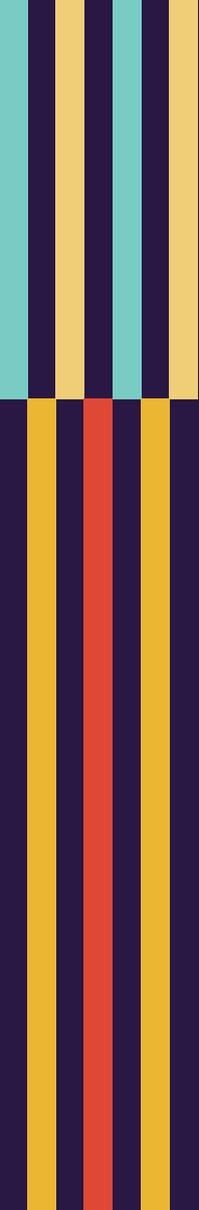




Navigating *Setbacks*:
Women's Political
***Representation* in**
the 2024 *Super*
***Election* Year**



Saskia Brechenmacher



Colmena fund
for Women's Political Power



2024 is a “*super year*” for elections *globally*.

Citizens across 73 countries are going to the polls, from global powerhouses like India and the United States to small island states that rarely take the global spotlight, such as the Solomon Islands and Comoros¹. Some of these elections are meaningful contests over political power. Others are unfolding in autocracies like Russia and Cambodia where the playing field is firmly rigged in favor of the status quo. In many countries, people are voting in contexts marked by both democratic erosion as well as continued political contestation (see appendix).²

Amidst this period of political change, one question has so far received little attention: how is the election super year reshaping women’s political representation around the world? Globally, *women remain severely underrepresented in political life*. At the beginning of this year, only 27 countries were led by a woman, and women held only 23.3 percent of ministerial positions and 26.9

percent of parliamentary seats in single or lower houses globally.³ According to the World Economic Forum’s Political Empowerment Index, it will take another 162 years to achieve parity in political empowerment.⁴ This analysis takes stock of trends in women’s political leadership seven months into 2024. As of July, forty-seven electoral contests have already taken place, including thirty legislative elections. How have women candidates fared in these contests? What successes and setbacks are emerging? And what trends deserve further analysis? This briefing paper begins by analyzing global trends, excluding only countries categorized by the Varieties of Democracy project as “closed autocracies” marked by high repression and violence.⁵ It then offers brief snapshots of five elections across different regions that saw meaningful or surprising political developments. It concludes by highlighting five emerging themes that deserve further analysis.

1 International IDEA, “The 2024 Global Elections Super-Cycle,” accessed August 16, 2024, <https://www.idea.int/initiatives/the-2024-global-elections-supercycle>.

2 Thomas Carothers, “Democracy and Geopolitics are on the Ballot in 2024,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 10, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2024/01/democracy-and-geopolitics-are-on-the-ballot-in-2024?lang=en>.

3 UN Women, “Facts and Figures: Women’s Leadership and Political Participation,” <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>.

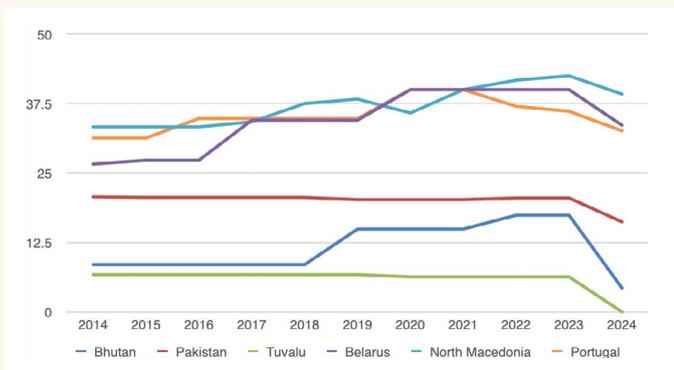
4 World Economic Forum, “Global Gender Gap Report 2023,” <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2023/#performance-by-subindex>.

