

Conclusion: Gender equality and advancing women's political participation



Community of Democracies

The world has witnessed dramatic changes in women's political participation over the past two decades. The proportion of women in national parliaments has nearly doubled from 12 per cent in 1997 to 23.6 per cent in 2017 (Inter-Parliamentary Union; for regional figures see Table 1). In an effort to assess what these changes have meant for gender equality and the political empowerment of women, the Community of Democracies, International IDEA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized five regional consultations, bringing together politicians and representatives from international, non-governmental, and civil society organizations. The consultations were held in Strasbourg (November 2016), Bali (December 2016), Johannesburg (March 2017), Tunis (March 2017) and Mexico City (May 2017). Each consultation addressed ongoing challenges, existing tools and mechanisms, and best practices and recommendations for effectively advancing women's political participation.

This Conclusion provides an overview of the global legal and policy instruments identified in the regional consultations, and practical guidance for stakeholders seeking to devise concrete strategies for electing and empowering women in the political realm. Section 1 describes the global treaties, charters and declarations in support of women's political participation. Section 2 discusses the regional bodies and frameworks that inspire, complement, and/or extend these global commitments. Section 3 reviews national laws and policies—including measures by political parties—to enhance women's political participation, highlighting the best practices that emerged from the regional consultations. The final section provides an overview of the ongoing obstacles to women's full and equal political participation, as well as possible strategies identified by the consultation participants to overcome these barriers, concluding that existing instruments have laid important groundwork but—as indicated in the regional conversations—additional support and commitment from a variety of actors is required at the global, regional, national and local levels to advance gender parity in politics.


Table 1. Percentage of women in lower and single houses of parliament, 1997 and 2017

Region	1997	2017	Change
Americas	12.9%	28.2%	+15.3 points
Arab states	3.3%	18.2%	+14.9 points
Sub-Saharan Africa	10.1%	23.8%	+13.7 points
Europe	13.8%	27.5%	+13.7 points
Asia	13.4%	19.7%	+6.3 points
Pacific	9.8%	15.0%	+5.3 points
Global average	12.0%	23.6%	+11.6 points

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, <<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>>, accessed 21 August 2017.

Global treaties, charters and declarations

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948 by delegates to the UN General Assembly, establishes that ‘Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status’. Article 21 states:

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

These rights are reiterated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in 1966 and entering into force in 1976 (articles 2, 25, and 26). Clarifying the meaning of Article 21 in 1996, the Human Rights Committee issued General Comment no. 25 in which it stressed that any restrictions to the right to participate in public affairs should be based only on “objective and reasonable criteria,” for example age or mental capacity.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, is an international bill of rights for women and a legally binding instrument that obliges states to promote gender equality. At present, there are 189 states parties, which makes CEDAW an important tool for national and international advocates of gender equality. Article 7 specifically addresses the elimination of gender discrimination in political and public life:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

In 1997, the CEDAW Committee issued General Recommendation No. 23 to elaborate on article 7, making a stronger case for ‘temporary special measures’ such as gender quotas to achieve equality of participation. The Recommendation states that the ‘formal removal of barriers and the introduction of temporary special measures to encourage the equal participation of both men and women in the public life of their societies are essential prerequisites to true equality in political life’. It also notes that states parties, political parties and public officials should actively encourage women’s full and effective participation, together with all other sectors of society.

The Beijing Platform for Action, signed unanimously by all UN member states at the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, lists ‘women in power and decision-making’ as Objective G among its 12 Strategic Objectives. Under Objective G, states commit to take measures to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, as well as to increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership. Paragraph 190a calls on governments to:

Commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary, including, inter alia, setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions.

