



## Gender Equality in Parliaments and Political Corruption

The most recent research on gender and political corruption overturns the view that, in and of itself, increasing the number of women elected to political office decreases political corruption.<sup>1</sup>

The reality is far more nuanced than a simple “numbers game”. The broader social and institutional context, in which female and male politicians operate, profoundly – and asymmetrically – shapes the relationship between gender and corruption in global politics.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, “...women are less susceptible to corruption in democracies but are equally susceptible in autocratic societies.”<sup>3</sup>

As a result, an increase in the number of women in parliament will tend to reduce corruption, if and only if the country in question has reasonably robust systems to uphold democracy and to enforce anti-corruption laws. However, in the absence of such systems, the gender blend of parliament is unlikely to have any impact on the levels of national corruption.

The Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption’s (GOPAC) Women in Parliament Network has concluded that to reduce corruption, countries should recruit greater female participation in politics in tandem with taking steps to increase institutional political transparency, to strengthen parliamentary oversight, and to enforce strong penalties for corruption.

## A 10-year gap analysis: The relation between perceived corruption and women parliamentarians

A ten-year analysis of the proportion of women elected to national parliaments, and Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI) national scores, shows no general worldwide correlation between changes in parliamentary gender balance and changes in political corruption.

However, if the nations of the world are segmented, some conclusions can be drawn with respect to democracies with strong parliamentary oversight and countries with poor parliamentary oversight. The examples of Arab region countries and Scandinavian countries are particularly instructive.

Countries in the Arab region had an average of 5.68 per cent women in their parliaments in 2003, the lowest average any region of the globe. In 2013, the proportion increased significantly to 13.62 per cent, but still remained the lowest across the globe.

As the Arab Spring revolutions amply demonstrated, many countries in the Arab region also have histories of being dominated by dictators or oligarchs, and therefore having weak parliamentary oversight institutions. The toppling of authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia exposed large cases of grand corruption enabled by undemocratic concentrations of power and disempowered parliamentary systems.

On average, the Arab region countries scored consistently poorly on the CPI, with an average CPI score of 41.3 in 2003 and 38.9 in 2013.

In contrast, countries in the Nordic region had an average of 27.68 per cent women in parliament in 2003 and 32.47 per cent in 2013.

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have traditionally been strongholds of parliamentary democracy, and have harboured effective financial oversight bodies.

On average, the Scandinavian countries scored an average 71 on the CPI index in 2003 and 72.3 in 2013, the highest of any region of the globe.

In Arab states, a significant increase in the proportion of female parliamentarians in the context of weak oversight was not correlated with any reduction in corruption. In Scandinavian states, a modest increase in the proportion of female parliamentarians in the context of strong oversight was correlated with modest reductions in corruption.

## Facts and Figures

- According to UN Women:
  - only 20.9 per cent of national parliamentarians were female as of 1 July 2013, a slow increase from 11.6 per cent in 1995
  - Globally, there are 37 States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, as of July 2013
- According to the UN, in 2012 there were 17 countries with women as head of government, head of state, or both, which has more than doubled since 2005.
- The Inter-Parliamentary Union has found that prejudice and cultural perceptions about the role of women, together with a lack of financial resources, frequently hinder women's access to political life.

## Recommended Resources

- <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>
- <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>
- <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/fast-facts/english/FF-Gender-and-Democratic-Governance.pdf>

1. Nawaz, Farzana, "State of Research on Gender and Corruption" U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, <http://www.u4.no/publications/state-of-research-on-gender-and-corruption>, June 2009
2. Esarey, Justin & Chirillo, Gina "Fairer Sex or Purity Myth? Corruption, Gender and Institutional Context." <http://jee3.web.rice.edu/corruption.pdf>, September 2013
3. Ibid & Sung, Hung-En, "Fairer Sex or Fairer System? Gender and Corruption Revisited", Social Forces 82: Dec 2003
4. Irene Ndungu, Institute for Security Studies, "Rwanda. Does the Dominance of Women in Rwanda's Parliament Signify Real Change." <http://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/does-the-dominance-of-women-in-rwandas-parliament-signify-real-change>, 12 November 2013

