

Women in National Governments Around the Globe: Fact Sheet

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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. As this report shows, women currently hold 25.4% of legislative seats around the world, an increase from 12.7% of legislative seats in 1998 (see **Figure 1**). As of December 1, 2020, women held 50% or more of the legislative seats in three countries: Rwanda, Cuba, and the United Arab Emirates (see **Table 3**). At the executive level, at least 29 countries currently have an elected female head of state or government (see **Table 5**). Since 1960, about 110 women have been elected or appointed as head of the national government in approximately 70 countries.¹

The participation and representation of women in elected government is generally considered healthy for their communities. As Ambassador Kelley E. Currie, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, stated in June 2020, "We know for a fact that when women are involved ... whether it's the local issues in their own communities, or getting a seat at the negotiating table for the most critical issues of their countries, that it helps their countries to become more stable, more peaceful, and more prosperous."²

To support the United States Government's efforts to empower women's political rights, the 116th Congress appropriated funds for foreign assistance programs designed to promote the political and economic participation of women. Both P.L. 116-94, the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, and P.L. 116-260, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, included funding for Gender Equality programs in Section 7059 of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Appropriations divisions. Each act appropriated \$50 million to fund programs designed to increase the political involvement of women "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" at the local, provincial, and national levels.³ Each act also appropriated \$300 million for grants to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).⁴ The NED, through its core institutes, the International Republic Institute and the National Democratic Institute, funds democracy programs, including programs aimed specifically at increasing the political participation of women.

The 115th Congress enacted the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-68) with the aim 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. This act expressed 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."⁵ Both P.L. 116-94 and P.L. 116-260 included statements that "the Secretary of State shall promote" the participation of Afghan women in peace and reconciliation

¹ *The Global Gender Gap Report 2018*, prepared by The World Economic Forum, December 18, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>.

² Ambassador Kelley Currie, Briefing on the Women, Peace, and Security Implementation Plan, June 12, 2020, at <https://www.state.gov/briefing-with-ambassador-at-large-for-global-womens-issues-kelley-currie-on-the-women-peace-and-security-implementation-plan/>.

³ P.L. 116-94, Division G, Sec. 7059(b) at 133 Stat. 2920 and P.L. 116-260, Division K, Sec. 7059(b).

⁴ P.L. 116-94, Division G, Title I, at 113 Stat. 2824 and P.L. 116-260, Division K, Title I, at page 519.

⁵ P.L. 115-68 §3(2).

processes in the country “in a manner consistent with the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017.”⁶

The Women, Peace, and Security Act required the President to submit to Congress a strategy (the WPS Strategy) describing how the United States intended to fulfill the objectives of the act.⁷ The Trump Administration filed its WPS Strategy in June 2019 and acknowledged that the “social and political marginalization of women strongly correlates with the likelihood that a country will experience conflict.”⁸ One particular goal is to “encourage partner governments to adopt policies, plans, and capacity to improve the meaningful participation of women in processes connected to peace and security and decision-making institutions.”⁹ The WPS Strategy approach to achieve the goal includes conferring “with host governments and non-governmental organizations to reduce barriers to and enhance the meaningful participation of women in economic, political, and security spheres.”¹⁰

This report provides a global snapshot of women’s political participation 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, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the *CIA World Factbook*, news reports, and other sources.

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 women, and then other underrepresented groups. Definitions of what constituted a “citizen” may also have changed over time, as they did in the United States, and gradually have become more inclusive of minorities and indigenous peoples. Other countries enacted universal suffrage from their very founding, granting the right to vote to all adults, male and female, regardless of ethnicity, religion, economic standing, or other criterion.

Table 1 and **Table 2**, respectively, list the first and latest countries to extend the right and duty of voting to women. 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.

⁶ P.L. 116-94, Division G, §7044(2) at 133 Stat. 2900 and P.L. 116-260, Division K, §7044(2).

⁷ Department of State page on the Women, Peace, and Security Strategy (WPS Strategy), at <https://www.state.gov/women-peace-and-security/>. Included on this page is the Implementation Plan for the Strategy.