5 This analysis excludes the following countries categorized by V-Dem as closed autocracies: Iran, Syria, North Korea, South Sudan, Chad, Kuwait, and Uzbekistan.

The global picture: more *setbacks* than *victories*

So far, elections in 2024 have brought more setbacks than gains for women's political representation. Of the twenty-nine countries (including the European Union) that have held elections for their single or lower house of parliament in the first half of the year, nineteen saw a decline in women's parliamentary representation relative to December 2023.⁶ Several countries registered decreases in women's representation of three or more percentage points, including Bhutan, North Macedonia, Pakistan⁷, Portugal and Tuvalu (see Figure 4). In Mexico, women's representation in the lower house remained the same.

Figure 2: Countries with the starkest decreases in legislative representation (in percentage)⁸



Source: IPU Parline

In contrast, only nine countries marked progress with respect to women's legislative representation in their single or lower house of parliament, with the Dominican Republic, Mongolia, and the United Kingdom achieving the largest gains. Women's share of legislative seats also increased in El Salvador, although the total number of women in the legislature *decreased* (and women's representation remained below the threshold reached in previous years (see Figure 3)). South Africa saw a minimal decrease in women's representation, yet from a high threshold. As a result, South Africa—together with Mexico and Rwanda—remains among the countries that have achieved or come close to achieving gender parity in parliament, thanks in large part to strong legislative or party-level gender quotas.

6 Data is drawn from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's monthly ranking of women in national parliaments as of August 2024. These data points exclude Thailand and Cambodia, which only held elections for their upper houses of parliament.

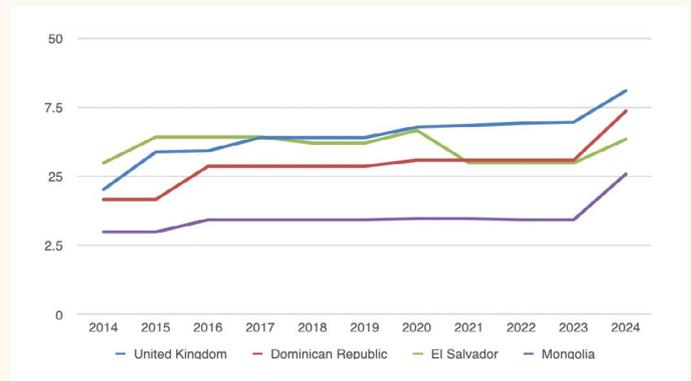
7 The decrease in women's representation in Pakistan is likely due to a significant share of reserved seats not yet being filled due to an ongoing political dispute. The number may thus change in the coming months.

8 Includes all countries with a decrease of more than three percent in women's share of seats in the lower or single house of parliament relative to December 2023.

Of the eighteen countries that held presidential elections, nine countries had women candidates on the ballot. Three countries elected women leaders: Iceland (Halla Tómasdóttir), Mexico (Claudia Sheinbaum), and North Macedonia (Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova). Both Sheinbaum and Siljanovska-Davkova are the first women to become president of their respective country. In Lithuania, Ingrida Simonyte lost her presidential bid but was re-appointed as Prime Minister.

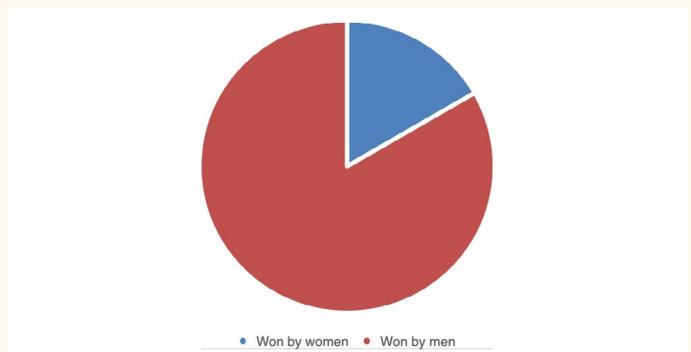
Liberal and electoral democracies—as defined by the Varieties of Democracy project—saw relatively fewer setbacks in women’s leadership than electoral autocracies. Half of liberal and electoral democracies that held elections suffered a decline in women’s representation, compared to 70 percent of electoral autocracies. All three women elected as heads of government/state were elected in liberal or electoral democracies.

