



IN BRIEF



KEY MESSAGES ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS, EMPOWERMENT AND EQUALITY: ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION 2024

Photo: UNMIT/Martine Perret

Background

The elections taking place in 2024 come at a key juncture for many countries as they grapple with various pressing issues such as economic recovery, climate change, social inequality, and geopolitical tensions – all threatening progress for gender equality and women's rights. 2024 is a crucial year for States and the global community to take significant strides toward achieving gender parity and inclusivity in electoral processes.

- In 2024, at least 63 countries will hold national elections, involving nearly 3.6 billion people (44% of the global population), including 1.8 billion women and girls. Over 2.6 billion people will have the voting age required to participate in these elections (32% of the world population), including 1.3 billion women.¹ While the number of elections is similar to previous years, the significance of countries holding elections, given their population size and economic impact, is notable.
- One of UN Women's key priority areas is the inclusive participation and representation of women in political and electoral processes, having supported global normative advancements and country programmes in over 100 countries since 2012.
- In 2024, UN Women is supporting women's political participation in over 40 countries, including nine

countries holding elections. This support includes advocacy to implement electoral gender quotas; technical assistance related to inclusive electoral processes; candidate training and networking for women aspirants and candidates; data collection, social norms change and awareness raising and support to civil society actors.

- Of particular concern is heightened levels of online violence, particularly technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF GBV) targeting women, with threats of death, rape, and beatings.² Additionally, candidates, campaign teams, electoral administrators, and observers may face psychological and physical violence.
- Votes have consequences. How women and men use their vote will not only impact the inclusiveness and diversity of political institutions but will also directly impact their lives through policy priorities of their chosen candidates.

1. UN Women calculations based on population data from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Data. <https://population.un.org/wpp/>; and country-level information on minimum age for voting from the World Bank, Identification For Development (ID4D) Global Dataset. 2018 Global Dataset (last updated March 2020; accessed February 2024)

2. [AI-4/5: On violence against women in politics, identify best practice and share it | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](#)

Normative Frameworks and Implementation Challenges

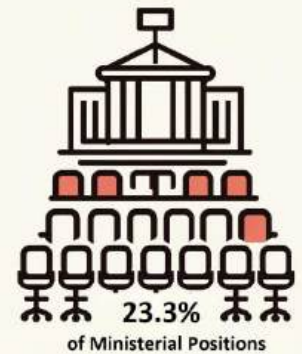
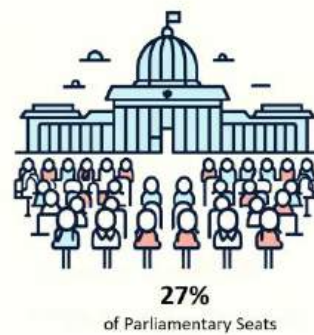
International standards provide a robust framework for governments, policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to promote and protect women's rights to participate in political and public life but their implementation lags.

- Women's rights to participate in political and public life are essential for achieving gender equality and inclusive societies, protected by international standards for decades. The 1979 [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) advocates for equal rights for women to vote, stand for election, and hold public office. [CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23](#) urges states to review and amend legislation from a gender perspective, and [General Recommendation No. 25](#) suggests measures to increase women's access to decision-making.³
- [The Sustainable Development Goals](#) call for ensuring women's full participation and equal leadership opportunities in political, economic, and public life. [The Agreed Conclusions from the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women](#) set a numerical target of 50/50 gender balance in elected positions, reaffirming the commitment of Member States to women's full participation in decision-making.⁴
- Despite these international standards, implementation lags, and power imbalances between women and men persist at all levels of decision-making. As of 2024, women hold just 27% of parliamentary seats, 23.3% of ministerial positions, and 35.5% of local government seats, with only 28 countries headed by a woman.⁵ At the current rate, gender parity in national legislatures will not be reached before 2063, and among Heads of Government before 2150.⁶



Photo: UN Women/Libya

Status of Women in the Decision-Making Positions



3. The new CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, currently being developed will strategically be important in its ambition to progress beyond gender-balanced and inclusive decision-making systems requiring temporary special measures to embedding parity (50:50) between women and men as a permanent feature of power-sharing and good governance in all spheres.

4. [E/CN.6/2021/L.3](#)

5. Parliament data from Inter-Parliamentary Union at 1 April 2024. Information compiled by UN Women on women Cabinet Ministers at 1 January 2024; women in local government at 1 January 2023; and women Heads of State and/or Heads of Government at 13 May 2024.

6. UN Women calculations.

Call to Action

2024 serves as a crucial moment for governments and other stakeholders to take urgent actions across several areas to advance the implementation of existing international frameworks and bring long-lasting change.

1. Governments and other stakeholders must uphold women's rights to participate in political and public life, in accordance with international standards.

- To uphold **women's rights to participate in elections as voters**, governments must facilitate voter registration, guarantee security at polling stations, and protect women from coercion or intimidation.
- To ensure **women's right to stand for election**, governments must remove structural barriers, address discriminatory gender norms, and end gender-based violence in politics. Introducing temporary special measures such as gender quotas or permanent measures that advance parity between women and men in electoral processes requires political will.
- **Involving women in election administration** enhances the inclusiveness and credibility of elections, bringing a gender-sensitive perspective that addresses gender-specific barriers, such as access to polling stations and safety concerns.

2. Creating an enabling environment for women's participation in elections as voters and candidates is critical to achieving parity in decision-making.

- Governments are urged to implement **temporary and/or permanent measures**, such as legislated gender quotas and gender-balanced appointments, **to achieve parity in decision-making**. Political parties should enforce these quotas or introduce voluntary targets to ensure a balanced representation of women in elections and beyond, including recruiting and nominating women candidates.
- **Ending violence against women in politics is imperative**. Governments must intensify legislative and policy endeavors aimed at eradicating such violence, hold perpetrators accountable, and strengthen access to justice and services for victims. Collecting data on the incidence of this violence and holding media and social media companies accountable to standards is also vital.

- **Elections must be inclusive and safe for women and men as voters, political candidates and representatives, and electoral administrators**. Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) should develop and implement inclusive policies and codes of conduct that promote non-discrimination, integrity, transparency, freedom from violence and dispute resolution.
- **Media coverage must be fair and transparent, avoiding harmful gender norms and stereotypes, and promoting balanced representation of all candidates**. Laws should prohibit hate speech, incitement to violence, and discrimination including gender stereotyping and violence against women.

3. Supporting women candidates is a long-term investment in creating inclusive and representative societies.

- Governments should invest in **capacity-building programs to encourage diverse women to run for office**, supporting their confidence, leadership skills, and campaign strategies.
- **Women's networks and resource centers** should be recognized and supported as partners in advancing women's political participation.
- Donors should support **civil society domestic observer groups to monitor elections and provide gender-disaggregated data on participation and violence**.
- Governments should consider **regulating campaign financing to allocate targeted funds for women candidates**, which can bridge the financing gap and promote equal participation.

4. Elections are a key platform for promoting women's participation and gender equality.

- **Political parties should provide opportunities for women's participation in election** by offering mentoring, training, and capacity-building programs, helping women overcome financial barriers, and advocating for policies addressing gender-based discrimination and economic inequality.
- **Civil society organizations (CSOs) including women's rights organizations, have the potential to leverage women's rights, amplifying women's voices and influencing electoral agendas advocating for policies that address women's needs, and engaging in voter education and monitoring**. After elections, CSOs can work with elected officials to protect gains made and advocate for women's empowerment policies, including appointing women to key positions and monitoring government actions.