

Increasing Women's Political Participation

A Primer on Best Practices

WHITE & CASE



BACKGROUND

Sustainable Development Goal 16 provides for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies. A key component of an inclusive society is active participation by women in political processes. Women are estimated to make up 49.6% of the global population in 2016, but only have 23.6% of parliamentary positions globally.² Closing this representation gap requires multiple strategies and is heavily dependent on local and regional nuances. However, there are some general strategies that research has proven to be effective in increasing women's political participation. The following is a brief primer, in alphabetical order, on the most effective strategies. Researchers and global organizations have dedicated a significant amount of resources on this topic, and the reader is encouraged to consult the sources listed and the organizations identified at the end of this document for further information.

Percentage of Women in National Parliaments ¹	
Americas	28.2%
Europe	27.5%
Sub-Saharan Africa	23.9%
Asia	19.7%
Arab States	18.2%
Pacific	14.6%
Global	23.6%

Addressing the Top Five Factors Deterring Women from Entering Politics

Barriers for Women	Barriers for Men
1. Domestic responsibilities	1. Lack of support from the electorate
2. Prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the role of women in society	2. Lack of finance
3. Lack of support from family	3. Lack of support of political parties
4. Lack of confidence	4. Lack of experience in "representative functions": public speaking, constituency relations
5. Lack of finances	5. Lack of confidence

Source: Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008.

Advocate for Women's Political Participation

- *Gender Mainstreaming Mechanisms.* Gender mainstreaming mechanisms aim at drafting, promoting, and monitoring laws and policies to ensure that gender equality issues are taken into account in national policies. Such mechanisms can be formal, like a commission or a committee, or informal, like a caucus or working group.

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union database, < <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> >, Data as of September 1, 2017.

² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, custom data acquired via website.

- *Advocacy.* Advocacy by women’s organizations and non-governmental organizations has a dual benefit. First, advocacy can influence gender representation in the political process. Secondly, advocacy can help challenge and change male-centric attitudes and culture.

Source: Advancing Gender Equality in Political Decision-Making: Good Practices, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016

Develop Competency of Women Candidates

- *Political Mentoring.* Mentoring and training programs prepare women for political work and enhance their political skills.
- *Local Positions.* Local-level positions equip women with the skills necessary for higher levels of public office and careers in regional and national politics. Thus, initiatives focused on encouraging women to enter local politics can be particularly effective at raising women’s participation in political processes.
- *Women’s Platforms.* Building women’s platforms, networks, and pools of potential candidates are a feature of many competency development programs.
- *Sustained Training:* Consistent and methodical training with female candidates yields better results than offering stand-alone training during just one phase of the electoral cycle. Engaging local women leaders or trainees who pass their knowledge to others increase the relevance and impact of training.
- *Finance:* Training women to fundraise and establishing fundraising networks to decrease the obstacle of financial disadvantage.
- *Leadership Skills:* Provide opportunities to strengthen elected women’s influence and leadership, such as conducting orientations for newly elected women, governance skills training, networking opportunities and providing opportunities to foster policy dialogue.

Source: Advancing Gender Equality in Political Decision-Making: Good Practices, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016; Women in Power Project Summary Report, United States Agency for International Development, 2016

Government Support of Women’s Political Participation

- State funding of initiatives promoting women’s participation in political parties. These initiatives hold seminars, training events, lobby to get more women elected, and provide networks for women politicians.

Source: Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women’s Political Participation in the OSCE Region, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Increase Women’s Access to Political Institutions

- *Transition Participation:* Including women during democratic transition processes offers opportunity to create political institutions that are more favorable to women’s political representation and leadership.
- *Political Parties:* Work with political parties to identify potential women candidates, increase public demand for women party candidates and leaders and build alliances with men to support gender equality.
- *Gender Integration:* Train election management bodies and election observers to identify and address barriers to women’s voting prior to elections and promote trust and integrity in the electoral process.
- *Caucuses:* Establish formal or informal women caucuses to provide support inside the legislature. Draw support for the causes from a broad range of international actors can help the women caucuses stay motivated and continue to work.

Source: Women in Power Project Summary Report, United States Agency for International Development, 2016

Establish Proportional Representation Electoral Systems

Proportional representation systems feature greater women participation than plurality/majority system. In a proportional representation system, the electoral system is designed such that the overall votes for a party corresponds to the proportion of seats in parliament. That is, a party that wins thirty percent of the vote will get approximately thirty percent of the seats in parliament. In plurality/majority (also known as winner-take-all), the candidate or party with the most votes is the electoral winner.

Proportional representation systems not only afford more opportunities for women participation, but 'contagion' is more likely to occur in a proportional representation system than plurality/majority systems. Contagion is the process by which parties adopt policies initiated by other political parties. In the women's political participation context, once one party nominates women in prominent positions, parties in proportional representation systems will be "much quicker to adopt this policy."