Figure 3: Countries with the starkest increases in legislative representation (in percentage)



Source: IPU Parline

Figure 4: Women winning presidential contests



Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

Key election snapshots

Mexico: *A milestone built on gender parity*



In June 2024, Mexico made history by electing Claudia Sheinbaum as the country's first woman president with more than sixty percent of the vote. Sheinbaum, who had previously served as mayor of Mexico City, enjoyed the backing of the popular incumbent, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and promised to build on his political legacy.⁹ The election was unique in that both of the top contenders were women and both were from minority groups: Sheinbaum is of Jewish origin, whereas her opponent, businesswoman and senator Xóchitl Gálvez, has indigenous roots. *Yet women's successes in the election go far beyond the presidential level.* Women will also govern nearly half of the country's states, and Mexico will have the fourth largest contingent of congresswomen in the world.¹⁰ Women outnumbered male candidates in both gubernatorial and congressional races.¹¹

These results are the fruit of years of mobilization that have built a legal framework focused on gender parity in leadership. Back in 1996, Mexican advocates first secured a recommendation that parties nominate 30 percent women. Although it was later made mandatory, parties used various loopholes to evade the rule. In response, women activists, politicians, and bureaucrats continued to push for legislative changes, ultimately securing a constitutional commitment to

gender parity in the federal Congress and the state legislatures in 2014 (a reform that was further expanded in 2019).¹² As a result, women politicians have made rapid gains, expanding their share of congressional seats from 26 percent in 2011 to 50 percent in 2021. Women are also at the helm of other key state institutions, including the Supreme Court and the National Electoral Institute.

Despite these successes, gender biases and stereotypes persist. Sheinbaum, for instance, had to fend off sexist commentary about her appearance and allegations that she was Obrador's "puppet."¹³ She now faces many pressing issues, including how to mitigate endemic violence by Mexico's drug cartels. It is worth noting that gender issues were not front and center of the presidential campaign, *with issues such as gender-based violence and unpaid care work receiving only limited airtime.*¹⁴ The election was also not without controversy: at least thirteen candidates for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate have been accused of taking seats reserved for indigenous and Afro-Mexican people despite not being legitimate representatives of those communities. According to formal rules, parties must nominate at least thirty-four indigenous candidates as federal and provincial deputies and five as senators.¹⁵

9 Vanessa Buschschlüter, "Mexico Elects Claudia Sheinbaum as First Female President," BBC News, June 3, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp4475gwny10>,

10 Georgina De La Fuente and Fatma Tawfik, "Women are Front and Center in Mexican Politics. What Can the U.S. Learn?" MS Magazine, June 11, 2024, <https://msmagazine.com/2024/06/11/women-are-front-and-center-in-mexican-politics-what-can-the-u-s-learn/>.

11 Ibid.

12 Jennifer M. Piscopo, "'Parity in Everything': What Mexico Can Teach Us About Women's Representation," Ms Magazine, June 4, 2021, <https://msmagazine.com/2021/06/04/mexico-midterm-elections-parity-women-representation-politics/>.

13 De La Fuente and Tawfik, "Women are Front and Center in Mexican Politics. What Can the U.S. Learn?"

14 Diana Baptista, "Mexico's First Female President Offers Little on Women's Rights," Context, June 3, 2024, <https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/mexicos-first-female-president-offers-little-on-womens-rights>.

15 Luis Fernando Lozano, "Suman 13 Quejas por Candidaturas Indígenas en Elección 2024, ¿Con Qué Criterios Valida el INE a las y los Aspirantes?" El Sabueso, March 13, 2024, <https://animalpolitico.com/verificacion-de-hechos/te-explico/candidaturas-indigenas-quejas-elecciones-2024>.

