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We Need Women Leaders in Politics

Better Society, Strong Democracy

March 22, 2021





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Women's participation in politics

IPU's research in 2021



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy, for everyone.

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.

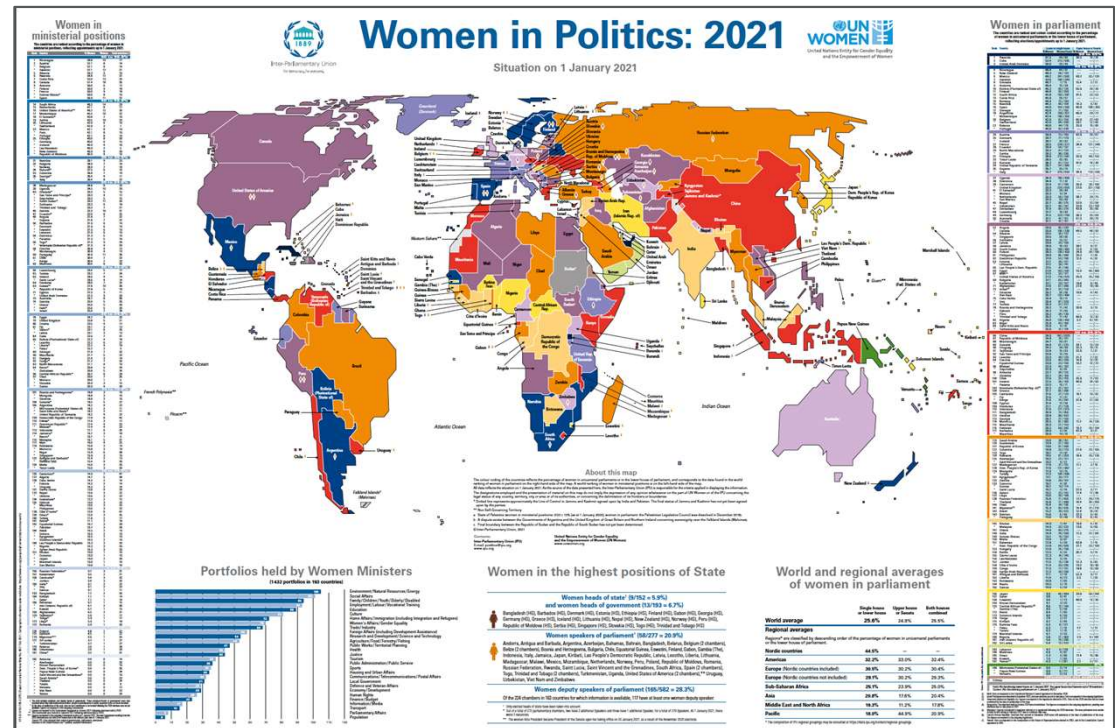
Women's participation continued to grow by 0.6 per cent in 2020, passing the 25 per cent mark for combined upper and lower/single chambers worldwide for the first time (+0.7 points for lower/single chambers and +0.2 points in upper chambers). This is a similar rate of growth to the past decade. Several 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, 26 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 percent 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**.



What hinders women's participation

- **Electoral systems**
 - Proportional or mixed systems facilitate women's access to parliament
 - Where quotas exist, closed lists tend to favour women's access. In the absence of quotas, open lists give women greater opportunity to compete
- **Political parties**
 - Main gatekeepers for women's access to parliament
 - Fundamental role in the success or failure of women through candidacy, finance, endorsements, access to resources and leadership positions
- **Political will** is crucial
- **Cultural norms** among the electorate are also important; that is why we need role models and to address stereotypes
- Parliaments must open-up to women and be **gender sensitive institutions**
- **Violence against women in politics**
 - Gender-based violence, harassment and stereotypes hinder women's participation



The impact of quotas on women's access to elected positions

- **Quotas**

- The main measures used to facilitate women's access to parliament
- More often now included in electoral laws than in the past, confirming the importance of the legal framework for gender equality in politics
- Must be ambitious, detailed and include implementation mechanisms
- Trend: some countries are moving towards parity but still in many cases quotas only target a “critical mass” (30%)