⁸ United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS Strategy), June 2019, p. 4, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WPS_Strategy_10_October2019.pdf#page=6.

⁹ WPS Strategy, p. 12, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WPS_Strategy_10_October2019.pdf#page=14.

¹⁰ WPS Strategy, p. 14, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WPS_Strategy_10_October2019.pdf#page=16.

Table 1. First Countries to Allow Women to Vote

Year	Country(ies)	Year	Country(ies)
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: The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/suffrage.htm>.

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 there were no restrictions and all female adult citizens were granted the right to vote.

Table 2. Most Recent Countries to Allow Women to Vote

Year	Country
2003	Qatar
2005	Kuwait
2006	United Arab Emirates
2011	Saudi Arabia

Sources: Pamela Paxton and Melanie M. Hughes, *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective*, 2nd edition, SAGE Publications, 2014, p. 50-51; and the *CIA World Factbook on Suffrage*, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/fields/311.html#AF>; “‘Surprise and Excitement’: Saudi Women React to Voting Rights Decision,” NPR, September 26, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2011/09/26/140819859/surprise-and-excitement-saudi-women-react-to-voting-rights-decision>.

Note: Newly independent countries (Kosovo, South Sudan, etc.) 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

Women’s suffrage has been closely linked to women’s participation in legislative bodies. In 1907, the voters of Finland elected 19 women to the country’s new unicameral parliament a year after Finnish women were granted suffrage; this was the first election in the world in which the names of both female and male candidates appeared on the ballot. On the other end of the spectrum, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia granted Saudi women the right to vote and run in municipal elections in 2011; women were able to exercise this right for the first time in 2015.¹¹

¹¹ “‘Surprise and Excitement’: Saudi Women React to Voting Rights Decision,” NPR, September 26, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2011/09/26/140819859/surprise-and-excitement-saudi-women-react-to-voting-rights-decision>; “For Saudi Women, ‘Baby Steps into this World of Democracy,’” NPR, December 2, 2015,

Gender Quotas

Several countries have instituted quotas to ensure that women are represented on the ballot or in the legislature. Similar quotas may also be used to ensure ethnic or religious diversity in the national legislature of some countries (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq).

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.” *The Atlas* further states that “gender quotas have proved to be the single most effective tool for ‘fast-tracking’ women’s representation in elected bodies of government.”¹²

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).** These quotas are adopted by individual political parties 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 shows the number of seats held by women in the national legislative chambers of selected countries. The countries listed include the 19 nation members of the G-20 (excluding the European Union) and countries that have legislative bodies in which women hold 44% or more of the seats. Two members of the G-20—South Africa and Mexico—are included in the 12 countries with more than 44% women legislators.

Note: At the time of publication, the most current numbers published by the IPU were from December 2020. It is expected numbers from February 2021 will be available by April 2021, and the report will be updated at that time.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/12/02/458162191/for-saudi-women-baby-steps-into-this-world-of-democracy>.

¹² The *Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas* was a joint project of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and Stockholm University, published in June 2014, p. 16, available at <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/atlas-electoral-gender-quotas?lang=en>.

