



# **RepresentWomen's Golden Year Analysis**

Record Wins for Women in Politics  
Worldwide (2021-2022)

by Fatma Tawfik

October 2023 | REPRESENTWOMEN

RepresentWomen is a U.S.-based research organization that studies the impact of major systems-level interventions on women’s political representation in the U.S. and abroad. Our work entails monitoring parliamentary elections and benchmarking outcomes for women each year. In 2021 and 2022, we identified 43 elections where women achieved record highs for their representation in national parliaments, making these “golden years” for women’s political representation. The following analysis highlights how election rules and voting systems shape opportunities for women to enter politics worldwide and informs our blueprint for reform in the United States. For additional information, contact:

**RepresentWomen**

8484 Georgia Avenue, Suite 240

Silver Spring, MD 20910

[www.representwomen.org](http://www.representwomen.org)

[info@representwomen.org](mailto:info@representwomen.org)

**Authors:** Fatma Tawfik

**Contributors:** Cynthia Richie Terrell, Courtney Lamendola, Steph Scaglia, Katie Usalis, Alissa Bombardier Shaw, and Nora Weiss.

**Key References & Acknowledgements:**

(1) RepresentWomen acknowledges that not all countries with high levels of women’s political representation have free and fair democracies. While we may use the contents of this paper to inform our call for systemic reform in the United States, this analysis does not constitute our endorsement of any other country’s regime.

(2) We similarly acknowledge that our work does not end when more women are elected; not all women in office have an equal voice in government. This analysis highlights countries that have made record-breaking progress in electing more women and identifies the mechanisms that shape opportunities for women to enter government. It is beyond the scope of this analysis to assert which countries have created the best environment for women in politics.

(3) Data on women’s representation in national parliaments is courtesy of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Information on gender quotas is courtesy of the International IDEA’s Gender Quota Database. All other major sources are cited throughout the analysis via footnotes.

(4) The data on women’s representation in national parliaments was pulled from the IPU in January 2022 for the 2021 elections and January 2023 for 2022. Minor discrepancies in the data may reflect vacancies, appointments, and special elections. Direct queries to our team at [info@representwomen.org](mailto:info@representwomen.org).

## Introduction

RepresentWomen has been studying women's political representation around the world for five years. Through our research, we have found that, while new records for women in politics are broken every year, just 3% of national parliaments are gender balanced.<sup>1</sup> As is the case in the United States,<sup>2</sup> global progress toward gender balance in politics is slow and uneven. However, there are cases where a country makes significant progress in a relatively short period, sometimes even a single election cycle. We developed the “golden year” framework to highlight these cases and draw attention to the factors (i.e., election rules and voting systems) that led to record-breaking elections for women in national office.

Between 2021 and 2022, 85 countries held elections for their lower houses of parliament.<sup>3</sup> In 43 of these countries, a record number of women were elected. Per our framework, when a record number of women are elected in a parliamentary election, this constitutes a “golden year” for women's political representation in that country.<sup>4</sup> Through the use of case studies, the following analysis hones in on the role that systems-level factors, such as election rules and voting systems, play in creating opportunities for more women to be elected worldwide.

Through this analysis, we found that:

1. **Countries are breaking records for women's representation each year.** Of 85 countries that held elections in 2021 and 2022, 43 broke records for women's political representation records and achieved “golden years.”
2. **Not all “record-breaking” progress is significant.** While some countries have made considerable gains in women's representation in a short period, others, including the United States, are making incremental progress.
3. **The countries that have made the most progress adopted gender quotas.** Additionally, 65% of countries that attained a golden year have either proportional (PR) or semi-proportional (semi-PR) voting systems. This finding echoes previous research that has established a positive relationship between gender quotas, proportional representation, and women's representation.<sup>5</sup>
4. **Repealing quotas negatively impacts women's representation in politics.** While the countries that made the greatest progress toward gender balance adopted gender quotas, those that repealed quotas experienced an immediate decline in women's representation. In addition to reaffirming the impact that quotas have on women's representation, this finding suggests that quotas alone don't resolve all barriers to representation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Six countries out of 186 have at least 50% or more women in their national parliaments, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). “Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments,” Inter-Parliamentary Union ([March 2023](#)).

