

PANORAMA

AN ANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

of parliamentary elections 2008



A REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN WORDS AND PICTURES

Bangladesh: A woman displays an inked finger as proof of casting her vote. © Commonwealth Secretariat/Tom Baird

"In any State the authority of the government can only derive from the will of the people as expressed in genuine, free and fair elections held at regular intervals on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage."

—Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, unanimously adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 154th session (Paris, 26 March 1994)

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AT A GLANCE

- Fifty-three parliamentary chambers in 46 countries (24.47 per cent of the 188 countries with functioning parliaments) were renewed through direct elections.
- Of the world's 45,009 parliamentary seats, 8,560 (19.02 per cent) were renewed through direct elections.
- Over 1,700 (19.86 per cent) of these seats were won by women.
- Almost sixty per cent of renewed chambers saw an increase in the percentage of women members.
- In 19 of the 35 countries where the composition of government depended on the results of parliamentary elections, the ruling party was returned to power. Fourteen countries voted the ruling party out of office.
- Worldwide voter turnout averaged 69.29 per cent, an annual increase of 3.95 percentage points based on data available.



Inter-Parliamentary Union

FOCUS ON NEPAL

Elections to the 601-member Constituent Assembly took place in April 2008. The Constituent Assembly exercises legislative power and is tasked with preparing a new Constitution for Nepal.

Why hadn't there been elections since 1999?

The government dissolved the House of Representatives on 22 May 2002 in order to hold early parliamentary elections. Following Maoist rebel threats to disrupt the elections, Prime Minister Deuba asked King Gyanendra to defer the polls by a year. The King then dismissed the government and postponed elections indefinitely. On 1 February 2005, the King assumed direct power, accusing the government of failing to make arrangements for parliamentary elections. Parliament, meanwhile, was unable to meet since, under the Constitution, the National Assembly (the upper chamber) could not be convened without the House of Representatives. On 24 April 2006, following a wave of street protests calling for elections as soon as possible, King Gyanendra agreed to reinstate the House, which reconvened on 28 April. This arrangement was succeeded by an interim legislature in January 2007 until elections could be held for a Constituent Assembly, to prepare a new Constitution.

What was at stake in the 2008 elections?

The main stake was the inclusion in the political process of the Maoists, who had led a ten-year rebellion causing over 13,000 deaths.

Taking 83 seats in the interim legislature under a negotiated agreement, Maoists continued to differ deeply with

traditional political parties on the choice of an electoral system and the status of the King. This resulted in the elections being postponed twice in 2007. They finally agreed to a mixed electoral system, combining “first-past-the-post” and proportional representation. They also agreed to institute a republic with a federal system of government.

The 2008 elections were an opportunity to test the strength of different political forces, and particularly the Maoists—this being their first participation in parliamentary elections since Nepal's Maoist Communist Party (CPN-M) was formed, in 1994.

Who won the elections?

The Maoists became the largest party, winning 220 of the Constituent Assembly's 601 seats. They were followed by the Nepali Congress (110 seats) and the Communist Party of Nepal-UML (103 seats). In all, 25 parties won representation in the Constituent Assembly. Women won 191 seats. Voter turnout was 63.29 per cent.

In late May, at its inaugural session, the Constituent Assembly voted to abolish the monarchy and to establish a federal republic in its stead.

After lengthy negotiations, the Constituent Assembly elected Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Maoist) as Prime Minister. His six-party coalition government took office on 22 August.

What next for Nepal?

In November 2008, the Speaker of the Constituent Assembly, Subash Subas Nembang, announced that the Assembly would pass a draft Constitution by April 2010 for submission to the President of the Republic and his promulgation on 28 May 2010.



3,937

This was the number of candidates, including 368 women, who stood for election to the Constituent Assembly. More than 3,000 of these candidates represented political parties (some 70 different ones), and around 800 stood as independents. In addition, the proportional representation system guaranteed representation for women, indigenous groups and the marginalized.

▲ Nepal: 80-year-old Ratna Maya Thapa from the Central Region shows her voter registration card after walking for one and a half hours to cast her ballot. © UN Photo/Nayan Tara

POWER SHIFTS

Ghana

Date of elections: 7 December 2008

Voter turnout: 8,671,272 (69.52%)

A smooth transition of power took place, once again, after the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) won both the presidential and parliamentary elections.

