



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Women in parliament in 2023

The year in review



Gender issues were prominent in several elections held in 2023. A protester in Poland holds a sign with the slogan “SMASH PATRIARCHY” (sic). © Artur Widak/NurPhoto/NurPhoto via AFP

Introduction

In 2023, progress on women’s representation in parliament was slow and mixed. Globally, the share of women MPs stood at 26.9% on 1 January 2024 – only 0.4 percentage points higher than it was 12 months earlier. This represented a similar rate of progress as in 2022, but slower than in the preceding years.

Parliamentary elections were held in 2023 for 66 chambers in 52 countries. In 32 of these chambers, women’s representation increased. The share of women fell in 19 chambers, and remained the same or changed by less than 1 percentage point in 15 others. In the countries that held parliamentary renewals in 2023, women accounted for 27.6% of elected MPs across all chambers – a 1.4-percentage-point increase as compared to the previous polls in these same countries. Cuba elected a female-majority parliament while the United Arab Emirates had a parliament with parity for the second consecutive time. In 19 chambers, women accounted for between one third and half of elected or

HIGHLIGHTS

- The share of women in national parliaments increased by 0.4 percentage points, from 26.5% on 1 January 2023 to 26.9% on 1 January 2024. This was a similar rate of progress as in 2022.
- In the 52 countries that held parliamentary elections in 2023, women accounted for 27.6% of elected or appointed MPs – a 1.4-percentage-point improvement as compared to the previous polls in these same countries.
- Women took 27% of elected or appointed seats in lower or single chambers in 2023, and 31% of seats in upper chambers.
- The Americas remained the region with the highest representation of women, who accounted for 42.5% of members elected to nine chambers in the six countries that held parliamentary renewals in 2023. Overall, as of 1 January 2024, women accounted for 35.1% of all parliamentarians in the region, across all chambers and countries.
- Eswatini recorded the highest progress in women’s representation among countries that held elections in 2023, with a 20-percentage-point increase in its upper chamber. It was followed by Benin and Sierra Leone, with increases of 18.5 and 15.9 percentage points respectively.
- Quotas continued to be a significant factor in women’s representation in parliament in 2023. The 43 chambers that had some form of quotas elected 28.8% women on average, versus 23.2% in chambers with no quotas. The share of women elected was the highest (33.5%) in chambers that had both legislated and voluntary quotas.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Electoral systems also made a clear difference in parliamentary renewals in 2023: countries using proportional representation or mixed electoral systems elected a higher share of women than those with a majority/plurality electoral system. The former were also more likely to have electoral quotas for women.
- At the end of 2023, six countries had parity (or a greater share of women than men) in the lower or single chambers of their parliaments. This was the same number as at the beginning of the year. Rwanda continued to lead the world with women accounting for 61.3% of parliamentary membership, followed by Cuba and Nicaragua with 55.7% and 53.9% respectively, while Andorra, Mexico and the United Arab Emirates had parity.
- In 49 countries, women held between one third and half of seats in the lower or single chamber of parliament at the end of 2023, up from 48 countries at the end of 2022.
- At the end of 2023, women accounted for less than 10% of members of the lower or single chamber of parliament in 21 countries, down from 22 at the end of 2022. This figure included two countries – Oman and Yemen – with no women MPs in their lower chamber.
- Globally, the share of women Speakers of parliament increased to 23.8% (up 1.1 percentage points) in the 12 months to 1 January 2024.

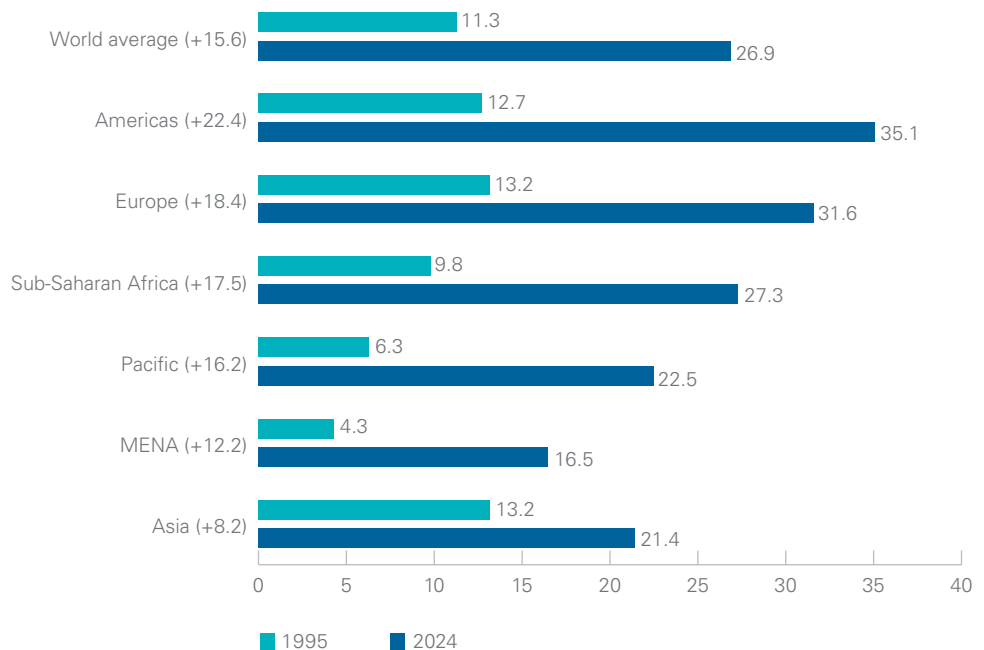
appointed MPs. In six countries, less than one tenth of seats went to women, while no female MPs were elected to the lower chamber of the parliament of Oman – the only chamber electing no women in 2023.

Beyond elections, the decision by several prominent female leaders to resign from their positions and/or quit politics highlighted the challenges of equal political participation.

Despite the disappointments, there was notable progress in certain regions and countries in 2023, often driven by electoral reform and institutional change. Women also reached historic milestones in a number of countries.

Figure 1:

World and regional averages of women in parliaments (%), 1995 and 2024



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data for all houses combined, figures correct as of 1 July 1995 and 1 January 2024 respectively. The baseline year of 1995 corresponds to the time of adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

There were some notable developments in regions around the world:

- In the Americas, women comprised 42.5% of all MPs elected, nominated or appointed in the chambers that saw renewals in 2023, the highest representation among all regions in the world.
- Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the highest improvement among all regions on women's parliamentary representation in 2023.
- In Europe, the share of women exceeded 40% in 7 of the 21 chambers that held elections in 2023.
- In Asia, progress remained mixed, with Kazakhstan recording a decline in the share of women MPs in its lower chamber.
- While the United Arab Emirates has parity in its parliament once again, setbacks in Oman and Tunisia held back progress on women's representation in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region.



Ecuadorians elected a record 43.1% women to parliament in 2023. The country has set incremental quotas for the top of candidate lists, with the ultimate aim of achieving gender parity. © Franklin Jacome/Getty Images South America/Getty Images via AFP

Regional trends

The Americas: The forward march continues

Overview

The Americas region continued to lead the way in 2023, maintaining its long-held position as the region with the highest representation of women in parliament. As of 1 January 2024, women accounted for 35.1% of all MPs in the Americas. The region is home to a number of countries with particularly high shares of women parliamentarians, including five – Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, Costa Rica and Bolivia – that rank among the top 10 globally in terms of women’s representation in parliament.

However, 2023 saw slower progress in the nine chambers in six countries in the region that held parliamentary elections: women took 42.5% of the seats up for election on average, which was only 0.7 percentage points higher than the share of women MPs following the previous renewals. Women’s representation improved in six of these chambers in 2023, while the share of women dipped in the other three (the lower chamber in Argentina and both chambers in Antigua and Barbuda).

Cuba, where women already held more than half of parliamentary seats, improved its record further: women’s representation jumped from 53.2% to 55.7% in 2023, with the country continuing to have the second-highest share of women MPs in the world, behind only Rwanda. Argentina placed second in the region, with women accounting for 45.8% and 43.2% of MPs in the upper and lower chambers respectively. Third was Ecuador, with women holding 43.1% of all parliamentary seats.

In 2023, there were a number of milestones in women’s leadership in the region. In Dominica, Sylvanie Burton was elected president, becoming the first woman and the first person from an Indigenous community to hold the position.¹ Christine Kangaloo was elected as only the second female president of Trinidad and Tobago. In Brazil, Sonia Guajajara, an influential Indigenous activist who was elected as an MP in 2022, was appointed as the country’s first-ever minister of Indigenous peoples in the newly elected government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, becoming the first Indigenous person to hold a ministerial role in the country.²

1 presidentoffice.gov.dm/president-of-the-commonwealth-of-dominica
 2 news.mongabay.com/2023/01/sonia-guajajara-turnaround-from-jail-threats-to-minister-of-indigenous-peoples/

Women's representation slips marginally in the lower chambers of Argentina, and Antigua and Barbuda

Argentina has long been a pioneer in women's representation in parliament. It introduced legally mandated quotas for women candidates in 1991,³ becoming the first country to legislate candidate-level gender quotas.⁴ Over the years, the law has ensured substantial representation of women in the national legislature. Several other countries in the region have followed in the footsteps of Argentina and introduced quotas of their own, and women's representation has touched, or even exceeded, 50% in some of them.

The progress enabled by quotas does, however, seem to be plateauing. In 2023, the share of women in the Senate of Argentina (the upper chamber) increased from 43.1% to 45.8%. However, women's representation in the Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber) saw a small decline in 2023. The chamber held a partial renewal, with 130 of its 257 seats up for election. Women were elected to 49 of these seats – a share of 37.9%. In contrast, women accounted for 46.5% of MPs elected to the seats in the 2021 polls. As a result, the total share of women among all MPs in the lower chamber now stands at 43.2%, down from 44.7% before the election held in 2023.

