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Women in parliament in 2016 The year in review



Lessons in legitimacy and perseverance: women aim high in 2016

34 Women Speakers of Parliament gathered in Abu Dhabi for a Global Summit on international challenges. ©UAE Parliament

In 2016, women sought to be among the world's most high-profile leaders. They demanded to be heard, and to ensure that women's voices everywhere were included in decision-making processes. Not all of these attempts were successful. As in previous years, 2016 once again brought home the point that women's political empowerment cannot be taken for granted. Gains can be lost and the road to gender balance in politics requires perseverance.

The worldwide average of women in parliament rose from 22.6 per cent by the end of

2015 to 23.3 per cent by the end of 2016. In December 2006, women held 16.8 per cent of parliamentary seats in the world. That is a 6.5 percentage point gain over the last decade.

In 68 chambers (25% of both single/lower and upper houses), 30 per cent of members or more are women. Women make up less than 10 per cent of the membership of 44 chambers (16%). There are no women at all in five chambers.

The number of women Speakers has reached an all-time high, with 53 women at the head of a parliamentary chamber.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The worldwide average of women in national parliaments rose from 22.6 per cent in 2015 to 23.3 in 2016.
- Ten years ago, in 2006, women held 16.8 per cent of parliamentary seats in the world. That is a 6.5 percentage point gain over the last decade.
- In 2016, women won 22.3 per cent of all contested seats in 66 elections or renewals held across 53 countries. That compares with 25 per cent of all contested seats in 2015 – a loss of just under 3 percentage points.
- The greatest gains and the greatest setbacks were recorded in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), where the relatively smaller size of parliaments has a bigger impact on women's share of seats. In the northern Pacific country of Palau, 2016 saw the highest number of women ever elected, up 12.5 percentage points in the lower house from the previous 2012 election. At the other end of the scale, women's share of parliamentary seats dropped by more than 23 percentage points in the Indian Ocean State of the Seychelles.
- In parliaments that held elections in 2016 and used electoral gender quotas, women hold 25.6 per cent of the seats in 35 chambers across 30 countries. That compares to just 16.1 per cent of seats in 31 chambers across 23 countries where no quotas are used.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2016, women won 23.9 per cent of seats in chambers elected by proportional representation and 24.4 per cent in those using either PR or mixed electoral systems. That compares to just 15 per cent of seats in chambers elected through a majority system, and 22.2 per cent where the chamber is appointed or indirectly elected.
- As of December 2016, women account for at least 30 per cent of the seats in 68 chambers (25%) and less than 10 per cent in 44 chambers (16%) (both single/lower and upper houses).
- The number of women Speakers of Parliament has reached an all-time high, with 53 women (19.1% of Speakers of Parliament).

A look at the regions

The Pacific: from little things, big things grow

Remarkably, the greatest gains made by women in parliament in 2016 were in the Pacific, a region not normally known for gender-inclusive political leadership. The regional average of women in parliament (both houses combined) increased by 1.6 percentage points from 15.8 per cent in 2015 to 17.4 per cent in 2016. In Palau, two out of six women candidates (33%) were elected to the lower house. With two women elected to the upper house, Palau now has the greatest number of women elected to its parliament in the last 30 years. In a country where women are not considered to be the ones who should “get up and speak,” according to returning female senator Rukebai Inabo, this achievement cannot be understated. “You have to be tough, you really have to fight hard and put your foot down. You really have to prove yourself so that they

will believe you, trust you and agree with you.”

In Samoa, the 2016 election was also a watershed. Political leaders heeded calls to address significant cultural barriers to women’s political participation. A 2013 constitutional amendment provides that at least five seats (10%) in the 50-member national parliament (*Fono*) are held by women. Only Samoan chiefs (*matai*), a mere 5.5 per cent of whom are women, are eligible for election. This measure has resulted in an increased proportion of women elected but also in more women contesting the election (24 compared to 7 in 2011). Four women were directly elected. The quota measure was therefore only required to create one additional seat for a woman candidate who had come second in her constituency.

As a further sign of change, the Parliament of the Marshall Islands (*Nitijela*) elected the first female head of State of any Pacific island nation in

January 2016. Dr. Hilda Heine was previously a member of parliament.