After the previous elections in December 2004, President John Kufuor's New Patriotic Party (NPP) held a slim majority in parliament, ahead of the NDC. In 2008, the NDC campaigned on a platform of more welfare and more schools. The NPP campaigned on its record of fostering peace in the country and good relations with its neighbours.

Of the country's 12.4 million registered voters, 69.52 per cent turned out at the polls. During the campaign, leaders across the political spectrum had called for peaceful, non-violent elections. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) hailed the elections as "peaceful, transparent and credible", while the Carter Center praised them as "competitive" and "further reinforcing Ghana's democratic tradition".

The NDC became the largest party, winning 114 of the parliament's 230 seats, ahead of the NPP (107 seats). In the presidential elections, Mr. John Atta-Mills (NDC) was elected in the second round with 50.23 per cent of the vote.

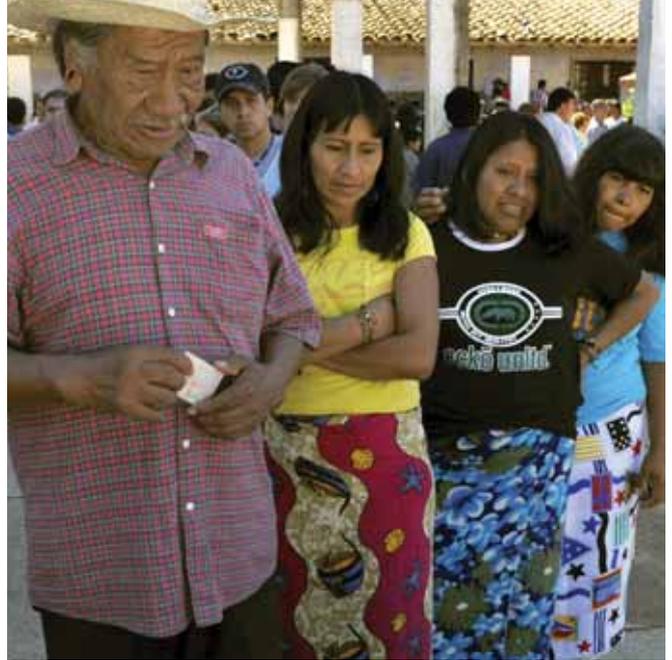
Pakistan

Date of elections: 17 February 2008

Voter turnout: 35,170,435 (44%)

Elections to the National Assembly took place in a very tense atmosphere, following the assassination on 27 December 2007 of Benazir Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People's Party, PPP.

In October and November 2007, two exiled former prime ministers – Ms. Bhutto and Mr. Nawaz Sharif, of the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) – returned to Pakistan to participate in the electoral process. On 3 November, President Pervez Musharraf, who had come to power by military coup in 1999, declared a state of emergency and postponed parliamentary elections indefinitely. Citing a deterioration in law and order and judicial interference in government affairs, he also suspended the Constitution and sacked, for the second time, Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. On 11 November, following mounting international pressure, President Musharraf announced that parliamentary elections would be held by 9 January 2008. He subsequently lifted the state of emergency and reinstated the Constitution.



▲ Paraguay: Members of indigenous Maka tribe vote at a polling station in Roque Alonso, outskirts of Asuncion. © AFP Photo/Juan Mabromata

After Ms. Bhutto's assassination on 27 December provoked violent street protests, the elections were postponed to 17 February 2008.

The voting gave PPP 125 of the National Assembly's 342 seats, while PML-N took 91 seats. These two parties formed a "government of national consensus", and in August President Musharraf resigned, under the threat of impeachment for corruption, economic mismanagement and violation of the Constitution.

Paraguay

Date of elections: 20 April 2008

Voter turnout: 1,874,127 (65.48%)

The election as President of Fernando Lugo – known as the 'bishop of the poor' – ended more than six decades of rule by the National Republican Association-Colorado Party (ANR).

The country's largest party since 1947—and throughout the dictatorship of General Alfred Stroessner from 1954 to 1989—the ANR had failed in the previous elections, in April 2003, to win a majority in either chamber, although the party's leader had been elected as President.