Antigua and Barbuda is a regional outlier: women's representation in parliament – and especially in the House of Representatives (the lower chamber) – has consistently been very low when compared to other countries. In 2023, only one woman was elected to the 18-member chamber, whereas the outgoing house had two female MPs. Women's representation has historically been higher in the Senate (the upper chamber), but the share of female members also fell following the 2023 renewal, which saw seven women appointed (41.2% of seats). By contrast, women made up 52.9% of the outgoing Senate.

Electoral reforms enable improved representation in Ecuador and Paraguay

In **Ecuador**, the 2023 elections saw an encouraging shift in trends. For many years, the share of women in the national parliament seemed to have plateaued, with women holding 38% of seats following the 2019 and 2017 polls, and 38.7% following the renewal in 2013. In 2023, however, 59 women were elected. This represented 43.1% of seats in parliament – a 5.1-percentage-point increase when compared with women's representation following the previous renewal.

The electoral law in Ecuador mandates equal representation of women on parties' candidate lists. While parties are required to alternate male and female candidates, there was historically no horizontal quota mandating an equal share of women at the top of candidate

lists. To address this, in 2020, Ecuador introduced a gender parity law⁵ that requires parties to progressively increase the share of women at the top of their lists. In 2021, the requirement was 15%. This was increased to 30% for the elections held in 2023. In 2025, parties will be required to ensure parity among candidates heading party lists.

Notable progress was made in **Paraguay**, where women's representation increased in both chambers of parliament. Eleven women were elected to the Senate (the upper chamber), representing 24.4% of seats, up 6.7 percentage points from the previous polls. Similarly, in the Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber), women's representation increased by 7.5 percentage points, with women now comprising more than one fifth (22.5%) of all members. This improvement happened despite the fact that women made up a smaller share of candidates in 2023 than in the previous polls. In 2018, over one third of candidates contesting seats in the lower chamber were women, while in 2023, this share was 26.2%. For the Senate, the share of women among candidates fell from 39.9% to 27.9%.

In 2023, Paraguay moved from closed lists to a system where voters rank their preferred candidates.⁶ This type of voting system has been shown to improve the chances of women getting elected.⁷

Europe: A year of mixed progress

Overview

In Europe, elections were held for 21 chambers in 17 countries. As a result of those elections, women's representation in this group of countries increased by 1.2 percentage points, from 30.7% to 31.9% at the end of 2023.

Following renewals in 2023, women held a higher proportion of seats in nine of these chambers, with Luxembourg, Monaco and Switzerland (upper chamber) seeing the biggest gains in the shares of women elected. Women's representation fell in five chambers, with the biggest declines in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Poland (upper chamber) and Switzerland (lower chamber). In the remaining seven chambers, women's representation remained the same or changed marginally (by less than 1 percentage point).

As of 1 January 2024, the overall share of women in parliaments across Europe stood at 31.6%, an increase of 0.6 percentage points as compared to the situation 12 months previously.

Andorra, which held a parliamentary renewal in 2023, achieved parity and ended the year with the highest representation of women in the region (and the fourth-highest in the world). In Estonia, Kaja Kallas was re-elected

3 iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/schwindtbayer2009_lsq_en.pdf

4 www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics-and-gender/article/abs/gender-quotas-and-womens-substantive-representation-lessons-from-argentina/7AA9E3D4D0DEB6754A4528FDCCD9811D

5 www.ifes.org/news/stronger-together-women-and-men-unite-gender-equality-ecuadors-political-parties

6 www.reuters.com/world/americas/paraguays-women-battle-break-political-glass-ceiling-2023-04-29/

7 www.representwomen.org/ranked_choice_voting_women_win

as prime minister, and Evika Silina was elected as prime minister of Latvia. With her election, all three Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – ended 2023 with female prime ministers.⁸ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Borjana Kristo became the chair of the Council of Ministers, while in Spain, women made up more than half of the ministers in the new Cabinet of the re-elected prime minister Pedro Sánchez.

Gains in Luxembourg and a landmark election in Estonia

Since 2016, **Luxembourg** has had a law in place mandating that women account for at least 40% of candidates on party lists.⁹ The 2023 renewal was the second election held since the introduction of this law. Women comprised 42.8% of all candidates running for the election and won 18 seats, making up 30% of all MPs – an increase of 10 percentage points versus the previous polls.

In **Estonia**, 30 women were elected to parliament, making up 29.7% of all MPs – a figure that was largely unchanged from the share in the previous polls. Kaja Kallas, who became the first female prime minister of Estonia in 2021, was re-elected to serve a second consecutive term. Women accounted for 32.6% of all candidates contesting the 2023 election, only marginally higher than the figure for the 2019 renewal (32.1%). The share of women candidates was higher than average among the three parties that eventually went on to form a government together: the Reform Party (36%), Estonia 200 (Eesti 200) (39%) and the Social Democratic Party (44%).¹⁰ The election was notable for other reasons, too: it saw the highest-ever turnout in the nation’s history and, for the first time, more voters voted online than in person,¹¹ with women comprising more than half of those who voted online.¹²

8 centraleuropeantimes.com/2023/09/all-three-baltic-countries-now-led-by-women-as-silina-becomes-latvia-pm/

9 www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database/country?country=130

10 news.err.ee/1608884594/women-s-representation-in-estonia-s-riigikogu-election-is-growing-steadily

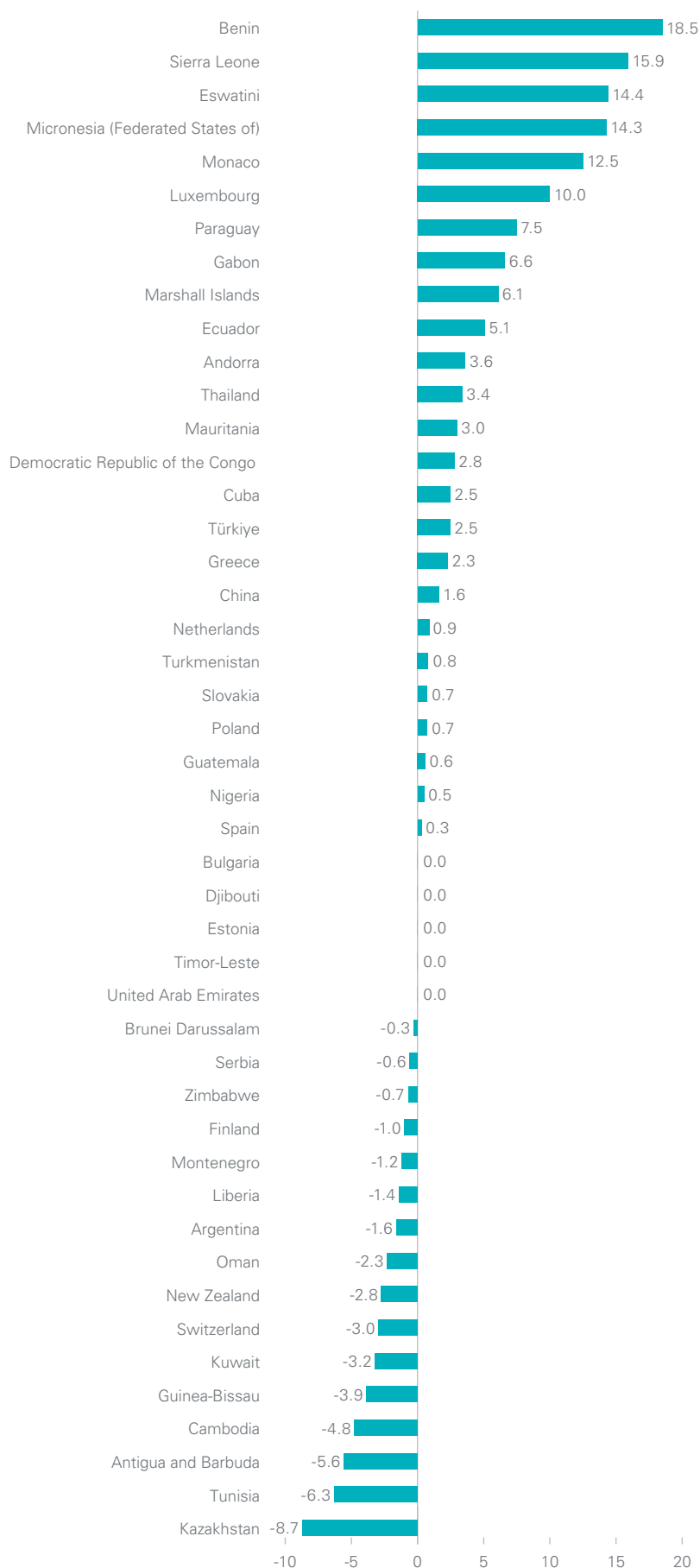
11 investinestonia.com/estonia-makes-history-with-i-voting-majority-and-record-female-presence-in-new-parliament/

12 www.valimised.ee/en/archive/statistics-about-internet-voting-estonia

Figure 2:

Parliamentary renewals in 2023

Progress and setbacks (in percentage points) of women in lower or single houses of parliament renewed in 2023





The 2023 elections in Luxembourg resulted in the election of 30% women MPs, a 10 percentage point increase from the previous polls but still well below the 40% candidate quota law. © Johanna Geron/AFP

An election with women's issues at the centre in Poland

In 2020 and 2021, **Poland** saw massive public protests against a court ruling that paved the way for severe restrictions on access to abortion. Polish citizens, especially women and young people, took to the streets demanding a rollback. The 2023 parliamentary elections were the first to be held in the country following the changes and protests. Women's representation in the Sejm (the lower chamber) increased slightly, from 28.7% to 29.3%. However, the share of women in the Senate (the upper chamber) fell by 5 percentage points, from 24% to 19%.