Paragraph 191 urges political parties to:

- (a) Consider examining party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women;
- (b) Consider developing initiatives that allow women to participate fully in all internal policy-making structures and appointive and electoral nominating processes;
- (c) Consider incorporating gender issues in their political agenda, taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, emphasizes the involvement of women in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction. Recognizing ‘the importance of [women’s] equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security’, the Resolution:



1. Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict,
2. Encourages the Secretary-General to implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in 2015, enumerate Gender Equality as SDG 5. The 2030 Agenda situates women's rights within human rights and development frames, explaining that 'ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, but it also crucial to accelerating sustainable development'. SDG 5 includes among its targets to:

- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

Regional bodies and frameworks

The African Union (AU) has taken numerous steps to promote good governance and democratic consolidation across the continent in the past 15 years. The AU Constitutive Act enshrines the principle of gender equality and, together with other AU declarations, resolutions and decisions, calls for the full participation of women as equal partners in Africa's development. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), adopted by the AU in 2003, has been signed and ratified by 36 of the 54 African countries—and signed but not ratified by 15 more. Article 9, on the 'Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process', states that:

1. States Parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that:
 - a) women participate without any discrimination in all elections;
 - b) women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes;
 - c) women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of State policies and development programmes.
2. States Parties shall ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making.

The AU African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, adopted in 2007, lists among its objectives the aim to 'promote gender balance and equality in the governance and

development processes'. Article 29 links this to the goals of development and democracy and establishes that:

2. State Parties shall create the necessary conditions for full and active participation of women in the decision-making processes and structures at all levels as a fundamental element in the promotion and exercise of a democratic culture.
3. State Parties shall take all possible measures to encourage the full and active participation of women in the electoral process and ensure gender parity in representation at all levels, including legislatures.

The Protocol on Gender and Development of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), signed in 2008, makes highly concrete pledges for action to achieve gender-balanced decision-making. Article 12 on 'Representation' states that: 'States Parties shall endeavour that, by 2015, at least fifty percent of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women including the use of affirmative action measures as provided for in Article 5'. It goes on to call on states parties to conduct public awareness campaigns, demonstrating a link between equal representation and democracy and good governance. Article 13 on 'Participation' specifies a number of policy measures that states parties should implement to achieve equal opportunities for women and men, such as legislation, capacity-building, training and mentoring, support structures, and changing discriminatory attitudes and norms—and crucially identifying the need to engage men in all of these activities.

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted a Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN region in 1988, which promotes the equitable and effective participation of women in all fields and at various levels of political, economic, social and cultural life. The ASEAN Committee on Women Work Plan for 2016–20 has a focus on increasing the number of women in leadership positions in all ASEAN member states, particularly in appointed and elected positions (ASEAN 2016).

Leaders in the Pacific region signed a Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration in 2012, committing themselves to the implementation of specific national policy actions aimed at advancing gender equality in government programmes and policies. With respect to women in decision-making, the agreement called for the adoption of temporary special measures (TSMs), such as reserved seats and political party reforms, to accelerate women's full and equal participation in governance at all levels.

Various institutions of the European Union have similarly expressed their support for greater efforts to promote women's political participation. In 1995, the European Council approved a resolution on the balanced participation of men and women in decision-making, affirming that 'the objective of balanced participation of men and women in decision-making and the sharing of responsibilities between men and women in every sphere of life constitutes an important condition for equality between men and women'. The resolution invited member states to 'develop an integrated global strategy for promoting the balanced participation of men and women in decision-making', including compiling data, developing incentives and launching public awareness campaigns. In 1996 the Council passed a recommendation on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process, calling on member states to develop a 'comprehensive, integrated strategy' that, 'where necessary', might include 'legislative and/or regulatory measures and/or incentives'.



In 2000 the European Parliament approved a resolution on women in decision-making, calling for a concrete action plan formulated by the various EU institutions with a timetable for achieving gender balance. Among its main recommendations were ‘calls for the use of quotas as a transitional measure to even up the involvement of men and women in internal party structures and, at an electoral level, for the introduction of a system in which there are alternate men and women candidates on election lists, and for the provision of political training and information for women candidates by the parties so that they can take up political life with full confidence’.

Alongside these efforts, the European Commission established a European Expert Network on Women in Decision-making, funded for the years 1992–96. A new group, the European Network to promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy, was funded for 2008–12. It provided a platform at the EU level for discussing successful strategies and best practice to improve the gender balance in decision-making positions. Continuity in the work of both networks has been provided in the form of an EU database on women and men in decision-making. The current version is maintained by the European Institute for Gender Equality. It tracks information on women and men in key decision-making positions—politics, public administration, the judiciary, business and finance, social partners and NGOs, the environment, and the media—in 35 European countries.

