



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Women in parliament in 2021

The year in review



Mexico made history by reaching gender parity in parliament for the first time in 2021. © Eyepix/NurPhoto via AFP

Introduction

The world walked into 2021 with the shadow of COVID-19 looming large over its head. As well as posing a major health risk, the pandemic had also caused economic and social upheaval. Political life had been affected too, from the challenge of holding elections safely to ensuring the smooth working of parliaments. Though many of these difficulties endured in 2021, and in some cases were compounded, there were fewer delays¹ in elections when compared with the previous year.

The pandemic had also exposed the particular vulnerability of women in times of crisis. Throughout 2020 and 2021, evidence showed that women were bearing a disproportionate brunt of the social and economic fallouts of the crisis.² Their vulnerabilities were further exacerbated if they were from non-dominant racial, ethnic, religious or class communities.

¹ www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections.

² www.cgdev.org/article/women-bear-brunt-covid-19-crisis-new-analysis-finds.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The share of women in national parliaments increased by 0.6 percentage points, from 25.5 per cent on 1 January 2021 to 26.1 per cent on 1 January 2022. This rate of progress was the same as in the previous two years.
- In the 48 countries that held elections in 2021, women were elected to 28.6 per cent of the parliamentary seats up for election. This was significantly better than in 2020, when women accounted for 22.9 per cent across all polls.
- This progress can be attributed to at least two factors. First, the average representation of women in the 48 countries was higher (26.5%) even before the 2021 parliamentary renewals. And second, 30 of the 48 countries that held elections to either chamber had some form of quota in place (compared with 25 of the 57 countries that held elections in 2020).
- Quotas continued to play a critical role in ensuring greater representation of women in 2021. Countries with some form of quota elected 31.9 per cent women on average to their lower or single house, while those without quotas elected only 19.5 per cent women overall.
- Although 28.8 per cent women were elected or appointed to lower or single houses across parliaments in 2021, the corresponding share of women elected or appointed to upper houses last year was 26 per cent.
- The Americas remained the region with the highest representation of women, who accounted for 39.1 per cent of members elected to 15 chambers in the 11 countries that held parliamentary renewals in 2021. Overall, as of January 2022, women made up 33.8 per cent of all parliamentarians in the region, across all chambers and countries.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Chad made the most progress among all countries renewing their lower or single house in 2021, with a 19.5-percentage-point increase in women's representation. Other top performers were Liechtenstein (16 percentage points), Cabo Verde (14.5 percentage points), the Republic of Moldova (13.9 percentage points) and Peru (13.8 percentage points).
- Among those countries that held elections to their upper house, South Sudan saw the biggest improvement in women's representation (22.1 percentage points), followed by Saint Lucia (18.2 percentage points).
- Five countries had parity (or a greater share of women than men) in their lower or single house as of 1 January 2022, up from three at the beginning of 2021. Rwanda led the world with 61.3 per cent women MPs, followed by Cuba and Nicaragua (53.4 and 50.6 per cent respectively). Both Mexico and the United Arab Emirates had an equal share of men and women parliamentarians.
- Overall, 50 countries had between 33 and 50 per cent women in their lower or single house at the end of 2021, up from 42 countries at the beginning of the year.
- At the end of the year, 24 out of 188 countries around the world had less than 10 per cent women in their single or lower house of parliament. These included three with no women MPs at all: Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Yemen.

Note: This analysis does not include the data for elections to the lower house in Somalia, since these had not been completed by the end of the year.

On a rare positive note, a conversation had begun in the early days of the pandemic about the effectiveness of women's leadership in mitigating the impact of the novel virus on people's health and lives. Yet despite this positive focus, the world entered 2021 with women making up just 25.5 per cent of members of parliament (MPs) globally. By the end of the year, that share had barely moved, nudging up to 26.1 per cent. The pace of progress was the same as in 2020 and 2019, when women's parliamentary representation had also improved by 0.6 percentage points.

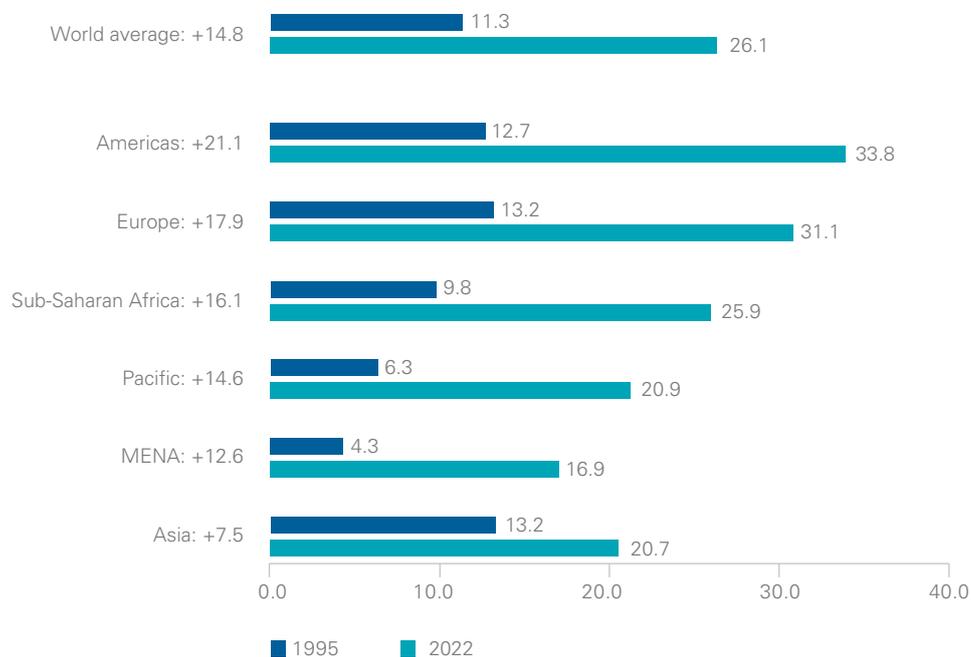
In total, 48 countries held parliamentary elections in 2021, electing 28.6 per cent women across the board. This figure represented a cumulative improvement of 2.1 percentage points when compared with previous parliamentary renewals in the same group of countries. But this progress was neither even nor unidirectional: many countries such as Cabo Verde and Peru made significant headway, but there were dramatic setbacks in Algeria and elsewhere, while women's representation remained stubbornly low in Japan and Tonga.

Despite slow progress overall, 2021 also saw numerous examples of women stepping up to claim their space in politics. In places like Honduras, Samoa, Sweden and Tanzania, women made history by rising to the very top of the political hierarchy. Meanwhile, countries such as Albania and Spain made admirable progress by appointing female-majority Cabinets. Moreover, there were three countries with gender parity (or a greater share of women than men) in their lower or single house of parliament at the start of the year. By 1 January 2022, that number had increased to five countries: Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates.

Regional trends

Figure 1

World and regional averages of women in parliaments, 1995 and 2022



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data for all houses combined, figures correct as of 1 July 1995 and 1 January 2022 respectively.



The Mapuche Elisa Loncon is elected president of the Constitutional Convention on 4 July 2021 in Santiago, Chile. © Marcelo Hernandez/Getty Images South America via AFP

The Americas: Building on the momentum

Overview

With women being elected to 39.1 per cent of seats in 15 chambers in 11 countries that held parliamentary renewals in 2021, the **Americas** had the highest share of women's representation of all regions in the world. There was also a 3.7-percentage-point improvement in these countries when compared with their previous polls.

The share of women elected increased in seven countries in the region. Peru led the way with a jump of 13.8 percentage points, followed by Chile, which recorded a 12.9-percentage-point improvement in the lower house. Gender parity was achieved in both Nicaragua and Mexico, with women elected to 50.6 and 50 per cent of seats in the lower or single House of Parliament respectively. Women's representation declined in the Bahamas and El Salvador.

As of 1 January 2022, women made up 33.8 per cent of members of all chambers and parliaments in the Americas, the highest share across all regions and a 1.4-percentage-point increase on the figure at the end of 2020.

The region's overall performance was boosted by a number of countries with particularly high shares of women parliamentarians. In fact, as of the end of 2021, the Americas were home to three of the top five countries in the world in terms of women's representation: Cuba (53.4%), Nicaragua (50.6%) and Mexico (50%).

The year opened with a historic development in the region, as Kamala Harris was sworn in as the first woman Vice-President in the history of the United States of America. She also became President of the Senate. Towards the end of 2021, Xiomara Castro de Zelaya was elected as the first woman President of Honduras, formally assuming office in January 2022. Honduras saw progress in the percentage of women parliamentarians by 6.3 percentage points after elections held in 2021.

UN Women for the Americas and Caribbean, observed³ that parties often understood quotas as the ceiling and not the minimum requirement for women's participation, and that it was time now to move from quotas to parity – a shift that has already happened in Mexico.

Peru and Chile drive progress, while Argentina inches closer to parity

Last year was a watershed period for politics in **Chile**, where the people elected 155 members to the Constitutional Convention, the body tasked with drafting the country's new Constitution. Half of its members are women, and the Convention was first headed by Elisa Loncon,⁴ who hails from the country's majority Indigenous Mapuche community. Chile is now set to become the first country in the world⁵ to have a Constitution drafted by an equal share of women and men – an achievement made possible by a 2020 referendum in which Chileans voted in favour of parity among members of the drafting committee.

The country also held elections to both Houses of Parliament in 2021. Six women were elected among the 27 members of the Senate (the upper house), and 55 women among the 155 members of the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house). In total, women's representation in the Senate now stands at 24 per cent. Meanwhile, there was a 12.9-percentage-point increase in the share of women in the Chamber of Deputies last year, which rose from 22.6 per cent following the 2017 polls to its current level of 35.5 per cent. Like several of its regional peers, Chile has legal mandates to ensure women's representation. The law, introduced in 2015,⁶ requires parties to ensure that no more than 60 per cent of candidates in each district are of the same gender, and also includes provisions for financial incentives for parties that field more

3 www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-09-10/gender-quotas-fail-to-boost-women-in-latin-american-politics.

