Statistics on Women in National Governments Around the Globe

Updated April 12, 2023

Introduction

Women and girls make up half of the world's population; however, in most countries, women are underrepresented in the political process at the national level. Possible causes include discriminatory laws and practices, gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care, and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women. Many experts have found that women's political participation, including representation in elected governments, contributes to the overall well-being of women and their communities.[1]

As this report shows, women currently hold 26.4% of legislative seats around the world, an increase from 15.0% of such seats in 2002 (see **Figure 1**). As of December 1, 2022, women held 50% or more of the legislative seats in five countries: Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates (see **Table 3**). At the national executive level, 35 countries currently have a female chief of state or head of government who won an election or was selected by elected bodies (see **Table 6**).

This report provides a snapshot of women's political participation in national governments worldwide by compiling statistics and other information from a variety of sources, including the annual *Global Gender Gap Report* issued by the World Economic Forum, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the CIA *World Factbook*, news reports, and other sources.[2]

Selected Congressional Action

Members of Congress have enacted legislation that, either directly or indirectly, addresses women's political participation around the world. For example, from FY2014 through FY2023, a provision in Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations Acts appropriated funds for women's leadership. Most recently, the FY2023 SFOPS Appropriations Act states:

> Of the funds appropriated under title III of this Act, not less than $50,000,000 shall be made available for programs specifically designed to increase leadership opportunities for women in countries where women and girls suffer discrimination due to law, policy, or practice, by strengthening protections for women's political status, expanding women's participation in political parties and elections, and increasing women's opportunities for leadership positions in the public and private sectors at the local, provincial, and national levels.[3]

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[1] For example, see U.N. document, A/RES/66/130, *Women and Political Participation*, adopted December 19, 2011; UN Women, "In Brief: Women's Leadership and Political Participation," at https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation; U.S. Department of State, Office of Global Women's Issues, "Cross-Cutting Issues, Women's Leadership," at https://www.state.gov/cross-cutting-issues/#wl; Aaron Reeves, Chris Brown, and Johanna Hanefeld, "Female Political Representation and the Gender Health Gap: A Cross-National Analysis of 49 European Countries," *European Journal of Public Health*, vol. 32, no. 5 (October 2022): pp. 684-689; and Niharika Rustagi and Sonia Akter, "The Impact of Women's Political Representation on Child Health Outcomes during 1990-2020: Evidence from a Global Dataset," *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 312 (November 2022).

[2] For information on global women's issues more broadly, see CRS In Focus IF11804, *Global Women's Issues: Background and Selected U.S. Efforts*.

[3] See Section 7059 of Division K of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328). The act states that such [women's leadership] programs shall hereafter be collectively named the ''Madeleine K. Albright Women's Leadership Program."

Members have also enacted laws that address aspects and issues related to women's political participation. For example, the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, among other things, aims to increase the participation of women in conflict prevention and conflict resolution processes as a means to build more inclusive societies and to help stabilize countries and regions. The act expresses the sense of Congress that "the political participation, and leadership of women in fragile environments, particularly during democratic transitions, is critical to sustaining lasting democratic institutions."[4]

Statistics on Selected Issues

Voting Rights

The right to vote is a primary step toward involving a populace in the political decisions of a government. In many countries, voting rights were originally granted only to adult men who owned property, then were eventually expanded to include all adult male citizens regardless of property ownership, then to women, and finally to other underrepresented groups. Definitions of what constituted a "citizen" may also have changed over time, as they did in the United States, and become more inclusive of minority groups and Indigenous peoples.

Table 1 and **Table 2**, respectively, list the first and latest countries to extend the right and duty of voting to women according to the IPU. Although subnational regions (e.g., states, provinces) may have granted the right to vote earlier, the years in the tables below indicate when suffrage was extended for national elections to female adult citizens.

Table 1. First Countries to Allow Women to Vote

Year	Country/Countries	Year	Country/Countries
1893	New Zealand	1917	Canada*
1902	Australia*	1918	Austria, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland,* Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, United Kingdom*
1906	Finland	1919	Belarus, Belgium,* Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden,* Ukraine
1913	Norway	1920	Albania, Czech Republic, Iceland,** Slovak Republic, United States
1915	Denmark, Iceland*	1921	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Sweden**

Source: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) using information from IPU.

Notes: Some countries granted suffrage in stages, at first denying the right to women of certain racial, ethnic, or economic groups. One asterisk (*) indicates the first year female citizens were allowed to vote in national elections with limitations; two asterisks (**) indicate when those limitations were removed. No asterisk indicates all female adult citizens were granted the right to vote without restrictions.

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[4] P.L. 115-68, Section 3, Sense of Congress. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF12346, *Women, Peace, and Security: Global Context and U.S. Policy*.

Table 2. Most Recent Countries to Allow Women to Vote

Year	Country(ies)
2003	Indonesia, Qatar
2005	Kuwait, United Arab Emirates
2006	Montenegro
2008	Bhutan
2011	Saudi Arabia

Sources: Compiled by CRS using information from the IPU, "Compare data on parliaments," accessed January 5, 2023; Pamela Paxton and Melanie M. Hughes, *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective*, 2nd ed., SAGE Publications, 2014, p. 50-51; CIA *World Factbook*, "Suffrage," accessed January 5, 2023; and Ahmed al Omran, "'Surprise and Excitement': Saudi Women React to Voting Rights Decision," National Public Radio, September 26, 2011.