In December 2007, the centre-left Patriotic Alliance for Change (APC) endorsed former Roman Catholic bishop Fernando Lugo as its presidential candidate. Mr. Lugo pledged to tackle corruption and poverty and promised land reforms. The ANR, weakened by internal rivalries, warned that he would implement leftist policies similar to those in Bolivia and Venezuela.

Mr. Lugo (APC) was elected with over 42 per cent of the valid votes, ahead of three other candidates. Though the ANR remained the largest single party in both chambers, the parties that compose the APC collectively hold slightly more seats.

ELECTORAL HIGHLIGHTS

Angola

Date of elections: 5–6 September 2008

Voter turnout: 7,213,281 (87.36%)

The country's first elections since 1992 confirmed the incumbent government of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

Back in 1992, when the MPLA had won the elections, the party's leader, José Eduardo dos Santos, had been re-elected as President, having first taken power in 1978. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) had challenged this outcome and resumed the civil war, a conflict that would ultimately claim some 500,000 lives. The civil war did not end until 2002, when the army killed UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi.

The 2008 elections – considered a dry-run for presidential elections in 2009 – were contested by 5,198 candidates from 10 political parties and four coalitions. Observer missions from the European Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) praised the electoral process, although the EU observers criticized media coverage as biased toward the government and short of basic international standards. The MPLA won a comfortable majority with 191 seats to UNITA's 16. Eighty-two of the winning candidates (37.27 per cent) were women.

Bangladesh

Date of elections: 29 December 2008

Voter turnout: 69,945,550 (86.29%)

A clear victory for the Awami League broke a political stalemate in place since parliament was dissolved in October 2006.

Parliament was dissolved in October 2006 with the aim to hold general elections in January 2007. The opposition Awami League (AL), however, led violent protests challenging the neutrality of the caretaker government tasked with overseeing the elections. On 11 January, President Ahmed postponed the elections and declared a state of emergency. Former prime ministers Sheikh Hasina (AL) and Khaleda Zia (Bangladesh Nationalist Party, BNP) were later arrested on corruption charges. Although both were allowed to run in the 2008 elections, the charges against them were maintained.

Both the AL and the BNP urged an immediate end to emergency rule, to permit free and fair elections. Both parties pledged to help the poor by lowering prices for essential goods.

► Zimbabwe: A voter looks up her name with the help of candle lights at a polling station just outside Harare. © AFP Photo/Alexander Joe

The European Union (EU) observer mission concluded that the elections had been credible and transparent, reflecting “the will of the people of Bangladesh”. The final results gave 263 seats to the AL-led alliance, including 230 for the AL itself. The BNP took 30 seats, and its allies, three. Women took 19 seats, and another 45 were reserved for women, in proportion to each party's performance in the elections.

Zimbabwe

Date of elections: 29 March 2008

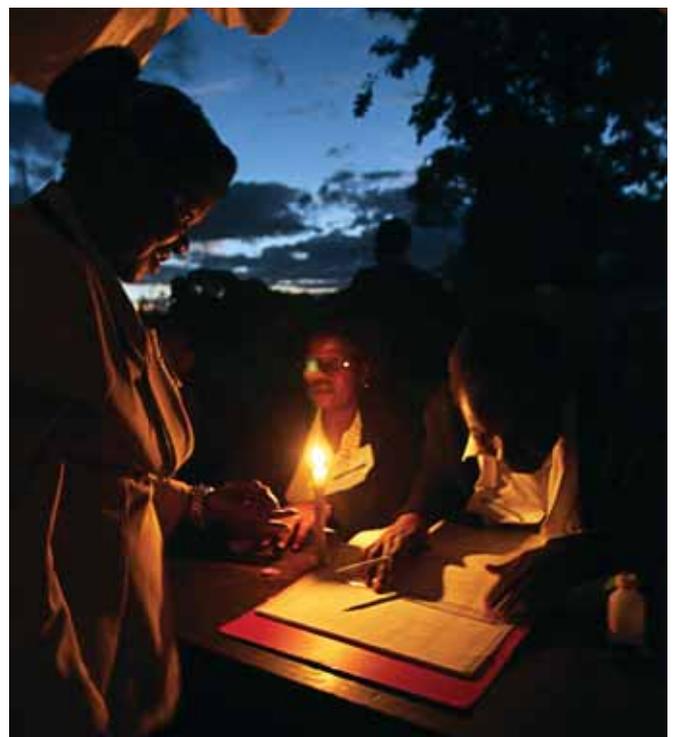
Voter turnout: no official data

Controversial presidential and parliamentary elections saw the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) become the largest party in the House of Assembly.