Women's participation and representation remained central to the election. Despite making up 44.5% of all candidates, women comprised just one quarter (24.9%) of candidates topping party lists.¹³ For example, while 40.4% of candidates standing for the incumbent Law and Justice (PiS) party were female, women only topped 24.4% of the party's electoral lists.¹⁴ The share of lists headed by women was higher for the main opposition party, the Civic Coalition (KO), at 41.5%. In fact, 48% of KO's candidates were women, and the party launched a campaign to actively promote its female candidates.¹⁵ For Third Way, the share of party lists topped by women was just 20%,

even though women formed 41.2% of the candidate pool. Additionally, women candidates faced a non-conducive environment, including sexual and physical threats and violence.¹⁶

PiS ended up winning the largest number of seats, while KO and Third Way won the second and third-largest numbers respectively. As a consequence, while the share of women contesting the 2023 election was high, the share of seats eventually won by women was lower.

Small gains in France and Türkiye

In **France**, 2023 saw a partial renewal of the Senate (the upper chamber), with 170 of the 348 seats up for election. A total of 65 women were elected, thus filling 38.2% of the seats at stake. After the election, women's representation in the chamber as a whole increased by 2.9 percentage points to 36.2%.

France has long had legislated quotas to ensure gender parity among candidates across political levels. In fact, it was the first country in the world to introduce a law mandating 50% representation of women among candidates.¹⁷ However, this long-standing legislation has not translated into parity among MPs. In the Senate, candidates are elected through either a majority vote

13 twitter.com/ISPThinkTank/status/1701219317302399338

14 notesfrompoland.com/2023/09/15/polish-opposition-launch-campaign-to-mobilise-female-voters/

15 Ibid.

16 www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/4/555048.pdf

17 www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database/country?country=76

system or a proportional list system, based on whether a district is electing one or two senators (the former) or three or more senators (the latter). Since there is no horizontal parity law, more men end up leading candidate lists, which translates into a male-majority chamber.¹⁸ Additionally, unlike the situation in other countries where candidate lists that do not comply with the gender quota are rejected, the law in France provides for financial penalties for parties that do not adhere to the law, enabling them to field fewer women by paying the fine.¹⁹

In **Türkiye**, 119 women were elected in 2023, representing 19.8% of all MPs. While this share was still low, it was nevertheless 2.5 percentage points higher than the figure following the previous polls held in 2018.

There are no legally mandated quotas in Türkiye, although some political parties have adopted voluntary quotas. Also, in 2023, political parties were less likely to place women at the top of their electoral lists, which further reduced their chances of getting elected.²⁰ For example, women comprised 18.8% of candidates standing for the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AK Party).²¹ However, only 4 of these 113 women candidates topped the party's lists. The Republican People's Party (CHP), the main opposition party, fielded 156 women candidates (26% of all candidates), but only placed 11 women at the top of its lists.²² On an encouraging note, the election saw a number of young women stand for election, including an 18-year-old.²³ The two youngest winning candidates were both women: Zehranur Aydemir (25 years old) and Rumeysa Kadak (27 years old).²⁴

Finland records a small decline in women's representation

In **Finland**, a total of 92 women were elected, making up 46% of the 200-member Eduskunta - Riksdagen, down 1 percentage point versus the situation following the previous poll.

Women's representation among candidates stood at 42.9% overall, with variations across parties.²⁵ For example, women accounted for 47.2% of candidates standing for the National Coalition Party (KOK), which won the most seats. But the Finns Party (PS), which won the second-highest number of seats, stood only 35% women candidates.²⁶

18 www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2023/09/24/french-senatorial-elections-a-guide-to-the-september-24-vote_6138887_5.html

19 www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2022/0617/Where-is-my-place-Women-push-back-against-French-politics-machismo

20 esik.org.tr/kategori/basin-aciklamalari/74104/kesinlesen-milletvekili-aday-listelerine-gore-yeni-meclis-te-33-ilden-kadin-vekil-olmayacak

21 www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/10/women-face-political-barriers-ahead-turkey-elections

22 Ibid.

23 www.trtworld.com/turkiye/a-look-at-women-and-youth-participation-in-turkeys-upcoming-elections-13145940

24 www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230516-womens-representation-in-turkiye-parliament-at-highest-level-in-history/

25 www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/23214-women-account-for-42-9-of-candidates-in-2023-finnish-parliamentary-elections.html

26 pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_evaa/statfin_evaa_pxt_13sr.px/table/tableViewLayout1/

By contrast, more than half (56.2%) of candidates standing for the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which won the third-highest number of seats, were women.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Two steps forward, one step back

Overview

In sub-Saharan Africa, elections were held in 2023 for 18 chambers in 13 countries. On average, 19.1% of those elected across the region were women – an increase of 3.9 percentage points when compared with women's representation following the previous renewals for these same chambers. This was the biggest increase recorded across all regions in the world in 2023. All in all, women's representation increased in 11 chambers, with some of the biggest gains recorded in Eswatini (upper chamber), Benin and Sierra Leone. In four chambers, women's representation remained the same (or changed by 1 percentage point or less), while the share of women MPs fell in three chambers: Guinea-Bissau, Liberia (lower chamber) and Nigeria (upper chamber).

Across the 13 countries that held renewals in 2023, the highest shares of women elected to parliament were recorded in the upper chambers of Zimbabwe (45%) and Eswatini (43.3%). By contrast, Nigeria elected the least gender-representative parliament in the region, with women making up only 2.8% of MPs in the upper chamber and 3.9% of MPs in the lower chamber following the 2023 polls.

At the beginning of 2024, the share of women in parliaments across sub-Saharan Africa was 27.3%, a 0.8-percentage-point increase relative to 12 months previously and the third highest among all regions in the world. A notable development was the appointment of Manuela Roka Botey as the first female prime minister of Equatorial Guinea.²⁷ She became the first woman to hold this position in the entire West African region. Another significant development was the election of Kandia Kamissoko Camara as the Speaker of the Senate of Côte d'Ivoire (the upper chamber) – the first time a woman had ever held this position.

Decisive steps forward in Sierra Leone and Benin

In January 2023, **Sierra Leone** enacted the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act, which introduced a mandatory 30% quota for women among election candidates.²⁸ A few months later – in July 2023 – the country held its first election with the new quota in place. Ahead of the poll, the IPU organized a series of workshops to promote the new law. These workshops included recommendations on a range of issues, including how to better support female candidates. Several MPs –

27 www.reuters.com/world/africa/equatorial-guinea-appoints-its-first-female-prime-minister-2023-02-01/

28 www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2023-01/sierra-leone-opens-door-more-women-in-parliament



In Benin, where a new electoral code adopted in 2019 introduced reserved seats, women now make up 25.7% of MPs, up from 7.2% in the previous polls. © Yanick Folly/AFP

male and female alike – as well as the women’s caucus of MPs advocated for their parties to include more women on candidate lists.

A total of 41 women were returned to parliament across the 135 seats that were up for election, representing 30.4% of directly elected MPs following the renewal. In addition, only one woman was elected among the 14 indirectly elected paramount chiefs in 2023. As a result, women accounted for 28.2% of the final 149 MPs – an increase of 15.9 percentage points versus the share of women elected in the previous polls held prior to the introduction of the new law.

In **Benin**, 28 women were elected to parliament, a historic high for the country.²⁹ Together, they accounted for over one quarter (25.7%) of all MPs, a jump of 18.5 percentage points versus the situation following the previous polls. This significant increase was the product of a constitutional amendment and the subsequent introduction of a new electoral code in 2019, which added 24 reserved seats for women in parliament.³⁰ As a result of this reform, which followed IPU-supported dialogue between parliament’s leadership and relevant stakeholders, women made up 26.3% of electoral candidates in 2023 – up from 8.4% at the previous election. At the beginning of 2023,

Benin ranked 169th in the world in terms of women’s parliamentary representation. By the end of the year, it had moved up to 87th position.

Disappointments in Nigeria

In **Nigeria**, women’s representation in the Senate (the upper chamber), which was already very low, shrank further by 3.7 percentage points in 2023. Only three women were elected in 2023, together representing just 2.8% of the total membership of the chamber. Women also remained vastly underrepresented in the House of Representatives (the lower chamber): in 2023, just 14 women were elected to the 358-seat chamber, accounting for 3.9% of all MPs – marginally higher than the 3.4% share recorded following the previous election.

In 2023, women comprised 8.4% of candidates running for the Senate and 9.2% of those standing for the House of Representatives.³¹ In fact, in 5 of the 36 states of Nigeria, there were no women candidates for the Senate. The likelihood of women standing for major political parties was even smaller, and analysis shows that 90% of women candidates in the 2023 elections across different political levels represented small parties.³²

29 www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/sdc/aktuell/newsuebersicht/2023/02/benin-frauen-nationalversammlung.html
30 www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database/country?country=24

31 www.vanguardngr.com/2022/09/2023-election-only-8-9-of-candidates-are-women-report/
32 carnegieendowment.org/2023/05/09/why-women-haven-t-been-successful-in-nigerian-elections-pub-89707