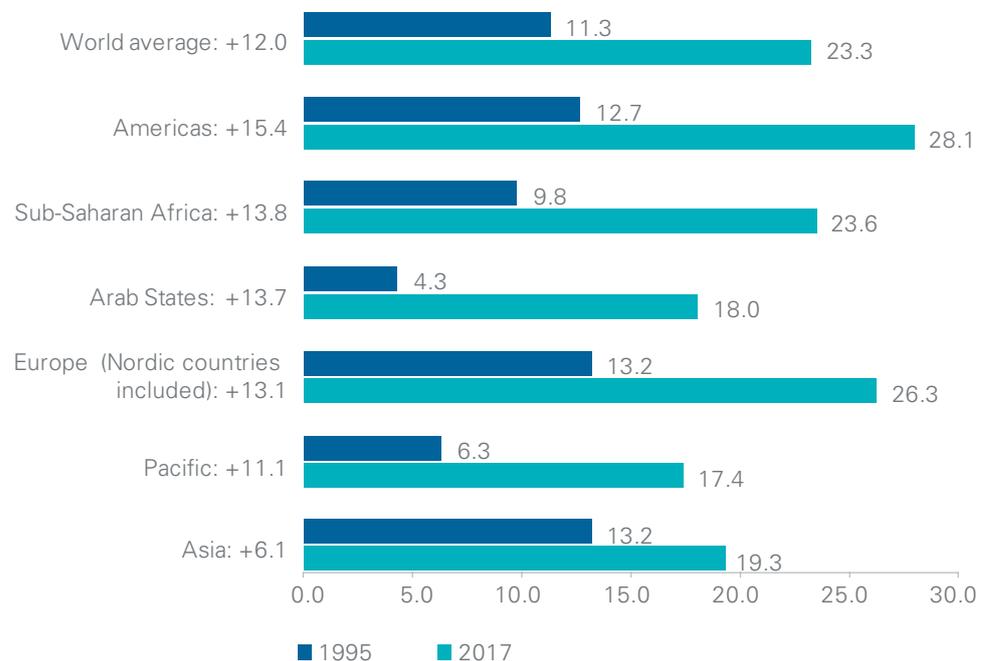
These gains in the Pacific come in the wake of the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration that focused more attention on women and decision-making. Women political leaders in the region have also had a greater opportunity to meet and discuss their experiences and strategies for future progress. Learning from one another – peers in similar cultural contexts – Pacific women MPs have identified common goals and paths to success.

However, not all elections in the Pacific in 2016 yielded progress. The Federal Parliament of Australia witnessed an overall drop in women’s representation. Minimal gains made in the lower house were lost in the upper house. The number of women elected to the government (Liberal) party declined from 17 in the previous

Figure 1

World and regional averages of women in parliaments, 1995 and 2017

Situation in July 1995 and January 2017, both houses combined. Regional ranking in the order of the percentage point change.



parliament to 13. That is the lowest number of women in the parliamentary group for more than 25 years.

The Australian Labor Party accounted mainly for the gains made in that house (28 women, up from 21 at the previous election, representing 40.5% of the party's lower house members). Having now reached its 40 per cent voluntary quota, in place since 2002, the Labor Party intends to increase it to 50 per cent by 2025. For the first time, Australia elected an indigenous woman to the lower house, Linda Burney, who promised to bring the "fighting spirit of her clan" to political life.

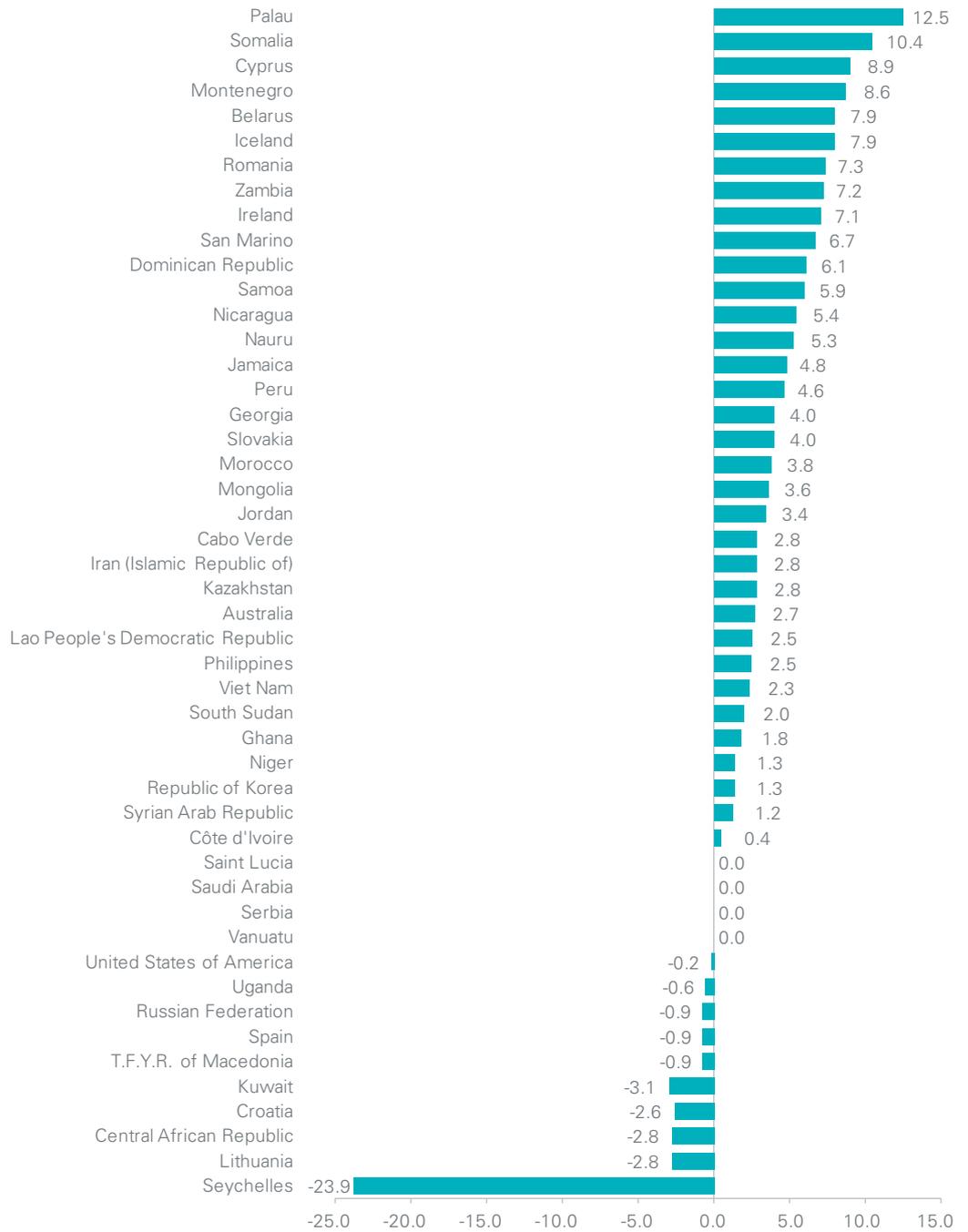
The Liberal Party's poor gender performance was partly due to the preselection of women to unwinnable seats or low-ranked positions on the Senate party ticket. To remedy this, the Party's federal executive has developed and adopted a 10-year gender diversity reform programme.