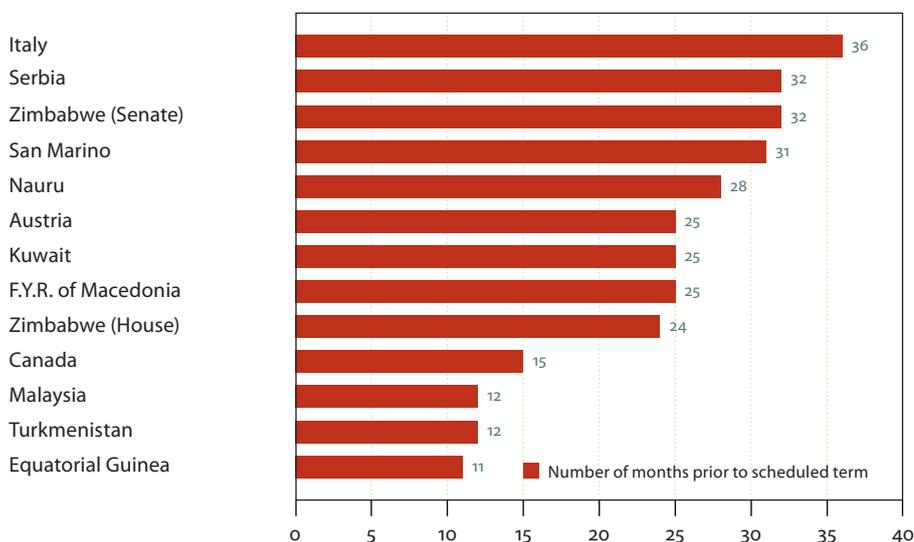
Elections took place against the backdrop of an economic catastrophe, with inflation exceeding 100,000 per cent in February 2008. President Mugabe promised to invest in agriculture and to “defend” his country against the West, whom he blamed for the country's woes. The MDC campaigned on a platform of economic stabilization, restoration of law and order and constitutional changes.

Turnout was reportedly high among the 5.6 million registered voters, although the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission did not release an official figure.

Observers from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) expressed several concerns over the election process. Various observers were not allowed to participate, including the Commonwealth and the European Union. Delayed announcement of the presidential election results heightened tensions, with both President Mugabe and MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai claiming victory. On 22 June, Mr. Tsvangirai withdrew from the run-off, citing election-related violence against him and his supporters. The electoral commission nevertheless conducted the run-off elections and declared Mr. Mugabe's re-election.



Early elections



The year saw an unusually large number of early elections, i.e. more than 2 years before the end of parliamentary terms: in Austria and Italy after the governing coalitions collapsed, and in Kuwait and Nauru, after a standoff between parliament and the government. Early elections were also held in Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe as part of a new constitutional package.

On the other hand, Vanuatu's 8-party coalition government survived a total of six no-confidence votes before the parliamentary term ended and elections finally took place in September 2008. Voters returned 15 parties and 4 independents to parliament, leading to the formation of another coalition government.

The MDC became the largest party in the House of Assembly, winning 100 of the chamber's 210 seats. The ZANU-PF, which took 99 seats, lost control of the House for the first time since independence in 1980. Parliament did not hold its first session until 25 August, nearly six months after the elections.

The ZANU-PF, MDC and MDC-Arthur Mutambara faction signed a power-sharing agreement on 15 September, but continued to disagree over the allocation of key posts. The new government was finally formed in February 2009.

Mongolia

Date of elections: 29 June 2008

Voter turnout: 1,139,984 (74.31%)

Mongolia's election results were highly disputed. Large-scale street protests led to the declaration of a four-day state of emergency.

