



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Women in Politics

2021

March 2021



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Women in parliament in 2020

The year in review



2020 elections in New Zealand saw an unprecedented increase in the numbers of women and traditionally under-represented groups both in parliament and in government, reflecting people's demand for due representation of all sectors of society in a time of pandemic. The female Prime Minister was widely considered to have competently and efficiently managed her country's response to COVID-19, which may have boosted her bid for reelection. © Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images via AFP

Introduction

Elections in 2020 were profoundly marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in delays and cancellations, logistical challenges for candidates and election administrators and often low turnout. Women's leadership was frequently in the spotlight during the pandemic. The pandemic raised complex and deeply gendered challenges for citizens and created obstacles for MPs to communicate and engage directly with their constituents. It changed the ways parliaments operate, introducing flexibility and new technologies. A substantial number of MPs across the globe were infected, many lost their lives.

Women's participation continued to grow by 0.6 per cent in 2020, passing the 25 per cent mark for combined upper and lower/single chambers worldwide for the first time (+0.7 points for lower/single chambers and +0.2 points in upper chambers). This is a similar rate of growth to the past decade. Several parliaments, such as Mali's and Egypt's, overcame remarkable

HIGHLIGHTS

Globally

- 2020 was marked by continued gradual progress for women in parliament (+0.6 points) despite the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and its impact. The global average for the proportion of women in parliament reached an all-time high of 25.5 per cent. Women won 22.6 per cent of all seats up for renewal in 2020 in 70¹ chambers across 57 countries. Women took 22.9 per cent of the unicameral or lower chamber seats up for renewal, and 21.6 per cent of the upper chamber seats.
- COVID-19 created extensive challenges for elections and campaigning (especially online violence and harassment against women in politics) but raised public awareness and debate about many gendered aspects of governance and political leadership, such as the ability to combine private and public life, as well as the need for gender-awareness in recovery planning.
- Of the 57 countries that held elections in 2020, 25 implemented legislated quotas (either reserved seats or candidate quotas). On average, parliaments with legislated quotas elected 11.8 per cent more women to single and lower chambers than parliaments with no legal quotas (27.4 per cent v. 15.6 per cent), and 7.4 per cent more women to upper chambers (25.6 per cent v. 18.2 per cent).
- Quotas continued to act as a shield against backsliding in most cases but once quotas are introduced, women's participation often plateaus for multiple election cycles.
- Electoral systems play a role in the adoption – but not the effectiveness – of quotas. Quotas were much less likely to be used in countries with majoritarian electoral systems during parliamentary renewals in 2020. But when they were in place, quotas in majoritarian electoral systems performed

¹ Elections in the Central African Republic and Venezuela are excluded as results had not been validated or confirmed at the time of publication.



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A global snapshot of women in politics in 2021: the gains



25.5% of Parliamentarians are Women

20.9% of Speakers of Parliament are Women

5.9% of Heads of State are Women

6.7% of Heads of Government are Women

21.9% of Ministerial Positions are Held by Women

More women than ever before are at the highest levels of political power.



+0.6% more women parliamentarians

+0.4% more women speakers

+2 more countries with women heads of state and/or government

+0.6% more women holding ministerial portfolios

However, progress is moving very slow.



A global snapshot of women in politics in 2021: the losses

Women accounted for at least 50 per cent of members in just three parliaments: **Rwanda, Cuba and the United Arab Emirates.**




Three countries in the world currently have no women in their parliaments: **Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.**

The number of countries in which women hold at least **50 per cent of ministerial positions** dropped to **13** from 14 in 2020.

The number of countries with **no women ministers** increased from **9** to **12**.



Regional Parliamentary Trends following 2020 elections

Americas 32.4%	Europe 30.4%	Sub-Saharan Africa 25%	Asia 20.4%	Pacific 20.9%	MENA 17.7%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highest regional average• Record highs in the USA and Jamaica• Declines in Bolivia within parity margins but remains one of the top five regionally thanks to quota law	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most significant gains in Croatia and Ireland• Only Azerbaijan, Czech Republic and Romania failed to elect at least 20% of women MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impressive gains in Mali and Niger despite security challenges• Burkina Faso saw biggest setback• Burundi, Tanzania and Cameroon all elected women to at least 1/3 of seats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gains in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan• Only Nepal exceeded 30% women among MP renewals in 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Zealand made history with more women and minority MPs• Kiribati elected their first woman speaker• Only region in the world with parliaments that have zero women	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Egypt reached historic highs with new quota law• No seats won by women in Kuwait• Region with lowest average of women in parliament 

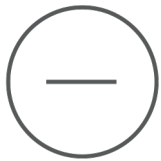
Highlights in 2021 Parliaments



There has been progress in all regions of the world in terms of women's representation, although **unequal in advancements**.



