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# Women in Parliament in 2015

## The year in review



In 2015, voters in Myanmar elected an unprecedented number of women representatives to the lower and upper houses of Parliament. © AP/Aung Shine Oo, 2015

## Numbers plateau in a year of political turbulence

Globally, 2015 proved to be a turbulent political year, with election discourses dominated by migration and the financial crisis, and the continuing incidence of extremist violence. Women's parliamentary representation, seemed to plateau, increasing by only 0.5 percentage points from the previous year. The more significant gains achieved in 2013 that saw an increase of 1.5 percentage points in the global average were not repeated.

Stronger gains were made in the Americas (+0.8 points), sub-Saharan Africa (+0.7 points) and Europe (+0.4 points); but those were tempered by meagre increases in the Arab States (+0.3 points), Asia (+0.1 points) and the Pacific (+0.1 points). The Americas remain in the lead in terms of regional averages, with women's parliamentary representation standing at 27.2 per cent. Interestingly, there was a noticeable decrease in the Nordic countries (-0.4 points): that subregion has now plateaued at 41.5 per cent.

In a total of 67, or 25.1 per cent, of parliamentary chambers across the world, women now represent more than 30 per cent of the membership. A slightly higher percentage of upper houses (27.6%) include more than 30 per cent women, compared to single or lower houses (24.1%). Following elections in 2015 to single or lower houses, two countries returned to the prestigious "30%+" group (United Republic of Tanzania and Switzerland), while five were included for the first time (Ethiopia, Trinidad and Tobago, El Salvador, Portugal and Sudan). Both parliamentary chambers in Ethiopia and in Trinidad and Tobago reached the 30%+ milestone.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Minimal change was seen in women's average share of all parliamentary seats following elections in 2015: it rose by only 0.5 percentage points. In the past ten years, that figure has increased by 6.4 percentage points, from 16.2 to 22.6 per cent.
- Women took 25 per cent of all the seats up for renewal in 2015.
- Suriname achieved the greatest gains in 2015, with an increase of 15.7 percentage points in women's representation. Egypt made equally impressive progress, with an increase of 12.9 points, followed closely by Ethiopia's lower house at 11 percentage points.
- The greatest setbacks were seen in Europe, where Andorra lost its third place on the IPU's world ranking of women in national parliaments. This leaves the ladder with only two countries above the 50 per cent mark.
- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) achieved a regional first with the appointment of a female Speaker of the Federal National Council.
- In 2015, parliamentary elections were held in 58 countries. Some form of electoral gender quota was used in 28 countries, where elections were held for 34 chambers. Women hold 28.3 per cent of the seats in these chambers. No form of quota was used in 30 countries, where elections were held for 36 chambers. In those chambers, women represent a mere 13.5 per cent of all members. Results here again confirm that the implementation of quotas leads to more women being elected.

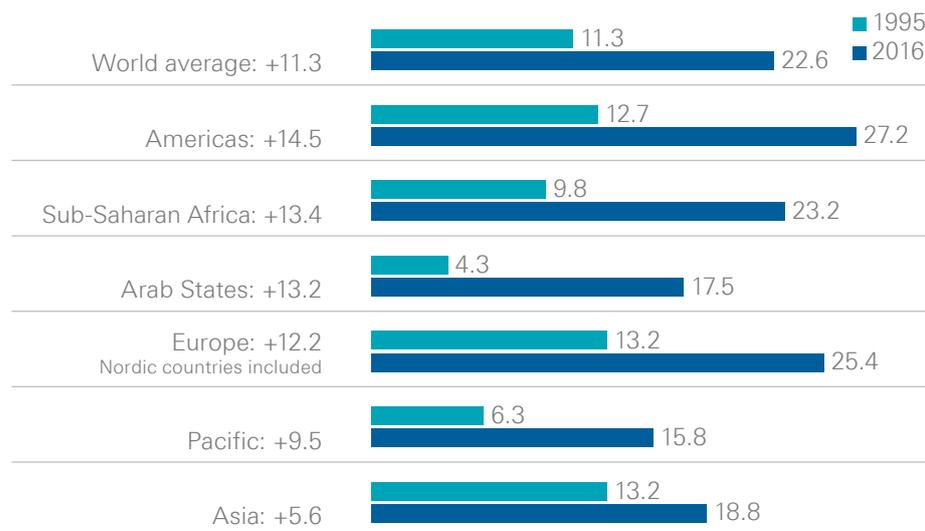
# HIGHLIGHTS

- Electoral systems again made their mark. Women took 25.8 per cent of seats filled through proportional representation, compared with 22.3 per cent that were either filled through majoritarian systems, or allocated by appointment.
- Women now account for at least 30 per cent of membership in over a quarter of all parliamentary chambers (46 single or lower chambers and 21 upper houses).
- The other end of the scale witnessed slower movement. As in 2014, in 38 single or lower houses women still account for less than 10 per cent of the membership. The number of these chambers without any women at all increased from five to seven in 2015. In 13 upper houses, women represent less than 10 per cent, including one with no women at all.\*

\* These figures include partial results of elections in Haiti.

**Figure 1: World and Regional Averages of Women in Parliaments, 1995 and 2016**

Situation in July 1995 and January 2016, both houses combined. Regional ranking in the order of the percentage point change.