After the previous elections in 2004, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) and the Motherland-Democracy Coalition, led by the Democratic Party (DP),

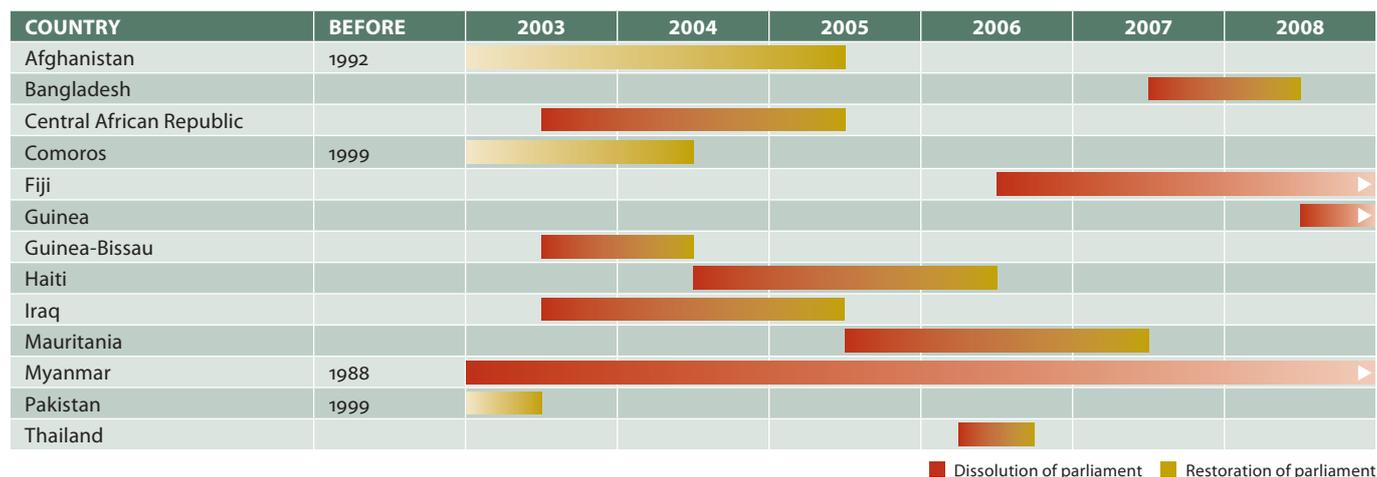
formed the country's first coalition government since the introduction of the multi-party system in 1990. The government, however, remained fragile and divided.

A key debate in the run-up to the 2008 elections concerned the use of recently discovered mineral deposits in the country, including copper, gold and coal. The MPRP advocated maintaining government control over these resources, while the DP called for more private-sector involvement.

A 16-member international observer panel declared the elections largely free and fair. The MPRP declared victory but was accused of election-rigging by the DP. Large-scale street protests turned violent: MPRP headquarters were set on fire, at least five people were killed and hundreds injured. President Enkhbayar declared a four-day state of emergency in the capital.

Facing a DP boycott, parliament failed four times to reach the two-thirds quorum required to swear in new members, finally mustering the required quorum and convening on 28 August. The MPRP and DP have since formed a new coalition government.

Countries without a functioning parliament, 2003–2008



VOTER TURNOUT

Compared to previous parliamentary elections, among countries for which data were available, voter turnout rose in 14 countries (37.84 per cent) but fell in 23 countries (62.16 per cent). The average rise in turnout was 8.45 percentage points; the average decline, 7.39 points. Eleven countries saw a change (increase or decline) of more than 10 points in voter turnout.

