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Women in National Governments Around the Globe: Fact Sheet

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Committees of Congress

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, including some U.S. policymakers and Members of Congress, 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 26.1% of legislative seats around the world, an increase from 14.2% of such seats in 2002 (see **Figure 1**). As of March 1, 2022, women held 50% or more of the legislative seats in four countries: Cuba, Nicaragua, Rwanda, and the United Arab Emirates (see **Table 3**). At the national executive level, 29 countries and the special administrative region Hong Kong currently have a female chief of state or head of government who won an election or was selected by elected bodies (see **Table 6**). Since 1960, more than 140 women have been elected or appointed by elected bodies as the executive in at least 70 countries.[2]

This report provides a global 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, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the CIA *World Factbook*, news reports, and other sources.

Overview of Congressional Actions

Over the years, Members of Congress have enacted or introduced legislation that, either directly or indirectly, addresses women's political participation around the world. For example, from FY2014 through FY2022, a provision in Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations Acts appropriated funds for women's leadership. Most recently, the FY2022 SFOPS bill states

> 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]

Members have also enacted laws that address aspects and issues related to women's participation in national governments. 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

[1] For example, see U.N. document A/RES/66/130, *Women and Political Participation*, adopted December 19, 2011. Also see U.S. Department of State's Office of Global Women's Issues, "the meaningful participation of women in political, economic, and public life is critical to building and sustaining representative societies.... Increasing opportunities for women and girls' leadership across sectors leads to building stronger and more prosperous societies." (Office of Global Women's Issues, Cross-Cutting Issues, Women's Leadership at https://www.state.gov/cross-cutting-issues/#wl.)

[2] *The Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, prepared by The World Economic Forum, March 30, 2021, at https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021.

[3] P.L. 116-260, Division K, Title VII, Section 7059.

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]

In the 117th Congress, some Members have proposed legislation addressing aspects of women's political participation. For example, the House and Senate versions of the Girls LEAD Act bills[5] require the Department of State and the United States Agency for International development (USAID) to develop strategies and programs to promote adolescents' participation, particularly that of girls, in the political processes and civil society of their countries. From a country-specific perspective, H.R. 116, the Equal Rights and Access for the Women of South Sudan Act, acknowledges that the government of South Sudan has taken steps to include women in the legislative assembly and calls for additional support from the United States to reinforce these steps.[6]

Selected Tables and Statistics

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 minorities and indigenous peoples. In contrast, 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 criteria.

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.

[4] This act is referenced in both P.L. 116-94 and P.L. 116-260, which include statements that "the Secretary of State shall promote" the participation of Afghan women in peace and reconciliation processes in the country "in a manner consistent with the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017."

[5] H.R. 1661 and S. 634.

[6] The Girls LEAD Act bills introduced in the 117th Congress are H.R. 1661 and S. 634. The Equal Rights and Access for the Women of South Sudan Act is H.R. 116. S. 2878 would provide statutory authority for an Office of Global Women's Issues within the Department of State in order to advance foreign policy and international programs aimed at increasing opportunities for women and girls, including in the political processes. H.Res. 801 acknowledges that violence against women in politics is a global phenomenon and recognizes it as a form of gender-based violence. The resolution urges the U.S. government to adopt policies to encourage women's political participation while mitigating online and in person violence against these women.

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

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union at https://data.ipu.org/compare?field=country%3Afield_suffrage%3Afield_right_to_vote#map; 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/the-world-factbook/field/suffrage/; "'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

The following tables highlight women's representation based in national legislatures, including data on quotas. 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 the national legislature of some countries (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." *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."[7]

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.

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

As of March 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, PQ	91	46	50.5
4	United Arab Emirates	Unicameral	RS	40	20	50.0
5	Mexico	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	628	313	49.8
6	New Zealand	Unicameral	PQ	120	59	49.2
7	Bolivia	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	166	80	48.2
8	Iceland	Unicameral	PQ	63	30	47.6
9	Costa Rica	Unicameral	CQ, PQ	57	27	47.4

[7] 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.

