

Women in Parliament in 2011

The Year in Perspective

Democratic transformation means progress for women in 2011

2011 has been hailed as a year of democratic transformation: a year in which calls for stronger democratic institutions were made loud and clear, and in which women played a vital part. Women not only entered parliaments in increasing numbers, but stronger efforts were made to ensure that they took their rightful place within these democratic institutions. Also in 2011, a new country was born – South Sudan – and its transitional constituent assembly was comprised of 26.5% of women; a healthy start for this newcomer to democracy.

By the end of 2011, thirty single or lower house chambers, up from 25 in 2010, had 30% or more women in Parliament, with seven surpassing 40% and two 50%. New to the list in 2011, further to general elections, were Nicaragua, the Seychelles and Slovenia. In addition, 19 upper houses (up from 17 in 2010) surpassed the 30% mark by the end of 2011, five of which now record more than 40% women. These historically high levels of women's representation are in parliaments across the globe: 20 chambers in Europe (including all five of the unicameral parliaments of the Nordic countries); 13 chambers in Sub-Saharan Africa; 13 chambers in the Americas; and four chambers in the Asia-Pacific region. The one region where women still have not reached this high level of political participation remains the Arab region.

At the other end of the spectrum, women represent 10% or less of members in 61 chambers, including 13 upper houses. Little progress was made with respect to the number of chambers with no women, which decreased during 2011 to seven, down from 10 the previous year.



▲ Tunisia, 2011. © ImageForum

HIGHLIGHTS

Globally

- Women won 21.8% of all seats up for renewal in 2011 in 69 chambers across 59 countries. Women took 21.8% of the unicameral or lower house seats up for renewal, and 21.7% of the upper house seats.
- Women continue to be represented in increasing numbers in their national parliaments. By the end of 2011, the global average stood at 19.5%, inching forward from the 2010 figure of 19%. Women continue to do better in single or lower houses, where, by the end of 2011, they held 19.7% of seats, compared with 18.7% of upper house seats.
- Of the 59 countries that held elections in 2011 for lower or single houses, 26 had implemented special measures. Legislated electoral quotas were used in 17 countries holding elections in 2011. In those countries, women took 27.4% of seats as opposed to 15.7% of seats in countries without any form of quota. In the nine countries where certain political parties adopt voluntary quotas, women won 17.2% of the national parliamentary seats.

Regionally

- The Arab Spring of 2011 heralded significant change for women and men in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. While women were influential in the democratic protests, it has been difficult to effect positive change to electoral laws to entrench their participation.
- The Nordic countries maintain their exemplary position at the top of the regional chart with 42%, following gains made in Denmark and Finland.
- In Europe, in the face of a continuing financial crisis and its ripple effect on the region's economies, "electoral realignments" (whereby an incumbent coalition(s) of parties is replaced by another) saw women lose ground in countries such as Cyprus, Estonia, Portugal and Spain. Women in the region still managed to make impressive strides in Andorra and Slovenia, where they now comprise 50% and 32% of the parliament, respectively.
- Pacific countries are making small steps in the right direction. While the numbers of women remain low in this region, 2011 saw positive developments with respect to the implementation of quotas for women. In Papua New Guinea and Samoa, policies to introduce quotas were announced in 2011; the necessary legislation to implement these policies is underway.