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

Over the past 20 years, two things have changed dramatically in respect of the 30%+ group. First, the range of countries whose single or lower house where women's representation is more than 30 per cent is significantly more diverse. In 2005, the group was predominantly composed of Nordic countries, while today we find countries from sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Europe, the Arab States and Asia. Following elections in 2015, the group now includes its first single or lower house from the Caribbean. Second, the percentage of women parliamentarians is much higher. Twenty years ago, parliaments hovered around the 30 per cent mark and only one had reached the 40 per cent mark. Today, 14 of the 46 single or lower houses are above 40 per cent, including Rwanda, where more than 60 per cent of parliamentarians are women.

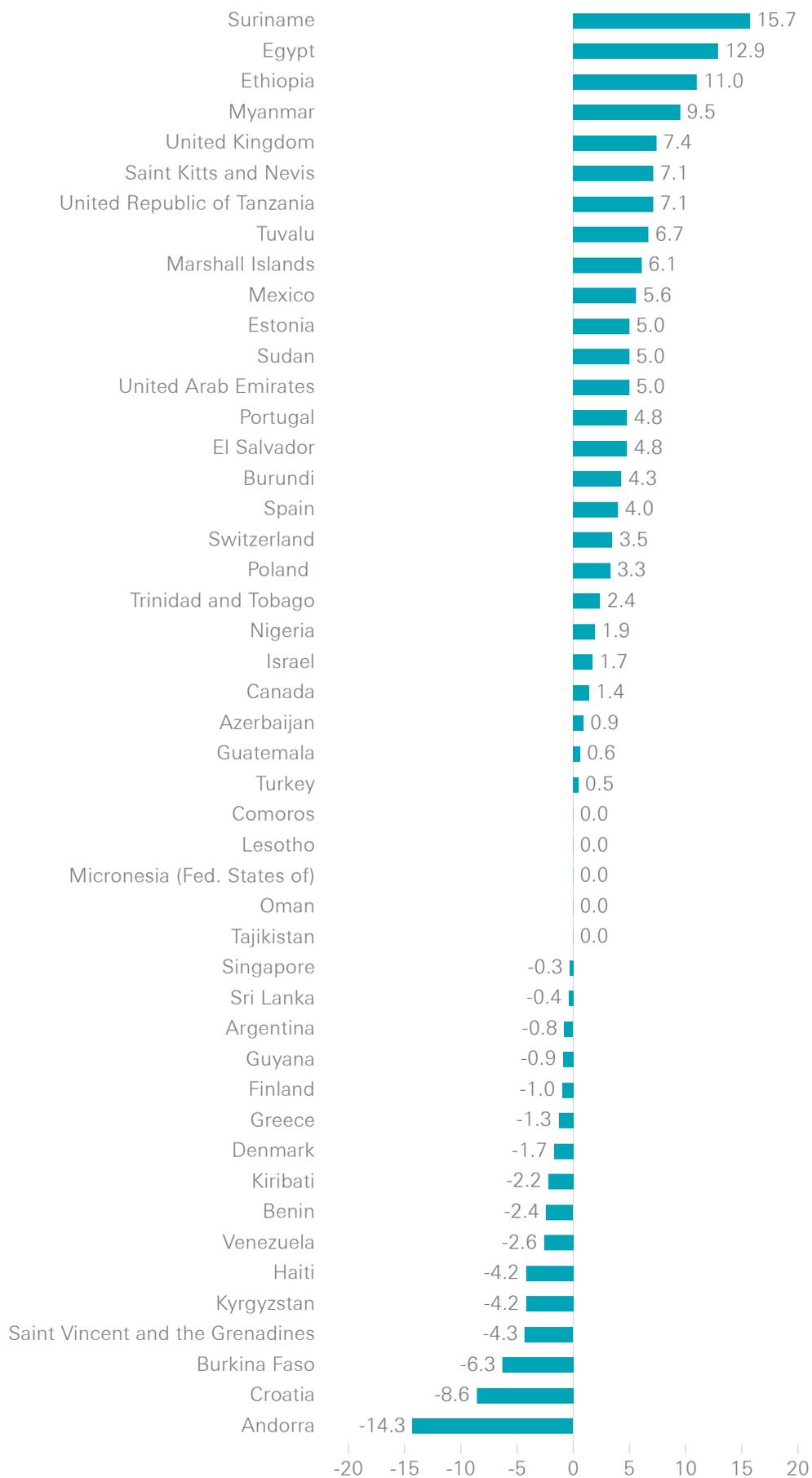
The number of chambers where women represent less than 10 per cent of the membership has shown remarkably little change. This group continues to be dominated by Pacific countries and a few Arab States, where quotas have not yet been implemented. Here again, a slight difference exists between upper houses (17.1%) and lower or single houses (19.0%): women's representation in upper houses is slightly less likely to be below 10 per cent. There is scope to further investigate the factors behind that discrepancy between chambers.



“Because it’s 2015.” Newly-elected Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on why he chose a gender-balanced cabinet.  
© The Canadian Press/  
Sean Kilpatrick, 2016

## Figure 2: Parliamentary renewals in 2015

Progress and setbacks of women in lower or single houses of parliament renewed in 2015 combined. Regional ranking in the order of the percentage point change.