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
10	Andorra	Unicameral	No Quota	28	13	46.4
11	Sweden	Unicameral	PQ	349	161	46.1
12	South Africa	Bicameral	PQ	450	205	45.6
13	Finland	Unicameral	No Quota	200	91	45.5
14	Norway	Unicameral	PQ	169	76	45.0
15	Argentina	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	329	146	44.4
16	Belgium	Bicameral	CQ	210	92	43.8
17	Senegal	Unicameral	CQ	164	70	42.7
18	Mozambique	Unicameral	PQ	250	106	42.4
19	North Macedonia	Unicameral	CQ, PQ	120	50	41.7
20	Austria	Bicameral	No Quota	244	101	41.4
21	Spain	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	614	254	41.4
22	Moldova	Unicameral	CQ	101	41	40.6
23	Peru	Unicameral	CQ	130	52	40.0
24	Serbia	Unicameral	CQ	250	100	40.0
25	Timor-Leste	Unicameral	CQ	65	26	40.0

Sources: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service using data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) at https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=3&year=2022, 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 viewed on March 24, 2022.

Notes: The selected countries listed here include those countries identified by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (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 190 countries listed in the complete IPU list of Percentage of Women in National Parliaments, posted at https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=3&year=2022.

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 nation members of the G-20 (excluding the European Union). Currently, 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 March 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
5	Mexico	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	628	313	49.8
12	South Africa	Bicameral	PQ	450	205	45.6
15	Argentina	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	329	146	44.4
32	Australia	Bicameral	PQ	226	87	38.5
33	France	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	925	350	37.8
37	Italy	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	950	341	35.9
42	Germany	Bicameral	PQ	807	281	34.8
44	Canada	Bicameral	PQ	430	148	34.4
59	United Kingdom	Bicameral	PQ	1,425	446	31.3
79	United States	Unicameral	No Quota	533	145	27.2
92	China	Unicameral	RS	2,975	742	24.9
108	Indonesia	Unicameral	CQ	575	126	21.9
121	Saudi Arabia	Unicameral	RS	151	30	19.9
131	South Korea	Unicameral	CQ, PQ	295	55	18.6
135	Russia	Bicameral	No Quota	619	110	17.8
138	Turkey	Unicameral	PQ	582	101	17.4
146	Brazil	Bicameral	CQ, PQ	594	90	15.2
152	Japan	Bicameral	No Quota	707	101	14.3
153	India	Bicameral	Sub only	779	110	14.1
	TOTAL 190 COUNTRIES			**45,885**	**11,959**	**26.1%**

Sources: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service using data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) at https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=3&year=2022, 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 viewed on March 24, 2022.

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 190 countries listed in the complete IPU list of Percentage of Women in National Parliaments, posted at https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=3&year=2022.

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

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

As of March 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
173	Algeria	Bicameral	CQ	571	40	7.0
174	Palau	Bicameral	No Quota	29	2	6.9
175	Kiribati	Unicameral	No Quota	45	3	6.7
176	Burkina Faso	Unicameral	CQ	127	8	6.3
177	Tuvalu	Unicameral	No Quota	16	1	6.3
178	Marshall Islands	Unicameral	No Quota	33	2	6.1
179	Iran	Unicameral	No Quota	286	16	5.6
180	Sri Lanka	Unicameral	Sub only	225	12	5.3
181	Lebanon	Unicameral	No Quota	128	6	4.7
182	Maldives	Unicameral	No Quota	87	4	4.6
183	Nigeria	Bicameral	No Quota	469	21	4.5
184	Qatar	Unicameral	No Quota	45	2	4.4
185	Tonga	Unicameral	No Quota	27	1	3.7
186	Kuwait	Unicameral	No Quota	62	1	1.6
187	Yemen	Bicameral	No Quota	340	1	0.3
188	Haiti	Bicameral	RS	10	0	0.0
189	Papua New Guinea	Unicameral	No Quota	111	0	0.0
190	Vanuatu	Unicameral	Sub only	52	0	0.0

Sources: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service using data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) at https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=3&year=2022, 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 viewed on March 24, 2022.