Note: Newly independent countries (e.g., Kosovo, South Sudan) would be included only if women had not been granted suffrage under the preceding country. For example, because Sudan granted women the right to vote in 1964, South Sudan is not included in this list, even though it did not gain independence until 2011.

Legislative Representation

The following tables highlight women's representation based in national legislatures, including data on quotas (described below). Several countries and political parties have instituted quotas to ensure that women are represented on the ballot or in the legislature, which may affect the statistics on women's representation in national governments. Some governments also may use quotas to ensure ethnic or religious diversity in their national legislatures (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq).

Gender Quotas

The *Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas* explains that "[g]ender quotas are numerical targets that stipulate the number or percentage of women that must be included in a candidate list or the number of seats to be allocated to women in a legislature. They aim to reverse discrimination in law and practice and to level the playing field for women and men in politics."

Three main types of gender quotas are generally recognized, and they may be used at the national or subnational level, or both:

- **Legislated candidate quotas.** These quotas are mandated through national constitutions or legislation to regulate the gender composition of the ballot.

- **Legislated "reserved seats."** These quotas reserve a specific number or percentage of seats in the legislature for women members. The quotas are mandated through national constitutions or legislation and are implemented through special electoral procedures.

- **Party quotas (also known as voluntary party quotas).** Individual political parties may adopt these quotas through the party's statutes and rules. Such adoption is the prerogative of each party, and some parties in a country may adopt quotas while other parties choose not to do so.

Table 3 lists the countries where women hold 40% or more of the total seats of the national legislative chamber body according to the IPU.

Table 3. National Legislatures with Women Holding 40% or More of Total Seats

As of December 1, 2022

IPU Rank by % of Total Seats Held by Women[a]	Country	Type of Legislative System	National Level Gender Quota Codes[b]	Total Legislative Seats	Total Seats Held by Women	% of Total Seats Held by Women
#1	Rwanda	Bicameral	RS	106	58	54.7%
#2	Cuba	Unicameral	No Quota	586	313	53.4%
#3	Nicaragua	Unicameral	CQ	91	47	51.7%
#4	New Zealand	Unicameral	PQ	119	60	50.4%
#5	United Arab Emirates	Unicameral	RS	40	20	50.0%
#6	Mexico	Bicameral	CQ	628	313	49.8%
#7	Bolivia	Bicameral	CQ	166	80	48.2%
#8	Iceland	Unicameral	PQ	63	30	47.6%
#9	Costa Rica	Unicameral	CQ, PQ	57	27	47.4%
#10	Andorra	Unicameral	PQ	28	13	46.4%
#11	Sweden	Unicameral	PQ	349	162	46.4%
#12	Finland	Unicameral	No Quota	200	91	45.5%
#13	South Africa	Bicameral	PQ	454	206	45.4%
#14	Norway	Unicameral	PQ	169	76	45.0%
#15	Australia	Bicameral	PQ	227	101	44.5%
#16	Argentina	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	329	146	44.4%
#17	Belgium	Bicameral	CQ	210	93	44.3%
#18	Senegal	Unicameral	CQ	165	73	44.2%
#19	Denmark	Unicameral	No Quota	179	78	43.6%
#20	Mozambique	Unicameral	PQ	250	106	42.4%
#21	North Macedonia	Unicameral	CQ, PQ	120	50	41.7%
#22	Spain	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	614	254	41.4%
#23	Austria	Bicameral	PQ	244	100	41.0%
#24	Moldova	Unicameral	CQ	101	41	40.6%
#25	Peru	Unicameral	CQ	130	52	40.0%
#26	Timor-Leste	Unicameral	CQ	65	26	40.0%

Sources: Compiled by CRS using data from the IPU and the Gender Quotas Database, published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, accessed January 17, 2023.

Notes: The countries listed here include those identified by the IPU where women hold 40% or more of the total seats in the national legislative chamber(s).

a. The rankings by percentage of total seats held by women are based on the 193 countries listed in the complete IPU list of Percentage of Women in National Parliaments. Data was available for only 188 countries. Three countries (Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, and Venezuela) had no values recorded and three countries (Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Sudan) had suspended legislatures recorded.

b. Four codes indicate the type of gender quota used in the country: CQ=legislated quotas for candidates on the ballot level; RS=legal quotas for reserved seats, whether legislated or mandated by the executive branch; PQ=voluntary party quotas; Sub only=quotas at the subnational level only, as identified by the Gender Quotas Database.

Table 4 shows the number of seats held by women in the national legislative chambers of the 19 members of the "Group of 20" (G-20), a forum for advancing international economic cooperation and coordination among certain countries.[5] According to the IPU, women hold 40% or more of the total seats in the national legislatures of three G-20 countries (Mexico, South Africa, and Argentina), and these countries appear in both **Table 3** and **Table 4**.