Mongolia: *A new constitutional framework*

In Mongolia, a new constitutional framework also drove significant gains in women's parliamentary representation. Despite being located between Russia and China, the country has established itself as one of the leading democracies in Asia, with political power regularly alternating between two major parties, the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) and the Democratic Party (DP).¹⁶

In 2023, the MPP government passed a constitutional amendment that expanded parliamentary seats from 76 to 126—48 of which are elected through a proportionate representation system. In addition, the reform introduced a mandatory 30 percent gender quota for political parties' candidate list, a threshold that is set to increase to 40 percent in 2028.¹⁷ The stated impetus for these reforms was to ensure greater representation for smaller political parties, especially after Mongolia in 2022 and 2023 saw multiple rounds of mass protests by young people

frustrated with bad governance. The MPP-led government has also sought to position itself as a leader on gender issues, for instance by holding the first meeting of female foreign ministers in July 2023.¹⁸

The June 2024 election was the first to be held under the new constitution. The MPP retained its majority, albeit with a smaller margin and with a stronger parliamentary opposition faction. Thanks to the new gender quota, *the number of women parliamentarians increased dramatically, from 13 to 32*. Most women parliamentarians were elected through the proportional representation system, while eight were directly elected.¹⁹ Although Mongolia now sits above the regional average, it remains far from gender parity. Perceptions of corruption and smear campaigns targeting women candidates continue to discourage many women from engaging in politics.²⁰

16 Maria A. Blackwood, "Parliamentary Elections in Mongolia," Congressional Research Service, July 9, 2024, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN12390>.

17 Bolor Lkhaajav, "Can Recent Constitutional Reforms Augment Women's Role in Mongolia's Democracy?" The Diplomat, July 14, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/07/can-recent-constitutional-reforms-augment-womens-role-in-mongolias-democracy/>

18 Leonie Stamm, "Mongolia Leans in to Feminist Foreign Policy," German Council on Foreign Relations, July 3, 2023, <https://dgafp.org/en/research/publications/mongolia-leans-feminist-foreign-policy>.

19 Blackwood, "Parliamentary Elections in Mongolia."

20 Agence France Presse, "Women 'Changing the Game' in Mongolia's Patriarchal Politics," June 27, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240627-women-changing-the-game-in-mongolia-s-patriarchal-politics>.

Senegal: *Democracy prevails, gender equality is in question*

Senegalese citizens celebrated the March 2024 presidential elections as a victory for democracy. 44-year-old opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye emerged as the clear winner, promising a new era of political change. The run-up to the election had been marred by significant tension as former president Macky Sall initially attempted to delay the election and retain power past the end of his second term.²¹

In many ways, the elections were a testament to Senegalese women's increasing political power. Women protested against Sall's threatened power grab, and women's groups such as Etu Jamm deployed hundreds of observers to protect the voting process.²² Prominent women politicians like former prime minister Aminata Touré pressured the president to step aside. The election was also the first since 2012 to include a woman on the presidential ballot, with Anta Babcar Ngom, the 40-year-old CEO of a poultry company, throwing her hat into the ring. Like Mexico, Senegal has institutionalized gender parity: a 2010 Law on Parity mandates total gender parity across

all partially or fully elected institutions, which has produced one of the highest shares of female lawmakers in the world.²³

Although resistance against the law persists, it has helped normalize women's political leadership in the eyes of the public. In 2019, for instance, Dakar elected its first female mayor since independence, Soham El Wardini.²⁴

Yet the 2024 presidential election was not an unmitigated success for Senegal's women's movement. The country's main opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko, was barred from competing after being convicted of a coercive sexual relationship with a young woman. Although his supporters dismissed these charges as politically motivated, Sonko made headlines for making sexist and racist comments about his accuser's appearance.²⁵ The case derailed his presidential ambitions, yet Sonko has now assumed the position of prime minister, without ever apologizing for his remarks.²⁶ In another setback, the new government includes only four women out of a total of twenty-five senior officials, a decline relative to the previous administration.²⁷ The announcement provoked

21 OHCHR, "Senegal Election is a Boost for Coup-prone Region," June 6, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2024/06/senegal-election-boost-coup-prone-region>.