<sup>2</sup> Courtney Lamendola and Steph Scaglia. “Gender Parity Index: the Status of Women's Representation in 2023” RepresentWomen (August 2023).

<sup>3</sup> “Recent and Upcoming Elections: 2021” IFES ([Accessed 31 March 2023](#)).

<sup>4</sup> The term “golden year” was inspired by the Academy Awards.

<sup>5</sup> Courtney Lamendola, Fatma Tawfik, Marvelous Maeze, and Steph Scaglia. “Voting Systems and Women's Representation: Lessons from Around the World and the Case for Proportional Ranked Choice Voting in the United States” RepresentWomen ([8 March 2023](#)).



<b>Countries that achieved their highest record in women representation in 2021 <sup>6</sup></b>			
<b>Country</b>	<b>Record in 2021</b>	<b>Previous Record</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>Chad</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>15.8%</b>
<b>Republic of Moldova</b>	<b>40.6%</b>	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>14.9%</b>
<b>Cabo Verde</b>	<b>38.9%</b>	<b>26.4%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>
<b>Armenia</b>	<b>34.6%</b>	<b>24.2%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>
<b>Peru</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>10.0%</b>
<b>Albania</b>	<b>35.7%</b>	<b>29.5%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>
<b>Liechtenstein</b>	<b>28.0%</b>	<b>24.0%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>
<b>South Sudan</b>	<b>32.4%</b>	<b>28.5%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>
<b>Morocco</b>	<b>24.1%</b>	<b>20.5%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>
<b>Viet Nam</b>	<b>30.3%</b>	<b>26.8%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>
<b>Chile</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>22.6%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>Ethiopia</b>	<b>41.5%</b>	<b>38.8%</b>	<b>2.7%</b>
<b>Czech Republic</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>23.0%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	<b>28.9%</b>	<b>26.5%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>
<b>Argentina</b>	<b>44.8%</b>	<b>42.4%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>
<b>Nicaragua</b>	<b>50.6%</b>	<b>48.3%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>
<b>Mexico</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>48.2%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>
<b>Honduras</b>	<b>27.3%</b>	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<b>27.4%</b>	<b>26.2%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
<b>Canada</b>	<b>30.5%</b>	<b>29.6%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>
<b>Norway</b>	<b>45.0%</b>	<b>44.4%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
<b>Russian Federation</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>15.8%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>
<b>Total: 23 Countries</b>			

<sup>6</sup>All data is true according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). "Monthly ranking of Women in national parliaments," Inter-Parliamentary Union ([January 2022](#)).

## Countries that Achieved a “Golden Year” in 2021:

Per our framework, countries achieve a “golden year” when they reach a new record-high for women’s representation in parliament. Of the 23 countries that achieved a golden year in 2021, seven are either at or near gender balance: Nicaragua (51%), Mexico (50%), Norway (45%), Argentina (45%), Ethiopia (42%), the Republic of Moldova (41%), and Peru (40%).<sup>7</sup> Of these countries, Nicaragua and Mexico stand out because they achieved gender balance (50%) for the first time in 2021.

Nicaragua and Mexico implemented new gender quota laws that worked to increase women’s representation in the last two decades. In 2006, women held 15% of seats in Nicaragua’s parliament; following the adoption of a new gender quota law in 2012, women’s representation more than doubled in the next ten years, reaching gender balance for the first time in 2021.<sup>8</sup> New gender quota laws in Mexico – coupled with its proportional voting system – led to an increase in women’s representation from 37% in 2012 to 50% in 2021.<sup>9</sup>

Other countries, despite not reaching gender balance in their parliaments, also broke records for women’s representation, making 2021 their golden year. These countries include Cabo Verde (39%), Albania (34%), Chile (36%), Armenia (34%), South Sudan (34%), Chad (32%), Canada (30%), Vietnam (30%), Iraq (29%), Liechtenstein (28%), Kazakhstan (27%), Honduras (27%), the Czech Republic (26%). Morocco (24%), the Russian Federation (16%), and Côte d'Ivoire (14%).