4 www.dw.com/en/chile-chooses-indigenous-woman-as-president-of-new-constitutional-assembly/a-58157983.

5 www.undp.org/blog/chile-celebrates-gender-equality-milestone.

6 www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/79/35.

women. Women who are elected are also eligible for more fiscal support.

In **Peru**, 52 women were elected to the Congress (the single House of Parliament) in the April 2021 election, making up 40 per cent of all those elected. This was a notable improvement from the previous election in 2020, when women comprised only 26.2 per cent of elected members. This represented a 13.8-percentage-point increase – the largest in the entire Americas region. This sharp improvement was the direct consequence of a new law⁷ brought in by the Peruvian government in July 2020 that made it mandatory for political parties to ensure parity and to alternate women and men candidates on party lists.

Argentina also held elections to both Houses of Parliament in 2021. Some 59 women were elected among the 127 seats that were renewed in the Chamber of Deputies, making up 46.5 per cent of all those elected. As a consequence, the share of women in the lower house now stands at 44.8 per cent. In the Senate, a similar share of women (45.8%) were elected among the 24 seats that were renewed, with women now accounting for 43 per cent of members of the upper house. Equality of opportunity for men and women for elective and political-party positions is enshrined in the Constitution of Argentina,⁸ which also has legal mandates for alternating candidates by gender on party lists, thereby ensuring parity at the candidate level. Women's representation in both Houses of Parliament has remained above 30 per cent since the turn of the millennium.

Mexico and Nicaragua reach representation milestones

Mexico, which has made consistent efforts to improve women's representation and participation in politics, achieved parity among those elected to the Chamber of Deputies (the lower House of Parliament) in 2021. This shift has been enabled by a range of reforms and policies. Mexico introduced party quotas for women candidates in 2003.⁹ The level was initially set at 30 per cent of candidates, increasing to 40 per cent in 2009. In 2014, the country transitioned to a system of gender parity and has subsequently introduced several policies and laws¹⁰ that focus not only on ensuring a minimum number of women, but also on creating a more level playing field.

Political parties are mandated to ensure parity among candidates and to alternate by gender on candidate lists, and are also prohibited from fielding women candidates in districts where the party is less likely to win. The Instituto Nacional Electoral, the electoral commission of Mexico, brought in rules preventing parties from discriminating

against women when it came to campaign finance and barring candidates convicted of committing violence against women. It also set up hotlines to support women facing violence during campaigns, and introduced monitoring of media coverage of candidates for gender biases. Affirmative action is also being taken in favour of other traditionally disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, including Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) people, with gender parity cutting across all such actions.

In 2021, **Nicaragua** elected 46 women to its 91-member National Assembly, taking the share of women to 50.6 per cent, up from 45.7 per cent at the previous election. The Constitution mandates equal representation of women among candidates and also requires parties to alternate between women and men on their candidate lists. Since 2011, women have accounted for more than 40 per cent of elected parliamentarians in the country, with that share crossing parity in 2021.

Stagnating gains in Canada and Ecuador, with a dip in El Salvador

In **Canada**, where early elections were called in 2021, the share of women MPs increased slightly from 29 per cent to 30.5 per cent, as 5 more women were elected to the 338-member House of Commons (the lower House of Parliament) this time around. There are no legislated quotas for women in Canada,¹¹ although some parties have internal policies on giving tickets to a certain proportion of women. The share of women candidates has improved steadily over the years, but the share of elected women has not increased at the same pace. In 2021, 37.9 per cent of candidates were women, up from 34.3 per cent in 2019.

Researchers studying this situation have argued that women have often been treated as "sacrificial lambs"¹² in the country's politics, with parties more likely to field women candidates in districts where they were less likely to win. Moreover, an analysis by CBC/Radio-Canada in the run-up to the 2021 vote¹³ found that white men who ran for office in the national elections of 2015 and 2019 received more money from their party and ran in constituencies where their party had a better chance of winning.

In **Ecuador**, the share of women in parliament also seems to be plateauing. In 2013, 53 women were elected to the National Assembly (the single House of Parliament), making up 38.7 per cent of all those elected. In 2017, 52 women were elected. And in 2021, 52 women were elected, representing 38 per cent of members.

Ecuador mandates equal representation of women among candidates and also requires parties to present lists that alternate men and women. In most cases, however, the

7 elcomercio.pe/politica/elecciones/elecciones-2021-se-proyecta-el-numero-mas-alto-de-mujeres-congresistas-en-toda-la-historia-del-parlamento-congreso-analisis-noticia/?ref=ecr.

8 www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/51/35.

9 www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/07/11/women-won-big-in-mexicos-elections-taking-nearly-half-the-legislatures-seats-heres-why/.

10 msmagazine.com/2021/07/22/mexico-gender-parity-women-politics-georgina-de-la-fuente-instituto-nacional-electoral-ine/?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=SocialWarfare.

11 www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/74/35.

12 doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2012.12.001.

13 ici.radio-canada.ca/info/2021/elections-federales/minorites-visibles-diversite-autochtones-racises-candidats-politique/en.

reality is that men sit at the top of candidate lists and political parties are also more likely to support male candidates. Meanwhile, political violence (including online gendered hate and abuse) deters women's full participation in politics, according to an analysis¹⁴ by RIMISP, the Latin American Centre for Rural Development. In 2020, parliament adopted a law introducing a horizontal quota on candidate lists that will require political parties to field 50 per cent women as heads of lists across the country. However, this gender parity rule will only apply at the 2025 elections.

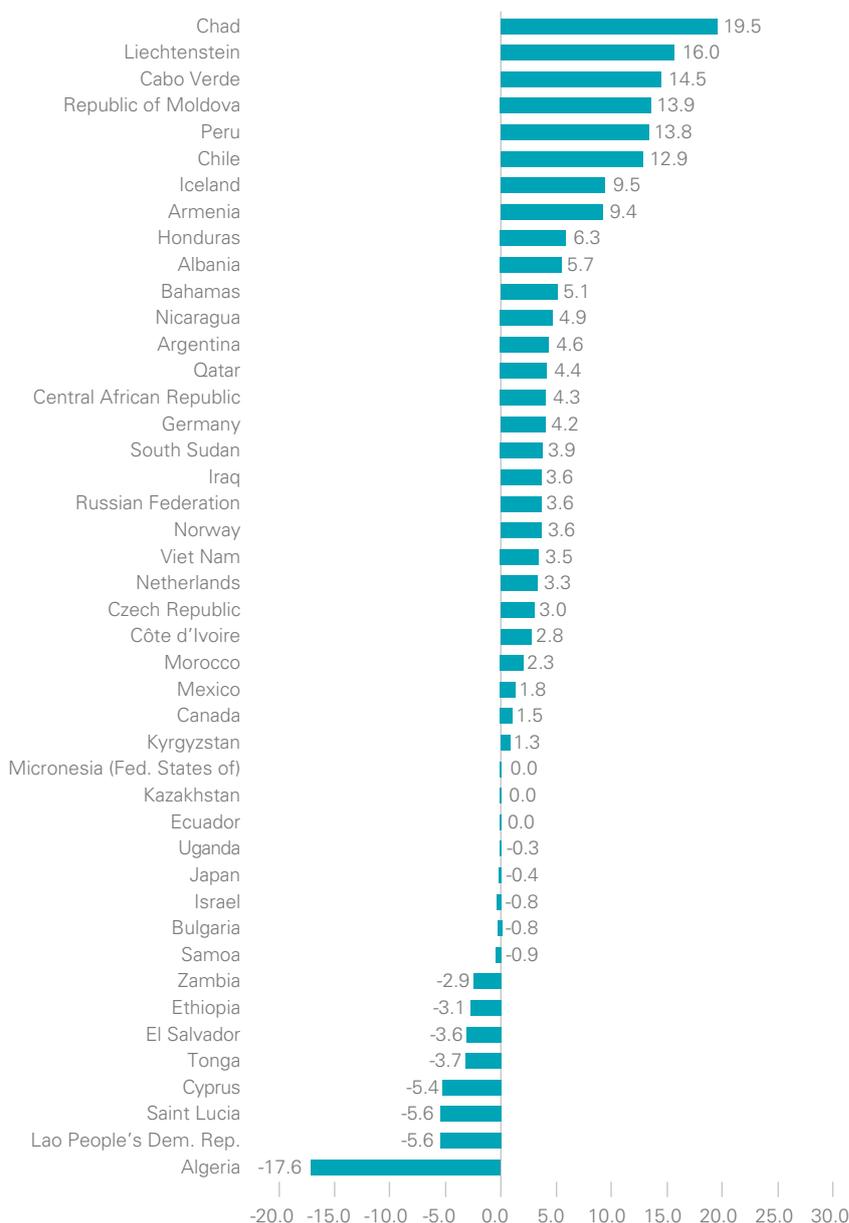
El Salvador saw a decline in the share of women elected, from 31 per cent previously to 27.4 per cent in 2021. This was also the largest dip in the entire Americas region. A 2013 law mandates parties in El Salvador to include at least 30 per cent women on their candidate lists, and includes a provision for imposing a fine on parties that fail to do so.¹⁵ The law, however, does not include any mandates related to the positioning of candidates on the lists. In 2012, 26.2 per cent women were elected to the Legislative Assembly (the single House of Parliament).¹⁶ This share increased to 32.1 per cent in 2015, but declined to 31 per cent in 2018 and fell further at the 2021 election.