In Vanuatu, women were unable to break the glass ceiling in the 2016 elections. Although temporary special measures have been successfully implemented locally, constitutional amendments to reserve national parliamentary seats for women are yet to materialize. Ten of the 256 candidates (3.9%) were women. None was elected. The difference between the two levels of government is stark. Women now represent over 30 per cent of the country's two major city councils, but continue to be completely excluded from national politics. Some commentators suggest that there could eventually be a "trickle-up effect." But it may also be that the national parliament is still not seen as a place for women.

Figure 2

Parliamentary renewals in 2016

Progress and setbacks of women in lower or single houses of parliament renewed in 2016



The figures show the percentage point difference between renewals in 2016 compared with the previous legislature, for countries where comparative data is available.

Europe: linking democracy to inclusion

The 2016 elections in Europe resulted in an increase in women's parliamentary representation. The regional average of women across Europe (both houses combined) increased from 25.4 per cent in 2015 to 26.3 per cent in 2016 (+0.9 percentage points).

There were significant gains in both Cyprus and Montenegro of over eight percentage points. Both countries used a proportional representation electoral system and legally binding temporary special measures. In Cyprus, the increase in the number of women occurred in the context of one of the greatest swings in Cypriot election history. A strong undercurrent of disillusionment with traditional



The only elected female MP in Kuwait's parliament, Safa Al Hashem, celebrates her election in November 2016. ©Jaber Abdulkhaleg/Anadolu Agency

political parties resulted in the election of the largest number of parties (many small) in 15 years. Four of the eight parties represented in parliament now include at least one woman.

The 2008 global financial crisis once again reverberated in Iceland's 2016 elections, where the electorate also still mistrusts traditional political parties. The female-led Pirate Party won a significant proportion of seats in the parliament (*Althingi*) after pledging to enhance direct democracy by passing the world's first "crowd-sourced constitution". Much was made in the Icelandic media about the success of women MPs across all parties. Women now represent 47.6 per cent of the Althingi, recording an overall eight percentage-point increase. Commentators have noted that only two more women members would have been required, in addition to the 30 elected ones, for women MPs to form a government outright.

A legally binding candidate quota introduced in 2012 yielded benefits for the first time in Irish politics. For the 2016 elections, at least 30 per cent of candidates on all party lists were required to be women. Parties failing to meet the target were liable to lose 50 per cent of their State funding. All parties fielded lists including between 31 and 35 per cent of female candidates. This was almost double the number of women candidates who contested the previous election. As a result, women now make up 22.2 per cent of the lower house, up from 15.1% (+7.1 points).

The non-partisan group, Women for Election, was also created in the lead-up to the Irish elections to encourage more women to run for political office. Political leaders were all urged to ensure that half of their ministerial teams would be women, and to make other gender balance commitments before the election.

Smaller gains were made in San Marino, Kazakhstan, Slovakia, Georgia and Czech Republic (with increases ranging from 2.8 to 6.7 percentage points). In Georgia, women's representation jumped four percentage points from 12 to 16 per cent. Before this increase, a task force on women's political participation had been established composed of civil society groups and political parties. It campaigns for stronger measures to encourage women's political participation. Parties in Georgia are able to

secure an additional 10 per cent of State funding if at least 20 per cent of their nominated party list are women.

Women still suffered electoral losses in Europe – notably in elections in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (-0.9 percentage points), the Russian Federation (-0.9 percentage points), Spain (-0.9 percentage points in the lower house and -1.1 percentage points in the upper house), Croatia (-2.6 percentage points), Lithuania (-2.8 percentage points) and the upper house of Belarus (-4.7 percentage points).

Snap elections in Spain were called in an attempt to break a political impasse. The electoral law mandates "gender balance" in party lists for both the Senate and the Congress of Deputies. However, it proved difficult for women to go beyond the 40-per cent target, and this election saw a small decline (-0.9 points in the lower house) from the previous year's historic high for women in the parliament.