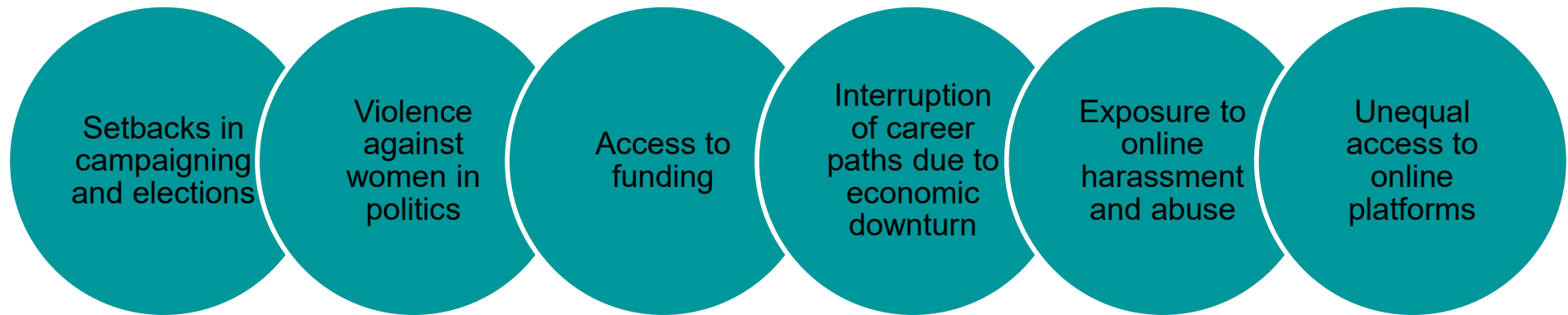


Obstacles in COVID-19's context

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.





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Violence against women in politics

Violence against women in politics

- A top deterrent to equal participation in politics and to women's full contribution to political processes
- A message that women are not wanted in politics
- A major prejudice to democratic institutions and democracy

IPU studies on VAW in parliament



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Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians

Introduction

Parliaments are evolving constantly, reflecting changes in society. They need to set an example and provide a model for pluralistic, equal, peaceful and tolerant social relations. From that perspective the sharp increase in the number of women in parliament in recent years' represents an important step towards achieving the principles essential to democracy: The growing presence of women in parliament, once a predominantly male domain, is enabling the institution to adapt and its working methods, structures and legislative priorities to evolve.

While the influx of women into parliament is beneficial for representative democracy, it has tended to disrupt the established order, provoking some resistance. The recent IPU study on Gender-Sensitive

Parliaments' highlighted the fact that by entering the political domain women are shifting away from a role that confined them to the private sphere and are entering a world where their legitimacy is sometimes challenged. Such resistance can take different forms, such as sexist remarks, intimidation or harassment. Directed against women in politics, such behaviour is particularly troubling. It might once have been considered "something one had to deal with" or "just part of politics" but today, throughout the world, women as well as men are increasingly seeing it unacceptable, and having no place in political culture.

This Issues Brief aims to clearly identify the matters at play by analysing the results

of a first study specifically devoted to the subject of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament.¹ It seeks to clarify what the phenomenon consists of, where, why and in what forms it occurs, who are the perpetrators and what is its prevalence.

It also seeks to alert parliaments to the issue and encourage them to address it, in particular by defining the issues at stake for their proper functioning, inclusiveness, representative character and willingness to achieve gender equality. It also aims to help parliaments bring about change to the world of politics, by tackling a phenomenon that is hindering women's progress towards equality and undermining the foundations of democracy.

Issues Brief

October 2018



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Issues Brief

October 2018

Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe

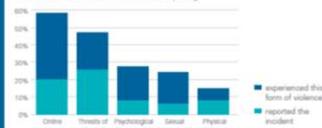
Key points

Findings

- The study is based on voluntary one-to-one conversations with 123 women from 65 European countries. 91 of these women were members of parliament (MP) and 32 were members of the parliamentary staff.
- The study shows that acts of sexism, abuse and violence against women are indeed to be found in parliaments in Europe. The extent and nature of these acts, which are violations of fundamental rights, need to be addressed by parliaments and require action to be taken:
 - 85.2 per cent** of female MPs who took part in the study said that they had suffered psychological violence in the course of their term of office.
 - 46.9 per cent** had received death threats or threats of rape or beating.
 - 59.2 per cent** had been the target of online sexist attacks on social networks.
 - 67.9 per cent** had been the target of comments relating to their physical appearance or based on gender stereotypes.
 - 24.7 per cent** had suffered sexual violence.
 - 14.8 per cent** had suffered physical violence.
- Female MPs under the age of 40 were more frequently subject to psychological and sexual harassment.
- Female MPs active in the fight against gender inequality and violence against women were often singled out for attack.