This trend merits close attention because women's representation in national politics appeared to increase initially after the introduction of candidate-level quotas, but has been declining ever since. Among the many barriers that prevent women from participating in the country's politics on an equal footing with men, one of the most blatant is the gender gap in campaign financing, according to a *Reuters* report from 2020.¹⁷ When it came to funding campaign publicity for candidates, on average, political parties in El Salvador spent twice as much on men as on women, research by a non-governmental organization¹⁸ showed.

Figure 2

Parliamentary renewals in 2021

Progress and setbacks (in %) of women in lower or single houses of parliament renewed in 2021¹⁹



14 www.rimisp.org/noticia/ecuador-roles-secundarios-en-partidos-politicos-y-violencia-en-redes-sociales-inciden-en-menor-participacion-de-la-mujer-en-procesos-electorales/.

15 www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/273/35.

16 data.ipu.org/historical-women.

17 www.reuters.com/article/us-elsalvador-women-politics-idUSKBN28317Z.

18 As above.

19 Elections to the lower house in Somalia, which began in 2021, were still under way in early 2022 and have therefore not been included.



Baerbel Bas (in red) receives applause moments after she was elected President of the new Bundestag on 26 October 2021 in Berlin, Germany. The new Bundestag is more diverse than ever before. © Sean Gallup/Getty Images via AFP

Europe: A year of significant progress and notable achievements

Overview

After the Americas, **Europe** had the second-highest share of women elected in 2021 across all regions, at 30.4 per cent. Notably, the share of elected women increased by 4.2 percentage points on average in the 12 countries that held parliamentary renewals in 2021 – the biggest improvement among all regions of the world.

The share of women elected increased in 10 of the 12 countries that held elections last year, with Liechtenstein and the Republic of Moldova driving progress with improvements of 16 and 13.9 percentage points respectively. On the other hand, the share of women in the parliaments of Bulgaria and Cyprus fell relative to previous elections.

As of 1 January 2022, women made up 31.1 per cent of members across all chambers and parliaments in Europe, placing the region second globally on this metric.

In addition to the women elected to parliaments across Europe, 2021 also saw notable progress on women in political leadership positions in the region. Magdalena Andersson became the Prime Minister of Sweden after her predecessor, Stefan Löfven, stepped down from his position, making her the first woman in the country's history to occupy that post. In Estonia, Kaja Kallas became Prime Minister in another historical first. At that time, the President

of Estonia was also a woman (Kersti Kaljulaid), making it (briefly) the only country in the world with women as the elected Head of State and the Head of Government.²⁰ In Germany, the new government appointed a Cabinet with gender parity, while the new Cabinet in Spain included 14 women and 8 men.²¹ Albania appointed a Cabinet that included 12 women among its 16 members.²²

Liechtenstein and the Republic of Moldova lead from the front

Liechtenstein led progress in Europe in 2021, with 7 women elected to the 25-member Landtag (the single House of Parliament). This was the highest number in the country's history – four more than the number elected in 2017 – and women made up 28 per cent of all those elected. This progress appeared to be the consequence of more women contesting, rather than of legal mandates. A total of 23 women stood for election, making up 30.7 per cent of all candidates – almost 9 percentage points higher than at the previous election, when women accounted for 22.5 per cent of candidates. Political parties fielded more women than men as candidates for the five government seats.²³ The

20 estonianworld.com/life/estonia-becomes-the-only-country-in-the-world-led-by-women/.

21 english.elpais.com/economy-and-business/2021-07-12/in-sweeping-reshuffle-spains-pedro-sanchez-names-younger-cabinet-with-more-women.html.

22 balkaninsight.com/2021/09/02/albania-pm-announce-new-cabinet-complains-about-job-for-votes-politics/.

23 europeelects.eu/2021/02/14/liechtenstein-elections-minute-shifts-significant-consequences.

Progressive Citizens' Party (*Fortschrittliche Bürgerpartei*, or FBP), also nominated a woman – Sabine Monauni – as its candidate for Prime Minister, a first in the country's history. The FBP eventually finished second, with Ms. Monauni going on to become the Deputy Prime Minister. Three women made it into the five-member Cabinet.²⁴

The **Republic of Moldova** also made significant headway in improving women's representation in its parliament in 2021. Early elections were held after Maia Sandu, who became the country's first woman President in 2020, dissolved parliament. In the previous election, held in 2019, 26 women were elected as MPs, making up 25.7 per cent of all those elected. In 2021, this number jumped to 40 women parliamentarians, representing 39.6 per cent of members.

Political parties in the Republic of Moldova are required to ensure equal rights and opportunities for their members, and to abide by the minimum rate of representation of 40 per cent for both sexes under Law No. 71, which was adopted in April 2016. There was near parity among candidates for the 2021 election: women made up 46.7 per cent of those who contested the polls. This was significantly higher than in 2019, when 34.8 per cent of candidates were women.

As well as fielding more women candidates, political parties also placed more women at the top of their lists in 2021. Women held almost 28 per cent of the top five positions in party lists, with four parties including women at the top of their lists, according to an analysis by the United Nations Development Programme in Moldova.²⁵ The 2021 elections were remarkable on several fronts: more women were engaged in organizing and holding elections, and Natalia Gavrilița became the Prime Minister, making Moldova one of only a handful of countries to have women serving as both the Head of State and the Head of Government.

[Iceland within sight of parity, while Germany sees small jump](#)

Iceland now has near parity among its MPs, with women comprising 47.6 per cent of all those elected in 2021. This development marked a repeat of 2016 but was a notable jump from 2017, when women made up 38.1 per cent of parliamentarians. Iceland does not have any legally mandated quotas, but some parties have internal quotas to ensure a minimum representation of women. In 2017, the new Centre Party fielded only 14 per cent women candidates.²⁶ At the same election, women accounted for 62.5 per cent of Progressive Party candidates. In 2021, more women stood for election overall than in 2017, and there was parity among men and women in the top positions on party lists.²⁷

Iceland is now the highest ranked among all European nations on the IPU's index, having risen from position 25 globally at the beginning of 2021 to number 7 by the end of the year.

One of the most keenly watched elections of the entire year was in **Germany**, where incumbent Chancellor Angela Merkel retired after having served in the position for more than 16 years. The election was seen as the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. The fact that the country had been led by a woman for such a long period also drew considerable attention to and prompted debate about women's representation in politics. Following the election, women's representation in the Bundestag (the lower House of Parliament) increased by 4.2 percentage points relative to 2017, with women making up 34.9 per cent of all those elected.

The 2021 election was notable for the diversity among the women elected.²⁸ For the first time in the country's history, there would be a black woman serving in parliament. Two trans women were also elected in another historical first for the country. Yet while the share of women elected in 2021 was higher than at the previous election, the figure has hovered in the low-to-mid 30 per cent bracket since the turn of the millennium. It peaked in 2013 when a record 36.5 per cent of those elected were women, but dropped at the next election to 30.7 per cent.

[Cyprus on the other side of the trend](#)

Cyprus (along with Bulgaria) bucked the overall trend in the Europe region, registering a fall in women's representation at the 2021 election. Only 8 women were elected among 56 MPs – 3 fewer than in 2016 and only 14.3 per cent of all those elected. This was the lowest share among all the 12 European countries that went to the polls last year. As a consequence, Cyprus ranked 146 on the IPU's index of women in national parliaments at the end of 2021, having fallen from position 108 at the beginning of the year.

Cyprus does not have any special provisions for improving women's representation in politics. Moreover, at the 2021 election, major political parties did not field enough women candidates: less than a quarter (24.3%) of all candidates standing for election last year were women (a marginal improvement on 2016, when the same figure was 21.9 per cent). In fact, political parties argue that any form of gender quota would be against the Constitution²⁹ and have not shown any improvement in the share of women candidates in recent years, with women only accounting for 23 per cent of candidates³⁰ at the 2014 elections.

24 twitter.com/MFA_LI/status/1375349413305008130.

25 www.md.undp.org/content/moldova/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2021/record-pentru-numrul-femeilor-alese-in-calitate-de-deputate-i-al.html.

26 icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/politics_and_society/2017/10/30/fewer_women_in_iceland_s_new_parliament/.

27 www.icelandreview.com/news/parties-publish-candidate-lists-in-lead-up-to-fall-elections/.

28 apnews.com/article/immigration-middle-east-elections-turkey-germany-43bc5a77bfa406d9c526e5b24407b2bc.

29 www.financialmirror.com/2021/05/29/cyprus-not-closing-gender-gap-in-politics/.

30 www.akti.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Womens-Leadership-and-Participation-in-Decision-making.pdf.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Marching forward

Overview

In sub-Saharan Africa, women were elected to 29.2 per cent of parliamentary seats in the 10 countries that held elections in 2021, representing a 3-percentage-point increase on the previous share of women MPs in this same group of countries.

Women's representation in parliament improved in 7 of the 10 countries that held elections last year, while 3 countries – Ethiopia, Uganda and Zambia – registered declines.

As of 1 January 2022, sub-Saharan Africa ranked third behind the Americas and Europe in terms of women's representation in parliament, with women accounting for 25.9 per cent of parliamentarians across the region.

Last year also saw women appointed to top positions in the executive in the region. Samia Suluhu Hassan became the first woman President of Tanzania after she succeeded John Magufuli, who passed away in March 2021. In Uganda, meanwhile, President Yoweri Museveni named Jessica Alupo as Vice-President and Robinah Nabbanja as Prime Minister, as well as appointing a Cabinet with women accounting for 43 per cent.

Cabo Verde and Chad record high improvements

In **Cabo Verde**, women accounted for 37.5 per cent of all those elected in 2021 – the highest share among the 10 countries that held parliamentary renewals in the sub-Saharan African region in 2021. This figure represented an improvement of 14.5 percentage points on the previous election, held in 2016.

