



Subscribe

Sign in



GENDER IMBALANCE

Gender equality in Parliament: How do countries around the world fare?

At the current rate of progress, it will take more than 80 years to achieve parity, says the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Emma Batha, Thomson Reuters Foundation & Lin Taylor, Thomson Reuters Foundation



Sep 28, 2023 · 07:30 pm



BJP workers celebrate the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill by the Indian Parliament. | PTI

Lawmakers in India's upper house of Parliament on Thursday [guaranteed to reserve 33% of seats for women](#) in the lower house and state assemblies, in a bid to improve gender equality in the corridors of power.

Only 104 of India's 788 MPs, or slightly more than 13%, were women after the last national election, government figures show.

ADVERTISEMENT

AD

nd The India Fix Eco India The Latest The Reel The Field Magazine Video Trei
year. The Home Minister said it would likely come into effect in 2029.

Just over [one in four lawmakers](#) in national parliaments worldwide are women, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a global organisation, which warned it will take more than 80 years to reach parity at the [current rate of progress](#).

There are only six countries where women hold at least half of seats in their lower or single chamber – but as of March the Inter-Parliamentary Union said every functioning parliament in the world had at least one woman for the first time in history.

Here is a snapshot of progress and rollbacks. The data refers to the make-up of the lower chamber in countries with bicameral parliaments unless otherwise stated.

nd	The India Fix	Eco India	The Latest	The Reel	The Field	Magazine	Video	Tre
1995	2023							
World		11.3%						
		26.5%						
Americas		12.7%						
		34.9%						
Europe		13.2%						
		31.0%						
Sub-Saharan Africa		9.8%						
		26.5%						
Pacific		6.3%						
		22.6%						
Asia		13.2%						
		21.0%						
Middle East and North Africa		4.3%						
		16.3%						

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data for all houses combined as of Jul. 1, 1995 and Jan. 1, 2023

Chart: Diana Baptista • Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in parliament in 2022. The year in review"



Progress in 2022

Of the 47 countries holding elections last year, seven saw women elected or appointed to at least 40% of seats in a lower, upper or single chamber – Costa Rica, Sweden, Senegal, Denmark, Slovenia, Australia and Barbados.

ADVERTISEMENT

AD

Australia's Senate made history when women won 56.6% of seats, the highest share of any upper chamber.

But worldwide, women's overall share of seats rose by just 0.4 percentage points to 26.5%, the slowest growth in six years.

The [biggest gains](#) in lower and single chambers were in Slovenia, up by more than 15 percentage points, Malta (13 points), Equatorial Guinea (11), Colombia (10), and Australia (7.9).

Women held at least 30% of seats in 64 countries by the end of 2022, up from 61 the previous year.

Countries leading the way

Out in front is Rwanda, where women hold more than 60% of seats and which in 2008 became the first country to have a female-majority parliament. Women also outnumber men in Cuba (56%) and Nicaragua (52%).

New Zealand, Mexico, Andorra and the United Arab Emirates have an even gender split, while Iceland, Costa Rica, Sweden and South Africa are not far off.

ADVERTISEMENT

AD

The United Arab Emirates did not have any women in its Federal National Council before 2006, but achieved gender parity in 2019 following a presidential decree.

Other countries making strides

Dominica, Chad, Mali and Uzbekistan have also made significant progress in recent years.

A new gender empowerment law in Sierra Leone, where women hold 13% of seats, will ensure they make up at least 30% of the parliament and cabinet after elections in June.

Worldwide, only a fifth of government ministers are women - and they are often given portfolios that focus on health, family, social affairs or the environment.

Countries that have appointed a female-majority or an equal-gender cabinet include Spain, Albania, Colombia, Rwanda, Canada and France.

Countries faring badly

Yemen has no women in its lower house, and just one in its upper house.

Vanuatu's parliament welcomed a lone female lawmaker last year, its first since 2008.

ADVERTISEMENT

AD

Women hold fewer than 10% of seats in more than 20 countries including Nigeria (3.9%), Qatar (4.4%) and Iran (5.6%).

Despite having the world's first female prime minister in 1960, Sri Lanka is another laggard, with women making up about 5.3% of parliament for the last 25 years.

Although Japan saw record numbers of women elected in 2022, they still hold only 10% of seats in the lower chamber – way below other big economies.

Countries going backward

Algeria and Tunisia are the main backsliders.

In 2021, Algeria saw the share of women in parliament fall from 26% to 8% following changes to its quota system.

The setback came despite women accounting for 37% of candidates.

The IPU said changes to the election law were exacerbated by blatant discrimination, with women's faces often blurred in campaign materials and their photos replaced with blank avatars on ballot papers.

ADVERTISEMENT

AD

nd The India Fix Eco India The Latest The Reel The Field Magazine Video Trei

In Tunisia, the number of female lawmakers is set [to plunge](#) following a recent election in the North African country – traditionally seen as a regional leader on women’s rights.

As in Algeria, Tunisian women say changes to the electoral system have made it harder for them to contest and win seats.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban Islamist group has erased women from public life since seizing the country in 2021.

Before the takeover, women had held 27% of seats in the now defunct National Assembly. Many former women MPs have fled the country.

This [article](#) first appeared on [Context](#), powered by the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Buy an annual Scroll Membership to support independent journalism and get special benefits.

PICK AN AMOUNT

₹2,500

₹5,000

₹10,000

₹25,000

Other

No ads

Members-only events

Merchandise

Editorial meet-up invitation

Evening Edition newsletter

Weekly Edition newsletter

Help design new products

Continue to payment

[Already a member? Sign in](#)