22 Ibid.

23 Trans-Saharan Elections Project, "Gender Quotas and Representation – Senegal," <https://tsep.africa.ufl.edu/gender-quotas-and-representation/senegal/>

24 Ayen Deng Bior, "Women Are Fighting for More Than Political Power in Senegal's Presidential Election," The Christian Science Monitor, March 22, 2024, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2024/0322/Women-are-fighting-for-more-than-political-power-in-Senegal-s-presidential-election>.

25 Ibid.

26 Jessica Moody, "Senegal's New Government Is Bad News for Women's Rights," World Politics Review, May 17, 2024, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/senegal-womens-rights-gender-equality/>.

27 Noémie Landais, "Senegal's New Government – A Gender Perspective," Africa Practice, July 3, 2024, <https://africapractice.com/senegals-new-government-a-gender-perspective/>.

a groundswell of opposition, with more 250 women’s organizations condemning the lack of attention to gender parity during a time of democratic renewal.²⁸ The new government has also dissolved the Ministry of Women and Children and replaced it with a Ministry of Family and Solidarities, a move that may dilute the new administration’s

focus on women’s issues.²⁹ Yet Faye has also appointed a woman as Deputy Chief of Staff and proposed a new law focused on women’s sustainable economic empowerment. These various steps suggest that the new government is still finding its policy footing on gender issues and seeking to balance conflicting demands.³⁰

28 Sheriff Bojang Jnr, “Senegal: Anger and Concern Over Low Proportion of Women in New Government,” Africa Report, April 8, 2024, <https://www.theafricareport.com/343490/senegal-anger-and-concern-over-low-proportion-of-women-in-new-government/>.

29 Ibid.

30 Landais, “Senegal’s New Government – A Gender Perspective.”

Bangladesh: *An unexpected breakthrough*

Two women — Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia — have served as prime ministers of Bangladesh for 31 out of 33 years since the country’s democratic transition in 1991. Yet despite this unusual streak of female rule, Bangladeshi women remain underrepresented in politics, disadvantaged by a lack of monetary power and political muscle as well as entrenched religious and patriarchal norms. Although women are often politically active at the grassroots, they struggle to rise into positions of leadership without family connections.³¹ Bangladeshi

law reserves 50 legislative seats (14 percent of the total) for women, but relatively few women are directly elected beyond these quota seats. Prior to 2024, women also made up only 9.2 percent of cabinet members.³²

The 2024 parliamentary elections took place in a context of increasing repression. Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League have governed Bangladesh since 2008, and Hasina was up for her fourth consecutive term. Under her leadership, Bangladesh has made important strides in gender equality in education, economic empowerment, and other sectors.

31 Aditto Rimón, “Women Still Underrepresented in Bangladesh Politics,” Voice of America, January 5, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/women-still-underrepresented-in-bangladesh-politics/7428384.html>.

32 Ruaksana Haque, “Despite a Woman at the Top, Bangladesh’s Politics are Still Male Dominated,” International Republican Institute, October 28, 2021, <https://www.iri.org/news/despite-a-woman-at-the-top-bangladeshs-politics-are-still-male-dominated/>.

In parallel, however, the country has also suffered from increasing authoritarianism, including rampant security force abuses, harassment of regime opponents, and enforced disappearances.³³ In this context of rising repression, it was not surprising that the ruling Awami League scored a resounding electoral victory, particularly since the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party had boycotted the polls. The election also brought little change for women's representation. In total, 99 out of 1,973 candidates vying for 300 non-reserved parliamentary seats were women, or 5 percent, a slight increase relative to 2018.³⁴ Yet only twenty were elected, two fewer than in the previous election. Accounting for the 50 reserved seats, women's representation thus decreased marginally, from 72 in 2018 to 70 in 2024.³⁵ But turnout for the election was low at around 40 percent, and international observers deemed the contest not free and fair.