### **Case study: Rwanda's rise to world record women representation in parliament and the fight against corruption**

Rwanda is the only country in the world where an outright majority of parliamentarians are female. As of 2013, 63.8 per cent of Rwanda's parliamentarians are women.<sup>4</sup> This is, in part, the result of concerted efforts by Rwandans to increase female participation in politics, such as the creation of a gender quota system employing seats reserved for women and the establishment of Legislated Candidate Quotas.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 17.1 per cent of Rwanda's parliamentarians were women in 1997, 25.7 per cent in 2002, and 48.8 per cent in 2003 when the gender quota was established. In 2008, the percentage grew again to 56 per cent.

Simultaneously, Rwanda also strengthened parliamentary oversight mechanisms. In April 2011, the Rwanda parliament established a new Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to examine financial misconduct within public institutions and to report misuse of public funds. Previously, no parliamentary body had this responsibility, despite evidence of continuous theft of public funds.

In 2012, the PAC released its examination of state finances, which reported Rwf 9.7 billion (US\$16.3 million) lost in 2009–2010 as a result of failings in government operations. The PAC presented recommendations for government reforms. The review also established the requirement for parliament to act to remedy gaps in the management of public funds.

During this same period, Rwanda consistently improved its CPI score, beginning with its inclusion in the CPI analysis in 2005. Over the last 9 years, Rwanda has improved its CPI by 23 points, a number well above the 8-point global average improvement between 2003 and 2013. In 2013, Rwanda scored 53 on the CPI, and was ranked as the 49th least corrupt country, out of the 177 countries surveyed.

Although Rwanda's CPI score leaves room for improvement, it has experienced a significant reduction in corruption, clearly correlated with an increase in female political participation, in the context of improving systems of parliamentary oversight.

## Recommendations

GOPAC's Women in Parliament Network is asking our national chapters and members to:

1. Increase women's participation in politics and parliament, as an intrinsic part of their broader anti-corruption efforts, by:
  - Supporting public information campaigns on the need for and importance of women's participation in political life;
  - Reviewing their political parties' constitutions, policies, and operations, to eliminate any active discrimination against women, and any passive acceptance of discrimination against women;
  - Ensuring measures are taken to give equally qualified men and women equal opportunities to belong to decision-making bodies at all levels in their political parties' structure, at the local, regional, and national levels;
  - Creating a women's branch in their political parties, which would be a forum for discussing challenges, including corruption, encountered by female political actors;
  - Creating an equality committee in their political parties to ensure respect for the principle of equality, including within their parties themselves, composed of both women and men;
  - Introducing rules within their political parties that in general elections, the parties must field a minimum number of candidates of each gender.
2. Strengthen parliamentary oversight mechanisms by:
  - Ensuring that parliamentarians have the power to scrutinise and oversee all state revenues and expenditures;
  - Drafting, strengthening, and passing legislation to mandate parliamentary oversight of government use and management of state financial instruments, including procurement, contracts, grants, and loans;
  - Legislating standards for the government to report to parliament on revenues, expenditures, and outcomes;
  - Legislating standards for the public service, including on appointment, compensation, and accountability;
  - Establishing, an independent Audit Office, reporting to parliament, with the authority to audit all government departments, reports, and operations; the power to compel the production of documents and the testimony of witnesses; and the obligation to report to parliament promptly and publicly on its findings.
3. Advocate for and work with partners such as the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, NGOs, and academic institutions, to conduct research to further advance the analysis of gender equality and anti-corruption.

GOPAC established its Women's Parliamentary Network (WPN) in 2013. All interested members of GOPAC, irrespective of gender, are welcome to participate in the Network's work and activities.

### WPN Members

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This position paper was prepared by the GOPAC Global Secretariat. GOPAC's global parliamentary alliance gratefully acknowledges the intellectual contributions and research efforts of Livia Belcea, Akaash Maharaj, and Priya Sood.

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GOPAC is a worldwide alliance of parliamentarians working together to combat corruption, strengthen good government, and uphold the rule of law. Based in Ottawa, Canada, GOPAC has 53 national chapters on 6 continents. GOPAC supports its members' efforts through original research, global anti corruption capacity building, and international peer support.

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