Female MPs surveyed

Prevalence of acts of violence and rates of reporting



Both studies revealed:

- Alarming levels of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments
- Widespread under-reporting
- Lack of mechanisms in parliament to report the violence, protect victims and sanction perpetrators

The findings

- **Psychological violence** affected **82%** of the women MPs respondents (**85% in Europe**)
- **44%** had received **death threats or threats of rape or beating** (**47% in Europe**)
- **66%** had been the target of **sexist comments** (**68% in Europe**)
- **42%** had been the target of **online sexist attacks** on social networks (**58% in Europe**)
- **20%** reported having been **sexually harassed** (**25% in Europe and in 75% of cases by male colleagues, both from their own political party and from parties opposed to their own**)
- **26%** had suffered **physical violence** (**15% in Europe**)
- Such violence affects **women MPs in all countries** but is most acute for **women MPs active in advancing women's rights** in a national context of general **insecurity** or in countries where there is a clear reticence to respect women's rights

Online Violence a Growing Threat in COVID-19's context

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.



Addressing VAWP

- Assess the situation
- Adopt specific policies on ending sexism and gender-based violence in parliament
- Provide assistance and support services to victims
- Provide complaints and investigation mechanism
- Implement disciplinary sanctions against perpetrators
- Raise awareness and run training

IPU Guidelines for parliaments

Step 1

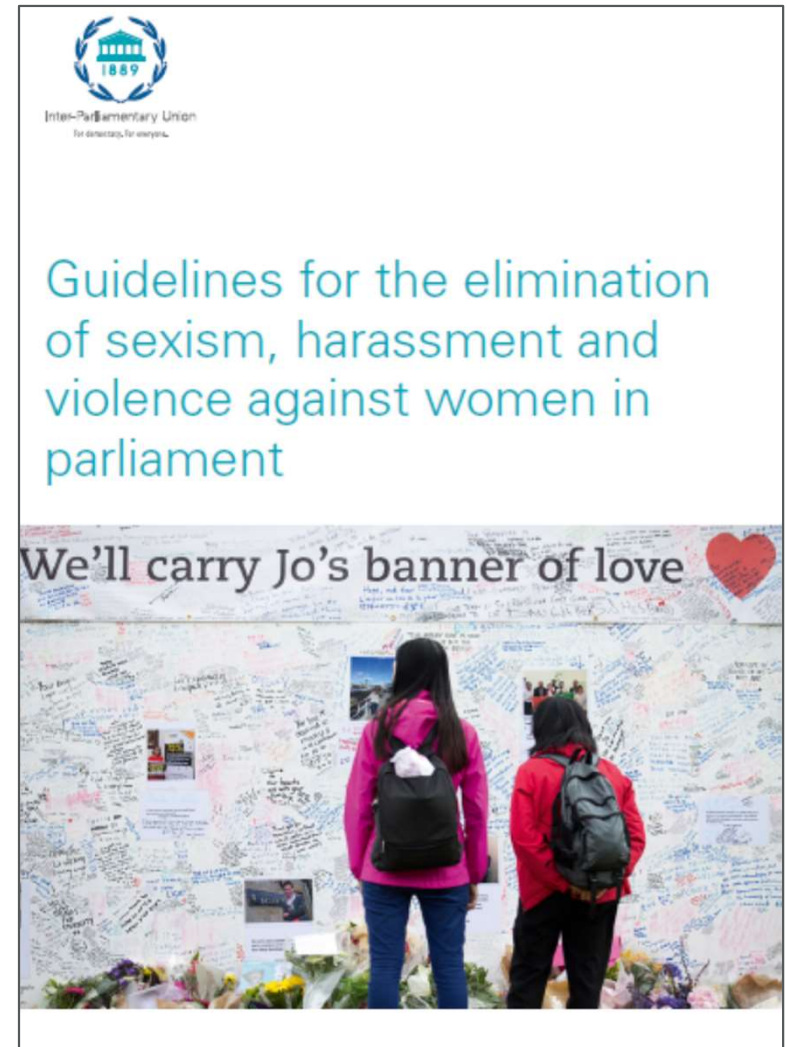
- Mobilise for action

Step 2

- Enshrine the standards in a policy

Step 3

- Implementation





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Gender-sensitive parliaments

Definition



A gender-sensitive parliament is premised on the principle of gender equality – that is, that both men and women have an equal right to participate in its structures and processes, without discrimination and without re-creation.