Table 4. Women in National Legislatures of G-20 Countries

As of December 1, 2022

IPU Rank by % of Total Seats Held by Women[a]	Country	Type of Legislative System	National Level Gender Quota Codes[b]	Total Legislative Seats	Total Seats Held by Women	% of Total Seats Held by Women
#6	Mexico	Bicameral	CQ	628	313	49.8%
#13	South Africa	Bicameral	PQ	454	206	45.4%
#15	Australia	Bicameral	PQ	227	101	44.5%
#16	Argentina	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	329	146	44.4%
#36	France	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	925	337	36.4%
#41	Canada	Bicameral	PQ	431	151	35.0%
#53	Italy	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	606	200	33.0%
#60	United Kingdom	Bicameral	PQ	1,424	446	31.3%
#75	United States	Bicameral	No Quota	531	149	28.1%
#94	China	Unicameral	RS	2,975	742	24.9%
#107	Indonesia	Unicameral	CQ	575	126	21.9%
#120	Saudi Arabia	Unicameral	RS	151	30	19.9%
#128	South Korea	Unicameral	CQ, PQ	295	55	18.6%
#132	Russia	Bicameral	No Quota	619	110	17.8%
#136	Brazil	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	594	104	17.5%
#137	Türkiye	Unicameral	PQ	582	101	17.4%
#146	Japan	Bicameral	No Quota	712	110	15.5%
#149	India	Bicameral	Sub only	779	114	14.6%
	TOTAL 193 COUNTRIES					

Sources: Compiled by CRS using data from the IPU and the Gender Quotas Database, published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, accessed January 17, 2023.

Notes: This list includes the 19 member nations of the G-20 and excludes the European Union.

a. The rankings by percentage of total seats held by women are based on the 193 countries listed in the complete IPU list of Percentage of Women in National Parliaments. Data was available for only 187 countries. Three countries (Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, and Venezuela) had no values recorded and three countries (Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Sudan) had suspended legislatures.

b. Four codes indicate the type of gender quota used in the country: CQ=legislated quotas for candidates on the ballot level; RS=legal quotas for reserved seats, whether legislated or mandated by the executive branch; PQ=voluntary party quotas; sub only=quotas at the subnational level only, as identified by the Gender Quotas Database.

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[5] The European Union, which is a member of the G-20, is excluded from the table. For more information on the G-20, see CRS Report R40977, *International Economic Policy Coordination at the G-7 and the G-20*.

Table 5 lists countries where women hold 7% or less of the total legislative seats according to the IPU.

Table 5. Countries Where Women Hold 7% or Less of Total Legislative Seats

As of December 1, 2022

| IPU Rank by % of Total Seats Held by Women[a]	Country	Type of Legislative System	National Level Gender Quota Codes[b]	Total Legislative Seats	Total Seats Held by Women	% of Total Seats Held by Women
#171	Algeria	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	571	40	7.0%
#172	Palau	Bicameral	No Quota	29	2	6.9%
#173	Kiribati	Unicameral	No Quota	45	3	6.7%
#174	Kuwait	Unicameral	No Quota	64	4	6.3%
#175	Lebanon	Unicameral	No Quota	128	8	6.3%
#176	Tuvalu	Unicameral	No Quota	16	1	6.3%
#177	Marshall Islands	Unicameral	No Quota	33	2	6.1%
#178	Iran	Unicameral	No Quota	286	16	5.6%
#179	Sri Lanka	Unicameral	Sub only	225	12	5.3%
#180	Maldives	Unicameral	Sub only	87	4	4.6%
#181	Nigeria	Bicameral	No Quota	469	21	4.5%
#182	Qatar	Unicameral	No Quota	45	2	4.4%
#183	Tonga	Unicameral	No Quota	27	1	3.7%
#184	Vanuatu	Unicameral	Sub only	52	1	1.9%
#185	Papua New Guinea	Unicameral	No Quota	115	2	1.7%
#186	Yemen	Bicameral	No Quota	340	1	0.3%
#187	Haiti	Bicameral	RS	10	0	0.0%

Sources: Compiled by CRS using data from the IPU and the Gender Quotas Database, published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, accessed December 1, 2022.

a. The rankings by percentage of total seats held by women is based on the 193 countries listed in the complete IPU list of Percentage of Women in National Parliaments. Data was available for only 187 countries. Three countries (Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, and Venezuela) had no values recorded and three countries (Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Sudan) had suspended legislatures.

b. Four codes indicate the type of gender quota used in the country: C=legislated quotas for candidates on the ballot level; RS=legislated quotas for reserved seats; P=voluntary party quotas; sub only=quotas at the subnational level only, as identified by the Gender Quotas Database.

According to the IPU, over a 20-year period, the percentage of seats held by women in national legislatures has risen worldwide from 15.0% in December 2002 to 26.4% in December 2022 (see **Figure 1**).