In 1999, Cabo Verde became one of the first countries in the world to introduce a quota system to improve women's representation in its politics.³¹ However, the law did not mandate strict quotas, but instead rewarded parties that gave more tickets to women. In November 2019, some 20 years later, a new law was introduced.³² Parties are now required to ensure at least 40 per cent representation for women and men on candidate lists,³³ with strict rules on alternating male and female candidates on these lists. At the 2021 election (the first held since the new law came into force), almost half of candidates (48.6%) were women, a decisive increase from 2016, when women made up just 13.3 per cent of candidates. Cabo Verde now ranks 35 on the IPU's index of women in national parliaments at 1 January 2022, a significant jump from position 75, which it held at the start of 2021 (before the election).

Chad, where the share of women in parliament increased substantially by 19.5 percentage points as compared to the previous renewal, was thrown into a political crisis after long-standing incumbent President Idriss Déby died just as the preliminary results of the April presidential election were announced. Following his death, the army announced the establishment of the Transitional Military Council (CMT) led by Déby's son, Mahamat Idriss Déby. An interim parliament, the Transitional National Council, was set up with a tenure of 18 months. It has appointed rather than elected members. Twelve groups were asked to send members to the Council, ensuring 30 per cent representation for women. As a consequence, there are 30 women among the 93 members, making up 32.3 per cent of the transitional body.

31 www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429284311-4/cabo-verde-aleida-borges-ragnhild-louise-muriaas-vibeke-wang?context=ubx&refId=2efcb8af-06a3-498b-86d8-6b01487df785

32 www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24824&LangID=E

33 www.nairobisummiticpd.org/commitment/cabo-verde-parity-law-gender-equity-and-human-dignity

The 2021 Cabo Verde electoral campaign: 11 April 2021 near Praia, Cabo Verde. © Seyllou/AFP



Ethiopia and Zambia see setbacks

Ethiopia caught the world's attention in 2018 when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed appointed a Cabinet with gender parity,³⁴ with women heading several ministries for the first time. In the same year, the Ethiopian Parliament elected Sahle-Work Zewde as the first woman President of Ethiopia. Just three years later, the country was making news for very different and troubling reasons: the conflict in Tigray, marked by the deliberate use of sexual violence against girls and women by various parties to the conflict.³⁵

Elections to both Houses of Parliament finally went ahead in 2021 after a delay of almost a year on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, and still under the shadow of the ongoing conflict. For security reasons, elections did not take place in a number of constituencies, including 38 in Tigray. Women made up 15.9 per cent of candidates for seats in the lower house, a drop from 29 per cent in the previous polls held in 2015. This decline in women's participation has been attributed to security concerns – including increased threats and intimidation, to which women candidates are more vulnerable – and to the extremely volatile security situation.³⁶ Among the 470 seats for which elections were held, 195 women were elected (a share of 41.5 per cent). In the upper house, meanwhile, women were elected to 30.6 per cent of the seats – 1.5 percentage points lower than previously.

In **Zambia**, women's representation fell by 2.9 percentage points to 15.1 per cent in 2021. Twenty women were directly elected, and two more took up seats in parliament through nomination. Three other women also became members of parliament through appointment to leadership roles. Nelly Butete Kashumba Mutti was appointed as the Speaker, becoming the first woman in the country's history to occupy that position. The Vice-President and Deputy Speaker roles were also taken up by women, taking the total number of women to 25 out of 167 MPs (in contrast to 30 women MPs in 2016).

Côte d'Ivoire registers minimal gains despite reform

Côte d'Ivoire elected the lowest share of women among the sub-Saharan African nations that went to the polls in 2021. Following the elections, women occupied 14.1 per cent of seats in the 254-member National Assembly, an increase of 2.8 percentage points on the previous parliamentary renewal. This minimal gain followed the introduction of new legal provisions on minimum representation, mandating at least a 30 per cent share of women candidates and requiring that party lists alternate men and women. Moreover, despite the law including incentives for parties that ensure parity among candidates, only 16.8 per cent of those standing at the 2021 election were women.

34 www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/08/27/eiep-ethiopian-womens-modern-rise-hits-ancient-glass-ceiling/.

35 news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1107122.

36 www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/LEOME%20Report%20of%20the%20June%2021%20Elections.pdf.

One of the reasons behind the poor implementation of the law has been a lack of sanctions for parties that do not comply. Another, more technical reason, according to analysis by *The Africa Report*, lies in a conflict between the Electoral Code and the implementing decree of the 2019 law.³⁷ Article 78 of the Electoral Code states that, in districts with more than two representatives, "the rosters of candidates must comply with the minimum 30 per cent female quota", otherwise they could be invalidated. The implementing decree of the 2019 law, on the other hand, requires parties to meet the 30 per cent quota even in districts with one representative, although it does not specify any penalties if they fail to comply. It appears that parties managed to contravene the rules without punishment in 2021 because of these contradictions and loopholes.

Asia: Timid gains

Overview

There was little progress in 2021 on women's participation in the **Asia** region, where women picked up 21.1 per cent of seats across the seven countries that held elections in the year – a marginal improvement of 0.8 percentage points.

Only Kyrgyzstan and Viet Nam registered increases in the share of women elected to parliament, while women's representation remained flat in Kazakhstan. In three countries – Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Pakistan – the share of women elected in 2021 declined relative to the previous polls.

As of 1 January 2022, women accounted for 20.7 per cent of parliamentarians across Asia as a whole – the second-lowest share of all regions and better only than Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This share has barely improved in recent times, with women's representation increasing by only 0.3 percentage points versus the same time last year.

Women's representation in the Asia region suffered severe setbacks in Myanmar and Afghanistan last year. In February 2021, a coup d'état saw the military seize control in Myanmar, denouncing the November 2020 elections as fraudulent³⁸ and declaring a year-long state of emergency.³⁹ Women comprised 15.3 per cent of members elected at the 2020 polls (a 5.4-percentage-point increase), but those gains were undone soon after. It has even been suggested that women's marginalization in the country's politics and public life may, in fact, have enabled the coup.⁴⁰ In Afghanistan, meanwhile, the Taliban seized back control in July and August 2021 as the United States-led force began withdrawing from the country. Soon after coming to power, the Taliban made it clear that there was no space for women in political life and appointed an all-male

37 www.theafricareport.com/65880/cote-divoire-women-underrepresented-in-parliament-despite-2019-law/.

38 www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-explainer-idUSKBN2A113H.

39 www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55902070.

40 theconversation.com/the-exclusion-of-women-in-myanmar-politics-helped-fuel-the-military-coup-154701.



On 28 November 2021 women cast their ballots at a polling station during the parliamentary elections, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. © Igor Yegorov/ Sputnik via AFP

government.⁴¹ Women made up 27 per cent of MPs in Afghanistan before the Taliban returned to power. Many of them have fled the country since the takeover.

Status quo in Kazakhstan, while gender gap widens in Japan

In October 2021, **Japan** held elections to its 465-member House of Representatives (the lower House of Parliament). Only 45 women were elected. This number was two fewer than in the outgoing house, with women accounting for less than one tenth (9.7%) of members. As of 1 January 2022, Japan ranked 165 on the IPU's index of women in national parliaments.

Japan has been noted for the consistently low representation of women in its parliament. Yuriko Koike, the current Governor of Tokyo and also the first woman to hold the post, once remarked that in Japan, there was no "glass ceiling" but an "iron plate" that was preventing women from participating and rising in the country's politics.⁴² Although her comment was made in 2008, it continues to be a succinct articulation of the state of affairs in the country to this day.

In 2003, then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi proposed a target of having 30 per cent women in leadership roles by 2020.⁴³ That goal was never met. In 2018, Japan passed a

new law⁴⁴ to encourage national and local governments to "attempt" to achieve gender equality among candidates as far as possible. However, the law contained no provisions for enforcing this vision. In 2020, the Cabinet proposed introducing a 35 per cent quota for women political candidates (not MPs) by 2030.⁴⁵

Despite these frequent vision statements, little has changed on the ground. Women made up 17.7 per cent of the 1,051 candidates who stood for election in 2021 – the same share as in the last poll in 2017. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) had one of the lowest shares of women candidates,⁴⁶ at just 9.7 per cent.⁴⁷ This compared with 18 per cent of candidates fielded by the Constitutional Democratic Party (the main opposition party) and 35 per cent of those fielded by the Japanese Communist Party. The LDP, which has long dominated the politics of Japan, has kept women on the margins.

In 2020, after then Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga appointed a Cabinet containing only two women out of 20 ministers, Tomomi Inada, a former defence minister, observed that Japan was "a democracy without women".⁴⁸ In 2021, the country elected its one hundredth Prime Minister – and also the one hundredth man to occupy the position.

41 edition.cnn.com/2021/09/09/asia/taliban-government-women-global-comparison-intl/index.html.

42 www.reuters.com/article/uk-japan-politics-women-idUKT19643320080907.

43 www.economist.com/briefing/2014/03/29/holding-back-half-the-nation.

44 thediplomat.com/2018/07/liberal-gender-equality-bill-passed-in-conservative-japan/.

45 www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/11/28/national/social-issues/female-politicians-quota/.

46 www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-20/japan-s-election-unlikely-to-bring-more-representation-for-women.

47 www.thenation.com/article/world/japan-womens-movement/.

48 www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/23/japan-is-a-democracy-without-women-says-ruling-party-mp.

In **Kazakhstan**, 29 women were elected to the 107-member Mazhilis (the lower House of Parliament), making up 27.1 per cent of all members. This was the same share as in the previous parliamentary renewal held in 2016.