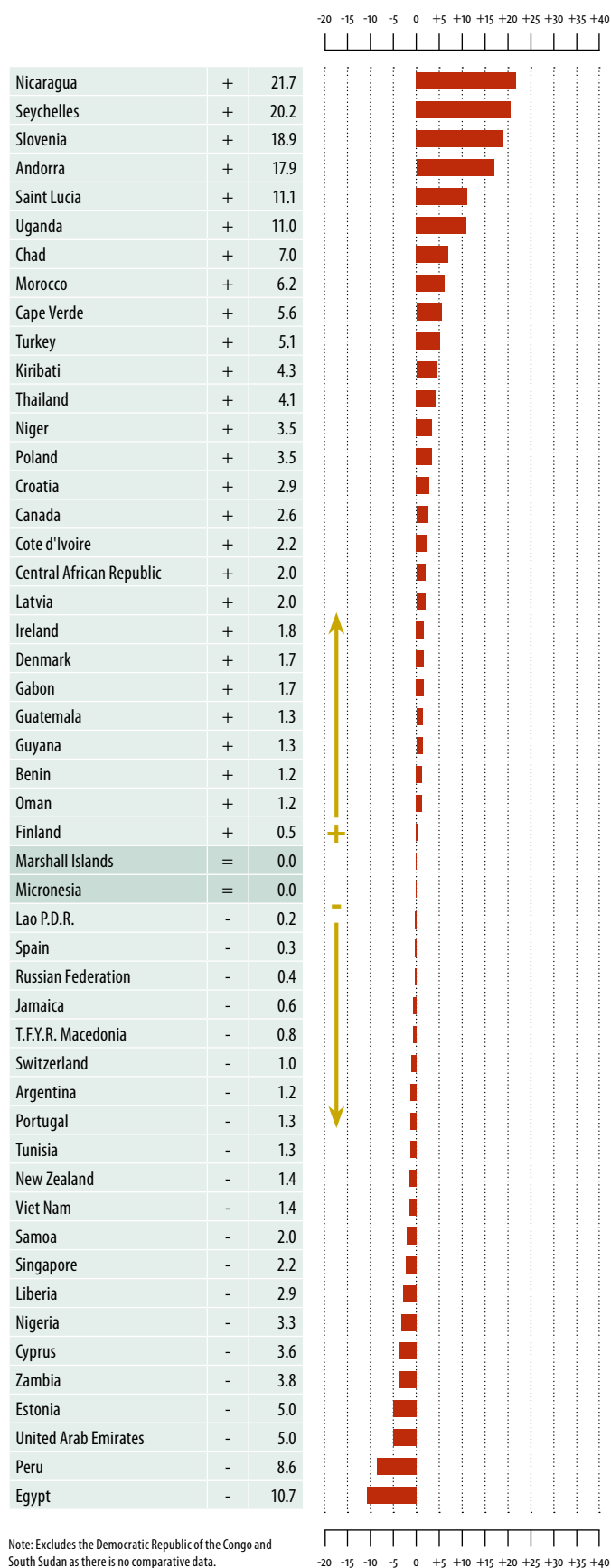


TABLE 1

Parliamentary Renewals in 2011

A. Progress and Setbacks of Women in Lower or Single Houses of Parliament Renewed in 2011

The figures show the percentage point difference between renewals in 2011 compared with the previous legislature



Note: Excludes the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan as there is no comparative data.

B. Women in Lower or Single Houses after Parliamentary Renewals in 2011

Country	Total seats	Total women	Percent women	Quota
ANDORRA	28	14	50.0%	No
SEYCHELLES	32	14	43.8%	No
FINLAND	200	85	42.5%	No
NICARAGUA	92	37	40.2%	Yes*
DENMARK	179	70	39.1%	No
ARGENTINA	257	96	37.4%	Yes**
SPAIN	350	126	36.0%	Yes**
UGANDA	375	131	34.9%	Yes##
NEW ZEALAND	121	39	32.2%	No
SLOVENIA	90	29	32.2%	Yes**
GUYANA	67	21	31.3%	Yes**
T.F.Y.R. MACEDONIA	123	38	30.9%	Yes**
SWITZERLAND	200	57	28.5%	Yes*
PORTUGAL	230	61	26.5%	Yes**
SOUTH SUDAN	332	88	26.5%	No
TUNISIA	217	57	26.3%	Yes**
LAO P.D.R.	132	33	25.0%	Yes
CANADA	308	76	24.7%	Yes*
VIET NAM	500	122	24.4%	No
POLAND	460	110	23.9%	Yes**
CROATIA	151	36	23.8%	Yes*
SINGAPORE	90	20	22.2%	No
PERU	130	28	21.5%	Yes**
LATVIA	100	21	21.0%	No
CAPE VERDE	72	15	20.8%	No
ESTONIA	101	19	18.8%	No
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	40	7	17.5%	No
MOROCCO	395	66	16.7%	Yes**
THAILAND	500	79	15.8%	Yes*
IRELAND	166	25	15.1%	No
GABON	120	17	14.2%	Yes**
TURKEY	550	78	14.2%	No
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	450	61	13.6%	No
GUATEMALA	158	21	13.3%	Yes*
NIGER	113	15	13.3%	Yes##
CHAD	188	24	12.8%	No
JAMAICA	63	8	12.7%	No
SAINT LUCIA	18	3	12.7%	No
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	104	13	12.5%	No
COTE D'IVOIRE	254	28	11.0%	Yes*
ZAMBIA	158	17	10.8%	No
CYPRUS	56	6	10.7%	Yes*
BENIN	83	8	9.6%	No
LIBERIA	73	7	9.6%	No
KIRIBATI	46	4	8.7%	No
SAMOA	49	2	4.1%	No
NIGERIA	352	13	3.7%	No
MARSHALL ISLANDS	33	1	3.0%	No
EGYPT	508	10	2.0%	Yes**
OMAN	84	1	1.2%	No
MICRONESIA	14	0	0.0%	No