**Figure 1. Worldwide Percentage of Seats Held
by Women in National Legislatures**

2002-2022

% of Women in Legislative Seats, Worldwide
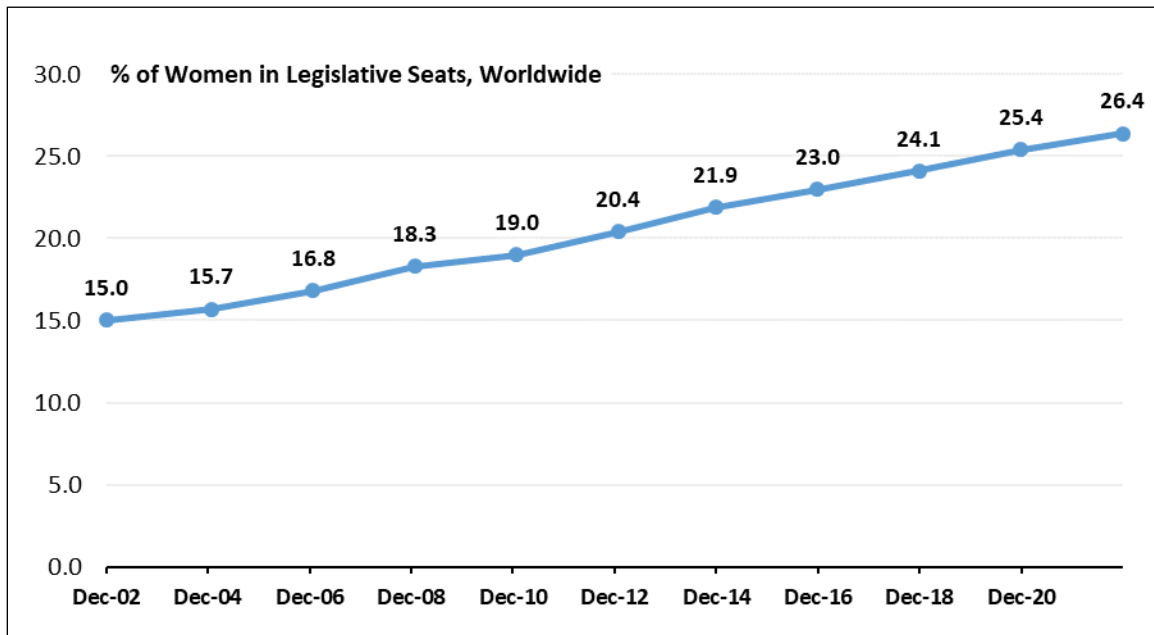
According to the IPU, in December 2002, Europe and the Americas were the only regions where women held 16% or more of legislative seats at the national level as shown in **Figure 2**. In 2022, women legislators in five regions hold more than 20% of the legislative seats. The Middle East/Northern Africa is the only region with less than 20% of legislative seats held by women, although women have increased their representation since 2002 by 11.4%.

Figure 2. Regional Percentages of Seats Held by Women in National Legislatures
2002-2022
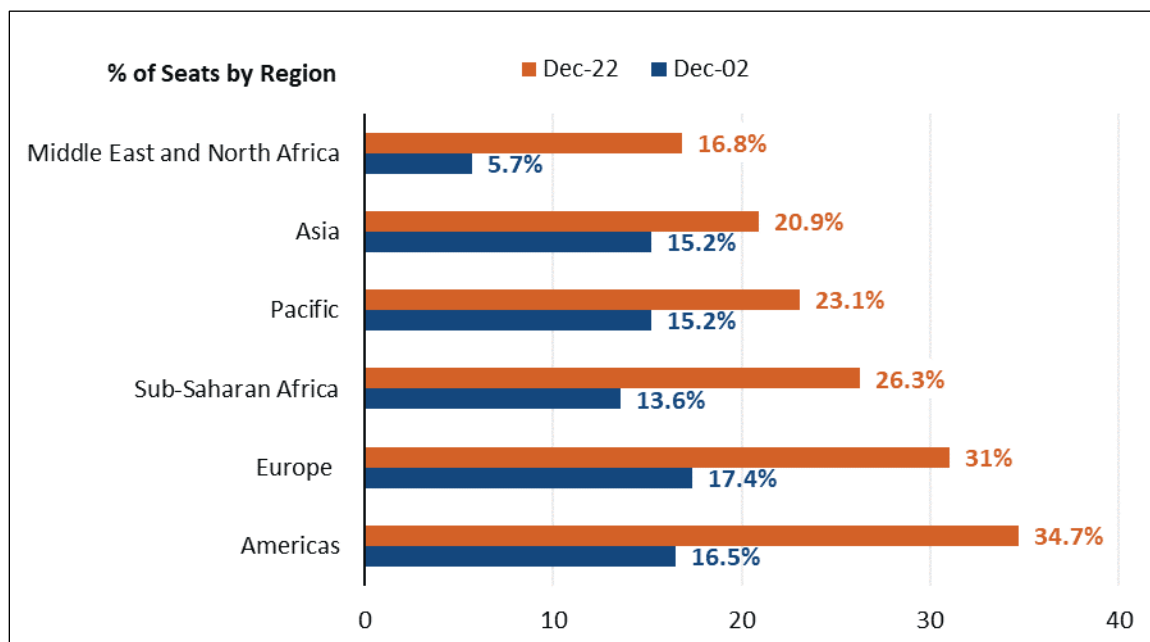
Executive Representation

Voters in at least 70 countries have chosen a woman as their executive since 1960, when Sri Lanka selected Sirima Bandaranaike as the world's first female prime minister. Executives may be selected through various methods: directly elected from a ballot dedicated to the executive office; indirectly elected by the legislature; appointed, following legislative elections, as the leader of the majority political party or majority coalition; or through other means.