Table 3. Female Representation in National Legislatures of Selected Countries

As of December 1, 2020

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	59	55.7
2	Cuba	Unicameral	None	605	322	53.2
3	United Arab Emirates	Unicameral	RS	40	20	50.0
4	Mexico	Bicameral	C, P	628	304	48.4
5	New Zealand	Unicameral	P	120	58	48.3
6	Bolivia	Bicameral	C, P	166	80	48.2
7	Nicaragua	Unicameral	C, P	91	43	47.3
8	Sweden	Unicameral	P	349	164	47.0
9	Andorra	Unicameral	None	28	13	46.4
10	Finland	Unicameral	None	200	92	46.0
11	South Africa	Bicameral	P	453	207	45.7
12	Costa Rica	Unicameral	C, P	57	26	45.6
18	Argentina	Bicameral	C, P	329	134	40.7
31	France	Bicameral	C, P	925	344	37.2
32	Australia	Bicameral	P	227	84	37.0
36	Italy	Bicameral	P	950	335	35.3
42	Canada	Bicameral	P	434	146	33.6
48	Germany	Bicameral	P	778	246	31.6
56	United Kingdom	Bicameral	P	1,445	433	30.0
70	United States	Unicameral	None	524	142	27.1
82	China	Unicameral	RS	2,975	742	24.9
111	Indonesia	Unicameral	C	575	117	20.3
116	Saudi Arabia	Unicameral	RS	151	30	19.9
123	South Korea	Unicameral	C, P	300	57	19.0
135	Turkey	Unicameral	P	589	102	17.3
142	Russia	Bicameral	None	620	100	16.1
148	Japan	Bicameral	None	710	102	14.4
149	Brazil	Bicameral	C, P	594	85	14.3
156	India	Bicameral	Sub only	784	105	13.4
TOTAL 194 COUNTRIES				46,025	11,699	25.4%

Source: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service using data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union at <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=12&year=2020>, and the Gender Quotas Database at <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/database>, published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, as posted on February 1, 2021.

Notes: The selected countries listed here include the 19 national members of the G-20 (excluding the European Union) and the 12 countries in which women hold 44% or more of the seats in the national legislative body.

- a. The rankings by percentage of total seats held by women is based on the 191 countries listed in the complete IPU list of Percentage of Women in National Parliaments, posted at <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=12&year=2020>.
- b. Four codes indicate the type of gender quota used in the country: C=legislated quotas for candidates on the ballot level; RS=legal quotas for reserved seats, whether legislated or mandated by the executive branch; P=voluntary party quotas; Sub only=quotas at the subnational level only, as identified by the Gender Quotas Database.

Table 4 lists countries where women hold fewer than 8% of the legislative seats.

Table 4. Countries Where Women Hold Fewer Than 8% of Total Legislative Seats
As of December 1, 2020

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
174	Tonga	Unicameral	No data	27	2	7.4
175	Nigeria	Bicameral	No data	469	34	7.2
176	Benin	Unicameral	No data	83	6	7.2
177	Palau	Bicameral	No data	29	2	6.9
178	Solomon Islands	Unicameral	C	47	3	6.4
179	Kuwait	Unicameral	No data	63	4	6.3
180	Burkina Faso	Unicameral	C	127	8	6.3
181	Tuvalu	Unicameral	No data	16	1	6.3
182	Marshall Islands	Unicameral	No data	33	2	6.1
183	Iran	Unicameral	No data	286	16	5.6
184	Sri Lanka	Unicameral	Sub only	223	12	5.4
185	Lebanon	Unicameral	No data	128	6	4.7
186	Maldives	Unicameral	No data	87	4	4.6
187	Yemen	Bicameral	No data	412	4	1.0
188	Micronesia	Unicameral	No data	14	0	0.0
189	Papua New Guinea	Unicameral	No data	111	0	0.0
190	Vanuatu	Unicameral	Sub only	52	0	0.0
191	Haiti	Bicameral	RS	10	0	0.0