Between these two elections, Kazakhstan brought in legislative reforms mandating a 30 per cent quota for women and youth on party lists.⁴⁹ The decision to introduce this combined quota came under fire, with critics arguing that two demographic groups that needed each other's support had instead been forced to fight over seats.⁵⁰ Moreover, because the quota system makes no mandates on positions in candidate lists, its effectiveness at increasing women's representation is weakened. Indeed, while there was an almost 9-percentage-point jump in the share of women contesting the 2021 election (28.9 per cent versus 20.1 per cent previously), this made no difference to the final share of women elected.

Middle East and North Africa: One step forward, two steps backward

Overview

The **MENA** region registered setbacks in women's representation in parliament in 2021. Overall, women took 18.6 per cent of seats in the five countries that held parliamentary renewals, a drop of 3.7 percentage points from their previous combined share of 22.4 per cent.

Two of the five countries saw a smaller share of women elected to parliament in 2021 relative to previous polls. One of these countries was Israel, where the share of women MPs dipped by 0.8 percentage points. In Algeria, meanwhile, women comprised just 8.1 per cent of members following the 2021 election, down from 25.8 per cent at the previous poll – a striking decline of 17.6 percentage points. This was the worst setback to women's representation globally among all countries that held parliamentary renewals in 2021, weighing heavily on the region's overall performance.

Women's representation did not exceed 30 per cent in any of the five countries that held elections in 2021.

As of 1 January 2022, women held 16.9 per cent of parliamentary seats in all countries in the MENA region – the lowest share across all regions and a 0.9-percentage-point decline on the figure recorded a year earlier. In fact, progress on women's representation in the region has been inconsistent in recent years, in contrast to other regions where the overall trend has been one of consistent, if slow, improvement.

In 2021, Tunisia appointed Najla Bouden as its Prime Minister,⁵¹ making her the first woman in the country to reach that position. Ms. Bouden's appointment resonated

49 astanatimes.com/2020/05/kazakh-government-commits-to-gender-quotas-mandatory-30-percent-women-in-politics/.

50 cabar.asia/en/how-parliament-of-kazakhstan-has-changed-from-majority-system-to-party-lists.

51 www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/oct/06/najla-bouden-what-next-for-tunisias-first-female-pm.

beyond national politics, since she also became the first woman prime minister of any Arab nation. Early in the year, Libya appointed five women to its Cabinet. While women held just 15 per cent of ministerial posts, Najla El Mangoush⁵² became the first woman to head the foreign ministry. A new government was finally established in Lebanon,⁵³ a year after the previous executive resigned in the wake of the Beirut blast. Only 1 of the 24 ministers was a woman – a sharp decline from the 30 per cent in the previous government.⁵⁴

Iraq and Morocco register gains

In **Iraq**, 98 women were elected to the Council of Representatives (the single House of Parliament), making up 28.9 per cent of members. This was the highest share of women elected in the country to date, marking a 3.7-percentage-point improvement since the previous election in 2018. Iraq has a legally mandated minimum of 25 per cent women in parliament – a quota that was comfortably surpassed in 2021. The share of women parliamentarians was similar to the share of women candidates (30%).⁵⁵

In **Morocco**, elections to both Houses of Parliament were held in 2021. Women were elected to 22.8 per cent of seats in the House of Representatives (the lower House of Parliament), up from 20.5 per cent at the previous election in 2016, while in the House of Councillors (the upper House of Parliament) women were elected to 12.5 per cent of the seats, representing a marginal increase from 11.7 per cent in 2015.

Morocco introduced a quota for its lower house in 2011, reserving 60 of the 395 seats exclusively for women.⁵⁶ This law was an extension of the 2002 charter signed by political parties that reserved 30 seats for women. While quotas have facilitated increased women's participation in the country, research indicates that the design of the quotas inhibits women from remaining in the House of Representatives.⁵⁷ This is because women are allowed to hold a seat on the reserved national list only once, meaning they have to contest non-reserved seats if they want to serve as MPs for more than one term. Women politicians interviewed as part of the same research said that male candidates were more likely to be established in those seats, and that political parties rarely gave women the resources and support they needed to effectively compete for their seats.

The upper house of Morocco, on the other hand, does not have any legal requirements on women's representation⁵⁸ and trails on this front. The share of women jumped

52 www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-government-women-idUSKBN2B32KE.

53 www.thenationalnews.com/mena/lebanon/2021/09/10/who-is-in-the-new-lebanese-cabinet/.

54 lebanon.un.org/en/143875-un-women-statement-response-womens-representation-new-lebanese-cabinet.

55 www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/braving-intimidation-hundreds-iraqi-women-run-parliament-2021-09-16/.

56 www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/200/35.

57 givwps.georgetown.edu/gender-quotas-and-womens-political-representation-lessons-from-morocco/.

58 www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/200/35.

significantly at the previous election in 2015, from 2.2 per cent to 11.7 per cent. But that momentum was not sustained, with women accounting for 12.5 per cent of members of the House of Councillors following the elections held in 2021.

A drop in Israel and Qatar

Israel saw a slight dip in the share of women elected to the Knesset (the single House of Parliament) in 2021, from 25 per cent to 24.2 per cent.

Israel follows a proportional representation system and does not have any mandates on women's representation in party lists. At the 2021 election, only one party – the Israeli Labor Party – fielded an equal number of men and women candidates on its list. It was the only party to achieve parity among its elected candidates, as well as the only party headed by a woman. Four other parties gave a third or more of their tickets to women candidates.

The Israel Democracy Institute attributed a “weighted representativeness score” to political parties based on the share of list slots held by women and the position of women on these lists for 2021.⁵⁹ The Israeli Labor Party was the only party to achieve a score of 50, an indicator of equality between men and women. This was a continuation of trends in past elections. While the share of women candidates has grown slowly over the years, it has never reached 33 per cent, according to analysis by the Knesset Research

and Information Center.⁶⁰ Moreover, the share of women in “realistic” or winnable slots on candidate lists is several percentage points lower. As a result, the share of women elected to the Knesset has stagnated in recent years.

Qatar held its first legislative election in 2021 to elect 30 members to the Shura Council (the single House of Parliament). Prior to last year's poll, all members had been nominated, not elected. There were 35 members in previous legislatures – all men, and all appointed by the Emir for a three-year term. The 2016 legislature was expanded to 41 members in 2017, with women (four in total) appointed for the very first time.

A total of 233 candidates contested the 2021 polls, including 26 women (11.2 per cent of all candidates). None of the women were elected. However, 15 seats were reserved for members appointed by the Emir, who selected 13 men and 2 women.⁶¹ As a result, women now hold 4.4 per cent of the 45 seats in the chamber – a very low level of representation and less than half the share of seats held by women prior to the election (9.8%).

Algeria registers a severe setback

In **Algeria**, only 33 of the 407 members of the National People's Assembly elected in 2021 were women – just 8.1 per cent of parliamentary seats and a 17.6-percentage-point drop from 2017. This was the most severe decline in the

59 en.idi.org.il/articles/34024.

60 m.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/mmm/WomenintheKnessetCompiledData.pdf.

61 www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/qatar-emir-appoints-two-women-advisory-council-after-men-sweep-polls-2021-10-14/.



Algeria's parliamentary elections in 2021 led to a sharp decrease in the percentage of women MPs following a reform in the quota law. © Ryad Kramdi/AFP

share of women elected to parliament anywhere in the world last year, despite the fact that women accounted for 36.8 per cent of candidates (up from 32.1 per cent in 2017).

The elections were held early after President Abdelmadjid Tebboune dissolved the National People's Assembly (the lower House of Parliament) a year earlier than scheduled. It was the first election to be held since 2019, when the country saw widespread popular protests that forced Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had been President since 1999, to resign. It was also the first poll since the country adopted a new Constitution in early 2021.⁶² Algeria recorded its lowest voter turnout on record, with just 23 per cent of the electorate casting their vote.

In 2011, Algeria introduced quotas reserving a third of seats in parliament and local government for women. In June 2021, President Tebboune's government replaced the quotas with a law that mandated parity among party candidates.⁶³ However, under Article 317 of this new election law, parties that did not meet the gender-parity requirement were only required to inform the election authorities, and could still contest the election. The new law also replaced the previous closed-list system with open lists, where voters could now choose candidates and not just the party. These changes were supplemented by a patriarchal campaign in which women remained invisible,⁶⁴ often having their faces blurred in campaign materials⁶⁵ and their photos replaced with blank avatars on ballot papers.

These developments led to a steep decline in women's representation in parliament: on 1 January 2022, Algeria ranked 167 on the IPU's index of women in national parliaments, having fallen from position 82 a year earlier.

Pacific: Between stagnation and setbacks

Overview

The **Pacific** region saw the most severe setbacks to women's representation in parliament in 2021. None of the three countries that held elections in 2021 saw any improvement in the share of women elected to parliament. Overall, women were elected to 5.4 per cent of parliamentary seats in the region in 2021, a drop of 2.3 percentage points relative to previous elections.

Women's representation did not even reach 10 per cent in any of the three countries in question. In Samoa, only four women were elected, holding 7.8 per cent of parliamentary seats. Tonga now has only 1 woman among 27 MPs (a 3.7 per cent share). And in the Federated States of Micronesia, not a single woman was elected at the 2021

polls. However, that changed later in the year when Perpetua Sappa Konman won a by-election in November, filling the seat vacated by her late husband and becoming the country's first woman parliamentarian in history.

The most notable development in the Pacific was the election of Fiame Naomi Mata'afa as Prime Minister of Samoa. In a part of the world characterized by such poor representation of women, Ms. Mata'afa's victory was historic not only for Samoa but also for the entire region. It was not a smooth process, however. In fact, an attempt was made to use a gender quota law to prevent her victory, but that attempt was rejected by the courts.

