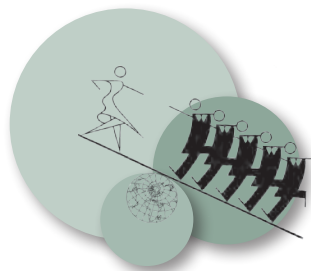


# Women in Parliament in 2009

## The Year in Perspective



### At a Glance: 15 Years of Progress

In 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Plan of Action called on States to increase women's participation in decision making and leadership and to ensure women's full participation in political life. At that time, women held 11.3 percent of parliamentary seats. In just seven chambers (3%) did women comprise more than 30 percent of the membership, and nearly two-thirds of all chambers had 10 percent or less women members. At the leadership level, 24 women held the post of Presiding Officer in parliament. Women constituted just 6.4 percent of Heads of State and/or Government.

Taking stock 15 years later, the parliamentary landscape has changed markedly. A new global high for women in parliament is heralded at the close of each year. By the end of 2009 the global average for the proportion of women members reached an all-time high of 18.8 percent – a gain of nearly 75 percent compared to 1995. The number of chambers that have reached the 30 percent target now stands at 44 (26 single/lower and 18 upper houses), or 16.7 percent of the total. The number with a membership of 10 percent or less women has halved from 141 in 1995 to 71 in 2009 (27.0%).

However, it is clear that challenges to women's political empowerment remain. In several parliaments there have only ever been a handful of women, and the number of parliamentary chambers where no women hold seats has not dropped dramatically (from 13 in 1995 to 10 in 2009). Women's advancement into leadership positions has been at a much slower pace than the improvement in parliamentary access. Although an increase from 24 in 1995, there are still only 35 women Presiding Officers at the helm of parliaments.



▲ A woman marking her ballot, South Africa. © AFP

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Globally

- The year 2009 was marked by continued progress for women in parliament. The global average for the proportion of women in parliament reached an all-time high of 18.8 percent.
- At the time of the Beijing Conference and Platform for Action of 1995, women held 11.3 percent of seats in parliament. Today's high represents a gain of almost 75 percent on the 1995 average.
- In January 2010, women held 35 (13.0%) of the 269 top posts in parliaments around the world. This is an improvement on the 1995 total when 24 women held this post.
- Women make up 30 percent or more of the members in 44 parliamentary chambers – 26 single or lower and 18 upper houses. This is a six-fold increase over the 1995 total, when just seven chambers achieved this goal.

### Regionally

- Africa achieved some impressive gains for women in 2009. On average, 29 percent of the seats renewed in the 10 chambers went to women, bringing the overall average there to 18.7 percent at the end of 2009. This is nearly double the 1995 average of 9.8 percent. In South Africa, women took 43.5 percent of the seats in the lower house election, placing it third in the global ranking.
- Europe continued to perform well, with 26 percent of the seats renewed in 2009 going to women. Similarly, the Americas maintained steady progress, with 25 percent of the nearly 1800 seats up for renewal going to women.
- There were mixed results in 2009 for women in the Arab region. For the first time, four women were elected to Kuwait's parliament, but no women were appointed to the Consultative Council in Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, the regional average of women parliamentarians is 9.5 percent, more than double the 1995 rate of 4.3 percent.



**TABLE 1**

**Parliamentary Renewals in 2009**

*A. Progress and Setbacks of Women in Lower or Single Houses of Parliament Renewed in 2009*

The figures show the percentage point difference between renewals in 2009 compared with the previous legislature



