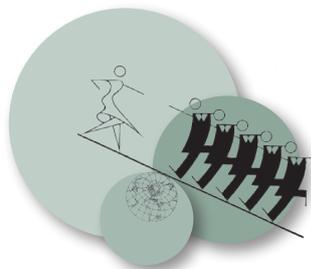


Women in Parliament in 2008

The Year in Perspective



At a Glance

A record number of women took seats in parliamentary renewals in 2008. One out of five parliamentarians elected was a woman. In all, 12,879 seats were up for renewal in 66 chambers in 54 countries. Women took 2,656, or 20.6 percent, of those seats, the highest annual renewal on record. Of these, 1,707 were directly elected, 878 were indirectly elected and 71 were appointed.

Ebbs and flows in the annual participation rates of women are commonplace. While 59 percent of chambers registered an increase in women's share of seats in 2008 (ranging from 27.7 to 0.3 percent), nine percent remained the same and one-third returned fewer women to parliament than previously (losses ranged from one to 13 percent). This trend has been consistent for the past five years: on average women gain in 60 percent of parliamentary renewals annually, while stagnation or setbacks are registered in 40 percent of cases.

This brought the overall average of women in single/lower and upper houses of parliament to 18.3 percent at the end of 2008 – one percentage point more than a year ago. It is also a significant improvement on the average a decade ago when women held 13 percent of seats.

Fifteen Percent of Chambers Reach 30% or More Women Members

The number of parliaments that have reached the minimum target of 30 percent women members set by the United Nations has grown significantly in the past decade. In 1998 just six single/lower chambers had reached the target, all of which were European. Today the figure has grown four-fold, where 24 single/lower houses of parliament have surpassed 30 percent women members. This distinction is no longer just limited to European parliaments: the lineup is now diverse and includes post-conflict and developing states from Africa, Asia and Latin America. In addition, 15 upper houses have reached the target, bringing the overall total to 39 out of 264 chambers (15%).



▲ A woman casts her ballot, Bangladesh. © AFP

HIGHLIGHTS

Globally

- The world average of women members across all chambers of parliament reached an all-time high of 18.3 percent.
- Ebbs and flows in the annual participation rates of women are commonplace. For the past five years, women have increased their share of seats in 60 percent of parliamentary renewals, while stagnation or setbacks have occurred in 40 percent of chambers renewed.
- Fifteen percent of parliamentary chambers have reached 30 percent or more women members. Forty percent of these chambers are found in Europe, one-third in Africa and 23 percent in Latin America.
- At the other end of the spectrum, one-quarter of all parliamentary chambers have less than 10 percent women members, and nine chambers have no women members at all.

Regionally

- In Africa, Rwanda's parliament made history when its lower house elected a majority of women members, 56.3 percent, while in Angola women took 37 percent of the seats in its first post-conflict election.
- Some impressive gains were registered overall in Latin America: women took a 26.5 percent share of the seats in the 12 chambers that were renewed.
- The Pacific Island States remain the worst-performing region in terms of women's election to parliament. No women candidates were successful in the single/lower house races in Nauru, Palau and Tonga.



Inter-Parliamentary Union

TABLE 1

Parliamentary Renewals in 2008

A. Progress and Setbacks of Women in Lower or Single Houses of Parliament Renewed in 2008

The figures show the percentage-point difference between renewals in 2008 compared with the previous legislature