## Countries that Regressed in 2021:

While 23 countries broke records in 2021, others, including Algeria (8%), Saint Lucia (11%), and Cyprus (14%), saw drastic declines in women’s representation. Just as rules and systems helped to improve women’s representation in the world’s best-ranked countries, removing these systems hurts women’s political representation.

In Algeria, women’s representation dropped from 26% to 8% after their June 2021 parliamentary elections, mainly due to President Abdelmadjid Tebboune’s order to waive the existing reserved seat gender quotas, which mandated gender balance in parliamentary seats.<sup>10</sup> Instead, he issued a new “electoral gender parity law” that only requires candidate lists to be gender balanced. Patriarchal social norms combined with the adoption of open lists and a direct election system resulted in fewer women being elected in 2021 (32/407) compared to the previous election (119/462) in 2017.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Iceland and the Netherlands were excluded from our analysis because they didn’t achieve their highest records for women’s representation in 2021. This said, we acknowledge that they have been able to maintain over 40% of women in parliament over time. As more countries near and surpass gender balance, we will modify the parameters of our analysis to give credit to countries that maintain high levels of women’s representation from year-to-year.

<sup>8</sup> “Nicaragua” IPU Parline ([Accessed July 2023](#)); “Nicaragua,” IDEA Gender Quota Database ([Accessed July 2023](#)); “Nicaragua” IDEA ([Accessed July 2023](#)).

<sup>9</sup> “Mexico” IPU Parline ([Accessed July 2023](#)); “Mexico” IDEA Gender Quota Database ([Accessed July 2023](#)); “Mexico” IDEA ([Accessed July 2023](#)).

<sup>10</sup> Ahmed Marwane. “Women and Politics in Algeria: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back,” Firka Forum ([15 September 2021](#)).

<sup>11</sup> “Algeria” IPU Parline ([Accessed July 2023](#)); “Algeria” IDEA ([Accessed July 2023](#)).

Women's political representation dropped even more dramatically in Saint Lucia, from 36% in 2009 to 11% in 2021.<sup>12</sup> Identifying the exact reason why women's representation dropped so significantly in Saint Lucia has been difficult, in part because of data gaps.<sup>13</sup> According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)'s New Parline Database, Saint Lucia broke the record for the number of women in its lower house in 2009, when there were four women in office.<sup>14</sup> Despite having 18 statutory seats, the IPU's data suggests there were only 11 officeholders in 2009, which may have inflated the numbers. This said, women's political representation in Saint Lucia has since declined. As of 2021, the IPU reports that there are two women members of parliament.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, women in Cyprus faced a setback in 2021 after the release of the May election results; women won only 14% of the seats in the parliament's lower house, compared to 21% in the previous election. The Gender Equality Commissioner Ioasifina Antoniou described these results as a consequence of gender stereotypes, lack of women's representation in policy centers, and lack of social equality.<sup>16</sup> Strengthening its gender quota legislation, which is currently only a voluntary party quota of 30%, would allow Cyprus to increase women's political representation. The glaring issue for Cyprus is that the law applies neither sanctions nor consequences for noncompliance.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Reasons for this decline include social and economic barriers, such as the local view that careers in politics are for men and not women and limited support for women candidates by political parties. Aleah Ranjitsingh. *Country Gender Assessment (CGA) St. Lucia*, Caribbean Development Bank ([January 2016](#)): 55.

<sup>13</sup> "Saint Lucia," UN Women ([Accessed October 2023](#)).

<sup>14</sup> "Saint Lucia: New Parline," Inter-Parliamentary Union ([Accessed October 2023](#)).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Gina Agapiou. "Just eight female MPs, a drop of three percent," *Cyprus Mail* ([31 May 2021](#)).

<sup>17</sup> "Cyprus" IDEA Gender Quota Database ([Accessed July 2023](#)).