A gender-sensitive parliament responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and work.

Promoting gender equality is the **responsibility of the institution** as a whole – and of men and women alike.

By being sensitive to gender issues and favouring equal participation of women and men, parliaments are more likely to **achieve gender equality in society** and to fulfil their **democratic mandate**.

Parliaments that embody and promote gender equality **deliver better to constituents and are more legitimate.**



What makes a Gender-sensitive Parliament?

Composition of parliament

Gender equality in numbers and positions

Legal and policy framework

Laws to support gender equality

Gender equality objectives and a plan of action for parliament

Gender-sensitive working policies

Working modalities, structures and mechanisms

Mainstreaming gender in all the work of parliament

Culture and infrastructure

A non-sexist environment free from gender-based violence

Facilities suited to men and women

Strategic partners

Men shouldering their gender equality responsibilities

Pro-active and gender-sensitive political parties

Diversity

Opening up parliaments to under-represented women

(young women, women with disabilities, ethnic, religious minorities...)



IPU Plan of action for parliaments

1. Increase the **number** of women in parliament and in parliamentary **leadership** positions and achieve equality in participation
2. Strengthen **gender equality legislation and policy**
3. **Mainstream gender equality** throughout all parliamentary work
4. Institute or improve **gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture**
5. Ensure that **responsibility for gender equality** is shared by all parliamentarians – men and women
6. Encourage **political parties** to be champions of gender equality
7. Enhance the gender sensitivity of, and gender equality among, **parliamentary staff**



A strategy for...

Women's participation: numbers and leadership positions

- Women MPs chair 26% of parliamentary committees
- Equal participation in committees is promoted by internal quotas

Gender mainstreaming: Gender equality committees and women's parliamentary caucuses

- 108 parliamentary gender equality committee in 2020 (105 in 2019).
- 156 formal or informal women caucuses exist in parliaments.
- Other initiatives: networks of parliamentary leaders, gender councils and research centres.

Inclusive culture and infrastructure

- Family-friendly environments: men and women needs taken into account.
- Facilities, language and dress code: adapted to be accommodating.
- Work-life balance: advanced by rearranging sitting hours, no sessions late at night or during school holidays, entitling all members to parental leave.
- Arrangements for women returning after maternity leave: allowing proxy votes; providing special rooms for breastfeeding mothers and establishing childcare centres



Where to start the action?

IPU GSP Self-assessment toolkit

Designed in response to a growing desire by parliaments around the world to improve the way that they advance gender equality and to be models to the communities they represent.

It enables the parliaments to examine critically their mode of operation and functioning; to evaluate and engage in reform; and to both progress and lead the way.

Examples of action taken after a gender self-assessment

In Colombia

- The new main hall of Congress was named after the Suffragettes and artwork representing women in the country's history was ordered for display in Congress.
- New measures to ensure safety of staff leaving the Congress premises in late hours have been put in place.
- Gender training for staff is being carried out.

In Georgia

- **Parliament's** Gender Equality Council was granted permanent status.
- A new law on sexual harassment was adopted.
- A new electoral law introduced gender quotas in the electoral lists

In Kenya

- A senior-level focal point was appointed to support MPs in advancing gender equality and a gender caucus made up of men and women MPs was set up.
- Gender training for staff was carried out for the first time.



What is needed?

- **Political will** is required to mobilize wide participation and ensure adequate follow-up.
- Whoever initiates the self-assessment, it should be a **Parliament-wide** and **Parliament-led** initiative.
- The process requires inclusiveness and **adapting** to each parliament's specific context and needs.
- **Participants:** A group as **diverse** as possible:
- Collect **data** and present it so as to prompt constructive debates and ensure they are based on evidence.
- **Facilitators:** One or more **gender expert(s)** as facilitator(s) may help but not necessary.





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Thank you!

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