The top 10 most gender balanced unicameral parliaments and lower chambers has remained similar to last year, with the **new addition of New Zealand at 5th from 20th**.



There are **23 parliaments in the world that have 40 per cent of women representation** or higher in their lower or single chambers, one less country than last year.



Among percentiles, the **largest increase in number of countries fall within the 25-30 percent range**. 11 countries have significantly increased the ratio of women in their parliaments in 2021 to join this new percentile range.



Regional Ministerial Trends

Americas 29.1%

- **US** women in charge of ministerial portfolios rose from 17% to 46% in 2020
- **Nicaragua** has the highest proportion globally at 58.8%

Europe 28.9%

- Biggest gains are in **Lithuania** (from 8% to 43%) and **Belgium** (from 25% to 57%)

Sub-Saharan Africa 24.4%

- **Namibia** made the biggest leap (39% from 15%)
- **Rwanda** still leads the region with 54.8%

MENA 15.1%

- Biggest regional growth compared to last year
- **Lebanon** has the largest share in the region (31.6%)
- Largest gains were in **Tunisia** (29.2% from 6.9%)

Pacific 14%

- **New Zealand** has the largest share of women ministers at 40%

Asia 9.2%

- Significant declines in Asia
- **Mongolia** has the biggest gains (6.7% to 18.8%)
- This is the first time a regional average dropped below 10% since 2017



Highlights in 2021 Ministerial Portfolios



The **environment or energy portfolio** jumped from third place in 2020 to the top spot in 2021 of ministerial portfolios held by women.



Women's share in **traditionally male-led ministerial portfolios** (such as defence and finance) has slightly increased in 2021.



Women ministers continue to dominate portfolios covering **social affairs, women's affairs and gender equality**.



The share of women ministers in charge of **foreign affairs portfolios** also saw a significant increase compared with last year, rising from 16.8% to 26%.



However, women only hold 22.4% of **health portfolios**.





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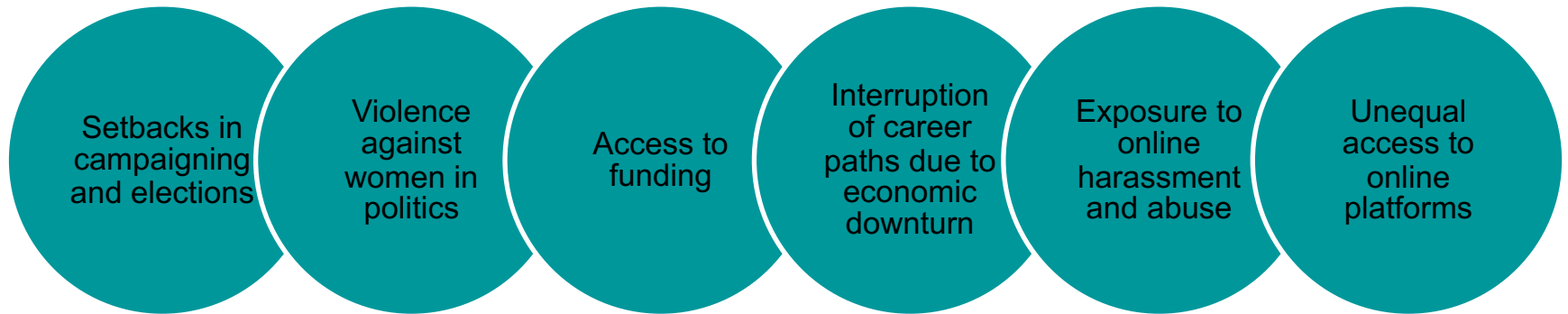
How is COVID-19 changing politics for women?

Elections and COVID-19

57 countries held national parliamentary elections in 2020

20 countries postponed parliamentary elections mainly due to COVID-19

What are the obstacles women faced in running for office in 2020?



In **Liberia**, a woman senatorial candidate was reportedly beaten, harassed and threatened through the politicization of a traditional cultural practice.

Ghana experienced a 59% increase in the cost of running for political office, adding another impediment for women's entry into public office.

Bolivia had to postpone their elections twice due to COVID-19.

In a province in **Canada**, police reported a 450% increase in online threats against politicians in 2020.



Violence Against Women in Politics: Online Violence a Growing Threat

Reports from all regions indicate that **online violence and harassment against women in politics increased** during campaigns and public life in general in 2020.



In an **Australian** 2020 survey on women in politics, 65% of respondents reported being exposed to internet abuse, and one in five feared physical safety.



Reports from **Kenya** indicate increased online violence and attacks against women in relation to the pandemic.