The figures show the percentage point difference between renewals in 2015 compared with the previous legislature.

# Regional perspectives

## Americas still in the lead: Progress achieved both with and without quotas

Regionally, the greatest gains were made in the Americas, where on average, women's share of parliamentary seats rose by 0.8 percentage points to reach 27.2 per cent. Gains were made in Suriname, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Mexico, El Salvador, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada and Guatemala. Women achieved very positive election results in Suriname due to the increased number of female candidates and their higher placement on electoral lists. Over one third of all electoral candidates were women; there were 90 women candidates at the previous elections and 128 in 2015. Although candidate quotas were not introduced, the efforts of the National Assembly and civil society organizations encouraged greater participation from women (now at 33.1%).

In El Salvador and Mexico, the gains made by women, of 4.8 and 5.6 percentage points respectively, are attributable to quotas. In El Salvador, women must comprise at least 30 per cent of all candidates. In Mexico, a revised gender parity law requires at least 50 per cent of the candidates fielded by a political party in either federal or state legislative elections to be women. The law in Mexico is accompanied by more stringent rules for implementation: both titular and substitute members are to be of the same sex, and the National Electoral Institute is mandated to review the distribution of women's nominations to ensure they are also placed in winnable constituencies. The use of quotas has placed those countries firmly in the 30%+ group: 32.1 per cent of El Salvador's parliamentarians are women, while that figure in Mexico stands at 42.2 per cent.

The outcome of elections in Canada made international headlines. During the election campaign, the leader of the victorious Liberal Party, Justin Trudeau, promised that half of the members of his cabinet would be women. The gender-balanced cabinet now contrasts with the percentage of women elected (26%), an increase of only 1.4 percentage points. The number of women whom parties nominated varied widely at these elections, from 20 per cent (Conservatives) to 43 per cent (the New Democratic Party). The non-partisan advocacy group Equal Voice declared that, at this rate, it would take another 11 federal elections (or 45 years) to reach gender parity in the Parliament of Canada.

In the Caribbean, gains were observed in Saint Kitts and Nevis and in Trinidad and Tobago. In Saint Kitts, the 7.1 percentage point increase (to 13.3%) was the result of just one woman's work. Previously there had been no women elected and one appointed. But in 2015, one woman succeeded in her election and another was appointed by the Speaker. One woman also made the difference in Trinidad and Tobago's lower house, where the election of 13 women took the country over the 31 per cent threshold. In the opposite direction, the defeat of one of the four previously

elected women in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines saw the country slide from 17 to 13 per cent in 2015. One of the first women to be selected for election, Deborah Charles, emphasized cultural norms and values and the critical nature of women's role in the family as major reasons why men far outnumber women in politics.

Other setbacks in the Americas were evidenced where quota legislation was not fully implemented or sanctions were not enforced. In Venezuela, a gender parity law was applied for the first time: it requires the list of titular and substitute candidates to meet a 50 per-cent quota with a zebra system. However, the law came into force after several parties had already completed their party primaries for the 2015 election, resulting in a chamber where women represented only 14.4 per cent of the membership. In Guyana, elections resulted in a small setback (-0.9 percentage points) for women. The country's Representation of the People Act mandates that women comprise 30 per cent of the candidate lists. However, parties are still able to allocate parliamentary seats as they wish after the election without adhering to the quota. Despite the weak quota implementation measures in place, Guyana, like Argentina, uses the proportional representation system. This means that even with setbacks, women still make up over 30 per cent of the legislature.

## Sub-Saharan Africa: Struggling democracies, inclusive of women

Not far behind the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa increased its regional average by 0.7 percentage points, bringing women's representation up to 23.2 per cent. However, this occurred in a year of continued regional conflicts, with elections marred by violence in Burundi and Nigeria. Where violence exists, free and fair elections become more difficult to administer, posing even greater challenges for women, both as candidates and voters.

The strongest gains were made in Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania, where a form of quotas is in place. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front has a voluntary 30 per-cent candidate quota and reportedly nominated women in 40 per cent of its lists. In addition, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia increased its financial support from 10 per cent at the last election to 15 per cent in 2015 for parties that fielded women candidates. As the Front and its allies won all the seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives in 2015, women accounted for 38.8 per cent of the House's seats (+11 percentage points). In Tanzania, 113 seats are reserved for women (allocated to political parties in proportion to their share of the electoral vote). In addition, two of the five members from Zanzibar and five of the 10 members appointed by the President must be women. Women also contested open seats. A total of 136 women (36.6%) were elected to the National Assembly