Table 1

Women in lower and single chambers after parliamentary renewals in 2023

| No. | Country | Total seats | Total women | % women | Quota |
|-----|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------|--------|
| 1 | Cuba | 470 | 262 | 55.7 | No |
| 2 | United Arab Emirates | 40 | 20 | 50.0 | Yes** |
| 3 | Andorra | 28 | 13 | 46.4 | Yes* |
| 4 | Finland | 200 | 92 | 46.0 | No |
| 5 | Monaco | 24 | 11 | 45.8 | No |
| 6 | New Zealand | 123 | 56 | 45.5 | Yes* |
| 7 | Spain | 350 | 155 | 44.3 | Yes*** |
| 8 | Argentina | 257 | 111 | 43.2 | Yes*** |
| 9 | Ecuador | 137 | 59 | 43.1 | Yes** |
| 10 | Netherlands | 149 | 60 | 40.3 | Yes* |
| 11 | Switzerland | 200 | 77 | 38.5 | Yes* |
| 12 | Serbia | 250 | 95 | 38.0 | Yes** |
| 13 | Timor-Leste | 65 | 22 | 33.8 | Yes** |
| 14 | Zimbabwe | 279 | 86 | 30.8 | Yes*** |
| 15 | Luxembourg | 60 | 18 | 30.0 | Yes*** |
| 16 | Estonia | 101 | 30 | 29.7 | No |
| 17 | Poland | 460 | 135 | 29.3 | Yes*** |
| 18 | Sierra Leone | 149 | 42 | 28.2 | Yes** |
| 19 | China | 2977 | 790 | 26.5 | Yes** |
| 20 | Benin | 109 | 28 | 25.7 | Yes*** |
| 21 | Turkmenistan | 125 | 32 | 25.6 | No |
| 22 | Gabon | 98 | 24 | 24.5 | Yes** |
| 23 | Bulgaria | 240 | 58 | 24.2 | Yes* |
| 24 | Mauritania | 176 | 41 | 23.3 | Yes** |
| 25 | Djibouti | 65 | 15 | 23.1 | Yes** |
| 26 | Greece | 300 | 69 | 23.0 | Yes*** |
| 27 | Paraguay | 80 | 18 | 22.5 | Yes*** |
| 28 | Slovakia | 150 | 33 | 22.0 | Yes* |
| 29 | Eswatini | 74 | 16 | 21.6 | Yes** |
| 30 | Montenegro | 81 | 17 | 21.0 | Yes** |
| 31 | Guatemala | 160 | 32 | 20.0 | Yes* |
| 32 | Türkiye | 600 | 119 | 19.8 | Yes* |
| 33 | Thailand | 500 | 96 | 19.2 | Yes* |
| 34 | Kazakhstan | 98 | 18 | 18.4 | Yes** |
| 35 | Tunisia | 154 | 25 | 16.2 | No |
| 36 | Micronesia (Federated States of) | 14 | 2 | 14.3 | No |
| 37 | Democratic Republic of the Congo | 477 | 61 | 12.8 | No |
| 38 | Marshall Islands | 33 | 4 | 12.1 | No |
| 39 | Liberia | 73 | 8 | 11.0 | Yes*** |
| 40 | Cambodia | 125 | 13 | 10.4 | No |
| 41 | Guinea-Bissau | 102 | 10 | 9.8 | Yes** |
| 42 | Brunei Darussalam | 34 | 3 | 8.8 | No |
| 43 | Antigua and Barbuda | 18 | 1 | 5.6 | No |
| 44 | Nigeria | 358 | 14 | 3.9 | No |
| 45 | Kuwait | 65 | 2 | 3.1 | No |
| 46 | Oman | 90 | 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

Nigeria ranked among the bottom five countries globally for women's representation in parliament and has consistently had very low shares of women in its legislature. Research commissioned by the IPU has identified a range of institutional and sociocultural factors that prevent women in Nigeria from being able to participate in politics on an equal footing.³³ These include gatekeeping by political parties, high candidate registration fees, the inconvenient scheduling of political meetings, the high cost of electoral campaigns, political violence and sexual harassment, clientelism (and, therefore, dependence on narrow networks of men), a ban on independent candidacies, and patriarchal social norms.

Since 2020, the IPU has supported the National Assembly of Nigeria in identifying and considering the best means to promote more equal and inclusive representation of women in parliament. However, none of the measures envisaged, such as the introduction of an electoral gender quota, had been adopted ahead of the 2023 elections.³⁴

33 Expert report produced on behalf of the IPU's Gender Partnership Programme as part of its cooperation with the National Assembly of Nigeria, July 2021.

34 www.ipu.org/news/statements/2023-02/more-women-needed-in-decision-making-in-nigeria

Pacific: Small gains

Overview

Three countries in the Pacific region held parliamentary elections in 2023: the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and New Zealand. Across these renewals, the share of women elected was 36.5% on average – marginally higher than the share following the previous polls (35.9%).

However, there was great variation between the three countries. New Zealand elected the highest share of women MPs (45.5%), while the Marshall Islands elected the lowest share (12.1%). In New Zealand, women's representation fell by 2.8 percentage points, while it increased in both the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia.

At the beginning of 2024, some 22.5% of MPs across the region were women – 0.1 percentage points lower than the situation 12 months previously. Yet this headline figure conceals a regional skew: excluding Australia and New Zealand, the average share of women MPs in the region was only 7.1%. Additionally, the Pacific was the only region where the average share of women MPs declined in 2023.



In 2023, Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke, a 21-year-old Māori politician, became the youngest person to be elected as an MP in the history of New Zealand. © Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images AsiaPac/Getty Images via AFP

Table 2

Women in upper houses after parliamentary renewals in 2023

| No. | Country | Total seats | Total women | % women | Quota system |
|-----|------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------|--------------|
| 1 | Argentina | 72 | 33 | 45.8 | Yes* |
| 2 | Zimbabwe | 80 | 36 | 45.0 | Yes*** |
| 3 | Eswatini | 30 | 13 | 43.3 | Yes** |
| 4 | Spain | 259 | 111 | 42.9 | Yes*** |
| 5 | Antigua and Barbuda | 17 | 7 | 41.2 | No |
| 6 | Netherlands | 75 | 30 | 40.0 | Yes* |
| 7 | France | 348 | 126 | 36.2 | Yes*** |
| 8 | Switzerland | 46 | 16 | 34.8 | Yes* |
| 9 | Congo | 72 | 23 | 31.9 | No |
| 10 | Cameroon | 100 | 31 | 31.0 | Yes* |
| 11 | Côte d'Ivoire | 97 | 24 | 24.7 | Yes*** |
| 12 | Paraguay | 45 | 11 | 24.4 | Yes*** |
| 13 | Gabon | 70 | 16 | 22.9 | No |
| 14 | Kazakhstan | 50 | 11 | 22.0 | No |
| 15 | Oman | 87 | 18 | 20.7 | No |
| 16 | Poland | 100 | 19 | 19.0 | Yes* |
| 17 | Bosnia and Herzegovina | 15 | 2 | 13.3 | No |
| 18 | Bhutan | 25 | 3 | 12.0 | No |
| 19 | Liberia | 30 | 3 | 10.0 | Yes* |
| 20 | Nigeria | 109 | 3 | 2.8 | 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

Some setbacks for women's representation in New Zealand

The biggest and most prominent election in the region was in **New Zealand**, which had attained some notable success on women's representation in politics in recent years, including electing one of the most diverse groups of MPs³⁵ despite not having legislated quotas, and appointing one of the most representative national Cabinets.³⁶

However, there were some setbacks for women's representation in the country in 2023. A total of 56 women took seats at the year's election, accounting for 45.5% of all MPs. By contrast, 48.3% of MPs were women following the polls held in 2020. In fact, in 2022, the New Zealand Parliament became female-majority after the election of Soraya Peke-Mason, which took the total number of women to 61 in the 120-member chamber.³⁷ As a result of this decline, New Zealand ranked 16th in the world for women's parliamentary representation at the beginning of 2024, down from 4th place a year earlier.

The New Zealand National Party, which won the highest number of seats at the 2023 election, had the lowest share of women among its candidates across all political

parties.³⁸ It also fared poorly on representation of diverse ethnic groups, having the lowest proportion of ethnic-minority MPs among political parties.³⁹ As a consequence, ethnic diversity in parliament also declined following the 2023 election. On a more positive note, the election saw a number of young women enter parliament.⁴⁰ They included Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke,⁴¹ a Māori politician who, at 21 years of age, became the youngest person to be elected as an MP in the country's history.⁴²

Small but notable gains in the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands

It was as recently as November 2021 that a woman entered the Congress of the **Federated States of Micronesia** for the first time in the Pacific island nation's history. Even though no women were elected during the midterm elections in March that year, history was made when Perpetua Konman was elected as an MP in a by-election in November 2021 for the seat vacated by her

35 www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/19/new-zealand-elects-most-diverse-parliament-boosting-female-lgbtq-and-maori-mps

36 www.ft.com/content/ccfc8195-aa97-4845-b16b-4f0762a168ed

37 www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/features/new-zealand-parliament-celebrates-majority-women-mps/

38 www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/133124359/a-lot-of-blue-suits-parliament-is-majority-male-again-after-nationals-election-success

39 theconversation.com/lost-voices-ethnic-diversity-in-the-new-zealand-parliament-will-decline-after-the-2023-election-217648

40 www.1news.co.nz/2023/10/16/history-made-as-2023-election-sees-young-women-cemented-in-politics/

41 www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/300980315/te-pta-mori-candidates-home-invaded-threatening-letter-left-party-says

42 www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/20/a-lot-on-the-line-new-zealands-youngest-mp-looks-to-maori-ancestors-to-build-new-future



In 2023, women were elected to 19.2% of seats in the House of Representatives of Thailand, a 3.4-point increase from 2019.
 © Valeria Mongelli/Hans Lucas/Hans Lucas via AFP

late husband. In 2023, women’s representation increased further: 2 women were elected to the 14-member parliament – a share of 14.3%. In all, 3 women contested the election, along with 26 men.⁴³

Following the 2023 election, there were four women MPs in the Nitijela, the parliament of the **Marshall Islands**, up from two women previously. As a result, women’s representation increased by 6.1 percentage points to 12.1%, the highest in the country’s history.

Asia: Sluggish progress

Overview

In Asia, parliamentary elections were held for nine chambers across eight countries in 2023. On average, women made up 24.7% of all elected candidates – an increase of 1.3 percentage points versus the share of women elected in the previous rounds of elections in these same countries and chambers. In Timor-Leste, women comprised 33.8% of all MPs elected in 2023, the highest share among the parliaments that saw renewals in the region in the year. At the opposite end of the spectrum was Brunei Darussalam, where only 8.8% of all MPs appointed in 2023 were women – the lowest among all Asian countries where parliamentary renewals took place in 2023.

Women’s representation increased in three chambers in the region in 2023: China, Kazakhstan (upper chamber) and Thailand (lower chamber). By contrast, it declined in another three chambers: Bhutan (upper chamber), Cambodia (lower chamber) and Kazakhstan (lower chamber). In the remaining three chambers – Brunei Darussalam, Timor-Leste and Turkmenistan – women’s representation remained relatively unchanged versus the previous composition (a change of less than 1 percentage point).