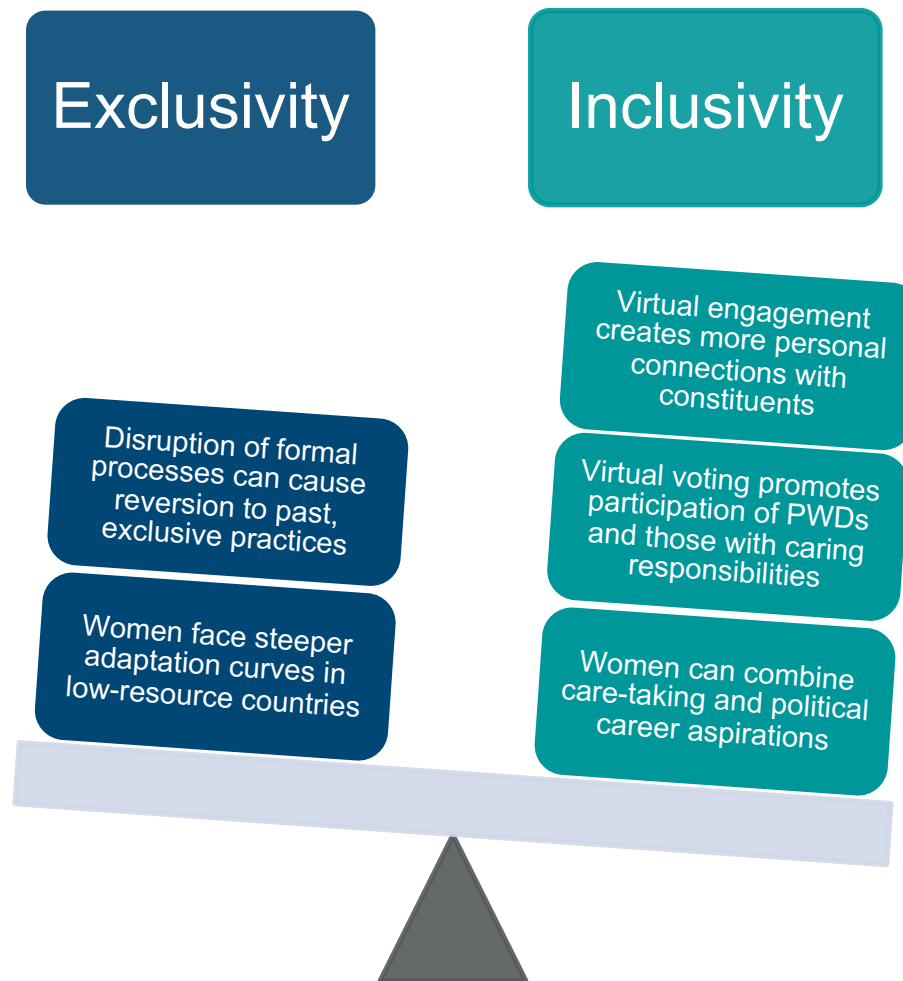
Online sexual harassment of women has doubled in the **United States** over the past three years.



Parliamentary processes and COVID-19

The pandemic changed the way parliaments operate.

How have these new processes affected political representation and inclusivity?

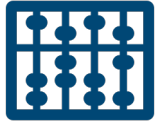




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How have tried and tested solutions fared during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Quotas prevent backsliding



In **25 out of 57 countries** that had elections in 2020, a gender quota was applied in some form



Parliaments with legislated gender quotas elected:
11.8% more women to single and lower chambers
7.4% more women to upper chambers



Quotas acted as a **shield against backsliding** in 2020.



Only two countries with quotas experienced a relapse in representation*:

- **Burkina Faso** (-3.1 points): underscores the importance of adequate enforcement and political will
- **Jordan** (-4.6 points): reflects the broader trend of plateaus at quota levels

**This does not include countries with minor adjustments of less than 1.5 per cent or adjustments in countries within parity margins.*



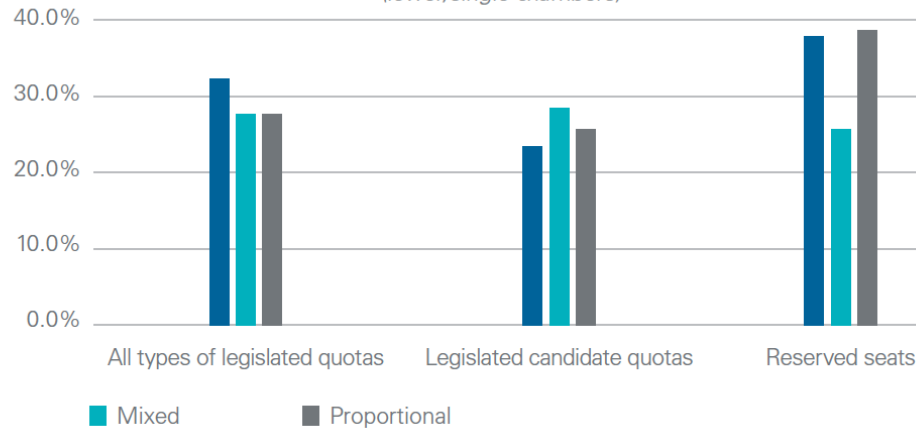
Quotas and electoral systems

Adoption and effectiveness of legislated quotas by electoral system

Absence of legislated quotas by electoral system
Number of countries that applied no legislated quotas during parliamentary renewals in 2020 (lower/single chambers)