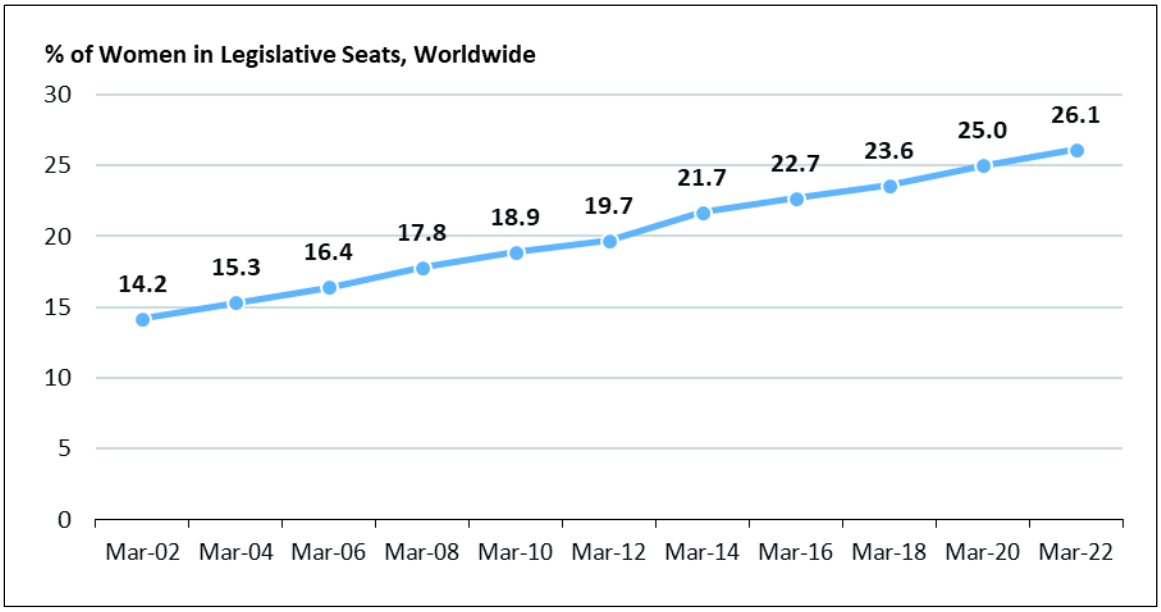
a. The rankings by percentage of total seats held by women is based on the 190 countries listed in the complete IPU list of Percentage of Women in National Parliaments, posted at https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=3&year=2022.

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 14.2% in March 2002 to 26.1% in March 2022 (see **Figure 1**).

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

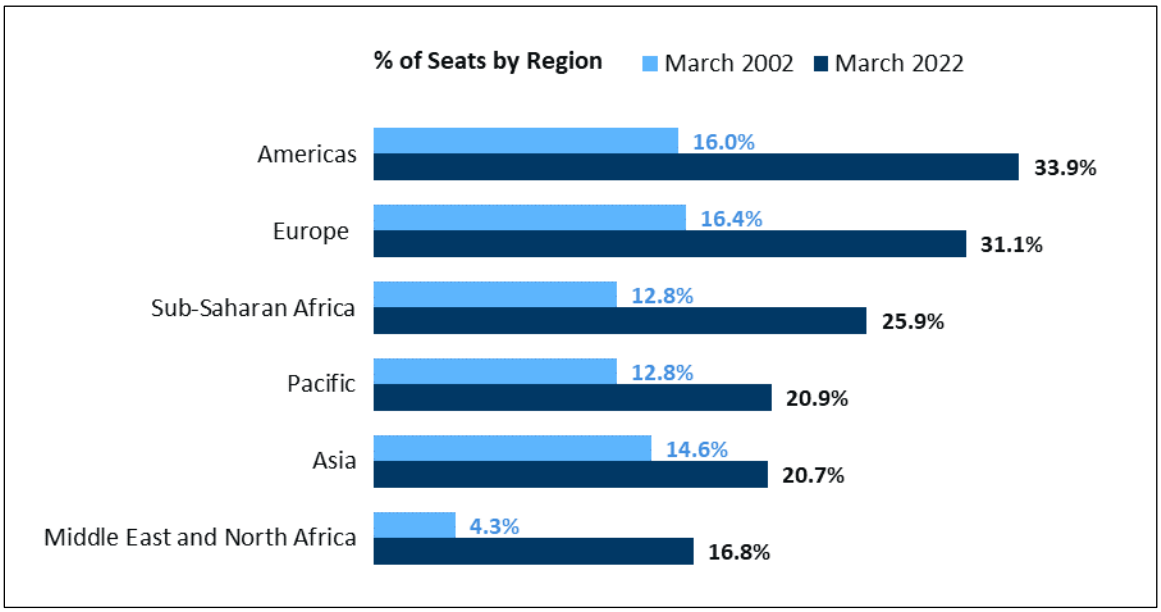
2002-2022



Source: Created by CRS using data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), available at http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm and https://data.ipu.org/women-averages.

As shown in **Figure 2**, in March 2002, Europe and the Americas were the only regions where women held 16% or more of legislative seats at the national level. In 2022, women legislators in six regions hold more than 20% of the legislative seats. Currently, the Middle East/Northern Africa is the only region with less than 20% of legislative seats held by women, although women have gained representation since 2002.