* One or more political parties adopted a voluntary measure to increase the number of women candidates.

** Legislated candidate quota.

Seats reserved for women.

Surprising leaps in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe

Women took 2,296 of the 10,553 seats renewed in 2011, accounting for 21.8% of members of parliament elected in 2011, representing a similar proportion to previous years.

In 2011, the Americas saw both the greatest progress of women elected to a national parliament and the greatest setback. An additional 20 women were elected in Nicaragua, taking the proportion of women from 18.5% in 2006 to just over 40% in 2011. Meanwhile, in Peru, the proportion of women elected dropped from 29.2% in 2006 to 21.5% in 2011.

The results of these two countries demonstrate the importance of political parties to the election of women. Both parliaments are unicameral and elected through a list proportional representation system. In Nicaragua, the party that won a significant majority of seats (62 out of 90) – the Sandinista National Liberation Front – has a voluntary party quota of 30% of its seats. In the 2011 elections, more than 50% of its seats were won by women. In Peru, on the other hand, political parties did not allocate sufficient top seats to women: only 15.8% of women candidates were ranked first on the list, compared to 84.2% of men. Compounding this was an adverse public reaction to corruption scandals involving Congresswomen, starting with the case of Congresswoman Elsa Canchaya (who hired her maid as Congress advisor). Snowballing into what became known as “the Canchaya effect”, the honesty of women in leadership was questioned when similar cases of corruption involving Congresswomen arose. While there were cases involving Congressmen, the significant decrease in the number of women elected in 2011 may suggest that women in Peru are judged according to stricter standards of public accountability than their male counterparts.

Substantial gains were made by women in the parliaments of the Seychelles (where there was an increase of 20 percentage points, to 43.8%), Slovenia



▲ Seychelles, 2011. © ImageForum

(almost 19 percentage points, to 32.2%) and Andorra (almost 18 percentage points, to 50%).

Decreases in the number of women elected to parliament occurred in 26 chambers (13 of which were unicameral). These parliaments spanned each geographic region, although some of the heaviest losses were felt in Sub-Saharan Africa (Liberia, Nigeria and Zambia) and Europe (Cyprus, Estonia, T.F.Y.R. of Macedonia, Portugal, Russian Federation, Spain and Switzerland).

Women comprise less than 10% of the national parliament in 10 countries, where they either lost ground at the 2011 elections (as in the case of Liberia, Nigeria and Samoa), or there was no change (Kazakhstan, Marshall Islands and Micronesia).

A look at the regions

The promise of the Arab Spring

In early 2011, the world watched with bated breath as decades-old regimes toppled under the pressure of popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. Women were at the forefront of these movements, leading protests, marches, and social media campaigns to change the status quo. While the movements were a testament to the strong will of the people in affirming their democratic rights, over the course of the year it transpired that women would have a longer struggle ahead in seeking equal participation in the political arena. Indeed, by the end of 2011, women represented only 10.7% of parliamentarians in the Arab States – more or less the same proportion as that in 2010 and, despite the promising start to the year, the Arab region remains the only one in the world without any parliament that includes at least 30% women.

Encouragingly, a number of countries in the Arab region have introduced quotas to improve the political participation rates of women, in the face of cultural, economic, and institutional factors that pose particular challenges to women in this region. Following the 2011 elections, women accounted for 16.7% of Morocco's Majlis-Annouwab (lower house), an increase of over six percentage points from the previous election. This was largely due to the reservation of 60 seats for women and 30 for candidates under the age of 40, in accordance with a bill passed by the Council of Ministers on 9 September 2011. Morocco now ranks among the top five countries in the Arab region with respect to women in parliament.

