly but most importantly, COVID-19 **posed a direct health threat** to parliamentarians worldwide, many of whom were exposed in the course of duty while meeting with constituents and foreign dignitaries, travelling or attending public events. It was responsible for the deaths of many women political leaders, including Burkina Faso's first vice president of the National Assembly, Rose Marie Compaoré; Iraqi MP, Ghaida Kambash; Pakistani MP, Shaheen Reza Cheema; South Africa's Permanent delegate to the National Council of Provinces, Martha Mmola; Ugandan MP, Faith Alupo; and Venezuelan MP, Bolivia Suárez.

Many national and local male and female politicians around the world announced they were infected with the virus. Little consistent, sex-disaggregated national or comparative data is available on exposure, infection or death rates among MPs.

Push-pull factors and other trends

In 2020, women played critical roles during reform processes, including in Syria and Chile, laying the groundwork for future political participation. Burkina Faso's disappointing experience in 2020 is a reminder that when women are absent during such foundational moments, their future participation can be compromised. As recognized by the Women, Peace and Security Agenda set out in United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), women's participation at key transitional moments is essential to determining the future course of their participation. Common perceptions that gender equality is secondary to political concerns during pivotal moments such as these is a major risk.

Women's participation in local government is significant as it impacts the outcomes of indirect elections at the national level. Where women are poorly represented in local government, outcomes for women in some indirectly elected national chambers tend to reflect that, as is the case in Madagascar and Namibia, where local government is the pool from which membership in those chambers is drawn.

The status of political parties in the political configuration of certain countries is visibly important. Women running for office in countries with dominant parties, such as Burundi, Cameroon, Tanzania, and in regions such as Central Asia, obtained strong outcomes. Likewise, where dominant parties that have been championing gender parity experience setbacks or major change, as is the case in Namibia and Bolivia, women's representation is similarly impacted. Overall, states with dominant parties elected on average 30.7 per cent women to parliament in 2020, as compared to 20.8 per cent elsewhere.



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