The Council of Europe (CoE) first organized a ministerial conference on ‘equality between women and men in political life’ in 1986. In 1989, a CoE seminar on political strategies for the achievement of real equality of women and men introduced the concept of ‘parity democracy’, linking gender equality and democracy, and laying a strong foundation—especially in countries like France—to mobilize for gender quotas in politics. In 2003 the Committee of Ministers of the CoE adopted a recommendation on ‘balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making’, which set out clear objectives, guidelines and measures aimed at remedying inequalities in representation. The two types of measure it proposed were legislative and administrative measures, focused on elected and appointed offices; and support measures, such as awareness-raising, research and capacity-building. The 2014–17 CoE Gender Equality Strategy lists ‘balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making’ among its five strategic objectives (CoE 2014).

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) implements programmes to increase the participation of women in politics and the public arena, contribute to the capacity building of women’s networks, combat violence against women, and implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The ODIHR developed a political party gender audit methodology—piloted in Armenia, Georgia and Tajikistan between 2013 and 2015—to determine the level of gender equality in key internal party processes, procedures, structures and policies. On the basis of this diagnosis of discriminatory practices, the methodology provides parties with tools to adjust their policies and strategies in line with gender equality principles (OSCE-ODIHR 2014). In Georgia, for example, three parties worked to develop plans that included organizing internal party meetings to discuss gender equality, improving coordination among their parties’ female MPs to raise issues of concern to female voters, countering negative media portrayals of female candidates, and developing more active women’s wings.

The Inter-American Commission of Women (Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres, CIM) of the Organization of American States (OAS) was the first intergovernmental organization in the world dedicated to women’s rights. It played a key role in promoting women’s suffrage across the Americas through the 1948 Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women, which also called on member states to guarantee

women's right to be elected to political office. CIM was also involved in drafting the 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará), which has been monitored since 2004 via the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) of the OAS. Reflecting its focus on combating violence in both the public and private spheres, article 4 of the Convention reiterates women's 'right to have equal access to the public service of her country and to take part in the conduct of public affairs, including decision-making'. Article 5 recognizes that violence may prevent and nullify the exercise of this right, which regional and international instruments on human rights must be relied on to protect.

In 2015 states parties to the Belém do Pará Convention, together with the competent authorities of MESECVI, issued a Declaration on Political Harassment and Violence against Women, which noted that political parity could not be achieved by quotas alone, but rather 'requires a comprehensive approach that on the one hand, ensures equal access of women and men to all government institutions and political organizations and, on the other hand, ensures that the conditions for exercising that access are free of discrimination and violence against women at all levels and in all arenas of political life.' It calls on numerous actors—such as governments, political parties and the media—to take concrete steps to collect statistics and devise interventions to tackle political violence and harassment. To support national legislative initiatives across the region, since 2016 CIM has organized a series of workshops and meetings in Spanish to elaborate a Model Law on Political Violence against Women.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), one of the five UN regional commissions, has organized a series of regional conferences on women since 1977. In 2007, the 10th Regional Conference approved the Quito Consensus, in which countries agreed to adopt all necessary affirmative action measures and mechanisms, including legislative reforms and budgetary measures, to ensure the full participation of women in public office, with a view to achieving gender parity in the state (executive, legislative and judicial branches) and in representative bodies at the national and local levels. The Quito Consensus calls on countries to develop electoral policies, and to address work–family conflicts and gender stereotypes as obstacles to women's full participation.

In 2016, delegates to ECLAC's 13th Regional Conference approved the Montevideo Strategy to achieve gender equality in the region by 2030—closely tied to the UN's 2030 Agenda. The 10 implementation pillars focus on normative frameworks; institutions; popular and citizen participation; state capacity-building and strengthening; financing for gender equality; communication; technology; cooperation; information systems; and monitoring, evaluation and accountability. The Montevideo Strategy states that true democratization is conditional on achieving parity in the distribution of power, in both a quantitative and a qualitative sense. Under the state capacity-building pillar, the strategy calls on governments to 'Design specific training processes to build the leadership capacities of women of all ages in order to achieve parity-based participation in decision-making roles and, in particular, in senior management, executive and technical positions'.