Following the democracy movements in the Spring, countries in the region were encouraged to implement similar special measures. In Tunisia, parties competing in the October 2011 elections were required to include women in their electoral lists in strict alternation. In theory, this was a strong affirmative measure, but in practice, most of the more than 80 parties competing in the elections (with more than 1,500 lists registered) won

only one seat in any one constituency, which went to the male candidate invariably heading the list. As a result, two fewer women were elected in 2011 than in the previous election in 2009.

In Libya, the adopted Election Law stipulates that the General National Congress (constituent assembly) would be composed of 200 members elected freely and directly, and requires parity on party lists for 80 of these seats.

In Egypt, however, the new law on the Exercise of Political Rights amended the previous quota for women, which used to allocate 64 seats (or 12%) in the parliament to women. The amended law required each political party to include one woman on their candidate list, but did not require women to be placed in “winnable” slots – each party has the freedom to decide where to allocate the name of the woman candidate, even at the end of the list. This has ultimately seen women lose the already small number of seats they had before the democratic protest movements. The January 2012 parliamentary renewal results in Egypt saw a dramatic drop of 10 percentage points from previous 2010 results, with only 10 women out of 508 members (2%).

These developments are less than satisfactory, given that temporary special measures have been a key strategy for including women in countries emerging from conflict. A third of all parliaments with more than 30% of women have been in States in democratic transition, which used the post-conflict period to design and adopt a legal framework that guaranteed respect for gender equality and facilitated women’s access to decision-making positions. That this was not done to the same

extent in the Arab region signals a missed opportunity to address inequalities of the past.

A continent of extremes: the Americas lose and gain the most ground

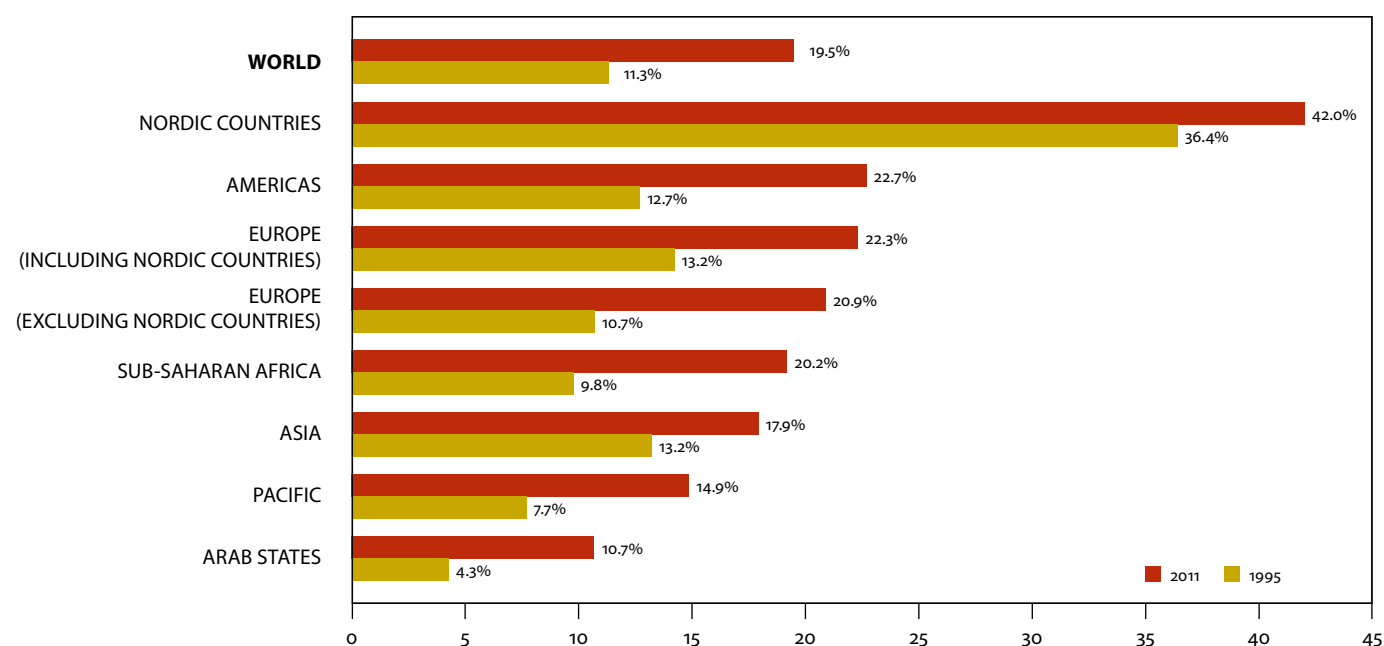
Second again only to the Nordic countries, the Americas maintained their proportion of women in parliament, with an average of 22.6% of women in single or lower house chambers. The Americas are also one of the few regions in the world where the average proportion of women in upper houses is higher than in single or lower houses, as it has been for the past 10 years. By the end of 2011, 23.4% of women were present in these second chambers.

