

Forum: UN Women

Issue: Implementing and developing measures to support the involvement of women in governance

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Introduction:

The involvement of women in executive government positions is essential to not only achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, but also to reach greater gender equality and a world of equal representation. Though as of September 1, 2021 the UN Women describes that worldwide, only 26 women are serving as Heads of State and/or Government in 24 countries. To drive change in the future, there is a need to accelerate not only the number of women in government positions but create change by measuring women's political empowerment and tracking women's share of legislative and ministerial positions over time, making sure that it transfers into meaningful political influence (Foreign Policy). The increase in women representation and involvement in decision-making are key to further highlight and bring about action on many important issues such as violence against women, and is also proven to bring about better outcomes to discussions, thus gender mainstreaming. Urgent action is required to achieve the internationally agreed target of 'balanced political participation and power-sharing between women and men in decision-making', set during the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Definition of Key Terms:

- 1. Gender mainstreaming:** Gender mainstreaming refers to the integration of a gender equality perspective across all government action. It is a strategy that helps governments make better decisions to achieve gender equality. A commitment to gender mainstreaming is one of the most effective ways that governments can support and promote gender equality.
- 2. Oppression:** Oppression is defined as prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control. Under this context, focus will be on the oppression against women who hold government positions.

- 3. Structural barriers:** obstacles that collectively affect a group disproportionately and perpetuate or maintain stark disparities in outcomes
- 4. Political participation:** Political participation is any number of voluntary activities undertaken by the public to influence public policy either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make those policies.

Background Information

History

Women's political participation has been a significant issue for decades now. In terms of gender equality around the world, progress has been made, but it is slow and uneven. As of 2015, all countries provided women with the right to vote. Though in terms of political participation, there is a lot more work needed. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) describes, 'Women are still underrepresented in politics, parliaments and public life.' At the same time though they also explain that over the years, there has been growing recognition and acknowledgement of the problem. While just recognizing that the issue exists is not enough to create and drive change, it does help to stimulate dialogue and discussion. In recent years, there has been an increase in women's political participation, though they still remain far behind the representation of their male counterparts.

Action

Many countries and governments have made efforts to change the gender dynamics and ratio of gender representation in parliaments and other political forums. These are outside the overarching global support that the UN aims to drive, and rather more country specific action. Examples include reserving a specific percentage of seats for women in local and national government positions. Alongside this, many countries have set up systems to collect systemic data regarding the gender equality situation and understand women's experiences to be able to get an insight into current barriers that lead to low women involvement in politics. Furthermore, countries are also creating mandatory or voluntary recruitment targets for political parties and well-resourced party mechanisms in order to be able to identify, recruit, and support women candidates in politics.

Current Situation

Key barriers and stigmas as to why the involvement of women in government positions remains low : Women today face many structural, socioeconomic, institutional and cultural barriers while holding a pivotal role in politics and governmental decision making.

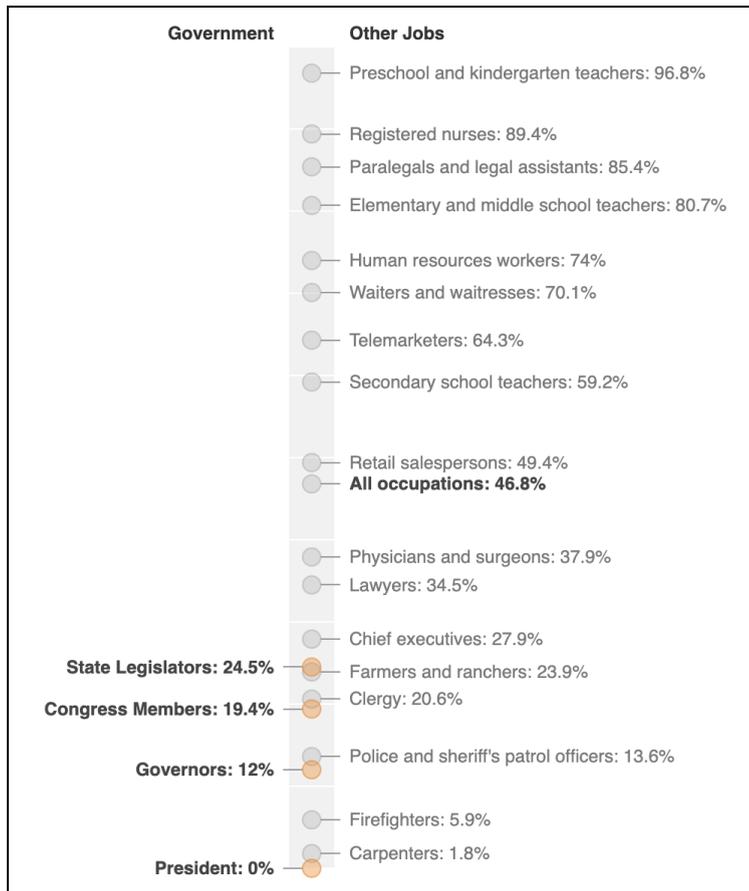


Image 1. A split of jobs that women are involved with in the United States of America collected and designed by bureau of labor statistics

1. Lack of self-confidence and belief

At a micro scale, it is described that one of the leading reasons for the low women representation is their lack of self confidence to run for office. Research conducted by American University professor of government Jennifer Lawless and Loyola Marymount University political science professor Richard Fox shows that women are much less likely to believe that they are qualified and have the required skill set and personality to run for office. This might also be a strong contributor to why many women do not run for 'core' ministers such as defence, finance, and foreign affairs.