Kuwait

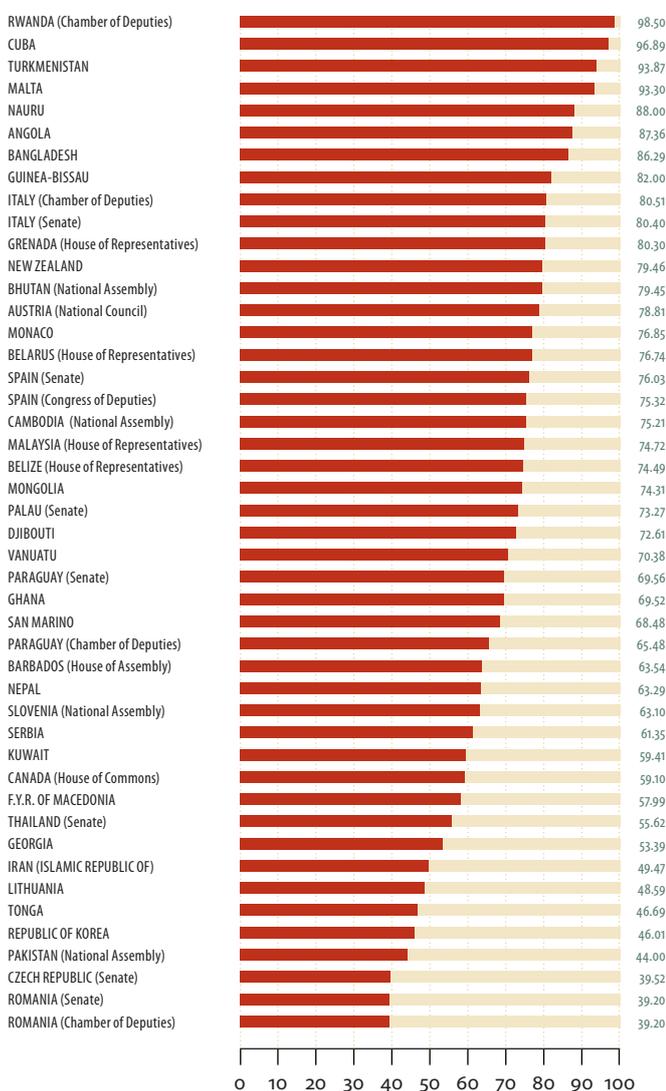
Date of elections: 17 May 2008

Voter turnout: 214,886 (59.41%)

The 2008 elections were triggered by a standoff between the government and parliament as well as sectarian tensions. A string of no-confidence votes in parliament against individual ministers had resulted in four cabinet reshuffles since the last elections, reflecting disagreement over public sector pay increases in a context of record inflation.

Voter turnout, 2008

(ballots cast/registered voters, per cent)



Following the cabinet's resignation on 17 March, the emir dissolved the parliament, accusing it of irresponsibility and citing the need to safeguard national unity. Voter turnout (59.41%) was 32 percentage points lower than for the June 2006 elections, when women had first gained the right to vote and run for office.

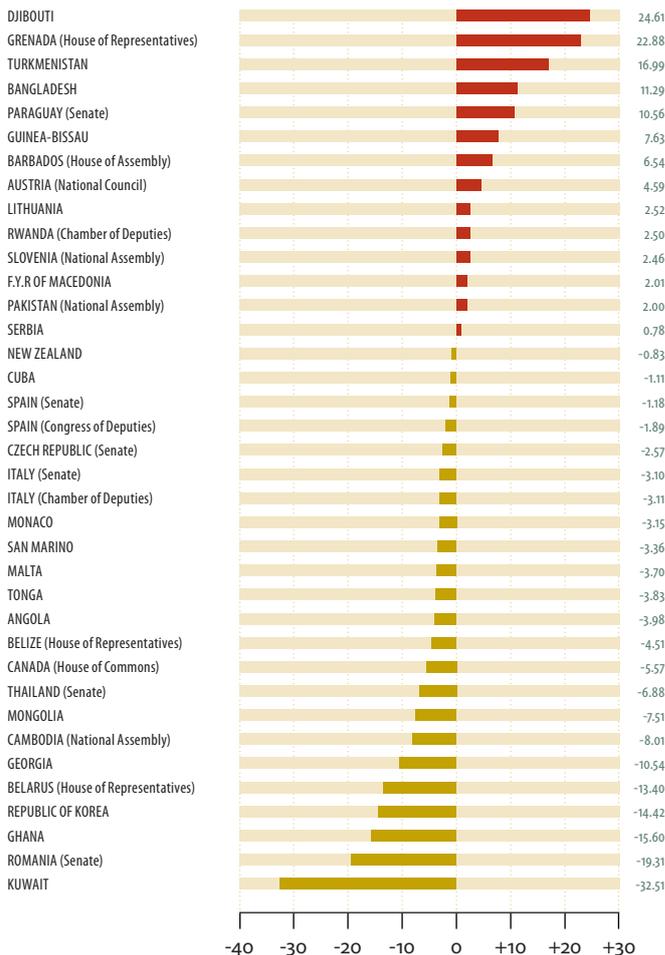
Turkmenistan

Date of elections: 14 December 2008

Voter turnout: 2,594,658 (93.87%)