As of 1 January 2022, the share of women parliamentarians in the Pacific region stood at 20.9 per cent – the same figure as a year ago. Much of the progress made in recent years has been driven by Australia and New Zealand, while the Pacific Island States have the lowest representation of women in parliament.

Samoa gets first woman Prime Minister, but not enough women in parliament

The April 2021 election in **Samoa** was tightly contested. The Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) – the incumbent party led by Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, who had been Prime Minister for more than two decades – won 25 of 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly (the single House of Parliament). Meanwhile, *Fa'atuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi* (FAST), the opposition party led by Ms. Mata'afa, won 24 seats and secured the support of two independents, taking its final tally to 26. There were 5 women among the 51 elected members (9.8%).

Article 44 of the Constitution of Samoa (as amended in 2013) provides for a minimum 10 per cent of seats for women in the Legislative Assembly. If the number of women elected falls below 10 per cent, then losing women candidates with the highest number of votes become additional members to meet this quota.

In the wake of the result, the election commission announced that one additional seat would be created to comply with the quota. It awarded this seat to the ruling HRPP, leading to a tie. This was challenged by FAST and the court invalidated the additional seat, thereby clearing the path to victory for the opposition party. However, the crisis continued, and Ms. Mata'afa and her government had to wait until July 2021 to take charge. The Legislative Assembly now has just 4 women among 51 members (7.8%).

Samoa is the only country in the Pacific region that has some form of quota for women's representation in parliament. However, the chain of events that occurred in 2021 has initiated a debate and prompted a rethink of gender quotas in the country.

This crisis has been attributed to the confusing wording of the constitutional amendment that brought in the gender

62 www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/2/algerias-tebboune-signs-new-constitution-into-law.

63 www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/women-and-politics-algeria-one-step-forward-two-steps-back.

64 english.alaraby.co.uk/analysis/algerias-election-rejecting-stagnant-political-system.

65 apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-africa-algeria-boycotts-health-09c0a6054d2bfab42790310b121c3a28.

quota in the first place.⁶⁶ The three Supreme Court judges that heard the case in May 2021 disagreed over the minimum number of women that needed to be elected to meet the 10 per cent requirement (five or six). Since the HRPP had been the dominant party in the country's politics, few may have anticipated that the wording of the law could lead to a crisis. In the end, the Court of Appeal supported a more substantive reading of the law (improving women's representation) over a restrictive one (mere numbers), clearing the way for Ms. Mata'afa's victory.

The **Federated States of Micronesia** held midterm elections in March 2021 to elect 10 members of its 14-member Congress (the single House of Parliament). All incumbents – none of them women – were re-elected. There was only 1 woman among the 19 candidates standing, but she was not elected. This continued a long-running and disappointing trend of the country never having elected a woman MP in its history. That glass ceiling was finally shattered later, on 12 November 2021, when Ms. Konman won a by-election to fill the seat vacated by her late husband.

In **Tonga**, elections were held to elect 17 of the 27 members of the Legislative Assembly (the single House of Parliament). No women were elected, and the result left parliament with just one woman member (down from two previously, a fall of 3.7 percentage points). Twelve women contested the 2021 polls,⁶⁷ making up 16 per cent of the 75 candidates (a dip from 2017, when 17.4 per cent of candidates were women). Tonga has a long record of excluding women from its politics. Since 1951, Tonga has only had 10 women MPs (6 individuals, some elected more than once), according to an analysis by *Asia Pacific Report*.⁶⁸

66 www.policyforum.net/gender-quotas-and-the-2021-samoan-constitutional-crisis/.

67 asiapacificreport.nz/2021/11/20/no-women-elected-in-tonga-time-to-change-the-story/.

68 As above.

Women in top leadership of parliament

In 2021, 73 new Speakers were appointed or elected in chambers around the world. Only 18 of them were women (24.7%). No new woman Speaker was appointed in any country in the Asia, Pacific or MENA region. Among the 18 appointments and elections were a number of historical firsts: Kamala Harris was sworn in as the Vice-President of the United States of America and, by consequence, the President of the Senate; Nelly Butete Kashumba Mutti became the first woman Speaker in Zambia; and Jemma Nunu Kumba was chosen as the Speaker of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly in South Sudan.

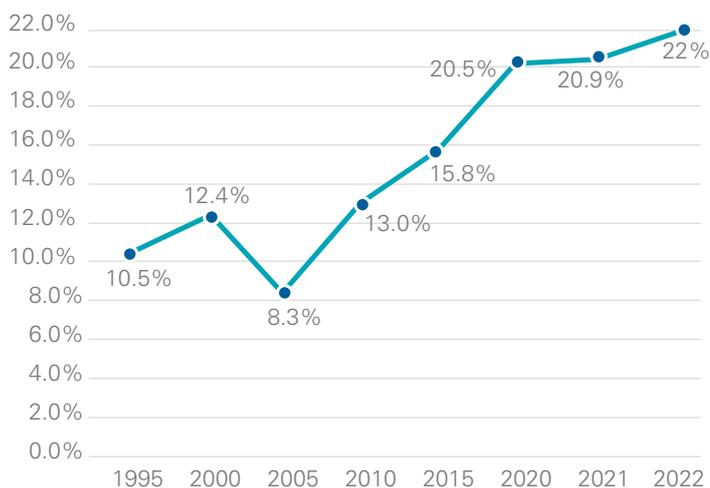
As of 1 January 2022, 22 per cent of all Speakers globally were women – an improvement of 1.1 percentage points as compared to their share a year ago. In absolute terms, the number of women Speakers increased from 58 in 2020 to 61 in 2021.

Only five countries – the Bahamas, Belgium, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States of America – had women Speakers in both chambers of parliament. Conversely, 43 of the 81 countries with bicameral legislatures had men serving as Speakers in both houses at the beginning of 2022.

While there were women Speakers in all parts of the world, their share varied greatly between regions. The Americas had the best representation of women in Speaker positions (35.2%), followed by Europe (28.6%). On the other side of the spectrum, there was only one woman Speaker in each of the MENA and Pacific regions (shares of 4.2 per cent and 6.3 per cent respectively).

Figure 3

Women Speakers of Parliament, all chambers combined
Progress of women Speakers 1995–2022



Proportion of women Speakers per region, 1 January 2022

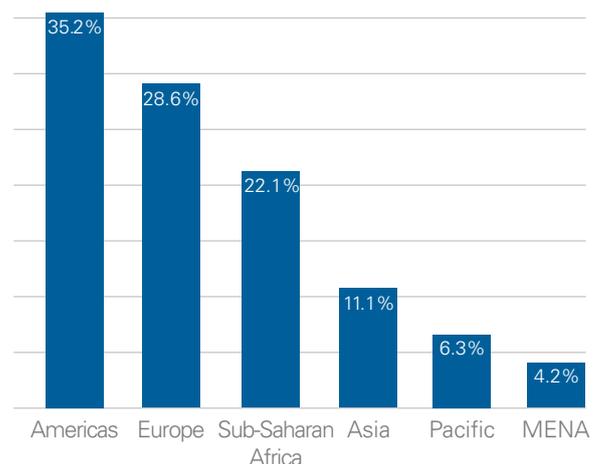
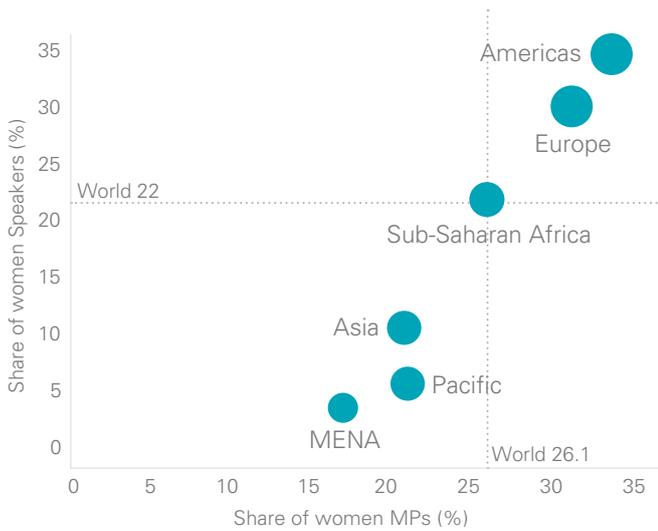


Figure 4

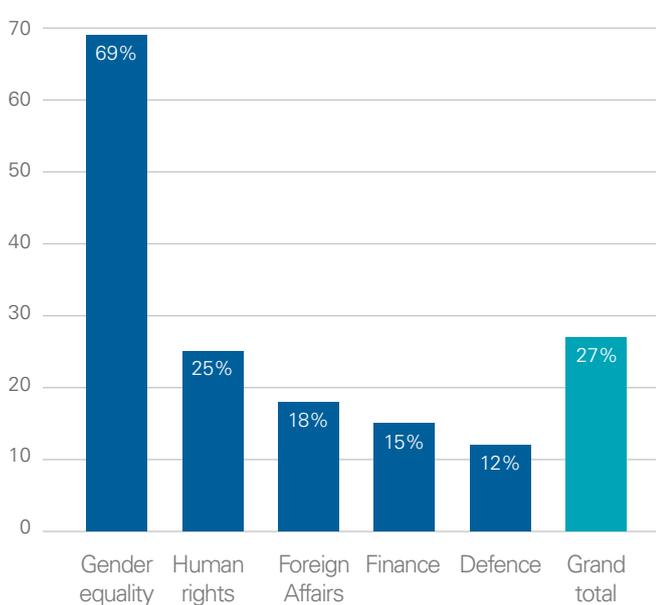
Regions with a higher share of women MPs also have a greater share of women Speakers (data as of 1 January 2022)



Women made up 25.9 per cent of Speakers of upper houses of parliament and 24.4 per cent of Speakers of lower chambers. The share of women Speakers was much lower in single-chamber legislatures, at 17.3 per cent. Moreover, as of 13 January 2022, only 27.8 per cent of Secretaries General of parliament were women (across all countries and chambers).

