



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

CHEMIN DU POMMIER 5
1218 LE GRAND-SACONNEX / GENEVA (SWITZERLAND)

TELEPHONE (41.22) 919 41 50 - FAX (41.22) 919 41 60 - E-MAIL postbox@mail.ipu.org

IPU releases data on women in politics for 2010

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Despite increased numbers of women in parliaments, with an all time global high of 19.1%, the target of gender balance in politics is still a distant one in many countries according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) survey on elections held in 2010. The survey, released on the eve of International Women's Day has the following key findings:

- 19.1% of parliamentarians worldwide are women. This is a small but significant gain: the proportion was 13.1% in 2000 and 16.3% in 2005.
- In 2010 ten parliamentary chambers reached 30%, bringing to a total of 43 the number to have met the UN target. Three of the renewed chambers passed the 40% mark, bringing the number with more than 40% of women members to 11.
- Five chambers that were renewed in 2010 ended up with no women members.
- Media coverage for women was still weaker than the coverage given to men.

In the different regions

- Despite some progress, mainly due to quotas, the average for the Arab States remained low.
- Northern European countries kept a relatively high percentage of women in their lower houses: Belgium with 39.3%, the Netherlands with 40.7% and Sweden with 45.0%.
- Progress was nil in the Pacific Island States: no women candidates won seats in Nauru, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu or Tonga.
- In 2010, there were renewals for 67 chambers in 48 countries. Half of them brought more women into parliament.

Arab States: Although they are at the bottom of the world table for women in parliament, the Arab States continue to progress: 4.3% in 1995, 9.5% in 2009 and 11.7% in 2010. The large variation in the region is a function of quotas. In Bahrain, only one woman, who was unopposed, was elected. Meanwhile 22.5% of women were appointed to Bahrain's upper house. In Jordan, with a strengthened quota system, there are now 13 women parliamentarians, including Jordan's first Bedouin woman. Sudan saw its first woman compete for the presidency, despite a fatwa banning women from running. In Iraq, the number of women parliamentarians in the lower house increased, although most parties failed to meet their 25% women-candidate quota. Qatar was the only Arab country to appoint no women parliamentarians in 2010.

In the Americas, where 15 chambers were up for renewal, the average improved slightly. Three more women heads of State were elected. Costa Rica maintained its high level of participation of women in parliament with 38.6%. The US mid-term elections saw a record number of women running for the both houses of Congress, but this did not lead to major gains.

Nordic Countries: The Nordic countries maintained their position at the top of the regional chart with a 41.6% average. Sweden's chamber was the only one to be renewed in the region in 2010, and despite a drop of 2.3 percentage points it maintained an impressive 45% of women in parliament.

The European average is stable at 20%. Most of the 14 chambers up for renewal saw little change. The exception was the Czech Republic, which saw 6.5 and 3.7 point increases in its lower and upper houses, respectively. Nevertheless, not a single woman cabinet minister was appointed in Prague. Neighbouring Slovakia elected its first woman prime minister. The average in the Netherlands increased to 40.7%. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, only 16.7% of members of parliament are women despite an election law that requires one in every three candidates to be a woman, but it

is still an improvement on 2006. In London, the House of Commons chalked up a 2.2 percentage point gain (up to 22%). Kyrgyzstan still has one of the highest rates of women parliamentarians in the region and elected its first women president in 2010. With a rise of 4.5 percentage points bringing women's representation up to 22%, Uzbekistan is on track to reach the 30% target in its lower house.

Sub-Saharan Africa saw no big changes. Ethiopia, Madagascar and Tanzania recorded improvements. Burundi consolidated its representation of women in the lower house with an increase of 2.5 percentage points to 32.1%, as well as a significant rise in the upper house (to 46.3%), largely due to its quota system. Women's representation in Sao Tome and Principe increased from 7.3% in 2006 to 18.2% in 2010 without any quota.

Asia saw a drop in the number of women parliamentarians. In a year of high-profile elections in the region, its average fell to 18%. Afghanistan's polls saw an increase of just 0.4 points. In the Philippines, where there have been two women presidents in the past 25 years and the proportion of women in government has increased every year, the figure for women in the lower house rose by 1.7 percentage points to 22% while the upper house figure fell by 4.3 percentage points to 13%. In the Pacific States, the percentage of women parliamentarians dropped from 15.3% in 2009 to 11.7% in 2010. Australia's relatively high proportion of women members inflates the figure for other States that have few or none. Of the five countries with renewals in 2010—Australia, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu—only Australia elected any women parliamentarians, as well as saw its first woman prime minister sworn in.

Quotas: Update on Progress

Quotas remain the single most effective way of increasing the number of women in politics. Many countries that have no legislated quotas in the national parliament have voluntary party quotas. In addition, there can be local-level quotas when there are none in the national parliament, such as in Namibia and the Philippines. The result is a greater number of leadership roles for women politicians at different levels in the hierarchy. Egypt's 2010 election result gives pause for thought. Quotas gave a 10.9 percentage point increase in the number of women members, but not a single woman was elected from outside the quota system. Previously, nine women had been elected to parliament through the normal electoral process. Given that Egypt's quota system is a temporary measure designed to 'jumpstart' a new era of female participation in politics, it will be interesting to see the results of the election that follows the present dissolution of parliament to gauge whether the reserved seat system is the best option.

Media Coverage

A significant issue for women candidates in the 2010 elections was the shortage of both media coverage of them and public appearances by women candidates. A survey of daily election stories in Tanzania revealed that men politicians dominated in election stories, and in Sudan, there were reports that women were getting less media coverage. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were complaints that women candidates' views were seldom aired. The election of Australia's first woman prime minister, Julia Gillard, met with a media focus on her flame-coloured hair and choice of attire. Attitudes were probably not greatly advanced by the production of the Czech Public Affairs Party's racy calendar of women politicians. In the US, women's groups set up an organization to take action on gender-biased reporting.

Established in 1889 and with its Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the IPU, the oldest multilateral political organization, currently brings together 155 affiliated national parliaments and nine regional assemblies as associate Members. The world organization of parliaments has an Office in New York, which acts as its Permanent Observer to the United Nations.

Contacts: Mr. James Jennings, Director of Communications. Tel. +41 22 919 41 32; jj@mail.ipu.org
Ms. Luisa Ballin, Information Officer. Tel. +41 22 919 41 16 / 27; lb@mail.ipu.org
Ms. Kareen Jabre, Manager, Gender Partnership Programme. Tel. +41 22 919 41 25, kj@mail.ipu.org - www.ipu.org and <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>