Evidenced by the fact that Latin America saw the greatest progress (in Nicaragua) and the largest setback (in Peru) in 2011, electoral quotas have had varying degrees of success in this region. By 2011, 12 of the 18 countries of the region had some form of gender quota law, but the laws differ in the minimum percentages for women’s inclusion on candidate lists, ranging from 20% to 50%. There are also differences with regard to the characteristics of the electoral systems, the specificity of the wording of the quota laws, the existence or lack of sanctions in cases of non-compliance by the political parties, and monitoring to ensure the full application of any provisions. Of the eight countries where renewals took place in 2011, three (Argentina, Guyana and Peru) had legislated candidate quotas and another three (Canada, Guatemala and Nicaragua) had voluntary party quotas.

TABLE 2

World and Regional Averages of Women in Parliaments, 1995 and 2011

Situation for all chambers of Parliaments combined in December of each year



The percentages do not take into account parliaments for which data is not available.

Europe: critical elections and cultural acceptance

In Europe, the continuing financial crisis dramatically impacted not only on the region's economies but also on women's participation in national parliaments. Women lost ground in Cyprus, Estonia, Portugal and Spain, where "electoral realignments" – or the replacement of a dominant coalition of parties by another – occurred. In such cases, a large number of incumbent seats are lost (typically, those more 'marginally' held by women), and are not always replaced by women from the incoming party or coalition of parties.

The electoral realignment from left-wing to right-wing parties in Ireland and Finland, however, saw the number of women elected increase. In Ireland, 25 women were elected to the Dáil Éireann (lower house) – an increase from 22 at the previous election – and 18 women to the Seanad Éireann (upper house). In Finland, 86 women were elected to the Eduskunta, or 43%, setting a new record for women in this country.

Following the success of women in Ireland, the Irish Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Bill 2011 was presented in the Seanad on 12 December 2011. The Bill is yet to be passed, but if it is, political parties will lose 50% of their electoral funding if they do not have a minimum of 30% women candidates at the next election and if they do not have at least 40% women candidates at the following election.

Women in Europe, including the Nordic countries, hold an average of 22.6% of lower or single house seats – a slight improvement from 21.9% in 2010, but a significant one from 16.4% in 2001. Gains in 2011 were made across Europe, both with and without the assistance of legislative candidate quotas. Of the eight chambers where candidate quotas are legislated, women improved their representation in four. Of the 11 chambers where no quota is implemented, women were still able to make progress in eight. These include the Nordic countries (Finland and Denmark), where cultural acceptance of women in politics has been generally greater than in other regions. Inversely, where parliaments relied on political parties to voluntarily implement quotas, as was the case in Cyprus and Switzerland, the proportion of women fell.

Sub-Saharan Africa: reserved seats working well

Sub-Saharan Africa might not be doing as well, in comparative terms, as the Americas, but due in no small measure to the use of reserved seats, this region now boasts 13 chambers with at least 30% women in their national parliament. On average, women in Sub-Saharan Africa hold 20.4% of single or lower house seats, an increase from 18.3% in 2010, and from 12.4% 10 years previously. Women in upper houses are not far behind, with 19.4%, a strong gain on 12.8% in 2001.

Renewals in 2011 saw a significant change in the Seychelles, where women won 11 of the 25 seats filled under the majority system and a further three nominated under the "compensatory seats", bringing the total number of women to 14 out of the full 31 members (45.2%). With the assistance of reserved seats, gains were made in Niger, the Rwandan Senate and Uganda.