The League of Arab States (LAS, Arab League) seeks to improve relations between member states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region by coordinating collaboration to safeguard the affairs and interests of the Arab countries. Although the LAS was established in 1945, it was only in 2003 that the Arab Women Organization (AWO) was created under the umbrella of the League. The impetus for the founding of the AWO was the Cairo Declaration coming out of the First Arab Women Summit convened in Egypt in November 2000. The AWO structure consists of a Supreme Council composed of Arab First Ladies (or



their representatives) and an Executive Board consisting of representatives from member states specializing in women's issues.

AWO priorities include enhancing women's political participation, among other goals. Its main tools and instruments for action include collecting and disseminating data regarding the status of Arab women, coordinating local and national efforts pertaining to women's issues, networking and cooperating with governmental and non-governmental actors, organizing seminars and workshops to coordinate joint Arab action on women's issues, and conducting research on Arab women's issues and their role in society. However, participants in the consultations were critical of what they saw as limited efforts for Arab women on the part of the LAS, which appeared to emerge from the priorities of member governments rather than civil society organizations working in the area of women's rights.

Global and regional programming

UNDP has supported women in politics worldwide. Its work includes raising awareness among women who wish to enter the political realm; working with male leaders and political parties to gain their support for women in politics; training female candidates ahead of elections, for instance on navigating gender stereotypes and improving their public speaking skills; and liaising with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide gender-balanced analysis of elections and electoral trends.

In Indonesia, for example, UNDP implemented a project that trained female candidates and, after the elections, worked with the newly elected female MPs to build their individual capacities and to strengthen the parliamentary women's caucus. In Uganda, UNDP facilitated education and skills training for female candidates and politicians in the areas of women's leadership, conflict mitigation and democratic governance.

UNDP has also worked with other stakeholders to draft and lobby for legal reforms to empower women in politics, including a gender parity law adopted in the Central African Republic in 2016. In Zambia, UNDP provided support for the drafting of the country's constitution, which called for the establishment of a Gender Equity and Equality Commission, as well as minimum of 30 per cent representation of both genders in decision-making bodies.

UN Women's work in Latin America includes programming for parity democracy, linking this to the SDGs. The two main axes of this work focus on substantive equality across public institutions, legislation, public policies and public services; and parity in decision-making in both the public and private spheres. Its model of parity democracy, presented together with the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO), calls for a parity state, guaranteeing substantive equality through all public institutions; parity representation, with equal numbers of women and men in decision-making; and political parties to be key entities involved in transforming the political culture away from the reigning 'macho' mentality through all the means at their disposal—electoral, financial and programmatic.

In Latin America, UNDP, International IDEA and UN Women partnered in 2014 to develop the Mechanism to Accelerate Women's Political Participation (ATENEA), a mechanism to monitor and promote women's political participation. Measuring 40 indicators along eight dimensions, ATENEA has now been applied to measure and compare progress towards political parity in six countries: Panama, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru and Mexico. It collates data on the presence of women in different spheres of political participation to measure access to, and the exercise and permanence of, power for women in positions of power, with the goal of promoting coordinated action by national actors to

transform structures, rules and processes that impede women's effective exercise of their political rights.

National laws and policies

Electoral gender quotas are the primary tool employed globally to fast-track women's representation in parliaments and, to a lesser extent, other levels of political decision-making. According to the Quota Database, these policies have been introduced in more than 130 countries, mostly since 1995, and take three main forms.

Reserved seats stipulate a minimum number of women to be elected. There are several ways a reserved seat can be filled, such as elections in districts specifically designated for female parliamentarians, on all-women national party lists and indirectly based on a party's share of the national vote. The existence of reserved seats for women does not preclude women's election to non-reserved seats. In some countries, women are limited to serving only one or two terms as reserved seat parliamentarians.

Samoa is one of the most recent countries to institute reserved seats. It amended its constitution in 2013 to reserve five seats for women in the national parliament, which amounts to 10 per cent of all MPs. The system is distinct from that employed in many other countries, as the quota is activated only after the election results are known. If fewer than five women are elected, additional seats are added to parliament and awarded to the unsuccessful female candidates with the highest number of votes. In the 2016 elections, a record number of women stood as candidates, and four women won in constituencies. A fifth woman, who had come second in her constituency—was awarded a seat due to the quota.