2. Attitudes and gender stereotypes in society - (such as responsibility of household tasks and childcare)

Many women today are still expected to solely be the ones running the house while the man is expected to go out, work and earn for the family. These stigmas have been rooted deeply in society for decades and have a spill-over effect as they build a set notion of gender roles in society. Especially in conservative cultures, this limits women and may seem like a closure between them and the outside world, discouraging and wavering women's courage to run for governmental positions.

3. Low levels of education

Especially in LEDC's and developing countries, low levels of education poses a major impact on political participation. As a result of overall low literacy rates across countries, and the existing sociocultural barriers that stop girls from attending school, both lead to lower levels of qualifications and skills of women, thus they are unable to apply for governmental positions, and even if they do, would have a very slim chance of being able to secure their position. This also traps women in the cycle of household work and has a negative spillover effect on future generations due to the lack of initiative to create significant large-scale change in this field.

4. Discriminatory laws and institutions

Often in many countries, existing structural barriers through discriminatory laws and institutions have the affect of limiting women's options to engage in governmental positions. Capacity gaps mean women are less likely than men to have the education, contacts and resources needed to become effective leaders. It is often also seen that male candidates pick on many gender stereotypical arguments against female candidates, tapping into an ingrained patriarchal mindset that discourages women from political participation. Additionally, even if women do get governmental positions and representations, often they are not fully involved in the decision making process or lack agency and power to create and drive change.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

UN Women

The UN Women plays a global role in identifying aspects of this problem and helping member nations find and comply with solutions. They have taken part in and initiated many different events and projects to help and support progress in this regard (can be found below in the 'UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events' section.) They have been pivotal in their action though more support by countries to further support the UN Women's projects would lead to higher success rate of these projects (ways to do this could be a potential solution in the resolution)

Rwanda

Rwanda has the highest percentage of women involved in governmental roles and political participation. In the country, more than half of the seats are occupied by women, the highest record for any country in this regard. The change was accelerated and driven mainly by President Paul Kagame. It is worth looking at their actions and employed solutions to replicate the same in other countries and include them in the resolution in hope for similar results. Some of the actions by the government include - 30 percent of parliamentary seats be reserved for women, girls' education encouraged, women appointed to leadership roles, like government ministers and police chiefs.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The country has made significant improvement in the percentage of women in political participation. United Arab Emirates. They have effectively achieved gender equality in the parliament — with 50% of parliamentarians being women, compared to just 20% in the past years. The country made an impressive improvement, jumping from 85th in the world in 2019, to third in the world. This came as a result of President Sheikh Khalifa calling for women to occupy half the parliamentary seats in 2018.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- As of 2011, the UN General Assembly's resolution on women's political participation notes the key barriers that act as obstacles to women political participation. They emphasised on barriers such as 'discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women' while acknowledging the key problem that 'Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere'
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women-aims to uphold women's right to participate in public life
- Beijing Platform for Action- calls for removing barriers to equal participation.
- Millennium Development Goals- measuring progress towards gender equality in part by the proportion of women in parliamentary seats.
- Provided training for women political candidates to help build their capacities
- Offering voter and civic education and sensitization campaigns on gender equality.
- Backing gender equality advocates in calling on political parties, governments and others to do their part in empowering women.
- Engaging in initiatives that encourage young men and women to get involved in advocacy around making gender equality measures central to public policymaking.
- Promoting the inclusion of women in political and electoral processes

Possible Solutions

- 1. Level playing field for women and men-** providing equal opportunities from a young age to open equal opportunities to all and provide each individual with the same strong foundation. This might include access to healthcare, housing, education, food, water and more basic necessities.
- 2. Education campaigns and awareness campaigns-** to raise the recognition of this problem and increase awareness about its existence. Would help to drive change from a young age and might encourage and motivate the younger generation to drive change in this aspect and create a more inclusive society.
- 3. Reforms to remove discriminatory laws-** having centralised country laws rather than many different and varied state laws regarding the involvement of women. This might include calls for greater gender equality and inclusive institutions.
- 4. Setting up committees to come up with varied ways to encourage increased women political participation-** to allow for greater female

political participation, which encourages more women to join as a spillover effect. It motivates and encourages others and empowers them, providing a sense of self confidence and belief in one's own capabilities.

Bibliography

Useful Links

1. [Understanding the meaning of 'Representation of Women' by political influence and power, not just numerically](#)
2. [Official UN Women Website with facts and statistics](#)
3. [Considering some key barriers to low women involvement in the government](#)
4. [Summary of progress over the years and key barriers](#)

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