B. Women in Lower or Single Houses after Parliamentary Renewals in 2008

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	Quota
Rwanda	80	45	56.3%	Yes**
Cuba	614	265	43.2%	No
Angola	220	82	37.3%	Yes**
Spain	350	127	36.3%	Yes**
New Zealand	122	41	33.6%	No
Nepal	601	197	32.8%	Yes**
Belarus	110	35	31.8%	No
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	120	36	30.0%	Yes**
Austria	183	50	27.3%	Yes*
Monaco	24	6	25.0%	Yes*
Pakistan	342	76	22.2%	Yes#
Canada	308	68	22.1%	No
Serbia	250	54	21.6%	Yes**
China	2987	637	21.3%	No
Italy	630	134	21.3%	Yes*
Lithuania	141	25	17.7%	Yes*
United States of America ¹	435	74	17.0%	No
Cambodia	123	20	16.3%	No
Zimbabwe	210	32	15.2%	No
San Marino	60	9	15.0%	No
Djibouti	65	9	13.8%	Yes**
Swaziland	65	9	13.8%	No
Republic of Korea	299	41	13.7%	No
Grenada	15	2	13.3%	No
Slovenia	90	12	13.3%	Yes**
Paraguay	80	10	12.5%	Yes**
Romania	334	38	11.4%	Yes*
Malaysia	222	24	10.8%	No
Barbados	30	3	10.0%	No
Guinea Bissau	100	10	10.0%	No
Malta	69	6	8.7%	Yes*
Bhutan	47	4	8.5%	No
Ghana	228	18	7.9%	No
Bangladesh ²	300	19	6.3%	Yes#
Equatorial Guinea	100	6	6.0%	No
Georgia	150	9	6.0%	No
Mongolia	75	3	4.0%	No
Vanuatu	52	2	3.8%	No
Tonga ³	32	1	3.1%	No
Kuwait ⁴	65	2	3.1%	No
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	286	8	2.8%	No
Belize	31	0	0.0%	No
Nauru	18	0	0.0%	No
Palau	16	0	0.0%	No
Qatar	35	0	0.0%	No

* One or more political party adopted a voluntary measure to increase the number of women candidates
 ** Legislated candidate quota
 # Seats reserved for women

Notes:
 Table excludes Turkmenistan as data was not available at the time of publication.
¹ Refers to the 435 voting members of the House of Representatives.
² This figure excludes the 45 reserved seats for women which were not yet filled at time of publication.
³ No woman won in the 2008 election, however one woman was appointed to the Cabinet. As cabinet ministers also sit in parliament, there is one woman out of a total of 32 members.
⁴ No woman won in the elections, however two women were appointed to the 16-member cabinet sworn-in in June 2008. As cabinet ministers also sit in parliament, there are two women out of a total of 65 members.

Rwanda reinforced its position at the top of the leader board by electing more than 56 percent women members to its lower house in September 2008. This is the first single/lower house in history where women hold the majority of seats. It improved on the previous record it had set, when in its first post-conflict elections held in 2003 it elected nearly 49 percent women. Rwanda is joined by Angola (37.3%), Burundi (30.5%), Mozambique (34.8%), South Africa (33%), Tanzania (30.4%) and Uganda (30.7%) as the seven African countries to have reached the target in single/lower houses.

Angola was a newcomer to the list in 2008, electing more than 37 percent women in its first election since 1992, signaling the return to a democratic process. In Angola, Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa, post-conflict settlements afforded the opportunity to incorporate special measures into electoral rules or party practices increasing women's representation in a short period of time. In Tanzania and Uganda, women's increased access to parliaments has been incremental.

Cuba, New Zealand and Spain consolidated their positions after slightly improving their proportion of women members, with 43.2, 33.6 and 36.3 percent respectively. While Cuba and New Zealand have no legislated quotas, Spain has a mandated candidate quota requiring political parties to nominate at least 40 percent women candidates. Austria was the only country to fall off the list after the proportion of women members dropped five percentage points to 27.3 following snap elections in which right-leaning parties made gains. Globally, left-leaning parties are more likely to implement special measures to increase women's access to political office.

Belarus and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia joined the list in 2008, electing 31.8 and 30 percent women members respectively. It is the first time since the regime changes of Eastern Europe that took place during the 1990s that women have been elected in such numbers. Nepal is the first directly elected Asian parliament to join the ranks, with 32.8 percent women members. Its new electoral arrangements mandated that at least 33 percent of electoral candidates overall were to be women.

In addition to the single and lower houses, several upper houses reached or surpassed the 30 percent target in 2008. Swaziland's upper house saw the election and appointment of 40 percent women members to the chamber, its highest proportion ever. In addition, renewals in Belarus (33.9%), Belize (38.5%), Grenada (30.8) and Spain (29.9%) resulted in a critical mass of women in each chamber. This brings to 15 the number of upper houses to have reached the target in 2008.



▲ Rwandan women queue to cast their votes. © AFP

Twenty-five Percent of Chambers Have Less Than 10% Women Members

In contrast to these performers, at the other end of the spectrum, one-quarter of all parliamentary chambers (51 single/lower houses and 14 upper houses out of 264) have less than 10 percent women members. In addition, there are nine chambers with no women members at all (these are mainly in the Pacific Islands and Arab Gulf States). So while overall averages portray upward trends, there is little room for complacency with so many parliaments yet to achieve a bare minimum proportion of women members.