Arab States: making inroads on inclusiveness

The Arab States have made significant inroads over the past 10 years to ensure greater gender inclusiveness in the conduct of public affairs. In 2016, women's share of seats in parliament (both houses combined) increased by just over half a percentage point (+0.5 points), now standing at 18.0 per cent. Much of this has come as a response to increasing public and international pressure for greater transparency and democratic accountability. It is no coincidence that where women made the strongest gains in this region in 2016 – notably in Morocco and Jordan – political elites have demonstrably heeded these calls.

In Morocco, the Arab uprisings of 2011 led King Mohammed VI to adopt wide-ranging constitutional reforms. These included increasing the electoral gender quota from 30 to 60 reserved seats for women. Not surprisingly, the past years have seen women's share of lower house seats double from 10.5 per cent in 2007, to 20.5 per cent in 2016. In the latest elections, women made additional gains on top of the quota, including 10 women who were elected to constituency seats. Both of the major political parties (the Party of Authenticity and Modernity and the Party of Justice and Development) saw strong levels of women

Table 1

Women in lower or single houses after parliamentary renewals in 2016

	Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	Quota
1	Iceland	63	30	47.6%	Yes*
2	Nicaragua	92	42	45.7%	Yes***
3	Spain	350	137	39.1%	Yes***
4	Belarus	110	38	34.5%	None
5	Uganda	449	154	34.3%	Yes**#
6	Serbia	250	85	34.0%	Yes*
7	T.F.Y.R. of Macedonia	120	38	31.7%	Yes**#
8	Philippines	292	87	29.8%	Yes*
9	Australia	150	43	28.7%	Yes*
10	South Sudan	383	109	28.5%	Yes**
11	Lao People's Democratic Republic	149	41	27.5%	None
12	Kazakhstan	107	29	27.1%	None
13	Dominican Republic	190	51	26.8%	Yes**
14	Viet Nam	494	132	26.7%	Yes**
15	Peru	130	34	26.2%	Yes*
16	Somalia	264	64	24.2%	Yes**#
17	Cabo Verde	72	17	23.6%	Yes**
18	Montenegro	81	19	23.5%	Yes**
19	San Marino	60	14	23.3%	None
20	Ireland	158	35	22.2%	Yes**
21	Lithuania	141	30	21.3%	Yes*
22	Seychelles	33	7	21.2%	None
23	Romania	329	68	20.7%	Yes*
24	Morocco	395	81	20.5%	Yes**#
25	Slovakia	150	30	20.0%	Yes*
26	Saudi Arabia	151	30	19.9%	Yes**#
27	Cyprus	56	11	19.6%	Yes*
28	United States of America	435	83	19.1%	None
29	Zambia	167	30	18.0%	None
30	Jamaica	63	11	17.5%	None
31	Mongolia	76	13	17.1%	Yes**
32	Republic of Korea	300	51	17.0%	None
33	Saint Lucia	18	3	16.7%	None
34	Georgia	150	24	16.0%	Yes**
35	Jordan	130	20	15.4%	Yes*
36	Niger	171	25	14.6%	Yes***
37	Syrian Arab Republic	250	33	13.2%	None
38	Ghana	275	35	12.7%	None
39	Russian Federation	450	57	12.7%	None
40	Croatia	151	19	12.6%	Yes***
41	Palau	16	2	12.5%	None
42	Côte d'Ivoire	254	29	11.4%	Yes*
43	Nauru	19	2	10.5%	None
44	Samoa	50	5	10.0%	Yes**#
45	Brunei Darussalam	33	3	9.1%	None
46	Central African Republic	140	11	7.9%	None
47	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	289	17	5.9%	None
48	Kuwait	65	2	3.1%	None
49	Vanuatu	52	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

elected, as both reserved seat MPs and constituency seat MPs, with 25.4 per cent and 19.2 per cent, respectively.

Jordan also witnessed a substantial gain in women's political participation. In 2016, women won 20 of 130 seats (15.4%) of the lower house, compared with 18 of the 150 seats (12%) in the previous legislature. These gains can be attributed to shifting attitudes. In the run-up to the polls, campaign posters at roundabouts along roads across the country extolled the virtues of women's political participation. The 2012 Electoral Law requires a minimum quota of 15 women MPs – at least one from each governorate. In all, 252 female candidates contested the election, which is the highest number to date. Women appeared in all but six of the 226 party lists.

Quotas are clearly effective in delivering greater numbers of women in politics. However, it is also essential to build awareness among the electorate of the importance of women's inclusion in democratic processes. In the Middle East and North Africa, the *Be 100 Ragl II* campaign was launched in 2016. It is a video-on-demand service with a reported average of 13.3 million visitors each month. It follows the lives of various women in public life, and proposes creative ways to empower women in the region.

In 2016, the same number of women (20% of all members) was appointed to the Saudi Arabian parliament during its renewal. In Kuwait, one woman was elected out of the 15 who ran for the 50 open seats in parliament. Only eight women ran in the previous elections and two were elected then.

Asia: the continuing tale of incremental progress

Elections in Asia are not commonly known for dramatic change and 2016 was no exception. Women's share of seats in parliament (both houses combined) increased by 0.5 percentage points, from 18.8 per cent in 2015, to 19.3 per cent in 2016. The increases were all relatively moderate in the proportion of women elected in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan,

the Republic of Korea, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, the Philippines and Viet Nam. But in most cases, they demonstrate that incremental change can still be meaningful and powerful.