**Table 1: Women in lower or single houses after parliamentary renewals in 2015**

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	Quota
Mexico	498	211	42.4	Yes***
Finland	200	83	41.5	Yes*
Spain	350	140	40.0	Yes***
Ethiopia	547	212	38.8	Yes*
Denmark	179	67	37.4	None
United Republic of Tanzania	372	136	36.6	Yes***#
Burundi	121	44	36.4	Yes**
Argentina	257	92	35.8	Yes***
Andorra	28	10	35.7	None
El Salvador	84	27	32.1	Yes***
Switzerland	200	64	32.0	Yes*
Portugal	230	72	31.3	Yes***
Trinidad and Tobago	42	13	31.0	None
Sudan	426	130	30.5	Yes**
Guyana	69	21	30.4	Yes**
United Kingdom	650	191	29.4	Yes*
Poland	460	125	27.2	Yes**
Canada	338	88	26.0	Yes*
Suriname	51	13	25.5	None
Lesotho	120	30	25.0	Yes**
Israel	120	29	24.2	Yes*
Singapore	92	22	23.9	None
Estonia	101	24	23.8	None
United Arab Emirates	40	9	22.5	None
Greece	300	59	19.7	Yes***
Kyrgyzstan	120	23	19.2	Yes**
Tajikistan	63	12	19.0	None
Azerbaijan	124	21	16.9	None
Croatia	151	23	15.2	Yes***
Egypt	596	89	14.9	Yes**
Turkey	550	82	14.9	Yes*
Venezuela	167	24	14.4	None
Guatemala	158	22	13.9	Yes*
Saint Kitts and Nevis	15	2	13.3	None
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	23	3	13.0	None
Myanmar	323	41	12.7	None
Burkina Faso	127	12	9.4	None
Marshall Islands	33	3	9.1	None
Benin	83	6	7.2	None
Tuvalu	15	1	6.7	None
Kiribati	46	3	6.5	None
Nigeria	360	20	5.6	None
Sri Lanka	225	11	4.9	None
Comoros	33	1	3.0	None
Oman	85	1	1.2	None
Haiti	92	0	0.0	Yes**
Micronesia (Federated States of)	14	0	0.0	None

\* One or more political parties adopted a voluntary measure to increase the number of women candidates

\*\* Legislated candidate quota

\*\*\* Legislated and voluntary quotas

# Seats reserved for women



Following the results of the October 2015 elections in Tanzania, women now account for 36.6 per cent of members to the National Assembly.  
© AFP/Tony Karumba, 2015

(+7.1 percentage points). Demonstrating a continuing cultural resistance to women's participation in politics, elections in the Zanzibar archipelago reportedly resulted in a number of women being divorced for having voted despite their husbands' forbidding them to do so.

While women were still able to improve their share of parliamentary seats, electoral violence in Burundi and Nigeria caused great concern and in Burundi, the opposition boycotted the elections. Burundi's legislated candidate quotas helped women to secure just over 36 per cent of seats in the lower house (+4.3 percentage points). Smaller gains were made in Nigeria, where a number of party members, supporters and voters were killed during the 2015 elections. Reports of ballot snatching, thuggery, vote buying, collusion and the false declaration of results put women at a disadvantage, particularly in the absence of any quotas. Women only won 5.6 per cent of the seats in Nigeria's lower house.

Stagnation and setbacks occurred where quotas are not in place, including in Comoros and Benin. In Comoros, women represented just 2.5 per cent of all candidates, resulting in only one woman elected to parliament. Women's representation therefore stagnated at 3 per cent. In Benin, the number of women elected fell from eight in 2011 to six in 2015 (7.2% of the total legislature). However, the 2015 elections provided an opportunity to launch an innovative campaign to improve electoral awareness among young women aged between 18 and 35 entitled Text Her: a *campaign* for free and fair elections in Benin. By partnering with a local organization,

SocialWatch, the campaign aimed to recount stories and testimonies from men and women who reported positive experiences at their local polling booth, and to monitor the number of texts sent by women about the elections. The campaign aimed to increase by 5 per cent the proportion of women under the age of 35 who went to the polls compared to the previous elections.

### Europe: A strong showing from women-led parties

In 2015, women came to the fore in elections across Europe. In Croatia, Denmark, Poland, Portugal and the United Kingdom, elections were contested by numerous women-led parties, with an unusually high number of televised political debates including more than one woman leader. This greater exposure showcased both women's ability to lead, as well as gender-based, negative and stereotypical portrayals of women. In Denmark, the country's first woman Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, was attacked as a "distant, unemotional ice queen" and ribbed as "Gucci Helle" for her clothing choices. In Portugal, following weeks of negotiation after the elections, the female-led Left Bloc party formed a government, but faced a series of sexist attacks, depicting the women as "hysterical". On social media, a petition calling for Mariana Mortágua to pose naked on the cover of a magazine was launched. 2015 also saw Europe's first women-led election since 1993 in Poland. Beata Szydlo and Eva Kopacz shared the electoral spotlight, with some commentators remarking that this heralded a change from the years of confrontation, of which voters had clearly had enough.

In 2015, political debates in Europe were dominated by a severe migrant crisis, and the continuing impact of austerity measures put in place following the global financial crash. Where debates focused on the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons fleeing from the conflict in Syria, popular responses tended to shift to the political right (such as in Croatia, Denmark and Poland). In Spain, Portugal and Greece, where the ramifications of the financial crisis continued to be debated, the electoral pendulum swung (or stayed) more to the left. In the former Soviet Republics of Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea dominated much of the debate.