It is expected that the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance that has just entered into force will act as a further catalyst for change in the region. The Charter requires States Parties to adopt legislative and administrative measures to guarantee the rights of women (Article 8) and create the necessary conditions for the full and active participation of women in the decision-making processes and structures at all levels (Article 29).



▲ Gabon, 2011. © ImageForum

Asia – improvement required?

Of the six chambers renewed in Asia in 2011, women gained seats in just one – the lower house of Thailand. Here, the July general election saw the election of Thailand's first woman Prime Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra, and an increase of women in the House of Representatives from 11.7% in 2007 to 15.8% in 2011. Earlier elections to the Thai Senate saw a slight drop in the number of women, down to 23 from 24.

In other parts of Asia, women lost ground, despite party 'targets' in countries such as Viet Nam and Lao People's Democratic Republic. The Viet Nam Women's Union Central Committee proposed to increase the proportion of women to 30% in the National Assembly and in the People's Provincial Councils. Similarly, in Laos, the 9th People's Revolutionary Party Congress in March 2011 established a target of 30% in the National Assembly and 15% in decision-making positions. Neither of these targets was reached. In Singapore, the May election similarly saw a reduction in the number of women in the national parliament, down from 23 in 2006 to 20 in 2011.

In the January renewal of Afghanistan's upper house, President Hamid Karzai appointed 34 members, including 17 women. Following the renewal, the House of Elders comprised 28 women out of a total of 102 members, representing no change from the previous composition.

Overall, women hold just over 18% of single or lower house seats in Asia, representing no change from the proportion held in 2010, and a gradual improvement from the 15.6% of seats held by women in 2001.

Pacific Islands advancing

The Pacific region's parliaments, which include those of the Pacific Island States, continue to be those most resistant to the inclusion of women, with the region having elected an average 12.4% of women to single or lower houses of parliament. When the representation of women in Australia (24.7%) and New Zealand (32.2%) is removed from the equation, however, women account for only 3.5% of members in the parliaments of the Pacific Islands States.

Nonetheless, significant developments are occurring among some of the island States. In Papua New Guinea, after a five-year campaign to introduce legislation on reserved seats for women, the Equality and Participation Bill 2011 was passed in December 2011. The Bill aims to introduce 22 new reserved seats for women into the parliament at the 2012 general election, one from each province, elected by both men and women. The introduction of the reserved seats is not secured though as it is contingent on another reform bill to create the electoral boundaries for the reserved seats. This has yet to be passed by Parliament.

In Samoa, the Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele, announced that a 10%-quota for women entering parliament would be introduced in time for the next elections. It was reported in early 2012 that a Bill to reserve five seats out of the existing 49 in the Samoan Legislative Assembly was tabled. In a radio interview, the Prime Minister said:

"We have ... decided to amend our Constitution and all related laws to simplify the procedure and put in place a formula that will secure at least 10% of the seats in the House for women. It is an initiative from within our cabinet in recognition of the embarrassment of course of the nine parliaments in the world that do not have any women representation. Six [sic] of those nine parliaments happen to be in the Pacific; that's quite an embarrassment."

In other parts of the Pacific, too, calls have been made for reserved seats. As part of her campaign, Maere Tekanene, a successful candidate in the 2011 Kiribati parliamentary elections, called for reserved seats for women. In this country alone women increased their representation in parliament, from three in 2007 to four in 2011. In the Federated States of Micronesia, Speaker Isaac Figir has tabled a bill to reserve four seats in the

Congress for women. The bill lapsed in 2011 with the election of a new Congress, although there is momentum for it to be reintroduced. In the Solomon Islands, the government indicated in its post-election policy statement that it intended to consider the issue of reserved seats for women as part of its overall planned review of electoral boundaries. In Vanuatu, discussions have been underway about reserving seats at the local government level for women, and in the Cook Islands there have been calls for political parties to promote the participation of more women candidates.

Are there sufficient numbers of women candidates?

Irrespective of the electoral system and use of quotas, across the globe, there are insufficient numbers of women candidates running for national parliament. It is evident from table 3 that in a number of countries, women have the same rate of election as men; it is simply that women are not vying for seats in sufficient numbers to make the same electoral impact. Challenges for women candidates include insufficient funds to run a campaign, high expectations from the electorate and the antagonistic nature of competitive political parties. In addition, women tend to have fewer resources at their disposal, less experience in running for office and in public speaking, and a lack of support from spouses and family. The world over, women also have multiple roles, and balancing them all can be very difficult.