Japan had elections to its upper chamber (the House of Councillors) in July 2016, at which a record 28 women were elected. That brings the total number of women to 50 out of 242 members or 20.7 per cent of all members (compared to 16.1% at previous elections). That is a much higher proportion than in the lower chamber, where 9.5 per cent of its members were women after the 2014 elections. Later in the year, Japan's opposition and second largest party (the Democratic Party) elected a woman as its head. At the local level, Tokyo elected its first female Governor in 2016. In Japan, women's fight for political inclusion is not only one against an electoral system in which the nomination fee is equivalent to almost US\$ 30,000. It is also a struggle against a relatively conservative society, with strongly entrenched gender roles.

In Iran, small electoral gains for women were accompanied by seismic shifts in attitudes away from hard-line conservatives. Iranian voters elected a record 17 women to parliament, up from nine (6% of the chamber) – more than the 16 elected religious leaders. The number of women candidates standing at the election almost doubled compared to the previous election. The 17 women elected were all newcomers and considered reformists.

In Viet Nam, a 2015 Electoral Law amendment helped stem an almost 10-year trend of continuing decline in women's parliamentary representation. The Law now requires that at least 35 per cent of all candidates be women and that at least 18 per cent be from ethnic minorities. In 2016, 132 out of 494 elected members of the National Assembly were women (26.7%), 86 were from ethnic minorities (17.3%), and 71 were under the age of 40 (14.3%). A majority (64%) were first-time members. Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan became the first woman Speaker of Parliament, with 95 per cent of the Parliament's membership voting for her. Women subsequently won three of the six committee chairs in parliament.



Iranian female MPs discuss the proposed annual budget during a parliamentary session in December 2016.
©Atta Kenare/AFP



Locals look for their names on election rolls at a polling station in Managua, Nicaragua.
©Alfredo Zuniga/AFP

In the Republic of Korea, women improved their share of seats in parliament by 1.3 percentage points, to a historic high 17 per cent. In a spectacular electoral achievement, just over half of the 93 women nominated as candidates (10.5% of the total number of candidates) were elected. The ruling and opposition parties had failed to deliver on their pledge to allot at least 30 per cent of their lists to women. A study¹ conducted by a group of former and current women politicians found that the most successful women candidates ran in the Seoul metropolitan area, and for one of the four major political parties. The study noted that 26.6 per cent of its surveyed respondents did not “feel comfortable with women politicians”. A further 24.5 per cent felt the electorate continued to hold the biased view that male politicians were “more capable” than their female counterparts.

The House of Representatives of the Philippines inched closer to the 30 per cent “critical mass” mark, but this continues to be elusive. With the support of voluntary candidate quotas, women won 86 of the 203 seats (29.8%), an increase of 2.4 percentage points. Elections to renew half of the 24 seats in the Philippines Senate resulted in two victories for women, bringing the total number of women senators to six (25%).

India recorded the region’s only setback. Reserved seats were successfully introduced for women in local government elections in 1994. However, a proposed constitutional amendment introduced in 2008 and intended to reserve national-level seats for women continues to be bogged down in parliamentary debate. Direct and indirect elections and Government appointments in June and July 2016 returned a total of 27 women of the 244 members of the upper chamber (*Rajya Sabha*) (11.1%, down from 12.8% at the previous renewals).

Poles apart in the Americas

Over the past decade, the Americas region has been at the forefront of the movement towards gender parity. In 2016, it recorded a 0.9 point increase with women accounting for an average of 28.1 per cent of seats in parliaments in the region (both houses combined). Latin America contributed mainly to

these advances. Indeed, the women’s movement in many Latin American countries has not been content with a “critical mass” of women in political leadership. Instead, it has pursued legislative reform designed to enable women to hold 50 per cent of decision-making positions. For example, Nicaragua amended its electoral law in 2012 so that political parties must include equal numbers of women and men candidates in their electoral lists. In 2016, women were elected to over 45 per cent of seats in the legislature.

In the Dominican Republic, there was a 6.1 percentage-point increase in the proportion of women elected to the lower house, mainly due to legally binding candidate quotas. In Peru, at least 30 per cent of slots in party lists for parliamentary elections must be allocated to men or women candidates. In 2016, women recorded a 4.6 percentage-point increase in parliamentary representation. Gender was also a highlight of the Peruvian presidential race, as two of the five presidential contenders were women.

In Saint Lucia, women secured an increase of 7.3 percentage points in the upper house, where seats are appointed by the Governor-General. In the lower house, two women out of 17 members were elected, both of whom are from the United Workers Party. With the election of a woman Speaker, that brought the total number of women to three out of 18 members (16.7%).

In Jamaica, a record number of women contested the elections, including the former Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller. Eleven of the 26 women candidates were elected, a record high for the lower house (up 4.8 percentage points to 17.5% of seats).

In the United States of America, it proved difficult for women to progress much past the 20-per cent mark in congressional races. The number of women in the Senate increased by one percentage point (to 21%). Women’s membership in the House of Representatives decreased marginally to 19.1 per cent (-0.2 percentage point). The Senate race resulted in the election of 16 women Democrats (an increase from 14 in the previous term) and five women Republicans (down one from the previous term). It also led to some further diversity, with the election of the first Latina and of the first woman veteran.