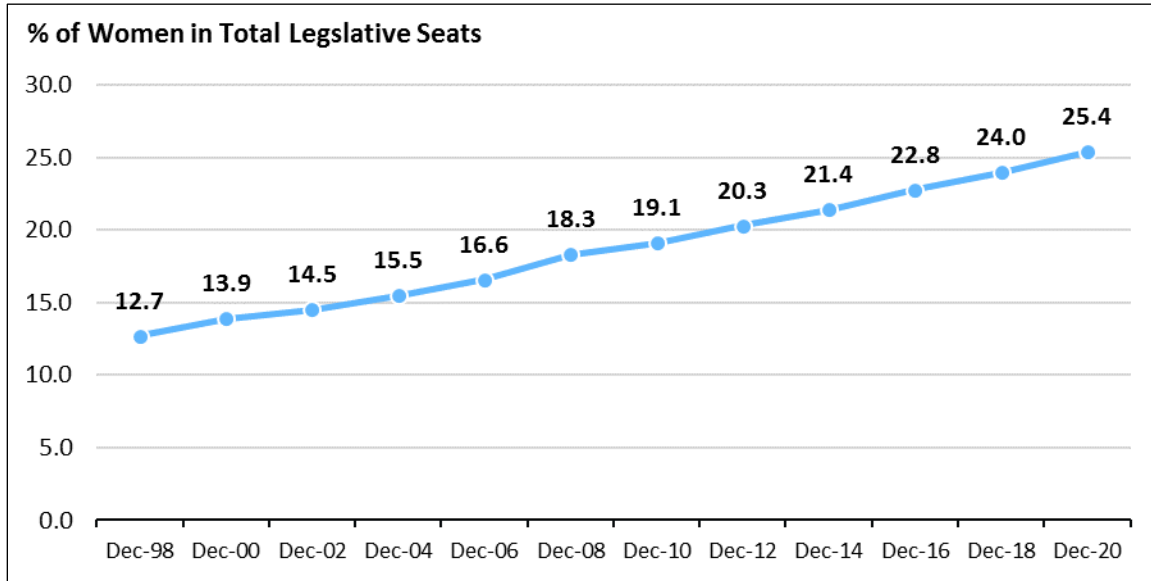
Source: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service using data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union at <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=12&year=2020>, and the Gender Quotas Database at <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/database>, published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, as posted on February 1, 2021.

- a. The rankings by percentage of total seats held by women is based on the 191 countries listed in the complete IPU list of Percentage of Women in National Parliaments, posted at <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=12&year=2020>.

- 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.

Over a 20-year period, the percentage of seats held by women in national legislatures has risen worldwide from 12.7% in December 1998 to 25.4% by December 2020 (see **Figure 1**).

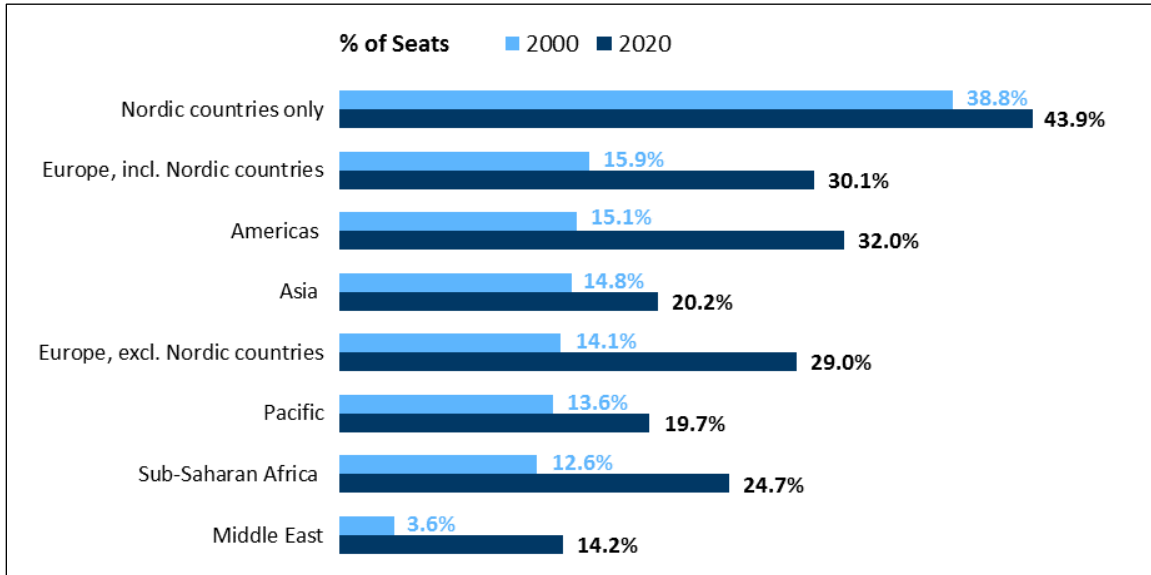
Figure 1. Worldwide Percentage of Seats Held by Women in National Legislatures
1998-2020



Source: Created by CRS using data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, available at <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>.