As of 1 January 2024, women held 21.4% of parliamentary seats in the Asia region. This was the second-lowest among all regions in the world and 0.4 percentage points higher than the share 12 months previously.

Small gains in Thailand

In **Thailand**, 96 women were elected to the House of Representatives (the lower chamber), making up 19.2% of the cohort of MPs – 3.4 percentage points higher than the share following the previous election in 2019. While this gain was encouraging, women continued to face resistance from their male peers in the political arena.⁴⁴ Only 18% of candidates in the 2023 elections were women.⁴⁵

43 www.forumsec.org/2023/03/30/release-forum-election-observers-complete-first-mission-to-federated-states-of-micronesia/

44 www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/21/a-new-generation-of-women-set-to-shake-up-politics-in-thailand

45 www.nationthailand.com/gallery/infographic/40027421

Setbacks in Cambodia and Kazakhstan

In **Cambodia**, women's representation – already low before 2023 – slipped further by 4.8 percentage points. In all, only 13 women were elected to the 125-member National Assembly (the lower house), down from 19 previously. Just 12.8% of candidates standing for the incumbent Cambodian People's Party (CPP) – the dominant force in the country's politics – were women. Although some other parties fielded a higher share of women candidates,⁴⁶ the CPP won 120 of the 125 seats in an election where the main opposition party⁴⁷ was banned from standing.⁴⁸

Women's representation increased slightly in the Senate (upper chamber) of **Kazakhstan**, from 18.8% previously to 22% in 2023. But there was a significant decline in the House of Representatives (the lower chamber): while 29 women were elected to the chamber in 2021 (27.1% of seats), only 18 women were elected in 2023 (18.4% of seats).

In the 2021 election, women comprised 28.9% of candidates. In 2023, this share fell to 23% (29% of candidates on party lists for seats elected through proportional representation (PR), and 20% of candidates vying for seats elected through a majority vote).⁴⁹ In 2020, Kazakhstan introduced a 30% quota for women and youth at the candidate level for elections to the House of Representatives.⁵⁰ Critics had cautioned against combining quotas for the two demographics.⁵¹ Additionally, the law did not have any mandates regarding the positions of candidates on electoral lists. Consequently, in the first poll held under the new law (2021), more women stood for election but there was no increase in the share of female MPs.

Following mass protests in January 2022, Kazakhstan undertook constitutional reforms that brought in a number of changes to the political system,⁵² including reducing the total number of seats in the lower chamber from 107 to 98.⁵³ The existing quota for women and youth was retained, and people with disabilities were included in the 30% requirement.

Women's underrepresentation was noted by international observers monitoring the 2023 election,⁵⁴ who found that

political parties had made limited attempts to promote women candidates. Many women therefore stood as self-nominated candidates, and were likely to face difficulties in accessing campaign premises.

Middle East and North Africa: Setbacks and disappointment

Overview

In 2023, elections were held for six chambers in five countries in the MENA region. Only 17.3% of MPs elected or appointed in these countries were women, down from 18.7% in the previous renewals for the same chambers. The United Arab Emirates once again elected a gender-equal parliament, placing it highest for women's representation among all the countries that held parliamentary renewals in the region. On the other hand, in Oman, no female MPs were elected to the lower chamber.

Women's representation increased in Mauritania and in the upper chamber of Oman, but declined in the lower chamber of Oman, as well as in Kuwait and Tunisia. There was no change in the share of women MPs in the United Arab Emirates, which remained number one in the region for women's representation in parliament.

As of 1 January 2024, the overall share of women MPs across the MENA region was 16.5% – the lowest of all regions globally and only 0.2 percentage points higher than the share 12 months previously.⁵⁵

Notable progress in Mauritania

In **Mauritania**, the share of women MPs increased by 3 percentage points following the 2023 election. A total of 41 women were elected, making up 23.3% of MPs – the highest share of female parliamentarians in the country since a record 25.2% women were elected in 2013.

Mauritania uses a mixed electoral system, with some seats following PR and the remainder elected via a majority-vote system. Since 2006, the law has reserved 20 seats for women in the National Assembly. Parties are also required to alternate between male and female candidates on their lists. Candidate lists that do not comply with the gender quota are rejected, and there are financial incentives for parties that have a higher share of elected women than mandated by the quota. In 2022, the country increased the statutory number of parliamentary seats from 157 to 176 and reserved 11 seats for youth. Lists for these seats must also alternate between men and women – a requirement that enabled increased women's representation in 2023.⁵⁶

46 kamnotra.io/en/succession/cambodia-election-2023/parties-candidates/

47 www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/19/cambodia-harassment-arrests-opposition-activists

48 apnews.com/article/cambodia-opposition-party-election-hun-sen-63659ff8f2de992d84d2be748afb8b

49 www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/2/539273.pdf

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

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

52 www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/16/kazakhstan-president-proposes-reforms-to-limit-his-powers

53 www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-07-20/kazakhstan-newly-adopted-constitutional-amendments-introduce-new-governance-model-and-strengthen-role-of-parliament/

54 www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/2/539273.pdf

55 As of 1 January 2023, the regional average for the MENA region did not include Tunisia, which concluded elections on 27 January 2023.

56 epc.ae/en/details/brief/mauritania-s-political-landscape-following-legislative-and-local-elections and alakhbar.info/?q=node/43045



The United Arab Emirates once again elected a gender-equal parliament in 2023, placing it highest for women's representation among all countries in the MENA region. © Waleed Zein/Anadolu Agency/Anadolu via AFP

A major setback in Oman

In **Oman**, women's representation and political participation received a major setback in 2023, when no women were elected to the Shura Council (the lower chamber of the Majles). This made Oman one of only two countries in the world with no female members in its lower chamber, down from two women following the previous poll held in 2019. A total of 32 women stood for election in 2023, comprising just 3.8% of all candidates. In comparison, the share of women candidates standing in 2019 was 6.3%. The situation was more encouraging in the State Council (the upper chamber), where 18 women were appointed as members, up from 15 previously.

Tunisia steps back from its promise of gender equality

In the wake of the Arab Spring, **Tunisia** enacted a new constitution in 2014 that enshrined the principle of gender equality.⁵⁷ The electoral law introduced in the same year required political parties to alternate between male and female candidates on their electoral lists.⁵⁸ This led to an increase in the share of female MPs, with 31% women elected in 2014, placing the country 30th in the world at the end of that year in the IPU's rankings of women's representation in parliament. However, this share

decreased to 22.6% of MPs following the subsequent election held in 2019.

In 2023, women's representation faced serious setbacks: only 16.2% of MPs elected were women. This decline was a consequence of a new electoral law enacted in 2022, which introduced several changes to the Tunisian political system,⁵⁹ all of which have been shown to have a detrimental impact on the chances of women getting elected. The new law removed the requirement for candidate lists to be gender-equal, as well as replacing the existing PR voting system with a single-member majority system.⁶⁰ The previous system of publicly funded electoral campaigning was also replaced by a private-funding arrangement, with candidates having to be endorsed by a unique set of 400 voters and to submit their campaign plan in advance.⁶¹ In addition to these constraints, women candidates faced resistance from their own families, as well as intimidation and threats from their male peers, all of which jeopardized their ability to participate in the elections on an equal footing.⁶²

57 www.unfpa.org/news/gender-equality-guaranteed-tunisia's-new-constitution

58 www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/02/tunisia-tramples-gender-parity-ahead-parliamentary-elections

59 *Ibid.*

60 www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/17/why-tunisia-elections-controversial-explainer

61 carnegieendowment.org/2022/10/11/tunisia-s-new-electoral-law-is-another-blow-to-its-democratic-progress-pub-88127

62 raseef22.net/english/article/1091355-haunted-by-threats-and-intimidation-women-on-women-candidates-are-first-victims-of

Quotas and electoral systems

Electoral quotas have been shown to play a critical role in improving women’s representation year after year.

Across chambers which had neither legislated nor voluntary quotas, women made up 23.2% of all MPs elected or appointed in 2023, down from 24% following the previous elections held for these same chambers. Conversely, in chambers with some form of quota, the corresponding share was 28.8%.

Quotas may be legislated or adopted voluntarily by some or all political parties. Sometimes, parties may adopt voluntary quotas above and beyond a legislated quota. In chambers where both legislated and voluntary quotas existed, women made up one third (33.5%) of all MPs elected in 2023 – up from 31.3% following the previous polls and the highest level of women’s representation regardless of quota type. In chambers with only legislated quotas,

the share of women was 27.2%, while in those with only voluntary quotas, it was 26.3%.

Quotas work best when they are designed and implemented in full spirit. As the examples of France and Mauritania show, quotas for candidate lists may not translate into high levels of women’s representation if they do not mandate placement rules – especially at the top of party lists, where the chances of getting elected are the highest. Attempts in Ecuador to progressively include mandates for parity at the top of lists are noteworthy in this regard, showing early signs of success in 2023. Meanwhile, as the example of Kazakhstan demonstrates, combining quotas for different demographic groups is not an ideal approach.

Quota systems gained further ground in 2023, with many more countries applying either newly introduced or expanded quota provisions. Benin and Sierra Leone held their first elections since the introduction of new quota laws, recording significant jumps in women’s representation in parliament, while Ecuador expanded its quota requirement for women at the top of candidate lists.