¹ See: <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20160621000907>

More broadly, the Americas region was not able to live up to its traditional reputation of being an area with a high number of women heads of State. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's presidency in Argentina ended in December 2015, and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was impeached. Hillary Rodham Clinton was recorded as the first woman presidential nominee of a major political party in the United States of America, although that did not lead to her election. During the election campaign, the debate took on a very gendered tone. From demeaning slogans and sexual innuendo, to a continual undermining of the human rights of women, the campaign was described as one of the nastiest in US election history. Clinton's defeat is a telling sign of the significant challenge women still face in reaching the most coveted leadership position in the USA.

Sub-Saharan Africa: quotas keep results "on an even keel"

Legally binding electoral gender quotas have been a key contributing factor to inroads by women into political life in sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade. Where quotas were in place, they kept the share of women's parliamentary seats relatively stable. Where quotas were not in place, substantial setbacks were recorded. As a result, 2016 witnessed one of sub-Saharan Africa's lowest rates of change. Women's share of seats in parliament (both houses combined) increased from 23.2 per cent in 2015, to 23.6 per cent (+0.4 percentage points).

The particular case of the Seychelles epitomizes the slow rate of growth recorded in 2016. After the 2011 elections, women's share of seats in the national parliament stood at over 40 per cent without recourse to any form of temporary special measures, mainly due to the relatively high number of women parliamentarians from the ruling People's Party. The parliament lost this leading position with the defeat of the People's Party, its first since 1993. Out of a total of 20 women candidates, seven (21.2%) were elected to the 33-seat parliament. Three of those elected (16%) were from the party that formed the new government (the Seychelles Democratic Alliance), and four were from the People's Party (28.8%).

In the Central African Republic, the first post-conflict National Assembly elections resulted in low levels of women's representation. The country's constitution and other election-related legislation do not provide for electoral quotas. Eleven women (7.9%) were elected to the 139-seat Assembly. Catherine Samba-Panza, the country's first woman President, honoured her commitment not to run again for the presidency.

The greatest gains in the region were made in a country without any formal quotas: Zambia. Twenty-six women were elected and four were appointed, including the Vice President of the Republic and the First Deputy Speaker. As a result, 18 per cent of Zambian parliamentarians are women. That is an increase of over seven percentage points from the 2011 elections. The 2016 elections saw four political parties and 14 independents elected to parliament. Women were represented in each of the four political parties and two independents were women. While there is no specific electoral gender quota, the amendments passed in 2016 encourage gender balance wherever "a person is empowered to

make a nomination or an appointment to a public office." Despite the increase in women's parliamentary membership, women's organizations noted that fewer women candidates had run in 2016 than in 2011, and that the elections had been marred by "political violence, prohibitive regulations and patriarchal attitudes." Police shot dead a female opposition supporter and observers noted reports of women candidates being beaten, intimidated and even stripped naked. Women's civil society organizations also sought exemptions for women candidates from the new requirement for all candidates to hold at least a school-leaving (year 12) certificate.

In Uganda, seats are reserved for women in each of the 112 constituencies. There was little change in women's overall representation, as women found it very difficult to win a greater share of open seats in parliament. Amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Act required aspiring candidates to pay a nomination fee of 3,000,000 Ugandan shillings (approximately US\$ 830); it had previously been 200,000 shillings (approximately US\$ 55). In addition, a study of voter attitudes uncovered the perception that women should not contest open seats, as they had reserved seats, and would therefore increase the pressure on open seats for male candidates. Of the 1,306 candidates contesting open seats, only 86 (6.8%) were women, 50 of whom (58%) ran as independents.

Cabo Verde and South Sudan, where quotas assure women's place in parliament, recorded minor but positive change. In Cabo Verde, political parties are required to propose lists that allot at least 25 per cent of the slots to men or women if they wish to receive any public funding. In South Sudan, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement requires that women hold 25 per cent of parliamentary and executive branch positions.

A total of 73 women candidates (13.2%) stood for the parliamentary elections in Cabo Verde. The ruling African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde nominated the greatest percentage of women on its lists with 59 women candidates (34%). As a result, women in Cabo Verde now make up almost 24 per cent of the national parliament, up 2.8 percentage points from the previous election.

Women in South Sudan took 28.5 per cent of the seats in the Transitional National Legislative Assembly. That is an increase of 2 percentage points from the previous renewal. However, in this relatively new country, power dynamics are still being tested. Ms. Betty Ogwaro, a member of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly and a former Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, is not convinced that the parliament is the central decision-making body: "The only problem with men—particularly in South Sudan—is that decisions are not made at the table. Decisions are made under the table. Decisions are made at night. Decisions are made after working hours, where women don't go. Even if they can influence decisions, it is difficult for them to do so when they don't know, because a decision is made when they're not there. Information is power."