<b>Countries that achieved their highest record in women representation in 2022 <sup>18</sup></b>			
<b>Country</b>	<b>Record in 2022</b>	<b>Previous Record</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Malta	27.9%	14.9%	13%
Colombia	28.9%	19.9%	9.0%
Australia	38.4%	31.1%	7.3%
Guinea	29.6%	22.8%	6.8%
Equatorial Guinea	31.0%	24.2%	6.8%
Saint Kitts and Nevis	31.3%	25.0%	6.3%
United States	29.4%	23.5%	5.9%
Bahrain	20.0%	15.0%	5.0%
Nauru	10.5%	5.6%	4.9%
Denmark	43.6%	39.7%	3.9%
Senegal	46.1%	43.3%	2.8%
Angola	33.6%	30.9%	2.7%
Brazil	17.7%	15.2%	2.5%
Costa Rica	47.4%	45.6%	1.8%
Lebanon	6.3%	4.7%	1.6%
Kenya	23.3%	21.8%	1.5%
Slovenia	37.8%	36.7%	1.1%
Hungary	13.6%	13.1%	0.5%
Nepal	33.1%	32.7%	0.4%
Congo	14.6%	14.3%	0.3%
<b>Total: 20 Countries</b>			

<sup>18</sup> All data is true according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). "Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments," Inter Parliamentary Union ([January 2023](#)).

## Countries that Achieved a “Golden Year” in 2022:

In 2022, almost half of the countries that held elections saw an improvement in women’s political representation in parliament. The most notable developments were in Malta (28%), Colombia (29%), and Guinea (30%). These countries had at least a 10% increase in women’s representation compared to their last elections.

In Malta, the passage of a new gender quota law in April 2021 nearly doubled women’s representation, bringing women’s share of parliamentary seats up to 28% in 2022 from 15% in 2017.<sup>19</sup> Under the new gender quota law, 12 additional seats, split evenly between two political parties, are allocated for “underrepresented genders” if women or nonbinary people win less than 40% of the total seats.<sup>20</sup> Other factors that contributed to Malta’s golden year include the 20% voluntary party quota in candidate lists and the 33% quota used by the Partit Laburista (Labor Party).<sup>21</sup>

In Colombia, women’s representation increased by 10% in 2022. This change was not due to a new or recently reformed gender quota; Colombia adopted a 30% legislated candidate quota more than ten years ago. Instead, increased awareness and advocacy on women’s issues resulted from protests that started in April 2021, the participation of the feminist political party *Estamos Listos*, and an overwhelming increase of women candidates after the country increased the number of electoral districts.<sup>22</sup>

In Guinea, women’s representation in the parliament’s lower house increased by 17% in 2022 compared to the previous election due to the implementation of a gender quota that legislators passed in 2019. The law stipulates that at least 30% of party lists must be reserved for women candidates and enforces legal sanctions for non-compliance.<sup>23</sup>

While three countries, Costa Rica (47%), Senegal (46%), and Denmark (44%), achieved near-parity in their golden years, with women’s representation nearing 40% or more in their lower houses, other countries made slighter improvements, despite also breaking records and achieving a golden year: Australia (38%), Slovenia (38%), Saint Kitts and Nevis (31%), Equatorial Guinea (31%), the United States (29%), Barbados (27%), Kenya (23%), Bahrain (20%), Brazil (17.5%), Burkina Faso (17%), Congo (15%), Hungary (14%), Nauru (10.5%), and Lebanon (6%).

---

<sup>19</sup> “Malta” IPU Parline ([Accessed July 2023](#)); “Malta” IDEA ([Accessed July 2023](#)).

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Paul Azzopardi. “Malta Officially Passes Gender Quota Bill With Overwhelming Parliament Approval,” *Lovin Malta* ([14 April 2021](#)).

<sup>21</sup> “A party strategy to increase women’s political representation,” EIGE ([Accessed July 2023](#)).

<sup>22</sup> “History is made in Colombia with gains in diversity led by feminist movements” IPU Parline ([27 February 2023](#)); Newsroom Infobae. “Women allocate more resources to be elected than men in Colombia” ([15 April 2022](#)).

<sup>23</sup> “Guinea” IDEA Gender Quota Database ([Accessed July 2023](#)).