The term "executive" refers to persons identified as either the chief of state or head of government of a country. The CIA *World Factbook* defines the chief of state as "the titular leader of the country who represents the state at official and ceremonial functions but may not be involved with the day-to-day activities of the government." The head of government is "the top executive designated to manage the executive branch of the government." In some countries, a monarch is identified as the "chief of state," whereas an elected official (such as the prime minister, premier, or administrator) is the "head of government." Other countries, such as the United States, have one person, the President, filling both positions. Many countries have a "chief of state," such as a president, and another person as "head of government," such as a prime minister, who won their office through different processes.[6]

Women Leaders in the 21st Century

Table 6 lists women who are currently the chief of state or head of government of their country, excluding monarchs.

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[6] Drawn from *CIA World Factbook,* executive branch field listing, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/executive-branch/, accessed on November 20, 2022.

Table 6. Current Women Executives

As of December 8, 2022

Country	Name	Title	Dates in Office
Aruba	Evelyn **Wever-Croes**[a]	Prime Minister	Nov. 17, 2017–present
Bangladesh	Sheikh **Hasina** Wazed	Prime Minister	1996-2001; Jan. 6, 2009–present
Barbados	Mia **Mottley**[a]	Prime Minister	May 25, 2018–present
Barbados	Sandra **Mason**[a]	President	Nov. 30, 2021–present
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Željka **Cvijanović**	Chair of the Presidency and President (Serb seat)[b]	Nov. 16, 2022–present
Denmark	Mette **Frederiksen**	Prime Minister	June 26, 2019–present
Estonia	Kaja **Kallas**[a]	Prime Minister	Jan. 26, 2021–present
Ethiopia	**Sahle-Work** Zewde[a]	President	Oct. 25, 2018–present
Finland	Sanna Mirella **Marin**	Prime Minister	Dec. 10, 2019–present
France	Élisabeth **Borne**	Prime Minister	May 16, 2022–present
Gabon	Rose Christiane Ossouka **Raponda**[a]	Prime Minister	July 16, 2020–present
Georgia	Salome **Zourabichvili**[a]	President	Dec. 16, 2018–present
Greece	Ekaterina **Sakellaropoulou**[a]	President	Mar. 13, 2020–present
Honduras	Xiomara **Castro de Zelaya**[a]	President	Jan. 27, 2022–present
Hungary	Katalin **Novak**[a]	President	May 10, 2022–present
Iceland	Katrin **Jakobsdóttir**	Prime Minister	Nov. 30, 2017–present
Italy	Giorgia **Meloni**[a]	Prime Minister	Oct. 22, 2022–present
Kosovo	Vjosa **Osmani-Sadriu**	President	Apr. 4, 2021–present
Lithuania	Ingrida **Simonyte**	Prime Minister	Nov. 24, 2020–present
Moldova	Maia **Sandu**[a]	President	Dec. 24, 2020–present
Moldova	Natalia **Gavrilita**	Prime Minister	Aug. 6, 2021–present
Namibia	Saara **Kuugongelwa-Amadhila**[a]	Prime Minister	Mar. 21, 2015–present
Nepal	Bidhya Devi **Bandhari**[a]	President	Oct. 29, 2015–present
New Zealand	Jacinda **Ardern**	Prime Minister	Oct. 26, 2017–present
Peru	Dina **Boluarte**[a]	President[c]	Dec. 7, 2022–present
Samoa	**Fiame** Naomi Mata'afa[a]	Prime Minister	May 24, 2021–present
Serbia	Ana **Brnabić**[a]	Prime Minister	June 29, 2017–present
Singapore	Halimah **Yacob**[a]	President	Sept. 14, 2017–present
Sint Maarten	Silveria **Jacobs**	Prime Minister	Mar. 28, 2020–present
Slovakia	Zuzana **Čaputová**[a]	President	June 15, 2019–present

Country	Name	Title	Dates in Office
Slovenia	Natasa **Pirc Musar**[a]	President-Elect	December 22, 2022-present
Taiwan[d]	**Tsai** Ing-wen[a]	President	May 20, 2016–present
Tanzania	Samia Suluhu **Hassan**[a]	President	Mar. 19, 2021–present
Trinidad and Tobago	Paula-Mae **Weeks**[a]	President	Mar. 19, 2018–present
Togo	Victoire Tomegah **Dogbe**[a]	Prime Minister	Sept. 28, 2020–present
Tunisia	Najla **Bouden** Romdhane[a]	Prime Minister	Oct. 11, 2021–present
Uganda	Robinah **Nabbanja**[a]	Prime Minister	June 21, 2021–present

Sources: Compiled by CRS using information from the CIA *World Factbook*, the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap 2022*, and government websites.

Notes: Surnames appear in bold face.

a. Evelyn Wever-Croes is the first female to hold this position in her country.

b. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a rotating three-member presidency. President Cvijanović is serving as the Chair of the Presidency and as President (Serb seat).

c. President Boluarte took office December 7, 2022, after the Peruvian Congress removed the former president Pedro Castillo from office. She had been serving as First Vice President.

d. Taiwan officially calls itself the Republic of China (ROC). For information on the status of Taiwan, see CRS In Focus IF10275, *Taiwan: Political and Security Issues*, by Susan V. Lawrence and Caitlin Campbell.

Table 7 lists selected women who formerly served as the executive of their country since 2000.

Table 7. Selected Women Who Served as Chief of State or Head of Government (Executives) from 2000-Present

Executives are listed in alphabetical order by country.