As shown in **Figure 2**, in 2000, women held more than 20% of legislative seats in only one region, the Nordic countries. In 2020, women legislators in five more regions held more than 20% of the legislative seats, and less than 20% in two regions. Currently, the Middle East is the region with the smallest portion of legislative seats held by women, although women's legislative representation has increased more since 2000 than in other regions.

Figure 2. Regional Percentages of Seats Held by Women in National Legislatures
2000-2020



Source: Created by CRS using data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, available at <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>.

Executive Representation

At least 70 countries have chosen a woman as their executive since Sirima Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka was selected as the world's first female Prime Minister in 1960. 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 indirect means.

Women Leaders in the 21st Century

Table 5. Current Women Executives

Country	Name	Title	Dates in Office
Moldova	Maia Sandu	President	Dec. 2020-present
Lithuania	Ingrida Simonyte	Prime Minister	Nov. 2020-present
Kosovo	Vjosa Osmani	Acting President	Nov. 2020-present
Togo	Victoire Tomegah Dogbe	Prime Minister	Sep. 2020-present
Gabon	Rose Christiane Ossouka Raponda	Prime Minister	July 2020-present
Greece	Ekaterina Sakellaropoulou	President	Mar. 2020-present
Sint Maarten	Silveria Jacobs	Prime Minister	Jan. 16 2020-present
Finland	Sanna Mirella Marin	Prime Minister	Dec. 10, 2019-present
Denmark	Mette Frederiksen	Prime Minister	June 26, 2019-present
Slovakia	Zuzana Čaputová ^a	President	June 15, 2019-present

Country	Name	Title	Dates in Office
Georgia	Salome Zourabichvili	President	Dec. 16, 2018–present
Ethiopia	Sahle-Work Zewde ^a	President	Oct. 25, 2018–present
Barbados	Mia Mottley	Prime Minister	May 25, 2018–present
Trinidad and Tobago	Paula-Mae Weekes ^a	President	Mar. 19, 2018–present
Iceland	Katrin Jakobsdóttir	Prime Minister	Nov. 30, 2017–present
Aruba	Evelyn Wever-Croes ^a	Prime Minister	Nov. 17, 2017–present
New Zealand	Jacinda Ardern	Prime Minister	Oct. 26, 2017–present
Singapore	Halimah Yacob ^a	President	Sept. 14, 2017–present
Hong Kong ^b	Carrie Lam ^a	Chief Executive	July 1, 2017–present
Serbia	Ana Brnabić	Prime Minister	June 29, 2017–present
Turks and Caicos Islands	Sharlene Cartwright-Robinson ^a	Premier	Dec. 20, 2016–present
Estonia	Kersti Kaljulad ^a	President	Oct. 10, 2016–present
Taiwan	Tsai Ing-wen ^a	President	May 20, 2016–present
Burma ^c	Aung San Suu Kyi ^a	State Counsellor	Apr. 6, 2016–present
Nepal	Bidhya Devi Bandhar ^a	President	Oct. 29, 2015–present
Namibia	Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila ^a	Prime Minister	March 21, 2015–present
Norway	Erna Solberg	Prime Minister	Oct. 16, 2013–present
Bangladesh	Sheikh Hasina	Prime Minister	1996–2001; Jan. 6, 2009–present
Germany	Angela Merkel ^a	Chancellor	Nov. 22, 2005–present

Source: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service using information from the *CIA World Factbook*, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/fields/312.html#AG>; the Global Gender Gap 2020, published by the World Economic Forum, at <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>; and media reports.

Notes: Surnames appear in bold face.