*B. Women in Lower or Single Houses after Parliamentary Renewals in 2009*

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women	Quota
South Africa	400	174	43.5%	Yes*
Iceland	63	27	42.9%	Yes*
Mozambique	250	98	39.2%	Yes*
Norway	169	66	39.1%	Yes*
Argentina	257	99	38.5%	Yes**
Germany	622	204	32.8%	Yes*
Ecuador	124	40	32.3%	Yes**
Andorra	28	9	32.1%	No
Mexico	500	141	28.2%	Yes**
Portugal	230	64	27.8%	Yes**
Tunisia	214	59	27.6%	Yes*
Namibia	78	21	26.9%	Yes*
Republic of Moldova	101	26	25.7%	No
Luxembourg	60	15	25.0%	Yes*
Liechtenstein	25	6	24.0%	No
Bolivia	130	29	22.3%	Yes**
Uzbekistan <sup>1</sup>	150	33	22.0%	Yes**
Malawi	193	41	21.2%	No
Bulgaria	240	50	20.8%	No
El Salvador	84	16	19.0%	Yes*
Indonesia	560	102	18.2%	Yes**
Honduras	128	23	18.0%	Yes**
Israel	120	21	17.5%	Yes*
Greece	300	52	17.3%	Yes*
Albania	140	23	16.4%	Yes**
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	687	107	15.6%	No
Chile	120	17	14.2%	Yes*
Uruguay	99	14	14.1%	Yes*
Dominica <sup>2</sup>	32	4	12.5%	No
Japan	480	54	11.3%	No
Montenegro	81	9	11.1%	No
India	543	58	10.7%	No
Antigua and Barbuda	19	2	10.5%	No
Niger	113	11	9.7%	Yes**
Botswana <sup>3</sup>	57	5	8.8%	Yes*
Panama	71	6	8.5%	Yes**
Kuwait	50	4	8.0%	No
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya <sup>4</sup>	468	36	7.7%	No
Maldives	77	5	6.5%	No
Lebanon	128	4	3.1%	No
Comoros	33	0	0.0%	No
Micronesia (Federated States of)	10	0	0.0%	No
Saudi Arabia <sup>5</sup>	150	0	0.0%	No

\* One or more political party adopted a voluntary measure to increase the number of women candidates  
 \*\* Legislated candidate quota

**Notes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Includes the results of a second round of voting which took place on 10 January 2010
- <sup>2</sup> Results provisional at the time of publication
- <sup>3</sup> The 5 women comprise 2 directly elected members, 2 appointed members and the Attorney General
- <sup>4</sup> All seats are indirectly elected
- <sup>5</sup> All seats are appointed

**TABLE 2**

Comparative Situation of Women Parliamentarians, 1995 and 2009\*

1995	Overview	2009
11.3%	Proportion of seats held by women in all houses	18.8%
7 out of 229 (3.0%) • 5 single or lower houses • 2 upper houses	Chambers with 30% or more women members	44 out of 263 (16.7%) • 26 single or lower houses • 18 upper houses
141 out of 229 (61.6%)	Chambers with 10% or less women members	71 out of 263 (27.0%)
13	Chambers with no women members	10
24 (10.5%)	Women Presiding Officers	35 (13.0%)
12 (6.4%)	Countries with women Heads of State and/or Government	16 (8.3%)

\* The figures do not take into account parliaments for which data are not available.

## Parliamentary Renewals in 2009

During 2009, 54 parliamentary chambers in 48 countries were renewed. Women took 1886 of the 9143 seats renewed, or 20.6 percent. This is the same proportion as in 2008. Of the women who gained seats, 1804 were directly elected, 70 were indirectly elected and 12 were appointed.

### 44 Chambers Surpass 30%—11 Surpass 40%—Women Members

Increases in women's participation were registered in 57 percent of the chambers renewed in 2009. Ten chambers achieved 30 percent or greater female membership in their 2009 renewals, bringing to 44 the number of chambers that have reached this milestone – five more than a year ago. Three chambers surpassed 40 percent women members – Iceland and South Africa's single/lower houses and Bolivia's upper house. The range of 30 percent-plus chambers is diverse and includes 16 in Europe, 13 in the Americas, 11 in Africa and four in the Asia/Pacific region. New to the list in 2009 were Bolivia and Ecuador after both countries adopted electoral gender quotas with enforcement mechanisms.

Several lower houses came close to achieving the 30-percent target, including Mexico, Namibia and Portugal.

### Stagnation and Setbacks in 40 percent of the Chambers Renewed in 2009

Although women increased their overall share of seats in 2009, a breakdown of the results shows that such gains need to be considered together with stagnation and even reversals in some parliaments. In nine of the chambers (17%) renewed, no progress was made and the proportion of women members remained unchanged. Worse, reversals were registered in 14 (26%) of the chambers renewed, leading to fewer women compared to the previous renewal.

In three chambers, no women were included in the 2009 renewals: the Comoros, the Federated States of Micronesia and Saudi Arabia. In the Comoros, there has only ever been one woman elected to parliament. The election in the Federated States of Micronesia was the only one to take place in the Pacific in 2009. There has never been a woman candidate for parliament in Micronesia. There has never been a woman member of the Consultative Council in Saudi Arabia, where all members of the Council are appointed by the King and there is no universal suffrage. A trend of stagnation and reversals in 40 percent of the parliaments renewed has been recorded for the past six years.