Legislated candidate quotas require all political parties to include a minimum proportion of women—or maximum and/or minimum shares of one sex—among their nominated candidates. Legislated quotas generally appear in constitutions, electoral laws or political party laws. Unlike reserved seats, these laws do not guarantee outcomes in terms of the proportion of women elected. The most successful quotas tend to be those with high percentages of required female candidates (30 per cent or more), mandates with regard to the placement of female candidates on the list and sanctions that compel parties to meet quota requirements.

In Serbia, legislated quotas have been highly effective at electing a large proportion of women to parliament. A 2011 reform requires that the candidate lists of all political parties must include at least 30 per cent of candidates of each sex. In 2016, women were elected to 34 per cent of the seats. The importance of oversight can be seen in the case of Nepal, where parties did not initially meet the 33 per cent quota requirement for elections to the Constituent Assembly in 2014. However, when the Election Commission refused to register parties that had failed to meet the required proportion of women, parties were forced to prepare new lists. The case of Poland suggests, however, that when parties are required to nominate women under threat of such a penalty, they may subvert the impact of the law by nominating women to list positions where they stand little chance of being elected.

Most of the countries in Latin America have adopted legislated quotas. The first wave of quota laws introduced in the 1990s generally stipulated at least 30 per cent women among party candidates. In the past ten years, however, a growing number of these countries have increased their quota requirements, moving increasingly to parity. In 2014, for example, the principle of parity was incorporated into Mexico's Constitution, followed by a new electoral law requiring 50 per cent male and female candidates. Parties must alternate between men and women on their party lists in the proportional representation portion of the electoral system, and they must nominate equal numbers of men and women across all constituencies.



in the majoritarian component. While parties may not nominate women ‘exclusively’ to losing districts, they still tend to place women in less winnable seats. Similar trends can be seen in Honduras, where parties must nominate at least 40 per cent female candidates but the parity requirement tends to be diluted by the primary elections inside the political parties.

Party candidate quotas entail voluntary pledges by political parties to include a minimum percentage of women—or maximum and/or minimum shares of one sex—among their candidates. These quotas tend to be institutionalized in party constitutions and statutes, but may also exist in less formal forms as well. With little outside oversight, these quotas vary greatly in terms of their impact on the number of women elected—while their overall impact depends on the size of the party adopting them.

In addition to political recruitment policies, actors around the world have begun to call attention to—and explore new policy solutions for—the rising backlash against increased political participation by women. The European consultation framed this problem in terms of a growing tendency towards sexism and hate speech in politics, especially on social media and the Internet more generally. Women may also be disregarded by their party and parliamentary colleagues because of their gender. In extreme cases, women may even receive death threats as a means of excluding them from the political decision-making process.

An entire day was devoted to political violence and harassment in the Latin American consultation, reflecting the centrality of this theme in current debates on women’s political empowerment in the Americas. Violence and harassment can occur during women’s political campaigns, as well as during their time in office. This can affect women’s cost-benefit analyses when deciding whether to pursue decision-making positions. In 2012, Law 243 Against Political Harassment and Violence against Women was passed in Bolivia. Similar laws have been proposed in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru. According to the consultation participants, such initiatives are crucial for identifying these actions as crimes in order to increase protection of women’s political rights. Sanctions for perpetrators and their accomplices must be made explicit in order to deter such crimes and transform the political culture that supports them.

Another strategy to address political violence and harassment is the Observatory on Women’s Political Participation, established in Mexico in 2014 by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the National Electoral Institute and the National Institute for Women, with the objective of coordinating actions to promote women’s participation in decision-making in the public sphere. Based on positive results at the national level, 32 local observatories have since been created. Participants also suggested possible reparations to victims of violence and harassment. For example, if women are harassed by a political advertisement, the offending political party might be required to provide free airtime to the women affected.

Beyond legal and party frameworks, women have also used their positions in parliament to promote women’s participation in other positions of political and public responsibility. In El Salvador, the women’s parliamentary caucus succeeded in getting women into 50 per cent of parliamentary leadership positions by insisting that women’s résumés must also be evaluated for such positions. Women in parliament also succeeded in getting women elected to half of the positions on the National Judicial Council, the government body responsible for selecting, evaluating and training candidates for magistrates in the Supreme Court of Justice, as well as candidates for the Appeals Court, the District Courts and Justices of the Peace.