Table 2

Progress and setbacks of women in upper houses of parliament up for renewal in 2016*

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	% point change
Romania	136	20	14.7%	7.3
Saint Lucia	11	3	27.3%	7.3
Japan	242	50	20.7%	4.5
Jordan	65	10	15.4%	3.4
Czech Republic	80	15	18.8%	2.7
United States of America	100	21	21.0%	1.0
Dominican Republic	32	3	9.4%	0.0
Ireland	60	18	30.0%	0.0
Jamaica	21	5	23.8%	0.0
Philippines	24	6	25.0%	0.0
Spain	266	101	38.0%	-1.1
India	244	27	11.1%	-1.7
Australia	76	28	36.8%	-3.2
Belarus	56	17	30.4%	-4.7
Palau	13	2	15.4%	-7.7

*For countries where comparative data is available

Women speakers – higher rate of progress than for women MPs

Women's leadership of political institutions also helps to promote gender equality. Women speakers (or presiding officers) are role models and ambassadors for their chambers. They can also guide the tone of debate and decide on urgent issues to be discussed in parliament.

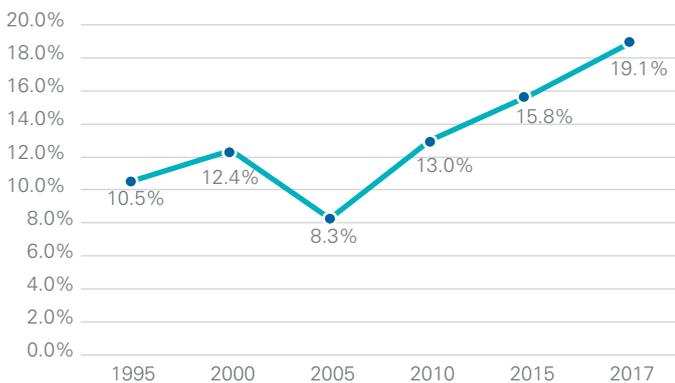
As of 1 January 2017, women held 19.1 per cent of all presiding officer posts in the world. That is over one percentage point more than the previous year. Nine new women Speakers were elected or appointed in 2016. The new Speakers of the Parliaments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Viet Nam were the first women to be elected to that position in their respective countries. Seven women were re-elected Speaker in 2016, often for the second, and in some cases, the third time. Given the almost three-percentage-point increase since 2015, the rate of progress for women Speakers is currently exceeding that of women parliamentarians.



The first female Speaker of the National Assembly in Viet Nam, Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, attends the opening ceremony of a new session of parliament. ©Hoang Dinh Nam/AFP

Figure 3

Progress of women speakers, 1995 - 2017



Women speakers of parliament

Situation on 1 January 2017

As of 1 January 2017, women hold 19.1 per cent of all presiding officer posts in the world, a 3.3-point increase over the figure from January 2015.

37 speakers in single or lower houses of parliament

Austria, Bangladesh, Belize*, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Denmark, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Fiji, Finland, Iceland**, India, Italy, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, Peru, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Serbia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam.

16 speakers in upper houses of parliament

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

* The Speaker was formally elected on 13 January 2017 to replace the former Speaker, whose mandate ended on 1 January 2017.

** The Speaker was elected as result of the October 2016 general elections. Her formal election was held on 24 January 2017, when the Althingi reconvened after the Christmas break.

Women's rights – a growing subject of political debate

Women's rights were often the subject of intense debate in several political campaigns held in 2016. In some cases, women's hard-fought reproductive rights and their legitimate place in public life were hotly challenged. Around the world, it is clear that women's political voice and their right to self-determination can no longer be taken for granted. Men and sometimes women political leaders either promised to or actually unravelled previous court decisions and gender-sensitive laws.

In 2016, misogynistic and sexist sentiments also permeated public and private spaces as women staked claim to political leadership. Women candidates were subjected to vile harassment, exaggerated discursive interruption ("maninterrupting"), and degrading stereotyping. This behaviour reveals the extent to which women still struggle to be considered legitimate political actors.

In response, women politicians in a number of countries have "called it out." In Canada, MPs from different parties spoke in parliament of their own experiences of harassment and misogyny. Women members of the Israeli Knesset revealed that they had been sexually assaulted or harassed. The Italian Speaker of Parliament took to Twitter with the line, "Men, enough sexism, it's 2016" and called for an "update" on the tired old satirical tropes of inflatable sex dolls. Seventeen French women politicians wrote a "Statement against Sexism" in which they called on their political parties to "verify" any acts of harassment against their women members, and help their members "make the truth known." And former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard championed the campaign to speak up and speak out early on about the sexism suffered by women in politics. The killing of the UK Member of Parliament, Jo Cox, was a devastating example of the exposure to violence MPs, and in particular, women MPs, increasingly face. Women's political participation is a key ingredient for achieving gender equality. However, it is equally important that our political institutions are sensitive to the diverse needs, interests and experiences of all whom they represent, and are transformed effectively to meet those needs.

Gender equality is also measured by parliaments' outputs, especially the legislation that they adopt. Throughout the year, a number of parliaments passed laws to: increase the participation of women in politics (Liberia); condemn acts of violence against women (Algeria) and so-called honour killings (Pakistan); ensure that women in special circumstances, such as rape victims, have access to safe abortions (Morocco); and ensure parents can take adequate leave to care for their babies (Rwanda). The parliament of Mexico also approved a protocol to address cases of political violence against women.