## Regional Highs and Lows

**Sub-Saharan Africa** achieved some impressive gains for women in 2009. On average, nearly 30 percent of the seats in the 10 chambers renewed went to women, bringing the regional average to 18.7 percent at the end of the year. This is nearly double the 1995 average of 9.8 percent. South Africa achieved the greatest success, electing 43.5 percent women to its lower house after the ruling African National Congress adopted a quota ensuring that women constituted 50



▲ Bolivian women checking the electoral register. © AFP

percent of candidates in alternate positions on the party's lists. This places South Africa third in the global rankings. Mozambique continued to make strides, improving its performance to elect 39.2 percent women members. In southern Africa, Malawi and Namibia also held elections, and both countries achieved over 20 percent women members. There were setbacks in Botswana and Niger, and in the upper house in Mauritania, where between two and three women lost seats in each chamber.

The consistent rate of progress in **Europe** over the past decade was largely sustained in the 14 elections for single or lower chambers that took place in 2009, in which women took 26 percent of the seats. This brought the regional total to 21.4 percent, eight percentage points higher than in 1995. The biggest gain was registered in Iceland, where the Althingi elected the highest proportion of women members in its history. The success of the left-leaning parties, which adopted quotas to guarantee women's participation, resulted in 42.9 percent women members, placing Iceland's parliament fifth in the global rankings. Iceland was closely followed by Norway, with 39 percent women, and Germany and Andorra, which both elected 32 percent women. New electoral arrangements were put into effect in Portugal, requiring political parties to nominate at least one-third women candidates or face financial sanctions. As a result, the proportion of women members increased to nearly 28 percent. There were no setbacks in the election of women to European parliaments, although in Liechtenstein and Bulgaria the proportion of women members remained unchanged compared to the previous legislature.

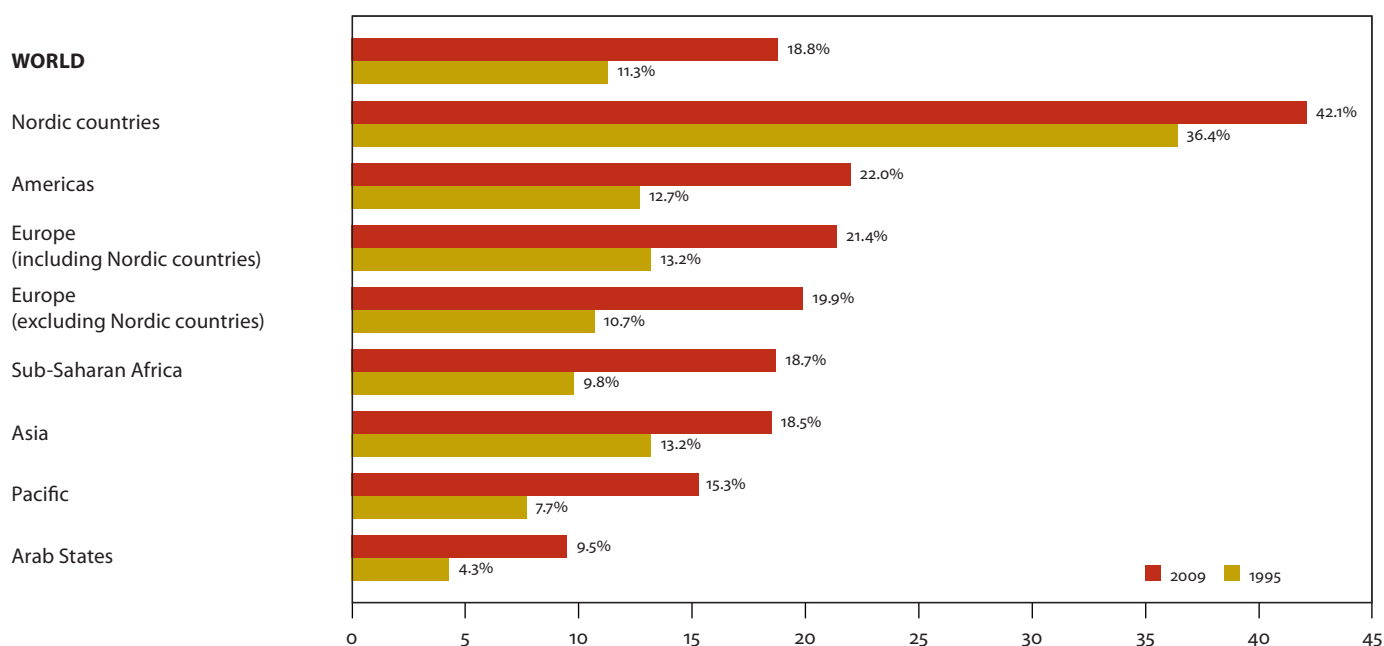
Renewals took place in 17 chambers in the **Americas** in 2009, with women taking 25 percent of the seats on offer. Women hold 22 percent of the seats in the region, almost 10 percentage points higher than in 1995. In addition to impressive gains in Bolivia, Argentina elected 38.5 percent women members to its lower house and 34.7 percent to its upper house, assisted by its electoral quota arrangements. Ecuador improved on its previous performance by seven percentage points, aided by electoral rules which mandated a five percentage point increase in the proportion of women presented on candidate lists by political parties. Stagnation and setbacks, however, were registered in six single or lower houses. Panama registered the largest regression of all renewals in 2009, as women appeared to be worst affected by an electoral reform which led to a reduction in the number of parliamentary seats, resulting in fierce competition between incumbents vying for the remaining seats.