Country	Name	Title	Years in Office
Argentina	Cristina **Fernandez De Kirchner**	President	2007-2015
Austria	Brigitte **Bierlein**	Chancellor	2019-2020
Bangladesh	Khaleda **Zia**	Prime Minister	1991-1996 and 2001-2006
Brazil	Dilma **Rousseff**	President	2011-2016
Burma	**Aung San Suu Kyi**	State Counsellor	2016-2021
Chile	Michelle **Bachelet**	President	2006-2010 and 2014-2018
Croatia	Kolinda **Grabar-Kitarovic**	President	2015-2020
Estonia	Kersti **Kaljulaid**	President	2016-2021
Germany	Angela **Merkel**	Chancellor	2005–2021
India	Pratibha **Patil**	President	2007-2012
Indonesia	**Megawati** Sukarnoputri	President	2001-2004
Jamaica	Portia **Simpson-Miller**	Prime Minister	2006-2007 and 2012-2016
Liberia	Ellen Johnson **Sirleaf**	President	2006-2018

Country	Name	Title	Years in Office
Lithuania	Dalia **Grybauskaite**	President	2009-2019
Malawi	Joyce **Banda**	President	2012-2014
Malta	Marie-Louise Coleiro **Preca**	President	2014-2019
New Zealand	Helen **Clark**	Prime Minister	1999-2008
Norway	Erna **Solberg**	Prime Minister	2013-2021
Panama	Mireya **Moscoso**	President	1999-2004
Philippines	Gloria Macapagal **Arroyo**	President	2001-2010
South Korea	**Park** Geun-hye	President	2013-2017
Sweden	Magdalena **Andersson**a	Prime Minister	Nov. 30, 2021–Oct. 18, 2022
Thailand	Yingluck **Shinawatra**	Prime Minister	2011-2014
Turks and Caicos Islands	Sharlene **Cartwright-Robinson**	Premier	2016-2021
United Kingdom	Theresa **May**	Prime Minister	2016-2019
United Kingdom	Mary Elizabeth "Liz" **Truss**	Prime Minister	September 6–October 25, 2022

Source: Compiled by CRS using media reports and *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Notes: Surnames appear in bold face. Hong Kong, although not a country, had female Chief Executive named Carrie Lam from July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2022.

a. Magdalena Andersson is the first female to hold this position in her country.

Women Leaders of the 20th Century

Table 8 identifies several notable female executives who held office in the 20th century.

Table 8. Selected Women Executives from 1960 to 2000

Executives are listed chronologically by their years in office.

Country	Name	Title	Years in Office
Sri Lanka	Sirimavo **Bandaranaike**	Prime Minister	1960-1965; 1970-1977; 1994-2000
Bandaranaike was the world's first female Prime Minister.			
India	Indira **Gandhi**	Prime Minister	1966-1977 and 1980-1984
Gandhi was assassinated while in office; she was succeeded by her son, Rajiv.			
Israel	Golda **Meir**	Prime Minister	1969-1974
Meir and her husband immigrated to then Palestine in 1921. She was a founder of the State of Israel and the fourth prime minister.			
Argentina	Isabel Martinez de **Perón**	President	1974-1976
Perón was world's first female president when, as vice president, she succeeded her husband, President Juan Perón, upon his death.			

Country	Name	Title	Years in Office
United Kingdom	Margaret **Thatcher**	Prime Minister	1979-1990
Thatcher became the first woman prime minister in Europe and was the only British prime minister in the 20th century to be elected to three consecutive terms.			
Iceland	Vigdis **Finnbogadottir**	President	1980-1996
Finnbogadottir was the first woman in the world to be elected head of state in a national election.			
Philippines	Corazon **Aquino**	President	1986-1992
Aquino restored democratic rule after the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos.			
Pakistan	Benazir **Bhutto**	Prime Minister	1988-1990 and 1993-1996
Bhutto was first female prime minister of a majority-Muslim country.			

Source: Compiled by CRS using news and other sources, such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Gale Biography in Context.*

Note: Surnames appear in bold face.

Violence Against Women in Politics

Some experts and observers have found that, while any candidate or elected politician may experience violence, women politicians can be targeted because of their gender and subjected to sexist threats, sexual harassment, and violence.[7] Violence may occur during the registration and voting processes, while campaigning and running for office, and/or while serving in a government.[8] Perpetrators may include both state and non-state actors, such as members of political parties, other parliamentarians, members of the public, media representatives, and religious or community leaders.[9]

Underreporting incidents of violence against women in politics makes addressing the issue particularly challenging. Information about the problem tends to be anecdotal rather than statistical, making it difficult to determine the extent and prevalence of the problem. In addition, many women may be reluctant to report violence out of the belief that doing so may limit a woman's political aspirations, and out of fear of reprisals, threats, and possible increased harassment.[10] According to a 2018 United Nations report, "women of color appear to be disproportionately affected, and risks are likely higher for women of marginalized communities."[11]

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[7] An article in the *Journal of Democracy* noted that actions to threaten, intimidate, or harass women who are participating in the political process are attempts to "deter women's electoral participation, and reinforce prevailing gender norms." Such activities "should thus be seen as a serious threat and affront to democracy." See Mona Lena Krook, "Violence Against Women in Politics," *Journal of Democracy*, January 2017, p. 74-75. The Kofi Annan Foundation cited research that determined "general political violence occurred against both men and women," but that women were "much more likely to experience sexualized forms of violence." See Carmen Alanis, *Violence Against Women in Politics*, Kofi Annan Foundation, November 2020, p. 31.