Figure 5

Proportion of women chairs of parliamentary committees (as of 31 December 2021)



As of 31 December 2021, some 259 of 959 chairs of five types of parliamentary committee were women (globally, across all chambers). Women were most likely to serve as chairs of gender equality committees (68.8 per cent women) and least likely to chair defence committees (12.4 per cent women). Women made up 25.1 per cent of chairs of human rights committees, 17.8 per cent of chairs of foreign affairs committees, and 15.2 per cent of chairs of finance committees.

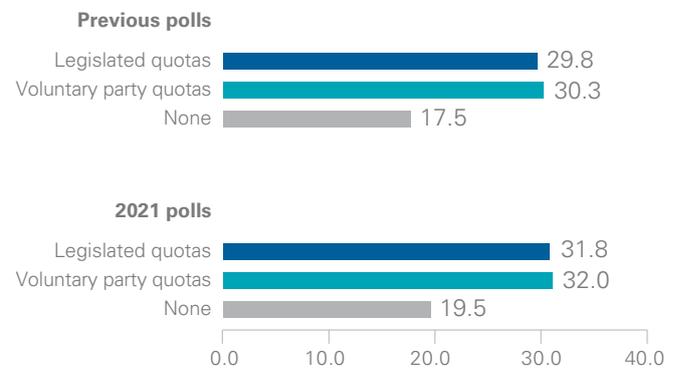
Impact of political structures and legal mandates

As in previous years, quotas appeared to be the most critical factor in determining women’s representation in 2021.

Among the 30 countries that had some form of quota system in place for the single or lower house, 31.9 per cent women were elected. This varied a little based on the type of quota – countries with legislated quotas⁶⁹ elected 31.8 per cent women on average, and those with only voluntary quotas adopted by political parties elected 32 per cent women. On the other hand, only 19.5 per cent women were elected in lower or single houses in countries with no form of legislated or voluntary quotas.

Figure 6

Share of women in lower/single house of parliament, by type of quota



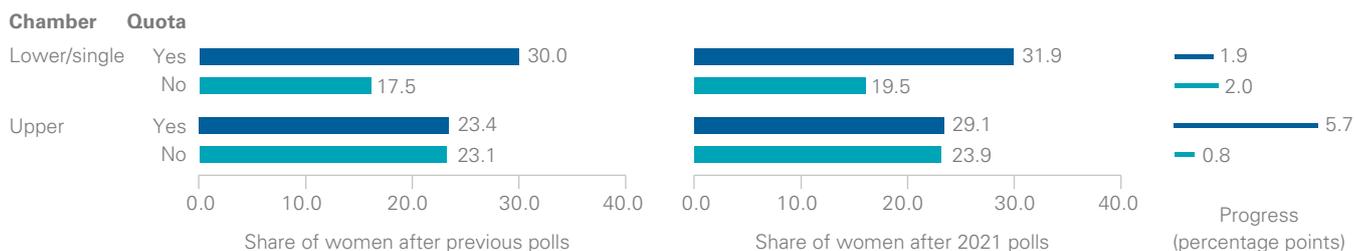
Note: “Legislated quotas” also includes countries which have voluntary party quotas in addition to legislated quotas

Among upper houses, meanwhile, 29.1 per cent women were elected in the four countries that had legislated quotas in place. In countries without any such affirmative action, 23.9 per cent women were elected to upper chambers in 2021. Upper chambers with some form of quota in place also made greater progress collectively – while women’s representation improved by 5.7 percentage points on average, the share of women in upper chambers with no quotas improved only marginally by 0.8 percentage points in 2021.

69 Includes countries which have legislated quotas and those with legislated + voluntary party quotas.

Figure 7

Share of women in parliament, by chamber and use of quotas



Note: "Yes" in quota indicates both legislated and voluntary party quotas

This gap occurred in every region. In the Americas, for example, women were elected to 38.2 per cent of seats in lower or single chambers where some form of quota existed, but only 14.5 per cent women were elected in the absence of any quota. In Europe too, women were elected to 34.8 per cent of seats in lower/single chambers where quotas existed, but women were elected to only 22.7 per cent of seats in the absence of quotas. In the MENA region, there was a 16.6-percentage-point gap, with women making up just 4.4 per cent of those elected in lower/single chambers with no quotas. The gap was narrowest in the sub-Saharan African region, where women were elected to 27.6 per cent of seats in lower/single chambers with some form of quota and to 23.7 per cent of seats in single/lower houses with no quotas.

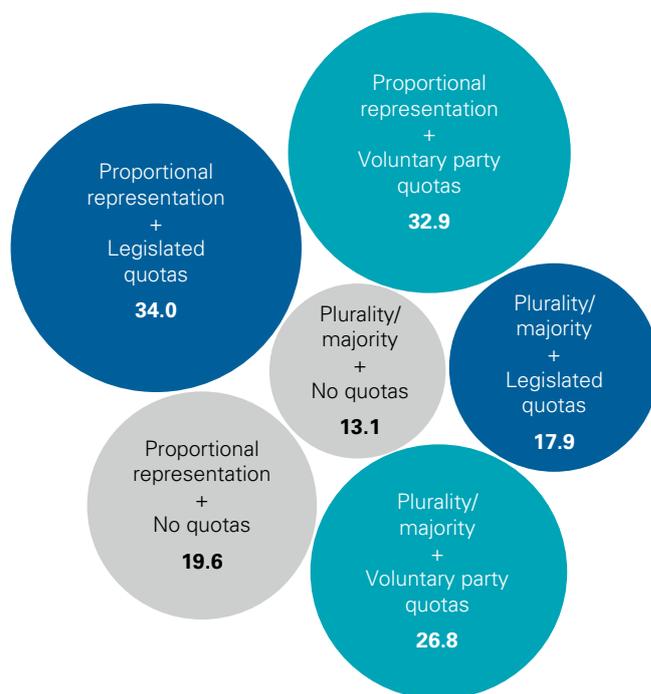
Another factor that seemed to have made a difference to the share of women elected to parliaments was the electoral system. In keeping with previous years, more women were elected in countries with a proportional representation system.⁷⁰ Some 29.4 per cent women were elected in lower or single houses in countries with proportional representation and mixed electoral systems, whereas in countries with a plurality or majority system, this share was 26.8 per cent. There was also a gap in the progress made – lower/single chambers with proportional representation saw an improvement of 2.2 percentage points, while those with plurality/majority systems improved by only 0.3 percentage points. The gap was wider when quotas are taken into account.

Although quotas can ensure a minimum level of women's representation, they did not always act as a shield against falling shares of elected women in 2021. Algeria, for example, saw the most severe setback to women's representation in parliament (17.6 percentage points) despite having quotas in place – and even though 36.8 per cent of candidates were women (up from 32.1 per cent in 2017). El Salvador also recorded a marginal decline in the share of women elected in 2021 when compared with previous elections, despite a quota requiring parties to field at least 30 per cent women candidates.

These examples underscore the fact that simply having a quota in place may not facilitate greater women's representation. To be effective, quotas must be clear,

Figure 8

Share of women elected in lower/single house, by electoral system and use of quotas



Note: "Legislated quotas" also includes countries which have voluntary party quotas in addition to legislated quotas. "Proportional representation" also includes countries with mixed systems.

well drafted and supported by enforcement mechanisms. In Algeria, for instance, a new law brought in before the election required parties that did not meet the gender quota requirement to merely inform the electoral authority. In Kazakhstan, a weak quota law did not enable any progress in the share of women elected in 2021. And in Samoa, confusion over the wording of the quota law created room for a political crisis.

70 Includes mixed electoral systems.



On 28 July 2021, Tanzania's first woman President, Samia Suluhu Hassan (left), at the State House in Dar es Salaam, during a mass vaccination campaign against COVID-19. © Stringer/AFP

The impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit women harder in a multitude of ways around the world. Yet few developments have turned the spotlight on women's political leadership to quite the same extent. In the early days of the pandemic, the success of countries led by women in mitigating the damage inflicted by the novel virus came into sharp focus, and that attention continued throughout 2021. There was added emphasis on understanding what made women's leadership effective during the global crisis,⁷¹ alongside calls to put women at the centre of all recovery and rebuilding plans going forward.⁷²

The gender differential in leadership emerged most starkly in Tanzania. Under President John Magufuli, the country remained in denial about COVID-19: it stopped publishing data on infections and deaths as early as May 2020⁷³ and declared itself "coronavirus-free" in June of the same year. This was despite repeated requests from the World Health

Organization for Tanzania to take the disease seriously⁷⁴ and to put out the numbers. Mr. Magufuli even discouraged health-care workers from mentioning the disease,⁷⁵ and said that the vaccine was dangerous and unnecessary.

Mr. Magufuli died in March 2021. He was rumoured to have contracted COVID-19 but his death was attributed to heart failure. He was succeeded by Samia Suluhu Hassan, who had previously served as Vice-President in the Magufuli government and became the first woman President of Tanzania. Since Ms. Hassan has taken charge, the country has moved away from COVID-19 denial and has actively taken measures to combat the spread of the disease.⁷⁶

Despite this increased attention and a growing body of evidence, the gender gap in representation in parliament remains wide. In 2021, the share of women MPs globally increased slightly from 25.5 per cent to 25.9 per cent. And while progress was made in many countries, the share of women elected to parliament slipped in others.

71 www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Effective-decisive-and-inclusive-Womens-leadership-in-COVID-19-response-and-recovery-en.pdf.

72 www.undp.org/blog/betting-womens-leadership-we-recover-covid-19.

73 www.bbc.com/news/56242358.