All this had an impact on women's parliamentary representation; there were gains of various magnitudes in Spain, the United Kingdom, Estonia, Portugal, Switzerland, Poland, Israel, Azerbaijan and Turkey. In Spain, the United Kingdom and Israel, national milestones were achieved: each country elected the highest number of women since its records began. Spain achieved a four percentage-point increase (to 40%) thanks to an equality law that ensures neither sex makes up more than 60 per cent of an electoral list. In the United Kingdom (now at 29.4%), a voluntary quota (of 50% women candidates) helped the Labour Party increase its female representation in parliament, despite an overall loss of seats for the party. A similar quota (of 40% women candidates) had less effect for the Liberal Democrats, due to the party's significant defeat, and the loss of all its sitting women members. Two political parties were led by women during the election: the Scottish National Party, which won an unprecedented 56 seats, including 20 by women; and the Greens, whose only seat in the House of Commons was won by a woman. While neither of these parties has adopted quotas, they both demonstrated a strong internal culture of inclusiveness and gender sensitivity.

**Table 2: Progress and setbacks of women in upper houses of parliament up for renewal in 2015**

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	% point change
Sudan	54	19	35.2	24.3
Ethiopia	153	49	32.0	15.7
Myanmar	168	23	13.7	11.0
Morocco	120	14	11.7	9.4
Trinidad and Tobago	31	10	32.3	6.5
Spain	265	104	39.2	5.8
Tajikistan	32	6	18.8	4.0
Madagascar	63	12	19.0	3.9
Argentina	72	30	41.7	2.8
Nigeria	108	7	6.5	2.8
Uzbekistan	100	17	17.0	2.0
Pakistan	104	19	18.3	1.9
Algeria	143	10	7.0	0.4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	15	2	13.3	0.0
Poland	100	13	13.0	0.0
Afghanistan	68	18	26.5	-1.0
Netherlands	75	26	34.7	-1.3
Oman	85	13	15.3	-2.8
Lesotho	33	8	24.2	-3.0
Namibia	42	10	23.8	-3.1
Haiti	14	0	0.0	-3.3
Switzerland	46	7	15.2	-4.3
Burundi	43	18	41.9	-4.5



Women leaders of Poland's two major political parties greet each other before a live televised debate during a highly contested election. © PAP/Jacek Turczyk, 2015



In Egypt, almost 15 per cent of parliamentarians are women following the 2015 elections – a significant increase from previous results.  
© Khaled Mashaal, 2015

In Andorra, Croatia, Kyrgyzstan and Greece, women were not able to maintain their numbers in parliament. In the absence of quotas in Andorra, a total of four women lost their seats (-14.3 percentage points), pushing the parliament out of the 50%+ group in the IPU's world ranking of women in parliament. In its assessment report, the OSCE noted that women were often placed in lower positions on the electoral lists. In Croatia, there was a strong showing from women candidates (41.4%) at the first elections to be held under the country's first woman President, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic. Despite that, there was an 8.6 percentage point decrease in women MPs (down to 15.2%). Women's parliamentary representation in Kyrgyzstan dropped by 4.2 percentage points, despite the existence of a 30 per-cent quota on candidate lists. The effectiveness of the quotas was undermined by a lack of provisions to ensure their application after the lists were registered. In Greece, the elections led to the implementation of further austerity measures. Although reports suggested that women represented 35 per cent of the candidates in the eight winning parties, women still lost ground (down to 19.7%).

The two elections held in the Nordic countries in 2015 resulted in electoral setbacks for women. In Denmark, the country's first female Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt was unable to secure a second term in government. Despite her party winning the largest number of seats in the parliament, the left-wing bloc to which her party belonged won fewer seats overall than the right-wing grouping. The total percentage of seats held by women fell from 39.1 per cent in 2011 to 37.4 per cent in 2015. In conceding defeat, Ms. Thorning-Schmidt remarked that while she was the first, she would not be Denmark's last woman Prime Minister. Similarly in Finland, elections saw a swing to the Centre Party of Finland, which had nominated fewer female candidates (39.8%) than the Finnish Social Democratic Party (47.2%) and the Green League (56.3%). That minor setback still left Finnish women in 41.5 per cent of the parliament's seats.

### Arab States: New "firsts"

Parliamentary renewals in 2015 continued the gradual trend of increasing women's participation in the Arab

region. A total of 17.5 per cent of parliamentarians in the region are now women. In the United Arab Emirates, 78 women candidates stood in the 2015 elections in comparison to 85 at the 2011 elections. The 40-member Federal National Council (FNC) includes nine women (22.5%), only one of whom was directly elected – Naama Al Sharhan. Taken together, all 78 women reportedly won 10 per cent of the overall vote. The country reached a significant milestone when Amal Al-Qubaisi was elected Speaker of the FNC, making her the first woman in the Arab world to hold such an office.

In Egypt, a new parliamentary law guarantees a minimum of 70 women representatives (or 5%) in a chamber comprising 568 elected seats and 28 appointed by the President. A total of 2,573 candidates stood in the most recent elections. According to the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights, 100 women candidates ran on eight party lists and a further 110 women ran as independents, totaling 8.2 per cent of all candidates. Seventy-five women were directly elected, including five as independents, while another 14 were appointed by the President. As almost 15 per cent of Egyptian parliamentarians are now women, Egypt has made an impressive step forward when compared to the results of previous elections held in 2012.