Changes in Regional Perspective: The Americas Move Ahead

Table 2 provides the global and regional breakdown of women in parliament. The overall number of women in parliament has increased 50 percent over the past 15 years, from 11.3 percent to 18.3 percent in 2008. Simultaneously, there have been increases in all regions of the world. The region that has consistently registered the highest proportion of women parliamentarians is the Nordic region, with an average across all countries of 41.4 percent.

Some impressive gains were registered in the **Americas** in 2008. Women took 26.5 percent of the seats, on average, for the 12 chambers renewed. Overall, women hold 21.5 percent of all seats in the region, second only to the Nordic countries. The high annual gains are attributable to the success women registered in Cuba (43.2%) and the upper houses in Belize (38.5%) and Grenada (30.8%). In the United States, both houses of Congress held elections, returning their highest proportions of women members: 17 percent in each chamber.

Women's access to parliaments in the Caribbean states is erratic, as highlighted in Belize and Grenada. While women were appointed to nearly 40 percent of seats in

the upper house in Belize, no women won election to the lower house. Just three women contested the lower house elections (compared with 90 men), none of whom was successful. In Grenada, the biggest percentage point drop—13.3—was registered after the number of women members halved from four to two in the lower house. Yet at the same time, women were appointed to 30 percent of seats in the upper house. With small chamber sizes and the majority systems used to elect lower houses, women’s chances of success are limited. However, appointing women to upper houses has proved an important counter-balance to poor electoral results in lower chambers.

The consistent rate of progress in **Europe** was largely sustained in the 19 chambers that were renewed, with women taking more than 21 percent of the seats on offer. In addition to Spain, Belarus, the Former Yugoslav Republic and Austria already mentioned, women made inroads into the parliaments in Monaco, France and Serbia, which all adopted a form of temporary special measures. Decreases in the representation of women were registered in Malta, Georgia and Romania. Romania’s electoral system change, from a proportional to a mixed member system where most members are elected by majority vote, contributed to a drop in the number of women elected.

Asia has registered the slowest rate of progress in terms of women’s access to parliaments over the past fifteen years, reaching a regional average of 17.8 percent. There were some significant gains for women in 2008, however. In all, 14 chambers were renewed and women took nearly 19 percent of the seats on offer. The biggest gain was registered