Parliamentary elections were the first to take place since the death in December 2006 of former President Saparmurat Niyazov, who had ruled the country for 16 years. Legally registered political parties and movements were allowed to submit candidates for the first time, but by the deadline for nominations, no new parties had been formed. Consequently, all candidates were members of the country's only legal party, the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT), and other entities within the National Revival Movement. Voter turnout in 2008 reached 93.87 per cent, a 17 point increase over the previous parliamentary elections, in 2004, but well below the 99.6 per cent officially recorded in 1999.

Difference in turnout between 2008 elections and previous elections, per cent



INCLUSIVE PARLIAMENTS

Worldwide, across all chambers of parliament, average participation by women reached an all-time high of 18.3 percent in 2008, with 60 per cent of the chambers renewed by direct elections experiencing increases in the percentage of women members. These figures mask wide disparities, however, ranging from a record high of 56.3 percent in Rwanda to zero in Belize (House of Representatives), Nauru and Palau (House of Delegates).

The election of women continued to be affected by electoral and party systems, with women achieving greater success in countries with proportional representation, as opposed to majority, “first-past-the-post” systems:

- In the 14 single/lower chambers elected by means of proportional representation, women won an average of 24.5 percent of the seats.
- In the 10 chambers with mixed electoral systems (combining elements of proportional and majority electoral systems), women were elected to 21.4 percent of the seats.
- In the 22 chambers using majority electoral systems, an average of 18 percent of the parliamentarians elected were women.

The adoption of special measures also contributed to an increase in women’s representation in 2008. Countries having adopted such measures elected women to an average of 24 percent of the parliamentary seats concerned, compared to 18 percent for countries without such measures.

Rwanda

Date of elections: 15–18 September 2008

Voter turnout: 4,697,689 (98.5%)

Rwanda’s Chamber of Deputies became the first single/lower chamber in the world to be composed of more than 50% women (45 of the chamber’s 80 seats, or 56.25 per cent). Since the country’s Constitution requires at least 30 percent of all posts in decision making organs to be held by women, 24 seats in the Chamber of Deputies were effectively reserved for women candidates only. Women won one seat reserved for youth and 20 seats in competition with men under the country’s proportional representation system. Women also account for 34.62 per cent of the Senate.

More analysis can be found in the IPU publication, *Women in Parliament in 2008: The Year in Perspective*.



▲ Romania: A Roma woman prepares to cast her vote at a polling station in Bucharest. © AFP Photo/Daniel Mihailescu

Changes to electoral systems in 2008

- **Bhutan:** A 2007 Royal Decree provided for nationwide elections involving political parties. The previous National Assembly had been a larger, non-partisan body.
- **Malta:** The party winning the highest percentage of first-count votes now receives “bonus seats” in the House of Representatives, if necessary to produce a majority.
- **Romania:** Proportional representation has been replaced by a mixed electoral system. Seats in constituencies where candidates do not obtain over 50 per cent of the votes are distributed among political parties in proportion to their share of the national vote.
- **San Marino:** The introduction in May 2007 of a threshold to win parliamentary representation promoted the formation of electoral coalitions. The electoral law was again amended in August 2008 to give “bonus seats” to the coalition with the highest number of votes, enabling it to hold a majority in the new legislature.

18

This is the number of minority groups receiving a seat following elections to the Romanian Chamber of Deputies. Electoral law entitles legally established national minority organizations not winning parliamentary representation in either chamber to one seat each in the Chamber of Deputies—on the condition that the organization obtains at least 10% of the average number of valid votes cast for an elected Deputy. In addition, political parties representing the Hungarian national minority in Romania won 22 seats outright in the Chamber of Deputies.