Progress was much slower in **Asia**, although fewer parliamentary elections took place there in 2009. Women took just 14 percent of the seats in the five chambers renewed. The overall average for the region stands at 18.5 percent, just five percentage points higher than in 1995. The largest gain in 2009 was registered in Indonesia, where the proportion of women elected increased from 11 to 18 percent. Revisions to the electoral law required political parties to nominate women to winnable positions, although this was not strictly adhered to by all parties. Setbacks were registered in the first multi-party elections in the Maldives, where the proportion of women members dropped more than five percentage points.

**TABLE 3**

**World and Regional Averages of Women in Parliament, 1995 and 2009**

*Situation for all chambers of parliaments combined in December of each year*







▲ The four women elected in Kuwait attend the inaugural session of parliament. © AFP

In the **Arab** region, seven parliaments were renewed and women took 8.7 percent of the seats, consistent with the overall regional average. The biggest gain was recorded in the lower house election in Tunisia, where women took over 27 percent of the seats. In Kuwait, four women were elected to the 50-member chamber, the first women elected in the country's history. The election of women to the parliament followed a long struggle for the right to vote, which was won in 2005, and two disappointing elections in 2006 and 2008 in which no woman candidate was successful. This result is the highest number of women directly elected to a parliament in a Gulf Cooperation Council member State – an area in which it is difficult for women to win a direct election. In Jordan and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the same proportion of women was returned to parliament as in the previous election. In Saudi Arabia, the Consultative Council was renewed by the King but no women were among the appointees.

## Predictors of Success: Electoral Systems, Quotas and Political Parties

This report illustrates that the highs and lows in terms of women's access to parliament vary significantly across countries and regions. Although political and socio-cultural factors are important, the most influential factors that determine the success of improving women's access to parliament are electoral system arrangements, the implementation of electoral gender quotas and the measures taken by political parties.

The influence of quotas is highlighted throughout this report. Of the 10 top-performing countries in 2009, those which surpassed the 30-percent target for women's membership of parliaments, nine used a form of quotas. The average proportion of women elected when special mea-

**TABLE 4**

Women in Upper Houses of Parliament in 2009

Country	Total	Total women	% women	% point change compared with previous result	
Bolivia	36	15	41.7%	▲	38.0
Antigua and Barbuda	17	5	29.4%	▲	11.8
Chile	38*	5	13.2%	▲	9.0
Gabon	102	18	17.6%	▲	4.5
Uruguay	30	4	13.3%	▲	3.3
Argentina	72*	25	34.7%	▲	1.4
Morocco	270*	6	2.2%	▲	1.1
Jordan	55	7	12.7%	◀▶	0.0
Mauritania	56*	8	14.3%	▼	-3.6
South Africa**	54	16	29.6%	▼	-3.7
Haiti	29*	2	6.9%	▼	-6.4

\* The chamber was partially renewed in 2009. These figures refer to the overall composition of the chamber after the renewal.

\*\* This figure does not include the 36 special rotating delegates appointed on an ad hoc basis, and the proportion of women is on the basis of the 54 permanent seats.