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



Source: Created by CRS using data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), available at http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm and https://data.ipu.org/women-averages.

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 (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.[8]

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.

[8] CIA World Factbook, executive branch field listing, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/executive-branch/, as viewed on March 24, 2022.

Table 6. Current Women Executives

As of March 25, 2022

Country	Name	Title	Dates in Office
Aruba	Evelyn **Wever-Croes**[a]	Prime Minister	Nov. 17, 2017–present
Bangladesh	Sheikh **Hasina**	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
Denmark	Mette **Frederiksen**	Prime Minister	June 26, 2019–present
Estonia	Kaja **Kallas**[a]	Prime Minister	Jan. 2021–present
Ethiopia	**Sahle-Work** Zewde[a]	President	Oct. 25, 2018–present
Finland	Sanna Mirella **Marin**	Prime Minister	Dec. 10, 2019–present
Gabon	Rose Christiane Ossouka **Raponda**[a]	Prime Minister	July 2020–present
Georgia	Salome **Zourabichvili**[a]	President	Dec. 16, 2018–present
Greece	Ekaterina **Sakellaropoulou**[a]	President	Mar. 2020–present
Honduras	Xiomara **Castro**[a]	President	Jan. 2022–present
Hong Kong[b]	Carrie **Lam**[a]	Chief Executive	July 1, 2017–present
Iceland	Katrin **Jakobsdóttir**	Prime Minister	Nov. 30, 2017–present
Kosovo	Vjosa **Osmani-Sadriu**	President	Apr. 2021–present
Lithuania	Ingrida **Simonyte**	Prime Minister	Nov. 2020–present
Moldova	Maia **Sandu**[a]	President	Dec. 2020–present
Moldova	Natalia **Gavrilita**	Prime Minister	Aug. 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
Sint Maarten	Silveria **Jacobs**	Prime Minister	Jan. 16, 2020-present
Samoa	**Fiame Naomi Mata'afa**[a]	Prime Minister	July 2021–present
Serbia	Ana **Brnabić**[a]	Prime Minister	June 29, 2017–present
Singapore	Halimah **Yacob**[a]	President	Sept. 14, 2017–present
Slovakia	Zuzana **Čaputová**[a]	President	June 15, 2019–present
Sweden	Magdalena **Andersson**[a]	Prime Minister	Nov. 2021–present
Taiwan[c]	**Tsai** Ing-wen[a]	President	May 20, 2016–present
Tanzania	Samia Suluhu **Hassan**[a]	President	Mar. 19, 2021–present
Togo	Victoire Tomegah **Dogbe**[a]	Prime Minister	Sept. 2020–present

Country	Name	Title	Dates in Office
Tunisia	Najla **Bouden** Romdhane[a]	Prime Minister	Oct. 11, 2021–present
Uganda	Robinah **Nabbanja**[a]	Prime Minister	June 21, 2021–present

Sources: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service using information from the CIA *World Factbook*, available at https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/executive-branch/; the *Global Gender Gap 2021*, published by the World Economic Forum, at https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021; government websites, and media reports.

Notes: Surnames appear in bold face.

a. This woman is the first female to hold this position in her country.

b. 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.

c. Taiwan, which officially calls itself the Republic of China (ROC), has an ambiguous sovereignty status. In joint communiqués concluded with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1972, 1978, and 1982, the United States recognized the PRC as the "sole legal government of China"; acknowledged, but did not affirm, "the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China"; and pledged to maintain only unofficial relations with Taiwan. Considering Taiwan's sovereignty status to be unresolved, the U.S. government generally does not refer to Taiwan as a country. For further information, see CRS In Focus IF10275, *Taiwan: Political and Security Issues*, by Susan V. Lawrence.

Table 7 lists selected women who formerly served as the executive of their country during the 21st century.

Table 7. Selected Women Executives No Longer in Office

Selected women who served as chief of state or head of government after 2000

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**[a]	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
Lithuania	Dalia **Grybauskaite**	President	2009-2019
Malawi	Joyce **Banda**	President	2012-2014

Country	Name	Title	Years in Office
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
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

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

Notes: Surnames appear in bold face.

a. Aung San Suu Kyi, head of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the largest party in Burma's national legislature, was selected by the parliament as State Counsellor in April 2016 and was recognized as the de facto leader of the civilian side of Burma's government. Following elections in November 2020, in which the NLD won 83% of the contested seats in parliament, the party, 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. For more information, see CRS Insight IN11594, *Coup in Burma (Myanmar): Issues for U.S. Policy*, by Ben Dolven and Kirt Smith.