[8] United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, *Violence against Women in Politics*, August 6, 2018, p. 9.

[9] United Nations, *Violence against Women in Politics*, August 6, 2018, p. 6.

[10] UN Women, *Data and Violence against Women in Politics: Expert Group Meeting Report and Recommendations*, December 4-5, 2019, pp. 9-13.

[11] United Nations, *Violence against Women in Politics Expert Group Meeting Report and Recommendations,* New York, NY, March 8-9, 2018, p. 6.

Figure 3 indicates the prevalence of attacks of "political violence targeting women" (PVTW) who participate in various functions in the political process according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. Trends in **Figure 3** reflect data gathered periodically from women in 190 countries from January 1997 to January 2020. Globally, women *candidates for office*, whether for local, regional, or national government, experience up to 8% of PVTW attacks, while female *politicians*, those women currently serving in an elected governmental position, experience 12% of PVTW attacks. *Political party supporters*, such as women who campaign and actively support a political party or candidate, face 24% of PVTW attacks, while women *voters* undergo 2% of PVTW attacks. *Government officials*, women who work in nonelected government positions, including public and civil servants, experience up to 16% of PVTW attacks. The largest group of women in public life, who experience 38% of PVTW attacks, includes *activists, human rights defenders, and social leaders*.[12]

Figure 3. Trends in Political Violence Targeting Women, by Role in Political Process
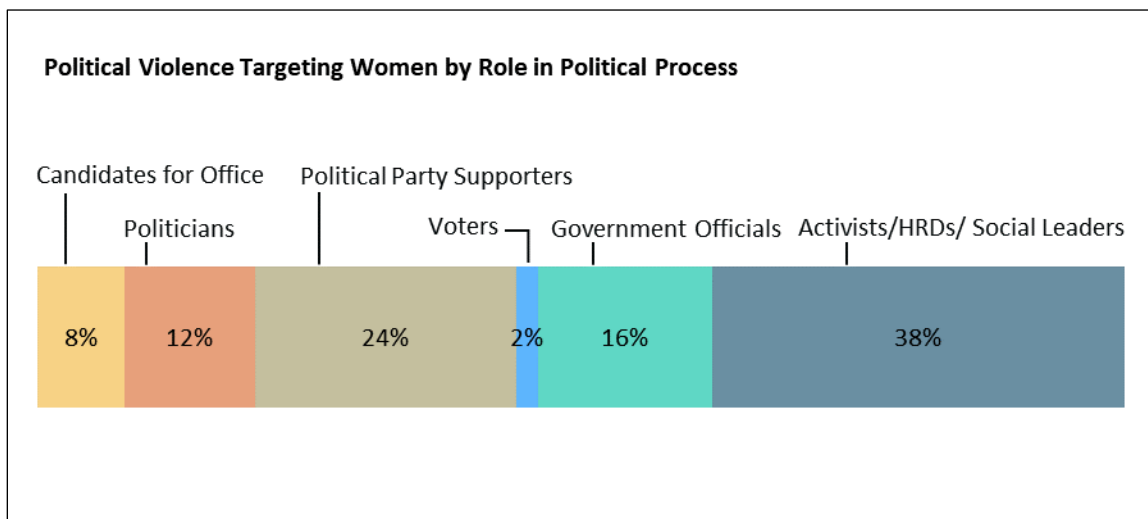
Source: Created by CRS, based on aggregate data from *Violence Targeting Women in Politics: Trends in Targets, Types, and Perpetrators of Political Violence*, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) Project, December 2021, pp. 4-7.

Notes: Data on violence targeting women in politics are restricted to acts of physical violence that take place in a public setting on women who engage in the political process. This does not include acts of bullying or intimidation, cases of domestic violence, or virtual aggressive actions.

Figure 3 summarizes the aggregate of all data compiled and analyzed by the ACLED Project through December 2021. ACLED began collecting data on 48 African counties in 1997 and has since added more than 200 countries and territories.

In October 2016, the IPU published the results of a survey of 55 women legislators from 39 countries on their experiences of harassment, intimidation, or violence based on their gender.[13] **Tables 9** to **12** illustrate the findings of this survey. Broadly, almost 82% of the women surveyed reported they had personally experienced psychological violence, almost 22% reported incidents

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[12] Kishi Roudabeh, *Violence Targeting Women in Politics: Trends in Targets, Types, and Perpetrators of Political Violence*, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, December 2021, pp. 4-7.

[13] IPU, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, IPU, October 2016. Survey participants included 18 from Africa, 15 from Europe, 10 from the Asia-Pacific region, 8 from the Americas, and 4 from Arab countries.

of sexual violence, 25.5% reported experiencing physical violence, and almost 33% had been subjected to economic violence.

Table 9. Prevalence of Various Forms of Violence Against Women Legislators

2016 IPU survey of 55 women legislators from 39 countries

	% of Respondents Answering "Yes"	
Type of Violence	**"Have you been subject to one or more acts of this kind of violence?"**	**"Have you witnessed acts of this violence committed against one or more of your female colleagues?"**
Psychological violence (see **Table 10** for details)	81.8%	78.1%
Sexual violence (e.g., sexual harassment; efforts to force sexual relations inappropriate and unwanted gestures or physical contact; requests for sexual relations in exchange for material or political advantages	21.8%	32.7%
Physical violence (e.g., actions that inflict or attempt to inflict bodily injury to a legislator, or to friends or members of her family)	25.5%	20.0%
Economic violence (e.g., denied funds and other resources that legislators are entitled to such as salary, offices, computers, staff, security; damage to or destruction of personal property)	32.7%	30.9%

Source: IPU, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, October 2016.