Figure 3:

Share of women in parliaments (%), all chambers combined, by type of quota

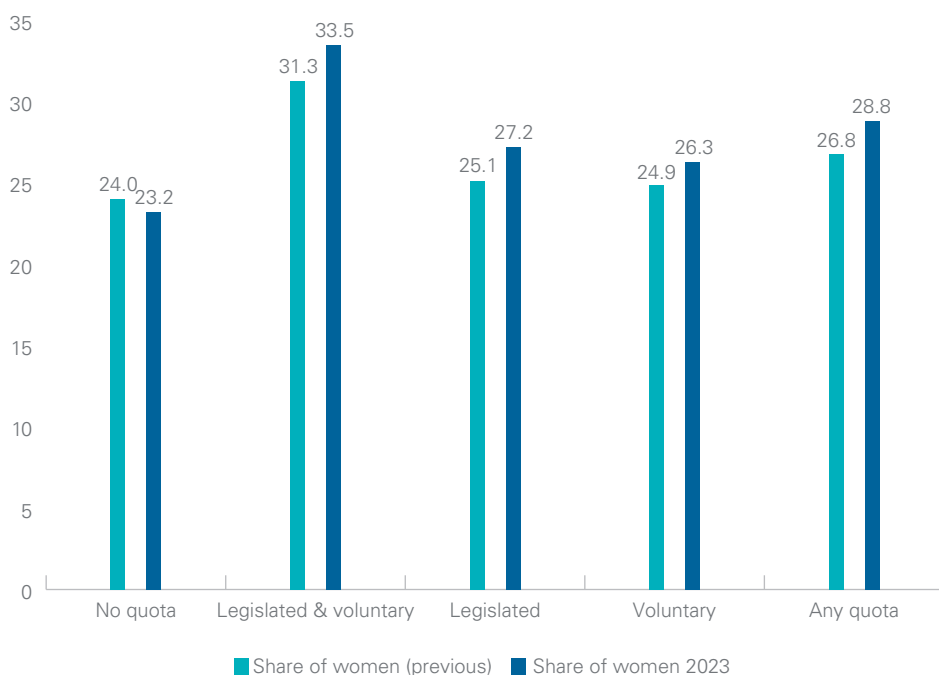
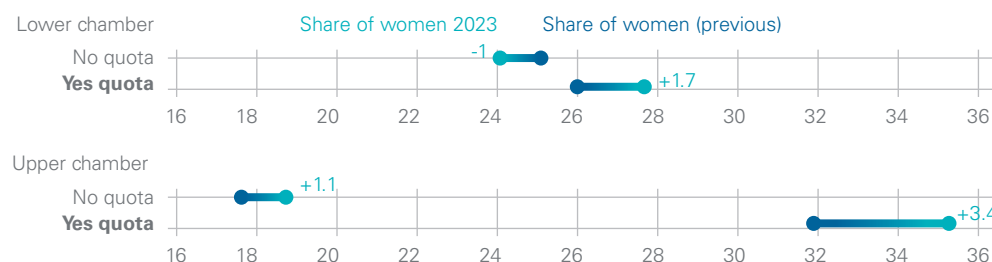


Figure 4:

Share of women in parliaments (%), by chamber and use of quotas





In 2023, Khuon Sudary was appointed as President of the National Assembly of Cambodia, becoming the first woman to hold the position. © Handout/AFP

Other countries introduced important reforms in 2023, which will be implemented in future elections. Mongolia, for instance, rolled out constitutional and legal reforms that are set to progressively increase the electoral quota for women among candidates from 20% at present to 30% in 2024, and to 40% in 2028.⁶³ India, meanwhile, passed a law reserving one third of all seats in the lower chamber of parliament and in state legislatures for women.⁶⁴ While this law does not mention a clear timeline for implementation, it is likely to boost women's representation significantly once it comes into effect.

There have, however, been some recent disappointments and setbacks on this front – most notably in Tunisia, where electoral quotas were removed and other changes were made to the political system, all of which adversely impacted women's representation. In Indonesia, the General Elections Commission tweaked a detail in its electoral quota rules that could have adversely impacted women's representation at the 2024 elections. However, this change was rolled back following demands from rights groups.⁶⁵

63 www.undp.org/mongolia/stories/momentum-here-mongolias-journey-towards-gender-equality-decision-making
64 carnegieendowment.org/2023/09/26/india-s-new-gender-quota-law-is-win-for-women-mostly-pub-90644
65 asianews.network/indonesias-election-commission-yields-to-demands-to-restore-womens-representation-rule/

Electoral systems also play a role in enabling or inhibiting women's representation, with PR and mixed systems tending to make it easier for women to get elected. In 2023, women comprised 28.7% of MPs elected to chambers with these electoral systems, up from 27.1% following the previous polls held for these same chambers. In contrast, in chambers with majority or plurality systems, women comprised only 11.6% of members elected in 2023, down from 12.4% at the previous polls.

Aside from the design of the system itself, PR/mixed systems are more likely to have quotas for women's representation, whereas plurality/majority systems are less likely to do so.⁶⁶ In 2023, of the 66 chambers that held elections, 35 used a PR/mixed system, with 30 of these (85.7%) having some form of quota for women. In contrast, among the 13 that used a majority/plurality system, only 4 had a quota.

Women in top leadership of parliament

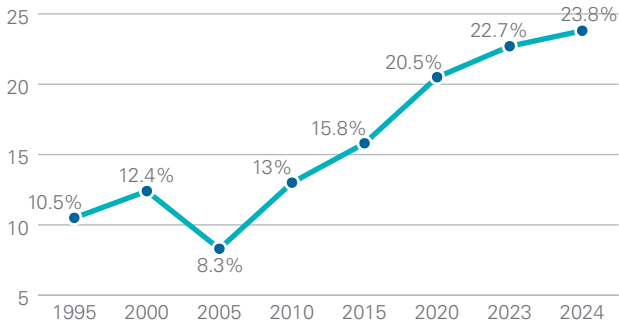
As of 1 January 2024, there were 64 parliamentary chambers led by women across the world. These female leaders comprised 23.8% of all Speakers, 1.1 percentage points higher than the share 12 months previously. Upper chambers were more likely to be led by women

66 www.electoral-reform.org.uk/proportional-representation-helped-women-get-elected-in-2022/

(32.1%) than lower/single chambers (20.2%). Additionally, one quarter (25.9%) of all secretaries general/clerks of parliaments were women, down from 27.8% in January 2022.

Figure 5:

Share of women Speakers of parliament (%), all chambers combined, 1995–2024



Again, as of 1 January 2024, women comprised 20% of Speakers of unicameral parliaments worldwide. In bicameral parliaments, the share of women Speakers was 26.4%, and there were five bicameral parliaments (the Bahamas, Belgium, Belize, Germany and Mexico) where both chambers were presided over by women. In contrast, of the world’s 77 bicameral parliaments, 42 had male Speakers heading both chambers.

In the Americas, over one third (34%) of all Speakers were women as of 1 January 2024 – the highest among all regions. The second-highest ranking region in terms of women’s representation among Speakers was sub-Saharan Africa (28.4%) – and women held 47.4% of Speaker positions in the southern Africa subregion. Sub-Saharan Africa was followed by Europe (27.1%), Asia (15.4%) and the Pacific (12.5%). There were no women Speakers in the MENA region as of 1 January 2024.

In total, 71 new Speakers were appointed in parliaments around the world in 2023. Of these, 16 were women (22.5%). In Cambodia, Khuon Sudary was appointed as President of the National Assembly, becoming the first woman to hold the position. A similar milestone was achieved in Côte d’Ivoire when Kandia Kamissoko Camara was elected as President of the Senate in another first for women in the country. In Turkmenistan, meanwhile, Dunyagozel Akmuhammedovna Gulmanova was elected as Chairwoman of the Assembly, becoming the youngest Speaker of a parliament across the world, as well as the youngest woman to lead a parliamentary chamber, at the age of 34.⁶⁷

As of 1 January 2024, women occupied 268 out of 984 chair positions across the five types of parliamentary committees included in the IPU’s Parline database (defence, finance, foreign affairs, gender equality and

Figure 6:

Share of women Speakers of parliament (%) by region, 1 January 2024

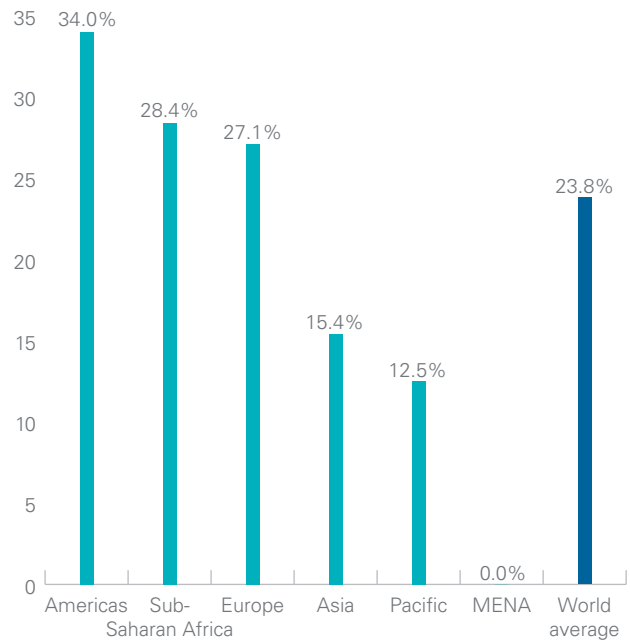
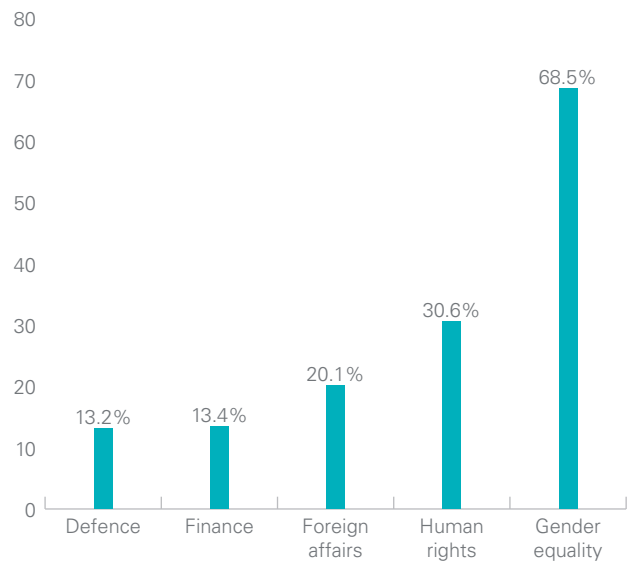


Figure 7:

Share of women chairs of permanent parliamentary committees (%), 1 January 2024



human rights). Women therefore made up 27.2% of committee chairs – an increase from 25.7% in 2022, but below the 2021 figure of 27.7%. The proportion of women chairs was lower (18.9%) when gender equality committees are excluded – marginally higher than in 2022 (17.4%) and in 2021 (18.5%). Globally, on average, women chaired between 13.2% and 20.1% of defence, finance and foreign affairs committees, 30.6% of human rights committees (up from 23.3% on 1 January 2023), and 68.5% of gender equality committees (up from 65.9%).