Conclusions

The substantial changes in women's political representation that have taken place over the past two decades have been a global phenomenon, and there have been a growing number of conventions, declarations, agreements and policies in support of gender-balanced decision-making. According to participants in the regional consultations, progress has not been easy or automatic. Success in electing and empowering women in politics has required a great deal of effort over many years. Moreover, full equality has not yet been reached: women still constitute a minority of political office-holders worldwide and their effectiveness in these positions is often undermined by ongoing resistance to women's political participation. In addition to mapping normative frameworks and best practices, discussions also focused on identifying remaining challenges and suggesting further mechanisms that might be pursued to attain greater parity in political life.

One set of challenges is rooted in basic political structures. Democracy is a relatively new phenomenon in some parts of the world, and some countries still lack some of the key components necessary for healthy democratic governance. High levels of corruption, in particular, may make it difficult for new groups of participants to enter politics. A second issue relates to the enforcement of international treaties, which may have the force of international law but still not translate into concrete actions at the country level. A third problem stems from an information deficit: while statistics on women's representation in legislatures are collected systematically for all countries, this is not true of other levels of governance—especially the local level, which constitutes the bulk of political positions in a given country. In addition to being the level of government at which representatives may have the greatest direct policy impact, participating in local politics can provide an important entry point to national politics. The lack of knowledge about, and attention paid to, women's representation at this level has been a crucial oversight in both global and national debates.

A second group of challenges concerns gender stereotypes. Despite the presence of greater numbers of women in political office, societal norms and practices contribute to a cultural mindset that politics is a man's job. The tendency to associate women with household and family duties can reduce opportunities for political participation—as well as creating specific burdens for women when they do decide to engage in politics. Traditional views on gender roles mean that many women do not even entertain the idea of running for office. They may also be less inclined to support other women who put themselves forward as candidates. Lack of widespread education for girls can compound these barriers, as well as tenets of customary or religious law that reinforce male dominance in the name of culture or local tradition. These societal dynamics can undermine normative advances in favour of gender-balanced decision-making made at the international, regional and national levels. As one consultation participant observed, achieving true parity democracy will therefore require cultivating a commitment to parity at the cultural level as well.

A third set of challenges relates to resources. Consultation participants across the various regions shared the view that women rarely face a level playing field in politics. Two barriers, in particular, were raised repeatedly across the consultations: political financing and media coverage. In many countries, the costs of contesting political office are very high. Due to gender inequalities in society, women are less likely than men to have personal monetary resources to spend on political campaigns. Due to discrimination, they may also find it more difficult to raise funds from outside donors, who may prefer to support men—either because they view men as more viable candidates, or because they believe that men are more open to



corruption. Political parties also tend to allocate more money to male candidates, enabling their electoral victories and, in turn, reinforcing perceptions that men are ‘more electable’ than women. The media also plays a crucial role in shaping women’s electoral prospects, as the bulk of political coverage in most countries is devoted to male politicians. Coverage is also highly gendered in terms of its content, often underplaying women’s qualifications and performance in comparison to men.

Solutions to these various challenges entail building on, but also going beyond, existing strategies. Ways to deepen democracy include working with electoral management bodies to ensure that gender quotas are fully respected, as well as implementing the gender equality recommendations of election observer reports to promote more inclusive elections. Convening forums, summits and conferences to identify and share success stories can help strengthen adherence to international commitments by transferring practical knowledge on how these global accords might be translated effectively into national laws and policies. More coalitions between local organizations and international actors such as International IDEA, UNDP and the Community of Democracies can further facilitate these exchanges of information by providing both technical and financial support. Partnering with youth organizations might also promote sustainability and long-term impact at the country level. Data collection initiatives on local politics could model themselves on the ATENEA project in Latin America, systematically measuring the degree of gender parity at different levels and in different arenas of government.

Tackling gender stereotypes is a difficult but urgent task. Many consultation participants emphasized the need to provide capacity-building programmes for women interested in entering politics, to bolster their confidence and equip them with the skills necessary to win elections. Another suggestion was to use online technologies to promote leadership among young women and thus encourage more women over time to run for political office. Once elected, women should receive further training and support to ensure that they are effective, including orientation sessions to acquaint them with the formal and informal rules of policymaking. Training could also focus on how to integrate a gender perspective into their political work. Other strategies to empower women more broadly might encompass forming a parliamentary women’s caucus, as well as developing alliances between women in politics and women in civil society.