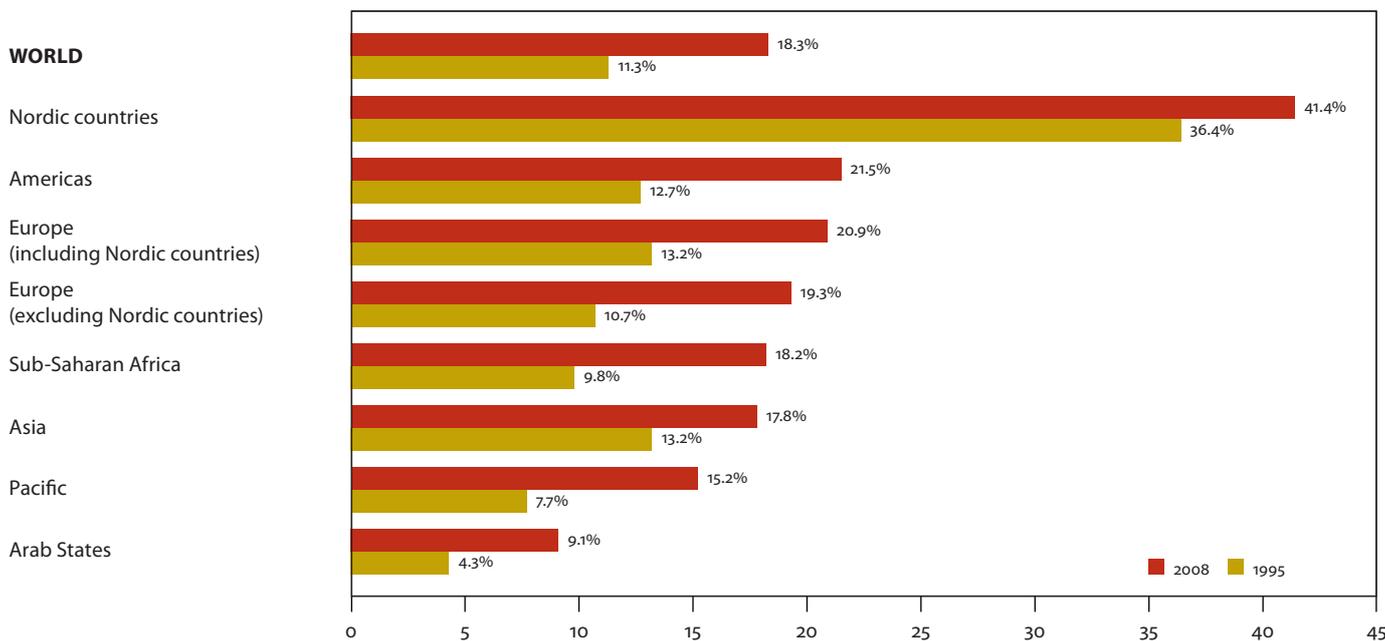
▲ Woman voting, Angola. © AFP

in Nepal, where women took 32.8 percent of the seats. The new electoral arrangements mandated political parties to ensure that 33 percent of the candidates chosen from party lists to take seats in parliament must be women, a measure that guaranteed women’s success. Pakistan, too, elected the highest number of women to its lowest chamber, where women took 76 of the 342 seats on offer. Sixty seats in the parliament are reserved for women, and 16 women won in the competition for open seats. In Bhutan, the first general elections were held for the new 47-member National Assembly, contested with a majority electoral system. Women took four seats there. The lowest proportion of women was registered in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where women won just 2.8 percent of the seats.

TABLE 2

World and Regional Averages of Women in Parliaments, 1995 and 2008

Situation for all chambers of parliaments combined in December of each year



The fewest changes took place in the **Arab States**, where just four chambers were renewed. Women took over nine percent of the seats, on a par with its overall regional average. Women took the most seats in Djibouti, with 9 out of 56 seats, an improvement of two since women first entered the parliament in 2003. In Tunisia's upper house, women took 13.5 percent of the seats, the same as the previous composition. Early elections were held in Kuwait, and as with the previous elections less than two years before, no woman candidate was successful. However, two women were appointed to the cabinet and took up seats in parliament (as cabinet ministers also sit in parliament). No woman was among the appointees to the 35-member Qatari Advisory Council. Qatar is one of three parliaments, including the Federated States of Micronesia and Saudi Arabia, never to have had a woman member.

Pacific women push for change

The lowest return rate for women in 2008 was registered in the **Pacific Islands States**, at less than four percent, on average. The parliaments of Nauru, Palau, Tonga and Vanuatu were renewed, and just five of the 131 seats on offer went to women. Two women won seats in the upper house in Palau; it has been a decade since a woman last sat in that parliament. In Vanuatu, two women were returned to the parliament. In the elections in Nauru, Tonga and Palau's lower house, no woman won a seat. However, in Tonga, one woman was appointed to the cabinet and thereby became a member of parliament.

Three other Pacific Islands States—the Federated States of Micronesia, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu—have no women members either. While a handful of female candidates do present themselves for election in these states, few receive enough votes to be elected. The extreme difficulties women face in being elected has led to calls from different sectors for governments and parliaments of the region to take action. A regional dynamic is beginning to take hold where special measures, such as reserved seats for women, are being proposed and debated as the only real policy option to redress the gender imbalances in parliaments.

Electoral Systems and Special Measures: Variables for Success

Table 1 illustrates the wide disparities in women's access to single/lower houses of parliament in 2008, ranging from a high of 56.3 percent in Rwanda, to zero in Belize, Nauru, Palau and Qatar. In upper houses, too, women's access ranges from 40 percent in Swaziland to four percent in Kazakhstan (Table 3). Of course, women's access is affected by different factors, including attitudes about the role of women in society, lack of support of political parties and bias among the electorate. But electoral arrange-

TABLE 3

Women in Upper Houses of Parliament in 2008

Country	Total Seats	Number of Women	% Women
Swaziland*	30	12	40.0%
Belize*	13	5	38.5%
Belarus*	56	19	33.9%
Grenada*	13	4	30.8%
Spain	264	79	29.9%
Zimbabwe*	93	23	24.7%
France**	343	75	21.9%
Barbados*	21	4	19.0%
Italy	322	58	18.0%
Czech Republic [#]	81	14	17.3%
United States of America [#]	100	17	17.0%
Thailand	150	24	16.0%
Paraguay	45	7	15.6%
Palau	13	2	15.4%
Madagascar [#]	33	5	15.2%
Tunisia*	126	17	13.5%
Congo*	70	9	12.9%
India [#]	243	23	9.5%
Romania	137	8	5.8%
Kazakhstan*	47	2	4.3%

* Includes indirectly elected or appointed seats.