- This woman is the first female to hold this position in her country.
- Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, which affords the city a limited degree of autonomy. Although President Xi Jinping is China's chief of state, Chief Executive Carrie Lam is recognized as the head of Hong Kong's government and, as such, is responsible for the day-to-day governance of Hong Kong.
- Aung San Suu Kyi, as head of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the majority party in the national legislature, was selected by the parliament as State Counsellor in April 2016 and has been recognized as the de facto leader of the civilian side of Burma's government. Following elections in November 2020 and winning 83% of the contested seats in parliament, the NLD, with Aung San Suu Kyi at its head, was set to begin a new session of government on February 2, 2021. However, on February 1, 2021 the Burmese military staged a coup, detaining Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders of the civilian government, declaring a state of emergency, and installing Senior General Min Aung Hlaing as head of the government.

Table 6 lists additional women who served as the executive of their country, and whose term of office has concluded.

Table 6. Additional Women Executives from the 21st Century

Selected leaders whose term of office has ended prior to December 31, 2020.

Country	Name	Title	Years in Office
Bangladesh	Khaleda Zia	Prime Minister	1991-1996 and 2001-2006
Panama	Mireya Moscoso	President	1999-2004
New Zealand	Helen Clark	Prime Minister	1999-2008
After leaving office, Clark became the Administrator of the United Nations Development Program.			
Indonesia	Megawati Sukarnoputri	President	2001-2004
Philippines	Gloria Macapagal Arroyo	President	2001-2010
Jamaica	Portia Simpson-Miller	Prime Minister	2006-2007 and 2012-2016
Chile	Michelle Bachelet	President	2006-2010 and 2014-2018
Liberia	Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	President	2006-2018
Sirleaf was the first woman to be elected the head of state of an African country.			
Argentina	Cristina Fernandez De Kirchner	President	2007-2015
India	Pratibha Patil	President	2007-2012
Thailand	Yingluck Shinawatra	Prime Minister	2011-2014
Shinawatra was forced to leave office after the constitutional court found her guilty of abusing her power.			
Brazil	Dilma Rousseff	President	2011-2016
Rousseff was the first woman elected as President of Brazil and was reelected in 2014. Over allegations of corruption, she was impeached and removed from office in August 2016.			
Malawi	Joyce Banda	President	2012-2014
Banda was elected in 2009 as Vice President to President Bingu wa Mutharika. She succeeded him as President upon his death in April 2012.			
South Korea	Park Geun-hye	President	2013-2017
Park was the first female President of South Korea. She became the country's first democratically elected president to be impeached on grounds of corruption and removed from office.			
United Kingdom	Theresa May	Prime Minister	2016-2019
Lithuania	Dalia Grybauskaitė	President	2009-2019
Malta	Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca	President	2014-2019
Romania	Viorica Dăncilă	Prime Minister	2018-2019
Bolivia	Jeanine Áñez	Interim President	2018-2019
Croatia	Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic	President	2015-2020
Austria	Brigitte Bierlein	Chancellor	2019-2020

Source: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service using media reports, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and the BBC.

Notes: Surnames appear in bold face.

Women Leaders of the 20th Century

Table 7 identifies several notable female executives who held office in the 20th century.

Table 7. Notable Women Executives, from 1960 to 2000

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 succeed her husband, President Juan Perón, upon his death.			
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 20 th century to be elected to three consecutive terms.			
Iceland	Vigdís Finnbogadóttir	President	1980-1996
Philippines	Corazon Aquino	President	1986-1992
Pakistan	Benazir Bhutto	Prime Minister	1988-1990 and 1993-1996
In January 1990, Bhutto became the first prime minister to give birth while in office.			

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

Notes: Surnames appear in bold face.