After unprecedented numbers of women were reported to have contested the 2015 election in Sudan, the number of women MPs increased by five percentage points, to 30.5 per cent. Twenty-two political parties reportedly submitted electoral lists that included a total of 128 woman candidates, while a number of women also ran as independents. This high proportion of women candidates is directly linked to the National Electoral Law: it allows political parties more than 4 per cent of whose candidates are women to nominate women for reserved seats.

Not all elections in the region resulted in strong gains. In Oman, fewer women contested the elections compared to the 2011 poll (down from 77 in 2011 to 20 in 2015). The only successful woman, Nemah bint Jamiel bin Farhan Al Busaidiya, was re-elected to represent Muscat's Seeb district. She was also the only

woman elected to the previous parliament. With women comprising only 1.2 per cent of the parliament, calls are increasingly being made in Oman for the implementation of electoral quotas.

### Asia: Women’s campaigns marred by sexism and harassment

Of the relatively few elections held in Asia in 2015, none were as closely followed as those in Myanmar. For the international community, these were expected to be the country’s first “credible” elections, held under the political and legal framework established by the country’s 2008 Constitution. As she campaigned broadly for greater democracy, one woman, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, attracted considerable media attention. Her presence encouraged greater numbers of women than ever before to run for parliamentary office, with one report suggesting that 800 women – 13 per cent of all candidates – were standing for election. The election saw a 9.5 percentage point increase in women’s representation in the lower house (12.7%), and an 11 percentage point increase in the upper house (13.7%). As newcomers to politics, however, women candidates faced discrimination and prejudice: some of their campaign posters were ripped down and dedicated teams were created to harass them and distribute false and fabricated information about them, including online. Not all women who were invited to contest the elections accepted the nomination, because of family concerns.

In Singapore, the 2015 elections resulted in minimal change in the parliament’s overall make-up. There was a small reduction in the number of women elected, down from 24 to 22 (23.9% of the total legislature). The ruling People’s Action Party fielded 20 women among its 89 candidates, well below its 30 per-cent voluntary target. Political parties in Sri Lanka were encouraged to ensure that at least 30 per cent of their electoral lists were made up of women; that advice went largely unheeded. Even though they promised to empower women, the two leading political parties included fewer than 20 women in their nomination lists. The number of elected women decreased from 12 to 11 (4.9%). Like in Myanmar, women were subjected to sexist commentary and ridicule.

The challenges faced by women in public life in this region were highlighted by the assassination of Angiza Shinwari, a popular woman politician in East Afghanistan, who died in a bomb attack on her car.

### Challenging candidate numbers and culture in the Pacific

In the Pacific, small numbers can make a big difference. In Tuvalu, a parliament that previously had no women members, of the 29 candidates running for election, only three were women. One of these was successful, resulting in a 6.7 percentage point increase (6.7%). In the Marshall Islands, three women were elected in 2015, an increase of two from the previous election (9.1% women parliamentarians in total).

Following a no-confidence motion in the President of the country in January 2016, Dr. Hilde Heine, the country’s first female MP, became the only candidate for the presidency. Twenty-four of the 30 voting members of the *Nitijela* endorsed Dr. Heine’s presidency, making hers a first for the Pacific region.

The number of women candidates is abysmally low in a region where cultural norms dictate that politics is “big men’s business”. In the Federated States of Micronesia, where women have never been elected, all 34 of the candidates in the 2015 election were men.

By contrast, candidate numbers may not have been the major factor in the electoral defeat of women in Kiribati, where women now make up 6.5 per cent of the parliament (-2.2 points). The number of women candidates contesting the election had reportedly more than tripled, from five in 2011 to 18 in 2015. One former MP noted that this election was more aggressively contested, often with the promise of handouts, which are prohibited only one month prior to election day.

This electoral defeat of women will see Kiribati slide down the Pacific regional ladder, from its previous second place. Elections in 2016 are expected to see the rise of Samoa, as it implements its own customized quota that will guarantee five seats for women in the *Fono*. Samoa’s journey shows the Pacific that it is possible to create a quota system that suits national customs and electoral contexts and to ensure a floor, if not a ceiling, for women’s political representation.

## Lessons learned

### Quotas: Necessary but not sufficient

Electoral gender quotas make a huge difference to the election of women to parliament. In 2015, in elections where quotas were legislated, women took almost a quarter of the parliamentary seats available. More women appear to have won seats where political parties adopted voluntary quotas. However, this finding is tempered by the relative strength of ruling parties compared with their oppositions. Either way, it is clear that women fare significantly better when quotas are used. Only 13.6 per cent of seats were won by women in countries without quotas.

**Table 3: Proportion of women’s representation relative to quotas**

Quota	Lower House	Upper House	Total
Legislated	23.1%	24.0%	23.2%
Legislated + Voluntary	33.4%	39.8%	34.3%
Voluntary	27.9%	29.1%	28.0%
None	14.1%	12.1%	13.6%

As shown in a number of countries, quotas are only as effective as their implementation regime. Where quota provisions are ignored, and sanctions are not applied or strictly enforced, women are not elected in large numbers.