Note: Definitions of the various kinds of violence are included in the report.

The 81.8% of respondents in **Table 9** who reported they had experienced psychological violence identified the manifestations of this violence in **Table 10**.

Table 10. Psychological Violence: Prevalence of Specific Behaviors

Behaviors described by the 81.8% of 2016 IPU survey respondents who reported they had experienced psychological violence

Actions of Psychological Violence	**% of Respondents Who Had Experienced These Actions**
Humiliating sexual or sexist remarks	65.5%
Images or disrespectful comments with sexual connotations about you in the traditional media	27.3%
Extremely humiliating or sexual images of you distributed through social media	41.8%
Threats of death, rape, beatings, or abduction	44.4%
Harassment (e.g. exposure to insistent and uninvited behavior, including unwanted attention, unwelcome verbal contact, or interaction that may have frightened you)	32.7%

Source: IPU, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians,* October 2016, p. 3.

Table 11 lists several factors identified in the IPU study that may make some women legislators a likely target for gender-based intolerance.

Table 11. Risk Factors for Women Legislators

2016 IPU survey of 55 women legislators from 39 countries

Reasons for Violence, as reported by women legislators subjected to gender-based violent acts and behavior	% of Survey Respondents
Intention to dissuade them and other women from participating in politics	61.5%
Political rivalry	41.7%
Positions of women legislators on specific issues	60.5%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, October 2016, p. 6.

Additional risk factors that appear to lead to violence against women in legislatures include being a member of the political minority, being under the age of 40, and belonging to a minority ethnic, religious, or other marginalized social group.[14] **Table 12** identifies how women legislators have reacted to the acts of violence they experienced.

Table 12. Effects of Violence Against Women in Politics

2016 IPU survey of 55 women legislators from 39 countries

Reactions of Women in Politics Subjected to Violent Acts	% of Survey Respondents
Distressed over the experience	66.7%
Concerned for the security of themselves, their friends, and family members	46.7%
Felt weakened in their ability to complete their mandates and to express their opinions	38.7%
Reported incidents to the legislative security services or the police	51.7%
Strengthened their determination as a legislator	80.0%

Source: IPU, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, October 2016, p. 7.

The IPU released regional updates on sexism, harassment, and violence against women in parliaments for Europe (2018) and for Africa (2021). IPU's 2018 Europe regional update is based on the results of one-on-one conversations with 123 women from 45 European countries. Eighty-one participants were members of parliament (MPs) and 42 were members of the parliamentary staff.[15] According to the Europe update, of the female MP respondents,

- 85.2% said that they had suffered psychological violence during their term of office;
- 46.9% had received death threats or threats of rape or beating;
- 58.2% had been the target of online sexist attacks on social networks;
- 67.9% had been the target of comments relating to their physical appearance or based on gender stereotypes;
- 24.7% had experience sexual violence[16]; and

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[14] IPU, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, October 2016, p. 6.

[15] IPU, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians in Europe*, October 2018, p. 1.

[16] Ibid., p. 4. This report identified two types of sexual violence: sexual harassment ("words or behavior of a degrading

- 14.8% had experienced physical violence.[17]

More broadly, female MPs in Europe under 40 experienced higher rates of psychological and sexual harassment. Female MPs who actively supported gender equality and condemned violence against women were often singled out for attack.[18]

IPU's 2021 Africa regional update is based on the results of confidential interviews conducted with 224 women from 50 countries. Of the participants, 137 were women parliamentarians and 87 were members of the parliamentary staff.[19] The Africa update found that of the women parliamentarian respondents,

- 80% have experienced psychological violence. Of this 80%:
  - 67% have experienced sexist behavior or remarks;
  - 46% have been the target of sexist attacks online;
  - 42% have received death threats, rape threats, or threats of beating or abduction directed at them or their loved ones;
  - 39% have faced intimidation or psychological harassment;
- 39% have experienced sexual violence. Of this 39%:
  - 40% have been sexually harassed.
  - 9% have been affected by sextortion (requests for sexual favors).
- 29% have been exposed to economic violence[20]; and
- 23% have experienced physical violence.[21]

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or humiliating sexual nature, sexual advances and/or demands for sexual favors") and sexual assault (being forced "engage in sexual acts, have sexual intercourse or carry out something of a sexual nature.")

[17] IPU, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians in Europe*, October 2018, p. 4. This report defines physical violence as being slapped, pushed, hit, having something thrown at you; being threatened with a firearm, knife, or another weapon; or being confined, beaten, or abducted.

[18] Ibid., p. 1.

[19] IPU, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians in Africa*, November 2021, p. 2.

[20] Ibid., p. 27. In the report, economic violence is defined as using "economic barriers and deprivation as a means of control, most often by destroying a person's property or putting in jeopardy their livelihood as a form of intimidation."

[21] Ibid.

Acknowledgments

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