SCOPE

This publication covers all direct parliamentary elections in 2008, held upon the normal expiry of the term or dissolution of the parliament/parliamentary chamber. It does not cover indirectly elected or appointed parliamentary chambers. Information is provided on presidential elections when held concurrently with parliamentary elections.

In direct elections, the personal vote of individual citizens determines who will be their elected representatives. In indirect elections, members of an electoral college elect the representatives on behalf of the citizens.

All data in the Panorama of Parliamentary Elections is drawn from the IPU's PARLINE database on national parliaments (www.ipu.org/parline).

All figures are based on data available on 31 January 2009. Data has been cross-checked with parliaments to the greatest extent possible.

Explanatory notes

Voter turnout: This is calculated as the percentage of voters to registered electors. Voters include those who cast blank or invalid ballots. Those countries for which turnout figures were not available were excluded.

Number of members directly elected: refers to the number of parliamentarians directly elected before 31 January 2009. The figure includes overhang seats but excludes seats that remain undecided from the general elections.

About the IPU

Created in 1889, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the international organization of parliaments of sovereign States. In February 2009, 154 national parliaments were members of the IPU. Eight regional parliamentary assemblies were associate members.

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Direct elections for parliamentary chambers in 2008

COUNTRY	CHAMBER	ELECTION DATE	NUMBER OF MEMBERS DIRECTLY ELECTED
ANGOLA	National Assembly	5–6 September	220
AUSTRIA	National Council	28 September	183
BANGLADESH	Parliament	29 December	300
BARBADOS	House of Assembly	15 January	30
BELARUS	House of Representatives	28 September	110
BELIZE	House of Representatives	7 February	31
BHUTAN	National Assembly	24 March	47
CAMBODIA	National Assembly	27 July	123
CANADA	House of Commons	14 October	308
CUBA	National Assembly of the People's Power	20 January	614
CZECH REPUBLIC	Senate	17–25 October	27
DJIBOUTI	National Assembly	8 February	65
EQUATORIAL GUINEA	House of Peoples' Representatives	4 May	100
GEORGIA	Parliament	21 May	150
GHANA	Parliament	7 December	228
GRENADA	House of Representatives	8 July	15
GUINEA-BISSAU	National People's Assembly	16 November	100
IRAN (ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF)	Islamic Consultative Assembly	14 March & 25 April	286
ITALY	Chamber of Deputies	13–14 April	630
ITALY	Senate	13–14 April	315
KUWAIT	National Assembly	17 May	50
LITHUANIA	Parliament	12 & 26 October	141
MALAYSIA	House of Representatives	8 March	222
MALTA	House of Representatives	8 March	69
MONACO	National Council	3 February	24
MONGOLIA	State Great Hural	29 June	75
NAURU	Parliament	26 April	18
NEPAL	Constituent Assembly	10 April	575
NEW ZEALAND	House of Representatives	8 November	122
PAKISTAN	National Assembly	17 February	270
PALAU	House of Delegates	4 November	16
PALAU	Senate	4 November	13
PARAGUAY	Chamber of Deputies	20 April	80
PARAGUAY	Senate	20 April	45
REPUBLIC OF KOREA	National Assembly	9 April	299
ROMANIA	Chamber of Deputies	30 November	334
ROMANIA	Senate	30 November	137
RWANDA	Chamber of Deputies	15–18 September	53
SAN MARINO	Great and General Council	9 November	60
SERBIA	National Assembly	11 May	250
SLOVENIA	National Assembly	21 September	90
SPAIN	Congress of Deputies	9 March	350
SPAIN	Senate	9 March	208
SWAZILAND	House of Assembly	19 September	55
THAILAND	Senate	2 March	76
THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA	Assembly of the Republic	1 & 29 June	120
TONGA	Legislative Assembly	23–24 April	9
TURKMENISTAN	Assembly	14 December	125
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	House of Representatives	4 November	435
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	Senate	4 November	35
VANUATU	Parliament	2 September	52
ZIMBABWE	House of Assembly	29 March	210
ZIMBABWE	Senate	29 March	60