More innovative solutions are also needed to tackle the continuing challenge faced by women of securing adequate financing for their campaigns. Elections in 2015 saw an increase in the percentage of public funding provided to parties in Ethiopia, where women were included in candidate lists – a model worth emulating. Voters also have to be convinced of women's ability to make meaningful contributions to the public sphere, and their rightful place in political decision-making. Benin's *Text Her* campaign helped to engage a younger electorate on women's political rights.

### **Context matters: Electoral systems**

Even where gender quotas were not completely respected, electoral systems preserved the number of women elected in both the Nordic region (Denmark and Finland) and Latin America (Argentina and Guyana). Women took 25.8 per cent of seats elected by proportional representation, compared with 22.3 per cent elected through majoritarian systems or allocated by appointment. While proportional representation itself allows political parties to field more women (because more than one candidate may be elected to a constituency), this system is also most compatible with legislated candidate quotas. These quotas are more difficult to implement in majoritarian systems precisely because only one candidate can be elected per constituency.

### **All political parties must field women candidates**

Data on candidates continues to be sporadically collected, making a comprehensive analysis difficult. The available data shows that women's success rates are high when the quota used is in the form of reserved seats (Pakistan and Tanzania), and where the outcome of the election is more predictable because of the strength of a ruling party (Ethiopia, Singapore and Tajikistan). In 2015, women's electoral success made a greater impact where the parliament is relatively small, particularly in the Small Island Developing States of Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and St Kitts and Nevis.

However, this data masks a significant finding: conservative political parties have tended to resist the adoption of targets or voluntary quotas, and have therefore seen fewer women selected as candidates for election. In Canada, for example, the New Democratic Party fielded the largest proportion of women, with 43 per cent, followed by the Greens with 39 per cent, the Liberals with 31 per cent, the Bloc Quebecois with 28 per cent and the Conservatives with just 20 per cent. In the United Kingdom, the Conservative Party nominated 26 per cent women candidates, compared to 27 per cent for the Liberal Democrats. The Scottish National Party fielded 36 per cent women candidates,

and the greatest proportion of women candidates was nominated by the Greens. Only the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats have voluntary targets (50 and 40% respectively). The same case was evident in Finland, where the Finns Party (35.3%) and Centre Party of Finland (39.8%) nominated the fewest female candidates of the parliamentary parties in the 2015 elections. The highest number of female candidates was fielded by Green League (56.3%) and the Finnish Social Democratic Party (47.2%). In Spain, where women accounted for 48 per cent of the total candidates, women from the left-wing party *Podemos* won the most seats, taking just under 50 per cent of the party's 69 seats.

Political parties are part of the solution when they take a chance on women and place them in winnable positions on their electoral lists. The 2015 results show that women made the most gains where they were preselected by political parties, both in sufficient numbers and in winnable positions. Where parties have adopted voluntary targets, the challenge was to meet them. Greater efforts are required to encourage all political parties across the political spectrum to respect and facilitate women's contribution and participation in politics.

### **The rise in women's leadership**

The number of women Speakers of Parliament reached an all-time high by the end of 2015 at 49 (or 17.9% of the total number of Speakers). That is up from 43 at the beginning of the year. Elections in Argentina, Denmark, El Salvador, Finland, Lesotho, San Marino, Switzerland and Trinidad and Tobago all resulted in the appointment of women Speakers. Women also became Speakers for the first time ever in Namibia, Nepal and the United Arab Emirates. In Namibia, long-time Deputy Speaker of the upper house and Chair of the IPU's Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, Margaret Mensah-Williams, was promoted to Speaker, in a new era of female leadership, following the appointment in 2015 of Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila as Namibia's first female Prime Minister.

The importance of women in these positions of parliamentary leadership cannot be overstated. Women have proven many times over their willingness to usher in gender-sensitive reforms. The case of Mauritius is illustrative. There, the country's first woman Speaker, Santi Bai Hanoomanjee, has sought to establish a parliamentary caucus on gender equality, which will review legislation and policies from a gender perspective. While networking with her peers at the IPU's Women Speakers' Meeting, she learned of the added value these bodies have brought to neighbouring countries in Africa. The role of international organizations in supporting women leaders as they implement such reforms remains essential.

### **Parliaments must be gender-sensitive for all MPs**

A parliament's gender sensitivity can be measured by its gender-balanced composition and its working

