



IN BRIEF



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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What's the Issue?

From the local to the global level, women's leadership and political participation are restricted. Women are under-represented as voters, as well as in leading positions, whether in elected offices, the civil service, the private sector or academia. This occurs despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of change, and their right to participate equally in democratic governance.

Women face several obstacles to participating in political life. Structural barriers through discriminatory laws and institutions still limit women's options to run for office. Capacity gaps mean women are less likely than men to have the education, contacts and resources needed to become effective leaders.

As the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation notes, "Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women."

Individual women have overcome these obstacles with great acclaim, and often to the benefit of society at large. But for women as a whole, the playing field needs to be level, opening opportunities for all.

Our Solutions

UN Women's programmes on leadership and participation are guided by a history of international commitments to women's representation. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women upholds women's right to participate in public life, while the Beijing Platform for Action calls for removing barriers to equal participation. The Millennium Development Goals measure progress towards gender equality in part by the proportion of women in parliamentary seats.

Towards these ends, we provide training for women political candidates to help build their capacities, and offer civic education and sensitization campaigns on gender equality. We back gender equality advocates in calling on political parties, governments and others to do their part in empowering women. Other initiatives encourage young men and women to engage in advocacy around making gender equality measures central to public policymaking.

UN Women advocates for legislative and constitutional reforms to ensure women's fair access to political spheres—as voters, candidates, elected officials and civil service members. We collaborate with UN country teams and work with civil society on programmes so that elections uphold women's rights, including to vote and campaign free from electoral violence.



How We Make a Difference

Recent results from around the world:

KENYA: In the 2013 elections, the number of women legislators rose to more than 20 per cent, more than double compared to the previous elections. UN Women contributed to this result by providing training to nearly 900 female candidates in all 47 counties and running a Campaign for Women in Leadership to encourage voters to vote for women.

PAKISTAN: In 2012 UN Women supported women's voter registration. The National Database and Registration Authority registered more than 40 million women, representing 86 per cent of the female population, increasing from 44 per cent four years earlier. For the first time, the Election Commission, supported by UN Women and UNDP, has a system to collect voter turnout data by sex, which will aid in pinpointing obstacles to women's civic rights.

TIMOR-LESTE: After the 2012 elections, Timor-Leste had the highest proportion of women legislators in Asia. At 38 per cent, it exceeded the one-third quota mandated by law. UN Women in partnership with UNDP has been instrumental in supporting an active women's parliamentary caucus, civil society groups and the national gender unit to promote women candidates.

ZIMBABWE: A new constitution that is strong on women's rights was signed into law in Zimbabwe, which resulted in women gaining 35 per cent of the seats in the 2013 July elections, compared to a previous 17 per cent in 2008. Behind the breakthrough was the *Group of 20*, a constitutional gender equality lobbying group comprising activists, politicians and scholars supported by UN Women.

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FACTS AND FIGURES - LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Women in parliaments:

- Only 20.9 per cent of national parliamentarians were female as of 1 July 2013, a slow increase from 11.6 per cent in 1995.
- As of July 2013, 8 women served as Head of State and 13 served as Head of Government.
- Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide. Women there have won 63.8 per cent of seats in the lower house.
- Globally, there are 37 States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, as of July 2013.

Other domains of government:

- As of January 2012, only 17 per cent of government ministers were women, with the majority overseeing social sectors, such as education and health.
- Women's representation in local governments has made a difference. Research on panchayats (local councils) in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with female-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with male-led councils.
- In Norway, a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found.



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