Overcoming gender gaps in resources requires close working with governments, political parties and media outlets. In Latin America, political parties allocate women a small fraction of the financial resources they accord to male candidates, an inequality that is exacerbated by the fact that men often also have greater access to non-public sources of political financing. Potential solutions include conducting analyses to compare how men’s and women’s campaigns are financed, to better diagnosis the dynamics at work in different countries and political parties; developing and strengthening state regulations on public funding, for example by mandating parity in party support for the campaigns of male and female candidates; and setting up specific funds, at the party or civil society level, to support women as candidates. Strategies to overcome the lack of equitable media coverage might involve working with journalists to raise awareness of gender bias, and encouraging them to avoid gender stereotypes in the language and images they use to discuss female politicians and, more broadly, when deciding which politicians they include in their news stories. Media and social media outlets could also serve as platforms for promoting parity democracy, especially at election time.

Cutting across these various solutions, finally, consultation participants stressed that in order to make further progress, campaigns for gender parity in politics should work on cultivating two types of alliances. The first is with political parties, which play a direct role in

recruiting, nominating and supporting political candidates. Parties are therefore indispensable to achieving equal representation; their commitment can help deepen democracy, combat gender stereotypes and provide the resources needed to level the political playing field.

The second type of alliance is with men—particularly, but not exclusively, those in political leadership positions. Male resistance to women’s political participation is a key factor driving women’s political exclusion. The support of male allies can therefore be crucial for tipping the balance and leading to efforts to encourage and support female candidates. Developing such alliances, however, is not only important for creating new opportunities for women to participate in political life. Greater gender balance increases the likelihood that political debates and policy reforms will identify and address new and neglected issues alike, enabling societies—of both men and women—to thrive.

References

- African Union (AU), ‘Constitutive Act of the African Union adopted by the Thirty-Sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government’, 11 July 2000, Lomé, Togo, <https://au.int/web/sites/default/files/pages/32020-file-constitutivact_en.pdf>, accessed 14 August 2017
- , ‘African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance’, adopted by the 8th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union, Addis Ababa, 30 January 2007, <http://www.achpr.org/files/instruments/charter-democracy/aumincom_instr_charter_democracy_2007_eng.pdf>, accessed 7 January 2016
- African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, ‘Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa’ [Maputo Protocol], adopted 11 July 2003, <<http://www.achpr.org/instruments/women-protocol/>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), ‘Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region’ Bangkok, Thailand, 5 July 1988, <http://asean.org/?static_post=declaration-of-the-advancement-of-women-in-the-asean-region-bangkok-thailand-5-july-1988>, accessed 14 August 2017
- , ‘ASEAN Women unite to promote women’s leadership’, Singapore, 6 October 2016, <<http://asean.org/asean-women-unite-to-promote-womens-leadership/>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- Community of Democracies, International IDEA and United Nations Development Programme, ‘Advancing Women’s Political Participation: Asian Consultation on Gender Equality and Political Empowerment,’ Bali, Indonesia, 9–10 December 2016
- , ‘Advancing Women’s Political Participation: African Consultation on Gender Equality and Political Empowerment,’ Johannesburg, South Africa, 9–10 March 2016
- , ‘Advancing Women’s Political Participation: Americas Consultation on Gender Equality and Political Empowerment,’ Mexico City, Mexico, 16 May 2017