**Table 4: Candidates running for election in 2015**

	Total No.	No. Men	No. Women	% Women	Success rate	Quota
<b>Majority Electoral system</b>						
Comoros	203	198	5	2.5%	20.0%	No
Ethiopia (lower house)	1828	1527	301	16.5%	70.4%	Yes **
Haiti (lower house)	1621	1492	129	8.0%	0.0%	Yes*
Haiti (upper house)	232	209	23	9.9%	0.0%	Yes*
Marshall Islands	98	93	5	5.1%	60.0%	No
Nigeria (lower house)	1730	1504	226	13.1%	8.8%	No
Nigeria (upper house)	747	619	128	17.1%	5.5%	No
Poland (upper house)	423	365	58	13.7%	22.4%	No
Tuvalu	32	29	3	9.4%	33.3%	No
United Arab Emirates	330	252	78	23.6%	11.5%	No
United Kingdom (lower house)	3971	2938	1033	26.0%	18.5%	Yes **
United Republic of Tanzania	1250	1012	238	19.0%	57.1%	Yes*
<b>Majority and appointed</b>						
Afghanistan (upper house)	73	58	15	20.5%	20.0%	Yes*
Saint Kitts and Nevis	23	22	1	4.3%	100.0%	No
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	43	37	6	14.0%	0.0%	No
Singapore	181	146	35	19.3%	62.9%	No
<b>Mixed electoral system</b>						
Andorra	106	72	34	32.1%	29.4%	No
Egypt	2573	2636	210	8.2%	42.4%	Yes*
Lesotho (lower house)	1136	799	337	29.7%	8.9%	Yes*
Mexico (lower house)	4496	2248	2248	50.0%	9.4%	Yes*
Micronesia (Fed. States of)	34	34	0	0.0%	0.0%	No
Switzerland (lower house)	3788	2480	1308	34.5%	4.9%	Yes **
Tajikistan (lower house)	285	255	30	10.5%	40.0%	No
Venezuela	1799	1128	671	37.3%	3.6%	No
<b>Proportional representation</b>						
Burkina Faso	6944	4870	2074	29.9%	0.6%	No
Croatia	2311	1354	957	41.4%	2.4%	Yes*
Denmark	799	549	250	31.3%	26.8%	No
Estonia	872	636	236	27.1%	10.2%	No
Finland	2146	1301	845	39.4%	9.8%	Yes **
Netherlands (upper house)	261	178	83	31.8%	31.3%	Yes **
Oman (lower house)	596	576	20	3.4%	5.0%	No
Pakistan (upper house)	121	103	18	14.9%	61.1%	Yes*
Poland (lower house)	7858	4530	3328	42.4%	3.8%	Yes*
Portugal	4453	2553	1900	42.7%	3.8%	Yes*
Sri Lanka	6151	5595	556	9.0%	2.0%	No
Suriname	387	259	128	33.1%	10.2%	No
Turkey	8426	6400	2026	24.0%	4.0%	Yes **

Legend:  
 Yes\* Statutory quota  
 Yes\*\* voluntary party quota  
 Success rate~ Total number of women candidates divided by the total number of women elected (not shown in table).

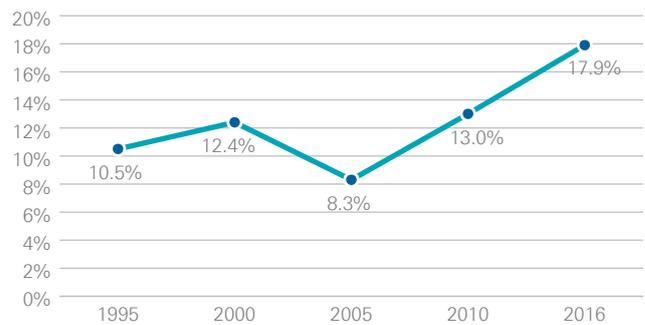
conditions. Long sitting hours and family-unfriendly leave provisions, including weak or inexistent maternity and paternity leave, can make political careers less desirable for both men and women. In 2015, the request for paternity leave from a Japanese male MP was met with mixed responses from the political community and from citizens, with many querying the cost of this request to tax payers. With a new generation of young men and women MPs the desire for greater flexibility in balancing work and family responsibilities is becoming stronger.

### The time has come for gender-sensitive media coverage

In explaining his decision to appoint a gender-balanced cabinet, Canada's newly elected Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, said: "Because it's 2015." It is time that the media treat women's electoral participation as a given, rather than a novelty. In 2015, where women led political parties, there was naturally some gender analysis, although too often, the coverage focused on the aesthetics of women's participation – what they were wearing or how their hair was done. Far too many electoral analysts are gender-blind. It remains incredibly difficult to find commentary on the number of women participating as candidates and as voters in elections, with news agencies often limiting the discussion to simply a photograph of a woman voting in elections. Coverage of issues from a gender perspective is equally lacking.

Increasing women's political participation is a matter of political will. When the political leadership decides to act in favour of women's entry into parliament – by introducing electoral gender quotas, by nominating more women candidates and placing them in favourable positions, by adopting electoral systems that lead to more candidates being elected to a constituency – women are present in greater numbers. This inclusiveness makes parliaments more legitimate and more effective. In 2015, this level of political will was evident in some elections. Without stronger levels of commitment, however, women will continue to hold a minority share of seats in parliament rather than an equal share.

Figure 3: Progress of women Speakers, 1995 - 2015



### Women Speakers of Parliament

#### Situation as at 1 January 2016

As of 1 January 2016, women hold 17.9 per cent of all presiding officer posts in the world, a two-point increase over the figure from 1 January 2015.

#### 32 Speakers in single or lower houses of parliament

Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Denmark, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, Finland, India, Italy, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lesotho, Lithuania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, Rwanda, San Marino, Serbia, Singapore, South Africa, Suriname, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, Uganda and United Arab Emirates.

#### 17 Speakers in upper houses of parliament

Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Austria, Bahamas, Barbados, Belgium, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Namibia, Netherlands, Russian Federation, South Africa, Swaziland, Trinidad and Tobago United Kingdom and Zimbabwe.



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