74 www.who.int/news/item/20-02-2021-who-director-general-s-statement-on-tanzania-and-covid-19.

75 www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/17/tanzanias-president-john-magufuli-dies-aged-61.

76 www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56944399.

Violence against women in parliament

A 2021 report on workplace culture in the Parliament of Australia made the following observation: “This is Parliament. It should set the standard for workplace culture, not the floor of what culture should be.”⁷⁷ While this dictum is applicable to parliaments everywhere, many deviated from this standard in 2021, proving that they were not safe spaces for women.

Last year saw several incidents of women MPs being physically harassed, often by their male colleagues and even during parliamentary sessions. Likewise, there were many instances of male parliamentarians using sexist language when addressing their female colleagues:

- In Tunisia, MP Abir Moussi was slapped and attacked by male colleagues over a disagreement during a parliamentary debate in June. This was not the first time that she had been physically assaulted – and nor was it the first time that a woman politician had been attacked inside the country’s parliament.⁷⁸
- Just a few weeks later, in Georgia, a male MP from the ruling party, Shalva Papuashvili, grabbed and picked up Tina Bokuchava, a female MP from the opposition, to prevent her from approaching the Speaker during a parliamentary session.⁷⁹

77 humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_set_the_standard_2021.pdf.
78 www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/07/tunisians-outraged-after-female-parliamentarian-slapped-islamist-colleague.
79 www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/666403-ana-nacvlshvili-sasesio-darbazshi-kali-deputatebis-mimart-ganxorcielebuli-aranormaluri-mokmedebebi-unda-gaxdes-shepasebis-sagani-rogorc-etikis-sabchos-aseve-genderuli-tanascorobis-sabchos-mxridan.

- Chief whip of the African National Congress, Pemmy Majodina, was kicked by Senegalese diplomat Djibril War while she was trying to intervene in a scuffle in the Pan-African Parliament.⁸⁰
- In Sri Lanka, male members from the ruling party sang lewd songs about one of their female colleagues,⁸¹ again in parliament, and the male Speaker allegedly laughed while this was happening.⁸²
- In France, as MP Mathilde Panot was about to speak during a debate, her male colleagues referred to her as “*c’est la folle*” (“a crazy woman”) and “*la poissonnière*” (“a fish lady”, a term used to refer to those who supported women’s participation in political life during the French Revolution).⁸³
- Idit Silman, a member of the Knesset in Israel, was told by her male colleague, Miki Zohar, to “answer like a good girl” when he entered a meeting late and asked her to update him on what he had missed.⁸⁴

In addition to these incidents of individual women being abused or attacked, 2021 was also a watershed year for shedding light on the toxic nature of parliament as a workplace for women in different parts of the world.

Australian politics was shaken up by allegations of rape and sexual misconduct in parliament. On 15 February 2021,

80 ewn.co.za/2021/06/01/he-cried-and-apologised-majodina-accepts-djibril-war-s-apology-for-kicking-her.
81 island.lk/singing-lewd-songs-in-parliament-mp-contradicts-speakers-denial/.
82 economynext.com/speaker-to-probe-alleged-verbal-sexual-harassment-of-sri-lanka-female-opposition-mp-84528/.
83 www.euractiv.com/section/non-discrimination/news/sexism-in-politics-french-mp-called-fish-lady-and-crazy-during-debate/.
84 www.timesofisrael.com/you-will-answer-like-a-good-girl-likuds-zohar-hurls-abuse-at-coalition-whip/.



On 2 September 2021, women took to the streets in Peru to demonstrate against sexism. © Ernesto Benavides/AFP

Brittany Higgins, a former parliamentary staffer, revealed that she had been raped inside parliament in March 2019. The incident, Ms. Higgins alleged, took place in the office of the Defence Minister, Linda Reynolds. Ms. Higgins also alleged that Ms. Reynolds had not been supportive, and had in fact discouraged her from filing a formal complaint.⁸⁵ More incidents of sexual assault inside parliament came to light following Ms. Higgins' revelations. Minister Christian Porter⁸⁶ was accused of raping a 16-year-old girl in 1988, while MP Andrew Laming was accused of bullying and harassing women online.⁸⁷ Women politicians shared their own experiences of sexism⁸⁸ and harassment⁸⁹ on different forums.

Women marched demanding justice,⁹⁰ and female politicians spoke up about the toxic culture in the country's politics. In response, the government reshuffled its Cabinet and created a new portfolio: the Minister for Women's Safety.⁹¹

In the aftermath of the allegations, an independent review was commissioned to understand the scale of the problem. In its report, the commission found that sexual harassment was widespread.⁹² Over half (51%) of all people working in parliament said they had experienced at least one incident of bullying, sexual harassment, or actual or attempted sexual assault. One third of those surveyed reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment: 63 per cent of female parliamentarians reported such incidents, compared with 24 per cent of their male colleagues.

Australia was not the only place with such concerns. A study by the IPU, in partnership with the African Parliamentary Union, highlighted the pervasive nature of sexism in African parliaments.⁹³ Based on confidential interviews with women MPs from across the continent, the study found that 8 in 10 had experienced some form of psychological violence in parliament, 67 per cent had been subject to sexist behaviour or comments, and 42 per cent had received death or rape threats, or threats of violence and/or abduction. Moreover, some 40 per cent of the women interviewed said they had been sexually harassed, and 23 per cent said they had suffered some form of physical violence. In Africa, as in Australia, these findings reveal that parliaments are not safe spaces for women in politics. The study found that most of the incidents of sexism, harassment or violence had taken place on the premises of parliament.

In June 2021, several women Members of the European Parliament shared details of the abuse and hate they had received online during a discussion in a plenary session.⁹⁴ In France, 285 women wrote an open letter in national newspaper *Le Monde*⁹⁵ demanding that there be no space for the perpetrators of sexual violence in the country's politics. In their letter, they pointed out that there were perpetrators of sexual violence in parliament too.

85 www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-56560666.

86 www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-56261504.

87 www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-56532248.

88 www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/mar/14/female-labor-staffers-share-details-of-workplace-sexual-harassment-and-abuse.

89 www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/female-politicians-reach-out-across-party-lines-for-support-20210317-p57bjf.html.

90 www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/tens-of-thousands-march-across-australia-for-womens-justice.

91 www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-29/cabinet-reshuffle-focus-on-women-politics/100036132.

92 humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_set_the_standard_2021.pdf.

93 www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2021-11/widespread-sexism-and-violence-against-women-in-african-parliaments-according-new-ipu-report.

94 www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2021-06-09-ITM-021_EN.html.

95 www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/11/15/nous-exigeons-que-le-monde-politique-prenne-enfin-en-compte-le-mouvement-metoo_6102086_3232.html.

Table 1

Women in lower and single chambers after parliamentary renewals in 2021

	Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	Quota
1	Nicaragua	91	46	50.5	Yes**
2	Mexico	500	250	50.0	Yes**
3	Iceland	63	30	47.6	Yes*
4	Norway	169	76	45.0	Yes*
5	Argentina	257	115	44.7	Yes**
6	Peru	130	52	40.0	Yes**
7	Republic of Moldova	101	40	39.6	Yes**
8	Netherlands	150	59	39.3	Yes*
9	Ecuador	137	52	38.0	Yes**
10	Cabo Verde	72	27	37.5	Yes**
11	Ethiopia	547	195	35.6	Yes*
12	Chile	155	55	35.5	Yes***
13	Germany	736	257	34.9	Yes*
14	Uganda	556	188	33.8	Yes***
15	Armenia	107	36	33.6	Yes**
16	Albania	140	47	33.6	Yes**
17	South Sudan	550	178	32.4	Yes**
18	Chad	93	30	32.3	No
19	Canada	338	103	30.5	Yes*
20	Viet Nam	499	151	30.3	No
21	Iraq	329	95	28.9	Yes**
22	Liechtenstein	25	7	28.0	No
23	El Salvador	84	23	27.4	Yes***
24	Honduras	128	35	27.3	Yes***
25	Kazakhstan	107	29	27.1	Yes**
26	Czech Republic	200	50	25.0	Yes*
27	Israel	120	29	24.2	Yes*
28	Bulgaria	240	57	23.8	No
29	Morocco	395	90	22.8	Yes**
30	Lao People's Democratic Republic	164	36	22.0	No
31	Kyrgyzstan	88	18	20.5	No
32	Bahamas	39	7	17.9	No
33	Russian Federation	450	73	16.2	No
34	Zambia	166	25	15.1	No
35	Cyprus	56	8	14.3	Yes*
36	Côte d'Ivoire	254	36	14.2	Yes*
37	Central African Republic	140	17	12.1	Yes**
38	Saint Lucia	18	2	11.1	No
39	Japan	465	45	9.7	No
40	Algeria	407	33	8.1	Yes**
41	Samoa	51	4	7.8	Yes**
42	Qatar	45	2	4.4	No
43	Tonga	27	1	3.7	No
44	Micronesia (Federated States of)	14	0	0.0	No

Note: * indicates one or more political parties adopted a voluntary measure to increase the number of women candidates. ** indicates a legislated quota (either candidate quota or reserved seats), and *** indicates both legislated and voluntary party quotas

Table 2

Progress and setbacks of women in upper houses of parliament up for renewal in 2021

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	% point change
South Sudan	84	27	32.1	+22.1
Saint Lucia	11	5	45.5	+18.2
Gabon	67	16	23.9	+4.9
Argentina	72	31	43.1	+4.2
Somalia	54	14	25.9	+1.9
Morocco	120	15	12.5	+0.8
Chile	50	12	24.0	+0.7
Pakistan	100	19	19.0	-0.2
Ethiopia	144	44	30.6	-1.5
Bahamas	16	4	25.0	-18.8
Turkmenistan	56	14	25.0	NA



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