67 www.newscentralasia.net/2023/04/08/dunyagozel-gulmanova-is-youngest-head-of-parliament-in-the-world-her-election-shows-some-vital-changes-in-political-landscape-of-turkmenistan/

Figure 8:

Share of women committee chairs across themes (%), including and excluding gender equality)

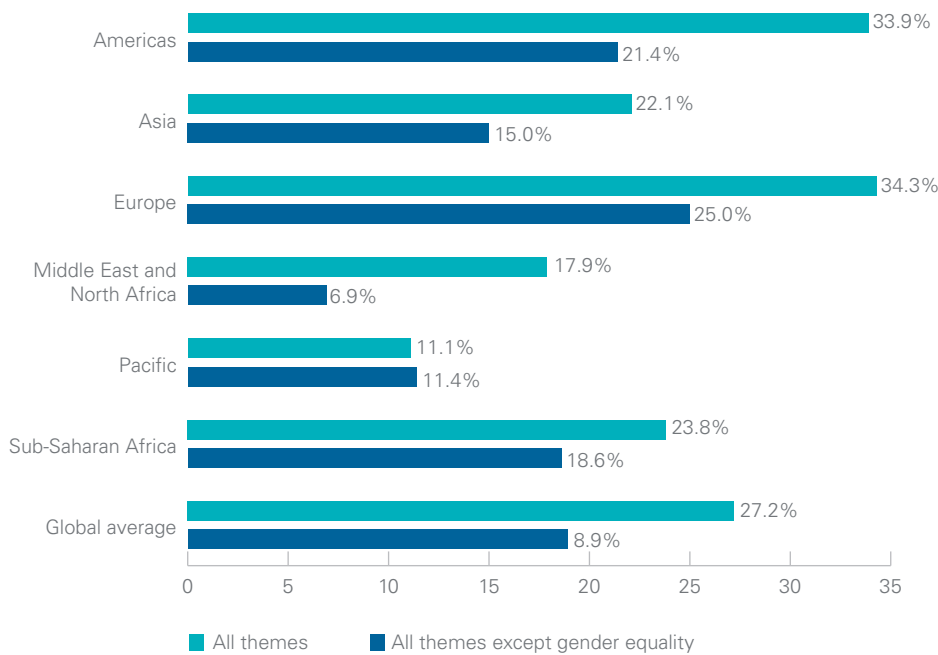
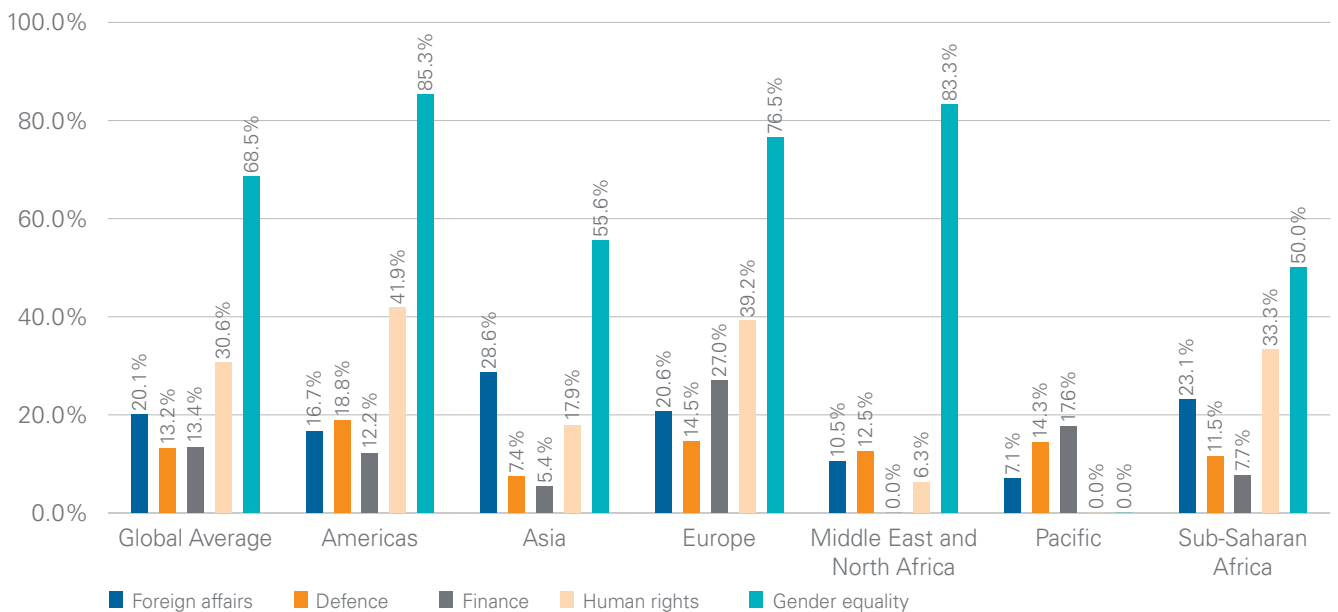


Figure 9:

Share of women chairs of select parliamentary committees (%)



Wide disparities existed across regions. As of 1 January 2024, Europe had the highest proportion of women chairing the five types of committees combined (34.3%), while this share was lowest in the Pacific region (11.1%). Sub-Saharan Africa was the only region with parity among chairs of gender equality committees, while MENA was the only region without a female chair of a finance committee. In the Pacific, no committee on human rights or gender equality was chaired by a woman.

Violence against women in politics

As the IPU’s research on this theme has revealed over the years, violence against women in politics remains alarmingly common across the world. Women parliamentarians and electoral candidates face hostility and violence both within parliament and in other political spaces. In an address at the annual meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2023, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that such acts



Australian MPs have been calling out sexual violence and sexist behaviour, including in parliament. © Saeed Khan/AFP

are meant “to perpetuate subordination and to crush the political activism and aspirations of women and girls”.⁶⁸ This violence can take many forms, from misogynistic comments to sexual assault and abuse, and even attacks on women’s lives. While political violence is not new, the digital world has emerged as an additional sphere to attack women in politics. Several women were once again targeted in different parts of the world in 2023. While the occurrence of such incidents remains a worrying concern, there were some encouraging attempts by parties and parliaments to address the issue.

Female candidates targeted with violence and disinformation

In Poland, where women’s rights were central to the election, female candidates were often targeted with sexual and physical violence.⁶⁹ A female MP who was contesting the 2023 parliamentary election was physically attacked by an unknown man,⁷⁰ another received death

and sexual-violence threats against her and her family,⁷¹ and fake photos showing another female candidate apparently kissing a man were circulated ahead of the polls. In Thailand, a male candidate photoshopped a female candidate’s face onto a nude model with the intention of damaging her popularity and discrediting her reputation.⁷² In Liberia, meanwhile, a photograph showing a woman candidate smoking a cigar was circulated online with the intent of questioning her credibility, with her opponent asking if this was the person voters would want their children to follow. The picture was accompanied by several sexist comments. Other women who were contesting the parliamentary election also faced similar experiences.⁷³ In New Zealand, young candidate Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke had her home broken into twice and received threatening letters. Other female candidates standing in the country’s 2023 election also faced threats and violence, including public and racially motivated attacks.⁷⁴

68 news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1138267

69 www.oscepa.org/en/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2023/poland-s-parliamentary-elections-were-competitive-but-marked-by-misuse-of-public-resources-and-public-media-bias-international-observers-say

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More women speak up

Several female parliamentarians came forward to report cases of sexual harassment. While some of these incidents occurred in 2023, others were examples of women sharing experiences of harassment that had occurred in the past.

In France, an investigation was opened against Joël Guerriau, a member of the Senate, for allegedly spiking the drink of fellow MP Sandrine Josso in an apparent attempt to sexually assault her.⁷⁵ Mr. Guerriau was subsequently suspended from the Horizons party, an ally of the ruling party. In the United Kingdom, a female MP from the opposition Labour Party filed a complaint with the police in 2023 against a colleague for sexually harassing her after a party in 2021.⁷⁶ In Australia, Lidia Thorpe, an independent senator, accused David Van, a male colleague, of sexual harassment and assault during a parliamentary session in 2021.⁷⁷ A day later, Amanda Stoker, another senator, accused the same male MP of sexual harassment in 2020.⁷⁸ Mr. Van was suspended from the Liberal Party in light of the allegations. In a media interview, Karen Andrews, a former Cabinet minister from Australia, shared her experiences of being harassed while she was an MP.⁷⁹ She also revealed that, when she had tried to raise the issue in the past, instead of receiving support, she had been told she was unable to take a joke.

While the high numbers of incidents continued to be a cause of serious concern, the fact that women were finally able to speak up and share their experiences of incidents that often happened many years ago reflected a welcome shift.

Parliaments are stepping up

This shift is being driven by a combination of various factors including the opening up of the conversation on sexual violence in the wake of the #MeToo movement and, subsequently, shrinking tolerance for such conduct. Several parliaments are also beginning to acknowledge the gravity of the issue and are continuing to introduce noteworthy measures in response.

Australia, for example, has taken several steps since 2021 when a number of serious incidents of sexual assault against female MPs and parliamentary staff came to light after Brittany Higgins, a parliamentary staffer, revealed that she had been sexually assaulted in parliament by a male colleague in 2019. In 2021, in response to these developments, an independent review⁸⁰ of parliamentary workplaces was commissioned, with the Australian Human

Rights Commission and the Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary Standards⁸¹ tasked with inquiring into and reporting on matters relating to the development of codes of conduct for Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces in 2022. In its report, the joint select committee proposed a number of recommendations and a code of conduct for parliamentarians.⁸² The Parliament of Australia has also released regular updates on the status of implementation of each of the recommendations.