Once women do decide to run, of course, their election rates are also dependent on their placement in "winnable" positions, either on a party list, or in winnable seats. In the 2011 elections in Canada, for example, where women reached record levels of representation, the political parties did not always field women in winnable "ridings". The New Democrats, for example, despite its target of 50% women candidates, actually fielded 41% but only 31% in its winnable ridings. Likewise, the Liberals had a target of 25%, fielded 30% (a decrease from the previous election, of 32%), and only 27% in winnable ridings. On the other hand, the Bloc Quebecois reached its target of 32% by filling more than a third of its winnable seats with women candidates.

In Nigeria, Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center produced a comprehensive assessment of the districts in which women were able to campaign in greater numbers (ranging from 15.5% in the South West to 2.3% in the North West). The report noted that the low number of women candidates and the disparity in their number across districts in the country showed "that very few women passed through the primaries to make the candidates' list, thus reinforcing the demand that the conditions for party primaries should be investigated to support the need for a more level playing field."

TABLE 3

Candidates running for election in 2011

	Candidates				Candidates Elected				Rate of Election %		Quota
	Total	Men	Women	Percent women	Total	Men	Women	Percent women	Men	Women	Quota
MIXED ELECTORAL SYSTEM											
ANDORRA	84	48	36	42.9	28	14	14	50	29	39	None
CHAD	1 409	1 264	145	10.3	188	164	24	12.8	13	17	None
MICRONESIA (FS)	34	32	2	0.6	14	14	0	0	44	0	None
THAILAND	3 568	3 008	560	15.7	500	421	79	15.8	14	14	VPQ**
PLURALITY/MAJORITY ELECTORAL SYSTEM											
CANADA	1 587	1 135	452	28.5	308	232	76	24.7	20	17	VPQ
LAO PDR	190	143	47	24.7	132	99	33	25	69	53	VPQ
MARSHALL ISLANDS	96	87	9	9.4	33	32	1	3.0	37	11	None
NEW ZEALAND*	453	333	120	26.5	70	51	19	27.1	15	16	None
SAMOA	159	150	9	5.7	49	47	2	4.1	31	22	None
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	468	383	85	18.2	40	33	7	17.5	9	8	None
VIET NAM	827	567	260	31.4	500	378	122	24.4	67	47	None
ZAMBIA	768	657	111	14.5	158	141	17	10.8	21	15	None
PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION ELECTORAL SYSTEM											
CYPRUS	412	314	98	23.8	56	50	6	10.7	16	6	VPQ
ESTONIA	789	611	178	22.6	101	82	19	18.8	13	11	None
FINLAND	2 315	1 412	903	39.0	200	115	85	42.5	8	8	None
IRELAND	566	480	86	15.9	166	141	25	15.1	29	29	None
NEW ZEALAND*	471	338	133	28.2	51	31	20	39.2	9	15	None
OMAN	1 300	1 223	77	6.0	84	83	1	1.2	7	1	None

* Altogether, 121 members were elected to the House of Representatives in New Zealand, of whom 32.2% were women.

** Voluntary party quotas.

In Zambia, the number of women candidates standing for local and national representation fell between 2006 and 2011. In 2006, 106 women (15%) were nominated out of a total of 709 nominations, a slightly higher percentage than in 2011, when women represented only 14.7% of

party candidate nominations. Some put it down to most women candidates lacking the financial backing to run a full campaign. Others blamed it on party nominating committees for their perceived lack of confidence in women as “winning” candidates. Others still claimed that the political environment was driven by personality politics and that voters tended to elect better known men candidates rather than new women candidates.

TABLE 4

Women in Upper Houses of Parliament further to 2011 renewals

Country	Total seats	Total women	Percent women
ARGENTINA [†]	72	28	38.9
RWANDA	26	10	38.5
NETHERLANDS	75	27	36.0
SPAIN	263	88	33.5
IRELAND	60	18	30.0
AFGHANISTAN	102	28	27.5
FRANCE [†]	348	77	22.1
SWITZERLAND	46	9	19.6
OMAN*	83	15	18.1
THAILAND [†]	149	23	15.4
CONGO [†]	72	10	13.9
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA*	15	2	13.3
LIBERIA	30	4	13.3
POLAND	100	13	13.0
JORDAN	60	7	11.7
SOUTH SUDAN	50	5	10.0
KAZAKHSTAN**	47	2	4.3
NIGERIA	109	4	3.7

[†] The chamber was partially renewed in 2011. These figures refer to the overall composition of the chamber after the renewal.