- , ‘Advancing Women’s Political Participation: European Consultation on Gender Equality and Political Empowerment,’ Strasbourg, France, 10 November 2016
- , ‘Advancing Women’s Political Participation: Middle East and North Africa Consultation on Gender Equality and Political Empowerment,’ Tunis, Tunisia, 9–10 March 2017
- Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, ‘Recommendation (2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making’, adopted 12 March 2003, 831st meeting of Ministers’ Deputies, <<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewBlob.jsp?id=2229&SourceFile=1&&BlobId=2730967&DocId=2154&Index=no>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- , ‘Gender Equality Strategy 2014–17’, February 2014, <<https://rm.coe.int/1680590174>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- Council of the European Union, ‘Council Resolution of 27 March 1995 on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making’, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, C168(3), 4 July 1995, <[http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:31995Y0704\(02\)&qid=1502717820042](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:31995Y0704(02)&qid=1502717820042)>, accessed 14 August 2017
- , ‘Council Recommendation of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process’, 96/694/EC, 2 December 1996, <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:31996H0694>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), ‘Gender Statistics’, [n.d.], <<http://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- European Parliament, ‘Resolution on women in decision-making’, B5-0180/2000, 3 February 2000, <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B5-2000-0180&language=CS>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, and Instituto Nacional Electoral, ‘Observatorio de Participación Política de las Mujeres en México’, <<http://observatorio.inmujeres.gob.mx/>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- Inter-American Commission on Women, ‘Violencia y acoso contra las mujeres en el ámbito político’, <<http://www.oas.org/es/cim/violenciapolitica.asp>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- Inter-Parliamentary Union, ‘Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 1 July 2017’, <<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- , ‘Women in National Parliaments: Statistical Archive’, <<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- International IDEA, Inter-Parliamentary Union and Stockholm University, Quota Database, <<http://www.quotaproject.org/>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- Organization of American States (OAS), Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women, adopted 2 May 1948, entered into force 29 December 1954, <<http://oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-44.html>>, accessed 14 August 2017

- , Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women [Convención de Belém do Pará], adopted 9 June 1994, entered into force 5 March 1995, <<http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-61.html>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- , Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), <<http://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/about.asp>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- , Declaration on Political Harassment and Violence against Women, Lima, 15 October 2015, <<http://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/docs/Declaracion-ENG.pdf>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 'Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties', 2014, <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/120877?download=true>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- Pacific Islands Forum, 'Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration', August 2012, <http://www.pilonsec.org/images/stories/PLGED_intros.pdf>, accessed 21 August 2017
- ParlAmericas, 'Acoso político y violencia de género', <<http://www.parlamerica.org/es/gender-equality/political-violence.aspx>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- Sineau, M., 'Genderware: the Council of Europe and the participation of women in political life', 2003, <https://www.coe.int/t/dgap/democracy/Activities/Key-Texts/03_Summaries_of_all_Publications/Genderware_en.pdf>, accessed 21 August 2017
- Southern African Development Community, 'Protocol on Gender and Development', adopted 17 August 2008, entered into force 22 February 2013, <https://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/Protocol_on_Gender_and_Development_2008.pdf>, accessed 14 August 2017
- United Nations, 'Beijing Platform for Action', Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995, <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/fwcwn.html>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- , 'Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to transform our world', adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit, New York, 25–27 September 2015, <<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- United Nations CEDAW Committee, 'General Recommendation No. 23 to elaborate on article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women', 16th session, 1997, <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom23>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 'Quito Consensus', 14 August 2007, <<http://www.cepal.org/publicaciones/xml/5/29555/dsc1i.pdf>>, accessed 14 August 2017

- , ‘Background: XIII Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean’, Montevideo, 25–28 October 2016, <<http://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/13/en/background>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- , ‘Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030’, LC/CRM.13/5, March 2017, <<http://www.cepal.org/en/publications/41013-montevideo-strategy-implementation-regional-gender-agenda-within-sustainable>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Resolution 217A, 10 December 1948, <<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- , International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Resolution 2200A (XXI), adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976, <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- , Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981, <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>>, accessed 14 August 2017
- , ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ [The 2030 Agenda], A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015, <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E>, accessed 14 August 2017
- United Nations Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 25 (57), CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, 27 August 1996, <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2f21%2fRev.1%2fAdd.7&Lang=en>, accessed 21 August 2017
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, S/RES/1325, 31 October 2000, <[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000))>, accessed 14 August 2017
- UN Women, International IDEA, and United Nations Development Programme, ‘ATENEA: Mecanismo de aceleración de la participación política de las mujeres en América Latina, República Dominicana y Haití’, <<http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20americas/documentos/publicaciones/2017/07/folleto%20atenea%20ok%20sin%20marcas%20web.pdf?la=es&vs=3949>>, accessed 21 August 2017
- UN Women and Latin American Parliament, ‘Norma Marco para consolidar la Democracia Paritaria’, December 2015, <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20americas/documentos/publicaciones/norma%20marco%20democracia%20paritaria%20parlatino.pdf?v=1&d=20151201T172235>>, accessed 21 August 2017