A woman casts her ballot during Uganda's national election in February 2016.
©Carl de Souza/AFP



Table 3

Candidates running for election in 2016*

	Total No.	No. Men	No. Women	% Women	Success rate	Quota
Majority Electoral system						
Australia (lower house)	994	682	312	31.4%	13.8%	Yes**
Czech Republic (upper house)	233	190	43	18.5%	34.9%	Yes**
Dominican Republic (upper house)	224	194	30	13.4%	10.0%	No
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	6.229	5.643	586	9.4%	2.9%	No
Jamaica (lower house)	152	126	26	17.1%	42.3%	No
Jordan (lower house)	1.525	1.000	525	34.4%	3.8%	Yes**
Lao People's Democratic Republic	211	161	50	23.7%	82.0%	No
Nauru	67	63	4	6.0%	50.0%	No
Palau (lower house)	33	27	6	18.2%	33.3%	No
Palau (upper house)	24	18	6	25.0%	33.3%	No
Philippines (upper house)	172	142	30	17.4%	20.0%	Yes**
Saint Lucia (lower house)	39	33	6	15.4%	50.0%	Yes**
Samoa	171	147	24	14.0%	20.8%	Yes*
Uganda	1.747	1.253	494	28.3%	31.2%	Yes*
Vanuatu	183	174	9	4.9%	0.0%	No
Viet Nam	870	531	339	39.0%	38.9%	Yes*
Zambia	651	545	106	16.3%	28.3%	No
Mixed electoral system						
Georgia	816	673	143	17.5%	16.8%	Yes*
Japan (upper house)	389	293	96	24.7%	52.1%	No
Lithuania	1.415	973	442	31.2%	6.8%	Yes**
Mongolia	498	369	129	25.9%	10.1%	Yes*
Philippines (lower house)	672	518	154	22.9%	56.5%	Yes**
Seychelles	76	56	20	26.3%	35.0%	No
Spain (lower house)	3.816	1.980	1.836	48.1%	7.5%	Yes***
Spain (upper house)	1.317	761	556	42.2%	18.2%	Yes***
Proportional representation						
Australia (upper house)	630	402	228	36.2%	12.3%	Yes**
Cabo Verde	551	478	73	13.2%	23.3%	Yes*
Croatia	2.456	1.480	976	39.7%	1.9%	Yes***
Cyprus	493	385	108	21.9%	10.2%	Yes**
Dominican Republic (lower house)	1.423	863	560	39.4%	9.1%	Yes*
Iceland	1.302	716	586	45.0%	5.1%	Yes**
Ireland (lower house)	552	389	163	29.5%	21.5%	Yes*
Kazakhstan (lower house)	234	187	47	20.1%	61.7%	No
Montenegro	1.120	760	360	32.1%	5.3%	Yes*
Peru	2.242	1.354	888	39.6%	1.2%	Yes**
Serbia	3.270	2.021	1.249	38.2%	6.8%	Yes**
Slovakia	2.194	1.473	721	32.9%	4.2%	Yes**

Legend:

Yes* Statutory quota
 Yes** voluntary party quota
 Yes*** legislated and voluntary quotas.

Success rate: the total number of women elected (not shown in the table) divided by the total number of women candidates.

*For countries where comparative data is available

Table 4

Types of quotas applied in the 2016 parliamentary renewals

A. Number of chambers renewed and types of quotas applied

Quota	Number of chambers per quota type		
	Lower/Single House	Upper	Total
Legislated	14	0	14
Legislated+voluntary	4	1	5
Voluntary	11	5	16
None	20	11	31

B. Proportion of women's representation relative to quotas applied

Quota	Number of chambers per quota type		
	Lower/Single House	Upper	Total
Legislated	25.5%	N/A	25.5%
Legislated+voluntary	29.2%	38.0%	31.5%
Voluntary	24.0%	20.0%	23.3%
None	15.5%	19.0%	16.3%

Lessons learned – time for more ambitious measures

In the past, women's share of seats in national parliaments had typically increased by significant margins in the course of a year. There were no such increases in 2015 and 2016. A range of factors may be contributing to this new trend of stabilization:

- Where quotas have been implemented, **the percentage of women in national parliaments appears to have stabilized**. In the 30 countries where elections took place in 2016 and where some form of electoral gender quota was used, women won 25.6 per cent of seats in the 35 chambers up for renewal. The figure for 2015 was 28.3 per cent.
- It seems that quotas as they stand today ensure a minimum level of women's representation in parliament, but do not always extend beyond that. In certain parts of the world, there has been a move to replace numerical targets that reflect a so-called critical mass (of 30 or 35%) with the idea of **"gender parity"** (reaching for 50%). In Latin America, in particular, this trend is reflected in continuing levels of progress for women in national parliaments.
- However, quotas of all descriptions remain difficult to adopt: in 2016, the only new quota law to be passed was in Liberia.
- The **greatest swings occurred in smaller parliaments** where the loss or gain of one or two women makes a big difference to the overall share of women's seats. **Women's representation in parliaments where quotas are not used is also more volatile** with both increases and decreases in representation being unpredictable.
- **One fact remains: implementing temporary special measures takes political will**. This was evident in 2013 in Samoa when political leaders chose to address low levels of women's representation in their national parliament by implementing a customized electoral gender quota. Likewise, it takes political will to nominate women to positions of public office. As a result of Zambia's 2016 constitutional amendments on gender equality, all four parliamentary parties now include women.



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