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 from the earliest to the latest 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 succeed 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
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*.

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.[9] Violence may occur during the registration and voting processes, while campaigning and running for office, and when serving in a government.[10] 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.[11]

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.[12]

Figure 3 indicates the prevalence of attacks of "political violence targeting women" (PVTW) made on women participating in various functions in the political process. Trends in this figure 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

[9] 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.

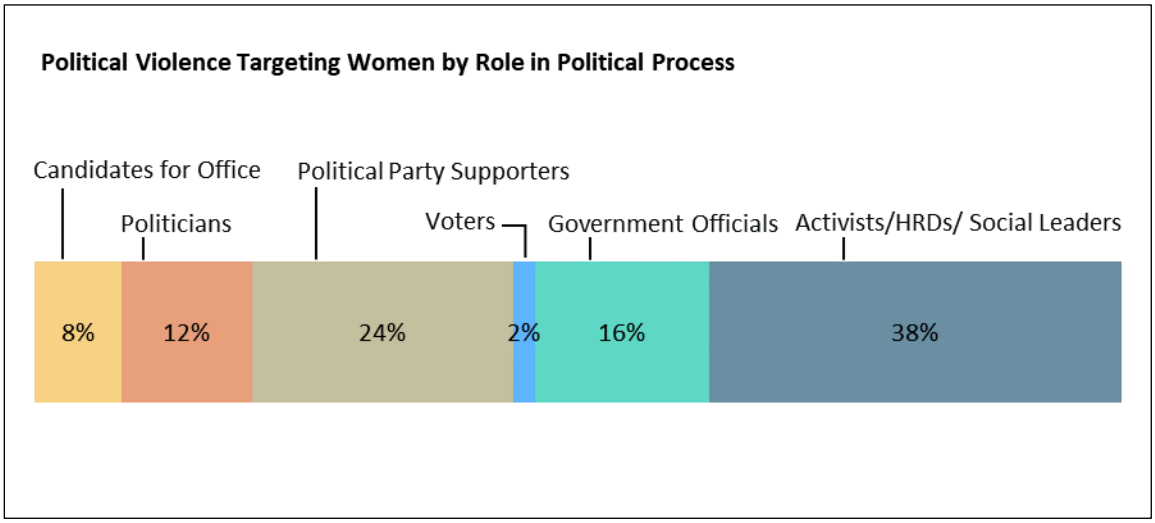
[10] *Violence against Women in Politics*, A/73/301, Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its cause and consequences, August 6, 2018, page 9, paragraph 33, at https://undocs.org/A/73/301.

[11] *Violence against Women in Politics*, page 6, paragraph 15, at https://undocs.org/A/73/301.

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

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*.[13]

Figure 3. Trends in Political Violence Targeting Women, by Role in Political Process



Source: CRS, based on information from *Violence Targeting Women in Politics: Trends in Targets, Types, and Perpetrators of Political Violence*, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), December 2021, pp.4-7, at https://acleddata.com/2021/12/08/violence-targeting-women-in-politics-trends-in-targets-types-and-perpetrators-of-political-violence/.

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 aggressive actions on social media or other online settings.

Figure 3 summarizes the aggregate of all data compiled and analyzed by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). 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.[14] **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 of sexual violence, 25.5% reported experiencing physical violence, and almost 33% had been subjected to economic violence.

[13] Kishi, Roudabeh, *Violence Targeting Women in Politics: Trends in Targets, Types, and Perpetrators of Political Violence*, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), December 2021, pp.4-7, at https://acleddata.com/2021/12/08/violence-targeting-women-in-politics-trends-in-targets-types-and-perpetrators-of-political-violence/.

[14] *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. Prevalence of Various Forms of Violence Against Women Legislators

2016 findings of an IPU 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 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: *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), October 2016, at https://www.ipu.org/file/2425/download.

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

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 respondents who reported they had experienced psychological violence, as noted in **Table 9**

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 (IPU), October 2016, at https://www.ipu.org/file/2425/download, 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 findings of an 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%
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 (IPU), October 2016, at https://www.ipu.org/file/2425/download, p. 6.

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 findings of an 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: *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians*, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), October 2016, at https://www.ipu.org/file/2425/download, p. 7.

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