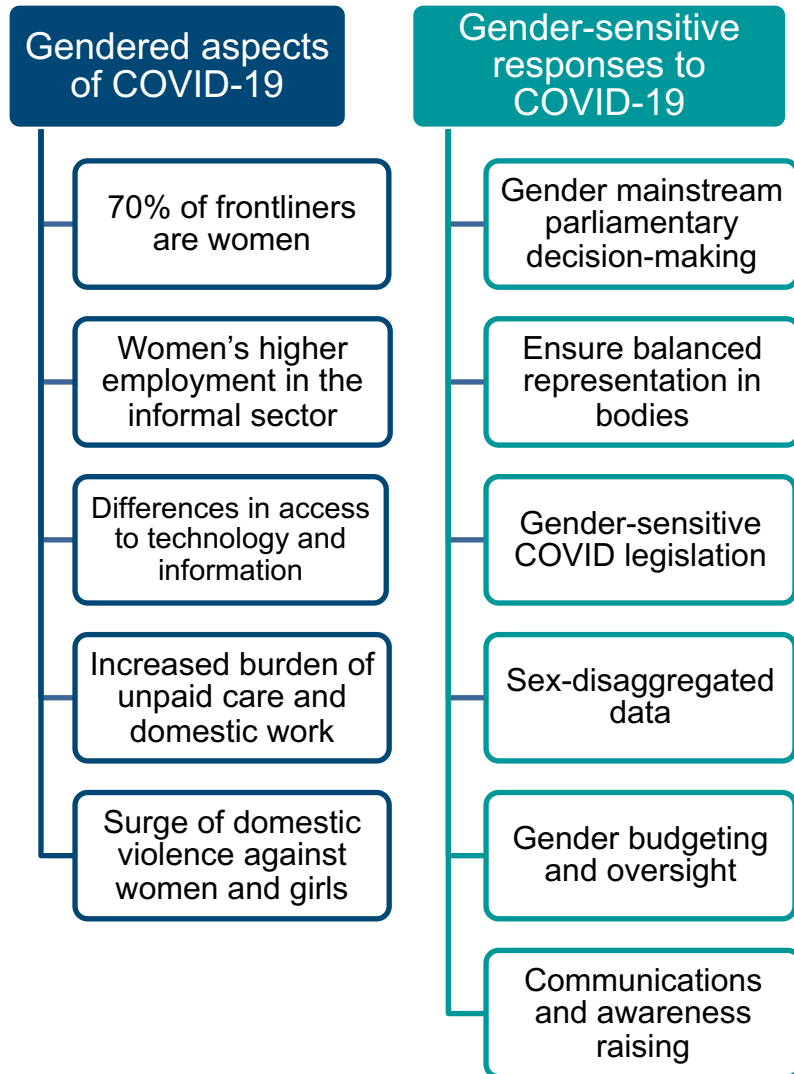
Effectiveness of legislative quotas by electoral system
Proportion of seats won by women during parliamentary renewals in 2020 (lower/single chambers)



- Quotas provide a significant advantage for women candidates in direct elections
- 2020 election results show that electoral systems play a role in the adoption—but not the effectiveness—of quotas
- **Quotas are less likely used in majoritarian electoral systems** compared to proportional or mixed systems
- **Countries with quotas performed equally well** in both majoritarian and proportional or mixed electoral systems.
- A need to eliminate barriers to adopting quotas in majority-based systems



Women's leadership and governance in a pandemic



The pandemic prompted MPs to respond to profoundly **gendered needs** among their constituents through **gender-sensitive responses**.

For example, **greater gender equality in legislatures** and female-headed health agencies were connected to **earlier adoption of stay-at-home orders**.



Gender parity in politics

The goal of achieving gender parity in decision-making and leadership is more crucial than ever.

Gender parity in political office and leadership is key to:

Removing barriers to gender equality

Opening politics to women from diverse backgrounds

Transforming the political space into an enabling environment

Addressing and reflecting demands of society

More efficient, effective and legitimate political institutions

So how do we achieve gender parity in politics by 2030?

Craft and adopt National Plans of Action

Legislate gender quotas

Reform discriminatory laws

Cap spending on electoral campaigns

Adopt laws to prevent gender-based violence

Target parity in all aspects of public life

Mandate and resource gender mainstreaming mechanisms





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Thank you!