In 2023, the Althingi of Iceland adopted a strategy and action plan against bullying and sexual and gender-based harassment. The documents complement and supplement the amendment to the *Code of Conduct for Members of the Althingi* adopted in 2019, which requires that MPs “shall not subject other members, employees of the Althingi or guests to any sexual or gender-related harassment or bullying or conduct themselves toward them in any other demeaning manner”.⁸³ The strategy and action plan – which were the result of extensive consultations with all the political groups in parliament, including their staff – set out preventive measures and provide guidance on how to process reports and handle cases. The key measures include regular training for MPs on bullying, sexual and gender-based harassment, and other demeaning conduct. The chairs of parliamentary groups, the secretary general of the Althingi and managers of the institution will be specifically trained on how to receive incident reports. Cases will be handled with expert advice to assess the situation and undertake possible mediation, while ensuring that the complainant has access to advice and support throughout the procedure. In the absence of agreement on the resolution of a case, the Speaker of the Althingi, after obtaining the opinion of the complainant, will refer the case to a code of conduct procedure.

In Benin, the National Assembly has been using an IPU and African Parliamentary Union study from 2021 on violence against women in parliaments in Africa⁸⁴ to raise awareness of the issue in parliament, in the media and among the general public. It has also appointed focal points to raise awareness on sexism and gender-based violence in parliament and to provide support to victims. A mechanism for handling complaints and applying sanctions has also been put in place in parliament, in partnership with the National Institute of Women.

In Ireland, a survey of 2,141 candidates who had stood in either the 2020 national or 2019 local elections found that women candidates were more likely to experience political violence than their male peers.⁸⁵ They were also more likely to experience political violence with sexual connotations. In response to the survey and media reporting on the issue,

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In Poland, women's rights were central in the 2023 parliamentary elections. © Wojtek Radwanski/AFP

the Parliament of Ireland set up the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life,⁸⁶ with the aim of identifying measures to safeguard and support participation and promote civil discourse in political life.

A case for institutional reform in Thailand

In Thailand, two male MPs from the Move Forward Party (MFP) – Wuttiiphong Thonglour and Chaiyamparwaan Manpianjit – were accused of sexual assault and violence by multiple female staff members. This development came a year after the country saw a serious conversation on sexual violence when Prinn Panitchpakdi, the deputy leader of the Democrat Party, was accused of sexual assault by multiple women.⁸⁷ Mr. Prinn was found guilty and received a custodial sentence.

Given that gender equality and addressing gender-based violence are part of the MFP's agenda,⁸⁸ the recent allegations led to scrutiny of the party's commitment to its stated principles. The party investigated the charges and both Mr. Wuttiiphong and Mr. Chaiyamparwaan were found guilty.⁸⁹ One was expelled by the party, while the other was initially put on probation but later expelled.⁹⁰ Both men later joined different parties,⁹¹ allowing them to retain their position as MPs. The MFP's investigation and disciplinary

measures show the importance of putting in place internal policies and mechanisms to enable women to come forward with their complaints. However, the fact that the MPs who were expelled on charges of sexual violence were easily able to join a different party and retain their seats underscores the need for a more comprehensive response above and beyond the internal policies of individual parties.

Gender issues in the elections

In recent years, women's rights have gained prominence in electoral campaigns around the world. The opening up of the conversation on sexual violence, especially after the #MeToo movement, has drawn attention to sexism within political spaces and institutions, sometimes emerging as an important conversation during elections (such as in Australia in 2022). Similarly, as more countries have moved – and are moving – to gradually liberalize access to abortions,⁹² women's reproductive rights have often become key electoral issues, particularly in countries where abortion remains a contentious issue.

In Poland, the 2023 parliamentary elections were the first to be held after a 2020 court ruling that severely restricted access to abortions. The court ruling came after the abortion laws were challenged by an MP from the ruling party, the PiS.⁹³ The decision was followed by massive protests across the country, led by women

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and young people.⁹⁴ The new laws have had profound consequences,⁹⁵ including the death of women who were denied abortions.⁹⁶

The issue was central in the 2023 election in the country. In fact, KO – the largest opposition party – argued that women’s rights were the “number one issue” in the election and promised to reverse the ban if they were voted to power.⁹⁷ Although the ruling party, PiS, received the highest share of votes, it did not gain a majority and was voted out of power. Analysis and reports⁹⁸ suggest that women and young people were key to this electoral outcome.⁹⁹

Argentina has also seen major reforms to its abortion law since 2020, when the National Congress voted in favour of a law that enabled legal access to safe abortion in the country. It was a landmark verdict that came after years of restrictive rules that had put the lives of many women at risk. Many women MPs who had voted in favour of the new law took to social media to celebrate the historic development. In 2023, less than three years after the new law was introduced, abortion was once again in the spotlight when Javier Milei, a leading presidential candidate, promised a referendum to determine whether to repeal the law.¹⁰⁰ Mr. Milei, who was ultimately elected as president, also vowed to shut down the ministry of women, gender and diversity.¹⁰¹ Many reports indicated that he received more support from male voters, especially young men, than female voters.¹⁰²

In Spain, gender rights remained in the spotlight with Vox, a conservative party, emerging as a critical player ahead of the polls.¹⁰³ The party proposed changes to abortion rules months ahead of the national election, as well as promising that it would work for the “elimination of all gender legislation” and that it would replace the ministry of equality with a family ministry.¹⁰⁴ Vox also claimed¹⁰⁵ that “gender-based violence against women doesn’t exist”¹⁰⁶ following a development in 2022, when Spain brought in

a law to punish sexual violence more strictly.¹⁰⁷ This claim prompted incumbent prime minister Pedro Sánchez to state that such a denial was a step backwards and that this was what was at stake during the election.¹⁰⁸ According to opinion polls, women voters were more likely to prefer Mr. Sánchez as a result of these statements.¹⁰⁹

Women quitting politics: A worrying trend in 2023

Women’s political leadership was a stand-out theme during the pandemic years. But 2023 stood out for a very different and concerning reason: the decision by several women leaders to step down from their roles and to quit politics altogether. Two common strands emerged in these announcements. The first was that the leaders who quit often cited burnout and fatigue.¹¹⁰ The past few years have been particularly challenging, with multiple crises impacting several regions, often simultaneously – from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, to inflationary pressures in several economies. The second was that female leaders frequently face the additional challenge of violence and personal attacks, which are becoming increasingly widespread and virulent with the advancement of digital tools.¹¹¹

In January 2023, Jacinda Ardern, then prime minister of New Zealand, announced her decision to step down from her position, citing burnout.¹¹² In April, she also stepped down from her parliamentary seat and did not recontest the parliamentary election in 2023.¹¹³ A few months later, Sanna Marin, the former prime minister of Finland who was voted out of power in the April election, also resigned as an MP¹¹⁴ and announced her decision to quit politics.¹¹⁵ In the Netherlands, deputy prime minister Sigrid Kaag announced that she was quitting politics, citing as her reason the death threats she had received, which had started to take a toll, especially on her family.¹¹⁶ Following Ms. Kaag’s announcement, two more prominent Dutch women leaders announced their decision to quit politics. The first was Liane den Haan, an independent MP, who said she wanted to quit politics over the ugly atmosphere.¹¹⁷

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In 2023, the IPU organized a panel discussion entitled “Women in politics: To stay or not to stay?”. The event brought together MPs from across the globe to discuss the challenges faced by women in pursuing a political career. © Parliament of Angola

Later, Carola Schouten, also a deputy prime minister and the interim minister for poverty policy, announced her decision to step down.¹¹⁸ Zuzana Čaputová, the president of Slovakia, also announced that she would not seek re-election after her current term ended in 2024.¹¹⁹ Ms. Čaputová, who became the country’s first female president in 2019, attributed her decision to not having the strength to continue for another five years.

Worried by these developments, the IPU’s Forum of Women Parliamentarians organized a panel discussion among women MPs from all parts of the world on the topic. Entitled “Women in politics: To stay or not to stay?”, it took place at the 147th IPU Assembly in October 2023. The participants examined the challenges faced by women when taking up a political decision-making position, and when pursuing a long and fulfilling political career. There was a consensus that women politicians faced additional pressures, harassment and intimidation, making it much more strenuous for them to sustain a career in politics. A key item that emerged from the discussion was the importance of peer-to-peer support for building resilience among politicians. The delegates emphasized the need to build more solidarity among women across party lines and

borders, in order to enable them to share their experiences, own their own stories and better support each other. Other recommendations included ensuring better representation of women and adopting codes of conduct.

Conclusion

Politics and parliaments have historically been gendered spaces. Women remain underrepresented in most parts of the world, especially in top leadership positions. However, the push for gender equality has gained traction in recent decades, often led by grassroots feminist movements, enabled by civil-society action, and strengthened by global commitments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals. As a result, the political arena is slowly but steadily changing.

Despite this shift, progress has not always been linear, with sharp contrasts between and within regions. An increasing number of countries have taken decisive steps to improve women’s representation in politics, with many reaching historic milestones on this front. Yet at the same time, other countries have rolled back progressive policies and stepped back from the vision of equality. But resistance to women’s leadership in politics exists everywhere. Worldwide, prominent female leaders are quitting politics altogether. In response to this, more and more parliaments are acknowledging the problem of violence against women in politics and taking steps to address this issue. In an overall context of backlash against women’s rights, gender issues are becoming increasingly prominent in elections.

Developments in 2023 once again illustrated these disparate trends, serving as a reminder that gains in political equality are still fragile, and that care and vigilance are required. Institutional reforms, whether quotas or codes of conduct, can only be effective if they are meticulously designed, and if their implementation and impacts are closely and consistently monitored. Parliaments and political parties alike will need to be proactive in rising to the challenge.

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Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

T +41 22 919 41 50
F +41 22 919 41 60
E postbox@ipu.org

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland

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