Thus, according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, "changing a country's electoral system often represents a far more realistic goal to work towards than dramatically changing the culture's view of women.

Source: Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

Establish Quota Systems

Half of the countries of the world use some type of electoral quota for their parliament. The three basic types of quota regimes are:

1. Candidate quotas
2. Reserved seats
3. Voluntary party quotas

Candidate quotas can either be at the selection or election stage. At the selection stage, candidate quotas mandate that a certain number or percentage of women are represented in the pool of candidates that are up for discussion. At the election stage, candidate quotas mandate that a certain percentage of all nominated candidates are women. Candidate quotas can be mandated either by the constitution or by electoral law.

Reserved seat quotas require that a certain percentage or number among those elected must be women. Like candidate quotas, reserved seat quotas can be mandated either by the constitution or by electoral law.

Finally, voluntary party quotas are where political parties introduce quotas requiring a certain number or percentage of women are in the pool of candidates. Unlike candidate quotas or reserved seat quotas, these quotas are voluntary.

Quotas represent an efficient mechanism for increasing the number of woman participating in political processes. However, quotas should be contemplated with other measures. Quotas help to promote a "critical mass" of women into politics. However, as the OSCE states, "participation is more than just numerical presence in decision-making forums. It is about the effective articulation of issues that matter to women and men and the ability to influence and monitor policies." It is important that women are not just participants in the political process, but that they are involved in critical decision making processes as well.

Additionally, not all quotas need to be specific. Soft quotas can also be used. Soft quotas include internal party quotas, informal targets, and recommendations. In some countries, internal party quotas, though voluntary, have been more effective in achieving greater representation of women.

Source: Global Database of Gender Quotas, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, <<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/quotas>>; Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Increase Political Party Support for Women

- Meetings at convenient and friendly places and at times when women can attend
- Financial support for caring responsibilities or the provision of child care
- Separate women's wings or organizations within parties
- Tackle sexist language and practices that reinforce the dominance of particular groups
- Gender-sensitive training programs
- Internal party quotas
- Candidate preparation (training, mentoring, and support of women identified with potential and desire to run)
- Gender audits to generate gender action plans for political parties
- Adopt a statement on gender equality in the party's founding documents
- Set targets for female participation in party conventions
- Ensure women are allocated safe seats
- Work with civil society organizations to oversee the implementation of quotas
- Share experiences with other parties across countries and regions
- Provide training to women candidates in such skills as fundraising, message development, media relations and communicating with voters
- Train and promote women in campaign leadership positions (e.g. in campaign management)
- Ensure women's visibility in the campaign by providing additional media exposure
- Identify and disseminate party positions that are priorities for women, which could also attract more women's votes for their party
- Monitor elections, including by recruiting women as party agents to be present at polling stations, particularly if those polling stations are allocated for women only
- Provide information to voters that include specific messages highlighting the importance of women's votes and women's right to vote as equal members of society

Source: Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR); Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Guidebook to Promote Women's Political Participation, United Nations Development Programme and National Democratic Institute, 2012

Reduce Violence against Women in Politics

- Support legal efforts, such as drafting laws, to combat violence against women
- Train poll workers to monitor and report on violence
- Establish an emergency telephone system for women candidates and voters to call if they experience threats and a tracking system to monitor police response to calls

Source: Women in Power Project Summary Report, United States Agency for International Development, 2016

Tracking Women's Representation

- Regular reliable data on women's representation is necessary to track progress and identify challenges and successes.

Source: Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Transform Attitudes

- *Creative Measures.* Creativity in raising awareness is essential for making the initiative visible and popular. For example, in Croatia, street performances and a "pillar of shame" was utilized to publicize political parties that did not comply with gender equality principles.
- *Publicity Materials.* Preparing publicity materials, such as guides, toolkits, handbooks, etc., strengthens the awareness campaign and provides helpful information and argumentation.
- *Media Collaboration.* Ensuring good coverage in the media, whether in television, radio, social media, digital or print media, increases the impact of awareness-raising. Use public service announcements, television programs, radio shows to spur public dialogue about women's empowerment, training, and promoting positive images of women leaders.
- *Education:* Design and conduct gender-sensitive civic and voter education programs to women and men citizens, including why women should vote and how family support for household and child care responsibilities can help women be active in politics.

Source: Advancing Gender Equality in Political Decision-Making: Good Practices, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016; Women in Power Project Summary Report, United States Agency for International Development, 2016

RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

- European Institute for Gender Equality
- International Women's Democracy Center
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
- Inter-Parliamentary Union
- National Democratic Institute
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
- Women's Environment and Development Organization
- New Tactics in Human Rights: Empowering Women in Political Participation and Leadership
- United States Agency for International Development: Women in Power Project
- WomenKind