## Countries that Regressed in 2022:

Not all countries achieved a golden year in 2022; while some set new records for women's political representation, others lost progress. Of these countries, Fiji (11%), São Tomé and Príncipe (15%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (19%) experienced the most notable decreases in representation, primarily due to policy changes.

In Fiji, women's representation declined from 22% to 11% after the December 2022 parliamentary elections, causing Fiji's global ranking to fall from 119th to 161st in January 2023.<sup>24</sup> One possible explanation for this stems from the passage of a new law, the Electoral Registration of Voters Amendment Act, in September 2021. Under this law, Fijians must register to vote using their birth name instead of their common name. According to women's rights advocates, this put married women at a disadvantage by forcing them to either give up their family names or their right to vote, ultimately disenfranchising women.<sup>25</sup>

The decline in women's representation in São Tomé and Príncipe was similarly drastic, falling by nearly 10% between 2020 and 2022.<sup>26</sup> This was a somewhat more surprising case to us because the country passed a Political Parity Law in July 2022 that was meant to reinforce the existing 30% legislated candidate quotas with 40% reserved seats for women.<sup>27</sup> Though it is not entirely clear what caused such a dramatic decrease in women in the September 2022 elections, it appears that the new gender quota law has not come into effect and has, therefore, not had enough time to make an impact.

Women's political representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has also declined since the last election. In 2018, women held 21% of seats in parliament; after the 2022 election, that number fell to 19%.<sup>28</sup> Despite having a 40% legislated candidate quota since 2013,<sup>29</sup> women's representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has remained low. Women's political representation declined significantly in 2022 due to the use of an open-list PR system where voters can alter the order of candidates on party lists, political parties prioritizing men leadership, the absence of funding and media coverage for women candidates, and an increase in violence against women politicians that reached 60% in 2019.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> "Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments," IPU ([January 2023](#)).

<sup>25</sup> David Broughton. "Fiji Elections 2022: Do Women and Marginalized Communities Have an Equal Playing Field?" International Republican Institute ([5 December 2022](#)).

<sup>26</sup> "São Tomé and Príncipe" IPU Parline ([Accessed July 2023](#)).

<sup>27</sup> Eric Overvest. "São Tomé and Príncipe: tangible gains for women in politics," UN Africa Renewal ([August 2022](#)).

<sup>28</sup> "Bosnia and Herzegovina" IPU Parline ([Accessed July 2023](#)).

<sup>29</sup> "Bosnia and Herzegovina" IDEA Gender Quota Database ([Accessed July 2023](#)).

<sup>30</sup> "EU support for women's political participation and leadership under the EU's Gender Action Plan, A case study on Bosnia and Herzegovina" The European Democracy Hub ([2021](#))

## **Conclusion**

The last two years may have been golden years for many countries, but not all records were broken equally. While some countries achieved gender balance for the first time or doubled their share of women in parliament, others made minimal progress. RepresentWomen research has found that gender quotas and system-level reforms often accelerate progress for women's representation in politics and are necessary to achieve SDG 5, but only if they are well-designed, properly enforced, and backed by political will.

While having more women in office is an important factor in creating a more representative government, we acknowledge that not all of the countries covered in this analysis are free and fair democracies. We further acknowledge that electing more women is an important first step in achieving a representative government, but this alone won't transform women's political power. This analysis is meant to bring attention to how election rules and voting systems shape opportunities for women to enter politics; the social and cultural factors in each country further shape the impact these systems have on women's representation and political power.

Our international research informs our domestic work, where women are underrepresented at every level of government, and progress towards gender balance remains minimal compared to other countries. Rules and systems from around the world can be adapted in the U.S. to accelerate the pace of change and achieve a gender-balanced, representative government - For more information, visit our website at [www.representwomen.org](http://www.representwomen.org).

***Fatma Tawfik is an International Research Manager at RepresentWomen.***



*Parity for Women in Politics*

REPRESENTWOMEN.ORG

[@RepresentWomen](#)



[Info@RepresentWomen.org](mailto:Info@RepresentWomen.org)



[www.representwomen.org/donate](http://www.representwomen.org/donate)