Violence Against Women in Politics

Many experts and observers have found that, while men candidates and officeholders experience violence, women politicians are targeted because of their gender and subjected to sexist threats, sexual harassment, and violence. Many agree that these acts are perpetrated to “preserve traditional gender roles and stereotypes and maintain structural and gender-based inequalities.”¹³ Violence may occur during the registration and voting processes, while campaigning and running

¹³ *Violence against Women in Politics*, A/73/301, Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its cause and consequences, August 6, 2018, page 5, paragraph 13, at <https://undocs.org/A/73/301>. For more information on violence against women in politics, see International Foundation for Electoral Systems, “Violence against Women in Elections,” at <https://www.ifes.org/VAWE>; and Alanis, Carmen. *Violence against Women in Politics*, Kofi Anan Foundation, November 2020, at https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2020/11/fa21f2be-violence-against-women-in-politics_2020_final_en.pdf.

for office, and when serving in a government.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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 of the women are 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. Political women may also be concerned that they will be considered "difficult" and "not toing the party line."¹⁶

In October 2016, the Inter-Parliamentary Union published a survey of 55 women legislators from 39 countries on their experiences of harassment, intimidation, or violence based on their gender.¹⁷ **Tables 1 to 4** illustrate the findings of this survey. Broadly, almost 82% of the women surveyed reported they had personally experienced psychological violence, almost 22% reported incidents of sexual violence, 25.5% reported experiencing physical violence, and almost 33% had been subjected to economic violence.

Table 8. Prevalence of Various Forms of Violence Against Women Legislators

Findings of a survey of 55 women legislators from 39 countries

Type of Violence	% of Respondents Answering "Yes"	
	"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 9 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: *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, October 2016, at <https://www.ipu.org/file/2425/download>.

Notes: Definitions of the various kinds of violence are included in the report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

¹⁴ Special Rapporteur, page 9, paragraph 33, at <https://undocs.org/A/73/301>.

¹⁵ Special Rapporteur, page 6, paragraph 15, at <https://undocs.org/A/73/301>.

¹⁶ Alanis, Carmen, page 17, at https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2020/11/fa21f2be-violence-against-women-in-politics_2020_final_en.pdf#page=17.

¹⁷ *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, October 2016, at <https://www.ipu.org/file/2425/download>. Survey participants included 18 from Africa, 15 from Europe, 10 from the Asia-Pacific region, 8 from the Americas, and 4 from Arab countries.

Table 9. Psychological Violence: Prevalence of Specific Behaviors

Behaviors described by the 81.8% of respondents who reported they had experienced psychological violence, as noted in **Table 8**.

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: *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, October 2016, at <https://www.ipu.org/file/2425/download>, p. 3.

Table 10 lists several factors identified in the IPU study that may make some women legislators a likely target for gender-based intolerance.

Table 10. Risk Factors for Women Legislators

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%
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.	

Source: *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, October 2016, at <https://www.ipu.org/file/2425/download>, p. 6.

Table 11 identifies how the women legislators reacted to the acts of violence they experienced.

Table 11. Effects of Violence Against Women in Politics

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: *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, October 2016, at <https://www.ipu.org/file/2425/download>, p. 7.

Additional Materials

Following is a list of current websites and recent publications, in addition to those cited above, that are available online and discuss the issue of violence against women in politics. These titles are listed from most recent to the earliest published.

National Democratic Institute, “Not the Cost: Stopping Violence against Women in Politics,” at <https://www.ndi.org/not-the-cost>.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems, “Violence against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool,” at <https://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections-online-social-media-analysis-tool>.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems, “Violence against Women in Elections,” at <https://www.ifes.org/VAWE>.

Eliminating Violence against Women in Politics: What Works and What Doesn't?, Inter-Parliamentary Union, November 25, 2020, a video of an online discussion at <https://www.ipu.org/event/eliminating-violence-against-women-in-politics-what-works-and-what-doesnt>.

Alanis, Carmen. *Violence against Women in Politics*, Kofi Anan Foundation, November 2020, at <https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/electoral-integrity/eliminating-violence-against-women-in-politics/>.

Guidelines for the Elimination of Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women in Parliament, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019, at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2019-11/guidelines-elimination-sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliament>.

Violence against Women in Politics: Expert Group Meeting Report and Recommendations, United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, UN Women, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, March 8-9, 2018, at <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/egm-report-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4036>.

Ballington, Julie, Gabrielle Bardall, and Gabriella Borovsky. *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide*, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), United Nations Development Program, 2017, at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/11/preventing-violence-against-women-in-elections>.

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