- Seventy-six of the 187 parliaments in the world are bicameral, composed of an upper and lower house.
- As of 31 December 2009, women held 17.6 percent of the upper house seats, the same proportion as one year before.
- In 2009, just 759 seats in 11 upper houses were renewed. Women took 113 of the seats – an average of 15 percent. Two-thirds of the seats were directly elected, while one-third were appointed or indirectly elected.
- Bolivia registered one of the largest gains in terms of women's participation in a single election. Women won 15 of the 36 seats (41.7%), a massive increase from the one woman senator after the previous election (3.7%). Electoral system reform in Bolivia saw the introduction of a mandatory quota to increase the number of women on candidate electoral lists, and a placement mandate requiring women to be placed in winnable positions on the lists. In addition, the total number of seats increased from 27 to 36.
- Increases compared with previous results were recorded in Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay in the Americas, and in Gabon in Africa. Jordan maintained the status quo, and decreases were recorded in Haiti, Mauritania and South Africa.

asures were used was 27 percent, as opposed to 13.8 percent for countries that did not use such measures. In addition, over 80 percent of the 44 chambers that have surpassed 30 percent women's membership globally have implemented some form of quota to bolster women's participation.

## Women Presiding Officers in Parliament

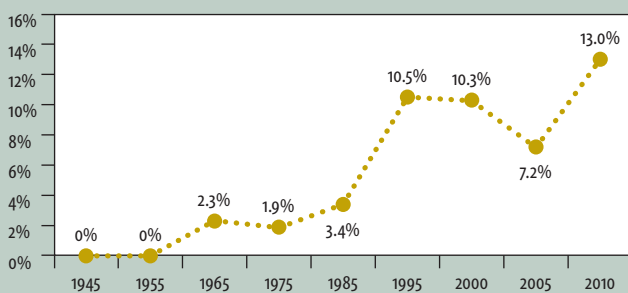
*Situation as of 1 January 2010:  
35 of the 269 Posts (13.0%)*

On 1 January 2010, women held 35 (13.0%) of the 269 Presiding Officer posts in parliaments around the world. This is nearly double the 2005 total when such posts were held by 18 women. The post is important as it is the highest position of power in a parliament. Women are slowly making inroads in this area, which has historically been dominated by men. In addition to playing a facilitating role in the chamber by moderating debates between rival political groups, Presiding Officers are well-placed to highlight outside the chamber the problem of gender inequality and to promote the interests of women.

In 2009, women took up Presiding Officer posts for the first time in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Gabon, Ghana, India and Lithuania.

### FIGURE 1

Trend in Women Presiding Officers, 1945–2010  
(January of each year)



### 25 Presiding Officers in Single or Lower Houses of Parliament

Albania (People's Assembly); Antigua and Barbuda (House of Representatives); Austria (Nationalrat); Bosnia and Herzegovina (House of Peoples); Botswana (National Assembly); Bulgaria (Naradno Schranie); Dominica (House of Assembly); Estonia (Riigikogu); Gambia (National Assembly); Ghana (Parliament); Iceland (Althingi); India (Lok Sabha); Lesotho (National Assembly); Lithuania (Seimas); Netherlands (Twede Kamer der Staten Generaal); Pakistan (National Assembly); Romania (Chamber of Deputies); Rwanda (Chamber of Deputies); Saint Lucia (House of Assembly); Serbia (Narodna Skupstina); Switzerland (National Council); Turkmenistan (Mejlis); United States of America (House of Representatives); Uzbekistan (Legislative chamber); Venezuela (Asamblea Nacional).

### 10 Presiding Officers in Upper Houses of Parliament

Antigua and Barbuda (Senate); Bahamas (Senate); Belize (Senate); Gabon (Senate); Grenada (Senate); Saint Lucia (Senate); Swaziland (Senate); Switzerland (Council of States); United Kingdom (House of Lords); Zimbabwe (Senate).

The other institutional factor to affect women's representation is the type of electoral system. Women are elected in far greater numbers by proportional representation (PR) systems than by majority/plurality systems. This finding is supported by an examination of the 2009 renewal results:

- In the 24 elections that used PR in 2009, women took an average of 26 percent of the contested seats. Quotas were also used in most of these elections to boost women's participation rates as candidates, including voluntary candidate quotas adopted by political parties and legislated quotas with enforcement mechanisms.
- In the nine chambers that used mixed electoral systems, that is, a combination of PR and majority elections, women took 24.6 percent of the seats. In seven of these elections, quotas were applied to the seats filled using the PR system.
- In the 13 chambers elected using majority/plurality electoral systems, the proportion of women elected was just 13.2 percent – half the average under PR systems. One of the main problems associated with majority/plurality systems is the difficulty in applying electoral quotas.

Electoral systems alone do not determine the level of representation of women, but they are important because they can be changed and amended to accommodate the implementation of special measures. Gender-sensitive electoral arrangements and political will at the highest levels are paramount for overcoming the imbalances in the world's parliaments.

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ISSN 1993-5196

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Design and layout: Rick Jones

Printed by Brailly