[#] The chamber was partially renewed in 2008. These figures refer to the overall composition of the chamber after the renewal.

- Seventy-six parliaments are bicameral, composed of a lower and an upper house.
- At 31 December 2008, women held 17.6 percent of the seats in upper houses, up from 10.9 percent one decade ago.
- During 2008, 2,200 seats in 20 upper houses were renewed. Of these, women took 407 seats (18.5% of all members, on average). Half of the women were elected, and half were appointed or indirectly elected.
- Women made the most gains in Swaziland, where they took 40 percent of the seats. Belize, Belarus and Grenada also did well with more than 30 percent women members appointed to the upper chambers. Political appointments offer another way to increase women's access to parliament.
- Two women won seats in Palau, and, for the first time in a decade, women will sit in that country's senate.

ments, together with political will, are among the most important factors explaining the staggering 56 percentage point difference between 2008's best and worst performers.

Electoral and party systems have an important influence on women's rates of election. Women are elected in greater numbers in systems of proportional representation than they are in majority electoral systems, as illustrated by the electoral results from 2008:

TABLE 4**Women Candidates Elected in 2008**

	CANDIDATE				CANDIDATES ELECTED				ELECTION RATE (%)		QUOTA
	Total candidates	Men	Women	% Women	Total Elected	Total Men	Total Women	% Women	Men	Women	Quota
PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION											
Serbia	3137	2155	982	31.3%	250	196	54	21.6%	6.2	5.5	Yes**
The F.Y.R. of Macedonia	1540	1005	535	34.7%	120	84	36	30.0%	5.5	6.7	Yes**
MIXED ELECTORAL SYSTEM											
Monaco	63	43	20	31.7%	24	18	6	25.0%	28.6	30.0	No
Nepal	3937	3569	368	9.3%	601	404	197	32.8%	10.3	53.5	Yes**
New Zealand	681	488	193	28.3%	122	81	41	33.6%	11.9	21.2	Yes*
MAJORITY ELECTORAL SYSTEM											
Belarus	263	209	54	20.5%	110	75	35	31.8%	28.5	64.8	No
Belize	93	90	3	3.2%	31	31	0	0.0%	33.3	0.0	No
Ghana	1060	991	69	6.5%	228	210	18	7.9%	19.8	26.1	No
Iran	7200	6610	590	8.2%	286	278	8	2.8%	3.9	1.4	No
Kuwait	275	249	26	9.5%	65	63	2	3.1%	22.9	7.7	No
Nauru	65	62	3	4.6%	18	18	0	0.0%	27.7	0.0	No
Palau	43	36	7	16.3%	16	16	0	0.0%	37.2	0.0	No
Tonga [†]	71	63	8	11.3%	32	32	0	3.1%	45.1	0.0	No
Vanuatu	334	325	9	2.7%	52	50	2	3.8%	15.0	22.2	No
Zimbabwe	779	680	99	12.7%	210	178	32	15.2%	22.8	32.3	No

* No woman won in the 2008 election, however one woman was appointed to the Cabinet. As cabinet ministers also sit in parliament, there is one woman out of a total of 32 members.

† One or more political party adopted a voluntary measure to increase the number of women candidates

** Legislated candidate quota

- In the 14 single/lower houses elected using proportional representation, women won an average of 24.5 percent of seats.
- In the 10 chambers using 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 parliamentarians elected were women.

The six percentage-point difference between chambers elected with proportional representation and majority electoral systems is explained by the fact that the former system provides greater opportunities for increasing women's representation, such as by introducing special measures. As candidates are elected on political party lists, political parties are afforded the opportunity to nominate women in winnable positions. For example, the electoral law can direct political parties to ensure that a certain proportion of their candidates are women, as was the case in Angola, Nepal and Spain. In 2008, those countries that used special measures elected 24 percent women to parliament on average, as opposed to 18 percent for countries that did not use such measures. This trend is confirmed by examining the 39 chambers that have exceeded 30 percent representation of women: 27 of them have implemented quotas, while six of them are appointed bodies.

Of course, quotas are not the only mechanism used to promote the participation of women in politics; some states have achieved results through a combination of strategies, such as providing skills-development or assistance in running electoral campaigns. What is evident, however, is that through gender-sensitive electoral arrangements and political will at the highest level, including through political appointments, gender imbalances in the world's parliaments can be redressed. ●

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