* Includes indirectly elected or appointed seats.

An unintentional side effect of quotas became apparent in Uganda in 2011, where women predominantly ran for those seats reserved for women. A total of 443 women ran for 112 seats. In addition, 46 women candidates contested the 237 directly elected constituency seats, representing an increase from 28 women candidates at the previous 2006 elections. The 46 women candidates, however, represented a mere 0.4% of all candidates to constituency seats.

While quotas are certainly working their magic by increasing the number of women elected to parliaments worldwide, to sustain these levels of women’s participation, more is needed. Women candidates require targeted training. In Liberia, for example, the National Elections Commission appointed 20 special trainers to assist women candidates in the election. The trainers themselves had a five-day workshop designed to teach women candidates the basics of an electoral campaign.

A new initiative in the Marshall Islands was to invite women candidates to participate in a Mock Parliament for Women. Six of the nine women candidates running in the 2011 elections participated, as well as a number of candidates running in local elections. The training session

and Mock Parliament were designed to provide an opportunity for women candidates to develop and apply their public advocacy skills. It was also an opportunity for the community to be encouraged to reflect on the importance of supporting the inclusion of more women

Women Presiding Officers in Parliament

Situation as at 1 January 2012:

41 of the 271 Posts (15.1%)

As at 1 January 2012, women hold 15.1% of all presiding officer posts in the world, another gradual increase from the previous year's record of 14.1%. The significance of women holding these positions is not only that they are the highest positions of power in parliament, but that these positions are the most senior representative of that institution.

30 Presiding Officers in Single or Lower Houses of Parliament

Albania; Antigua and Barbuda; Austria; Botswana; Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Dominica; Estonia; Ghana; Iceland; India; Jamaica; Lao P.D.R.; Latvia; Lesotho; Lithuania; Mozambique; Netherlands; Pakistan; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Rwanda; Saint Lucia; Serbia; Suriname; Turkmenistan; Uganda; United Republic of Tanzania; and Uzbekistan.

2011 saw women take up presiding officer posts for the first time in Lao People's Democratic Republic, Portugal and Uganda, and a woman return to the position in Jamaica and Poland. During the year, women lost the positions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile and Uruguay.

11 Presiding Officers in Upper Houses of Parliament

Antigua and Barbuda; Bahamas; Belize; Belgium; Gabon; Grenada; Russian Federation; Saint Lucia; Swaziland; United Kingdom; and Zimbabwe.

In 2011, a woman was returned to the presidency of the Belgian Senate, and for the first time, a woman took up the position in the Upper House of the Russian Parliament.

The woman who previously presided over the German Bundesrat was replaced by a man.

in decision-making positions in the Marshall Islands. Delegate Juana Leviticus Bellu noted: "I was not going to campaign for the upcoming local government elections but I am now, since going through this training. In our culture it can be hard for women to run against their uncles and brothers because we look up to them, but I will make sure I share this training with other women and encourage them to run for election as well."



▲ Marshall Islands, 2011. © Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

Does the electoral system matter?

Looking at those countries where a renewal took place in 2011, it is clear that proportional representation continues to be the electoral system that returns the highest proportion of women to parliament. Parliaments using proportional representation elected 22.6% women MPs, compared with 18.1% using the plurality-majority electoral system, and 19.1% using a mixed system. Where women were appointed to a chamber in 2011, they represented, on average, 15.2% of members.

Under proportional representation, voters cast their votes by party, and in some cases also by individual, and seats in parliament are allotted in proportion to the votes each party receives. This system provides an incentive for parties to broaden their appeal by adding women to their party lists. In some cases, where parties mandate the percentage of women to be included on lists – as in the rule of "every second seat a woman" – the results can be significant. Inversely, a plurality-majority system sees women compete directly with men in single-member constituencies. In the absence of a cultural acceptance of women parliamentarians, this can prove a difficult race for women.