What happened after the election was significantly more surprising. In July, campus protests broke out in response to the reinstatement of a thirty-percent job quota

for the descendants of 1971 independence war veterans, a move that many young people saw as a form of political patronage for regime supporters. Students took to the streets in large numbers, dissatisfied not only by the quota but by years of corruption, unfair elections, and a lack of economic opportunities. Hasina's government responded with brutal violence, deploying the army and arresting more than 10,000 protesters. At least 300 people were killed. Yet the protests only escalated further. Women took active parts in the uprising, and the image of veiled women protesting in the face of police brutality quickly emerged as a powerful symbol of the movement. Several women emerged as student leaders, including Nusrat Tabassum, Umama Fatema, and Rafia Rehnuma.³⁶ On August 5, Hasina resigned and fled the country.³⁷ A new interim government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, has promised to implement a wide range of political reforms and prepare the country for the future elections. Bangladesh thus finds itself at a moment marked both by uncertainty and hope.

33 Human Rights Watch, "Bangladesh: Prime Minister Hasina Resigns amid Mass Protests," August 6, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/06/bangladesh-prime-minister-hasina-resigns-amid-mass-protests>.

34 IPU Parline, "Bangladesh," <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/BD/BD-LC01/election/BD-LC01-E20240107/>; and Rimon, "Women Still Underrepresented in Bangladesh Politics."

35 IPU Parline, "Bangladesh," <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/BD/BD-LC01/election/BD-LC01-E20181230/>.

36 Farjana Mahbuba, "Why the End of Sheikh Hasina's Despotism Heralds a New Beginning for Muslim Women in Bangladesh," ABC, August 12, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/farjana-mahbuba-end-hasina-regime-new-era-dawns-bangladesh-women/104214576>; and Shahinur Sumi, "What The Women Of Bangladesh Fought For," Outlook, August 22, 2024, <https://www.outlookindia.com/international/what-the-women-of-bangladesh-fought-for>.

37 Human Rights Watch, "Bangladesh: Prime Minister Hasina Resigns amid Mass Protests."



Indonesia: *Regression in the legal framework*

In Indonesia, Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto in February 2024 won the biggest single-day election in the world with a clear majority. He had the backing of the popular incumbent Joko Widodo, and some critics fear that Subianto may continue some of his predecessors' strongman tendencies.³⁸

The elections highlighted the many challenges women face in Indonesian politics. **Financial barriers, conservative social norms, gendered political violence, and pervasive clientelist practices** all impede women's participation, particularly for women without political connections. In recent years, the country's conservative Islamic turn has also fueled greater opposition to gender equality in politics.³⁹ Additionally, the Electoral Commission weakened the legal framework governing women's representation. In 2019, Indonesians had voted more women into office than ever before, with women's share of seats rising to 20 percent (thanks to a quota requiring parties to nominate at least 30 percent women in every district). Yet ahead of the 2024 polls, the Commission decided to allow parties to round down when calculating the 30 percent threshold.

Although activists appealed the decision and won, the electoral commission decided not to enforce the court ruling, which meant that 18 percent of party lists failed to meet the 30 percent requirement.⁴⁰ In fact, only one party met the quota in each of the country's 84 electoral districts.⁴¹

There were also some bright spots. First, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 122 women were elected at the polls—a small decrease relative to the end of the last parliamentary term, but an increase relative to the 2019 elections, when only 100 women made it into parliament. There were also several lawsuits challenging political parties for not fulfilling the quota requirements, which led to re-votes in multiple electoral districts.⁴² Moreover, the newly formed Labor Party sought to win representation for domestic workers, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups by putting forward candidates from disadvantaged communities across the country.⁴³ However, the party only garnered 0.64 percent of the national vote, far below the 4 percent threshold needed to enter parliament.⁴⁴

38 Ananda Teresia and Stanley Widiyanto, "Indonesia's Prabowo Claims Victory After Presidential Election Rout," Reuters, February 14, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesia-votes-new-president-under-shadow-influential-incumbent-2024-02-13/>.

39 Sally White, Eve Warburton Pramashavira, Adrianus Hendrawan and Edward Aspinall, "Voting against Women: Political Patriarchy, Islam, and Representation in Indonesia," *Politics & Gender* 20, no. 2 (2023).

40 Sally White, "Even With a 30% Quota in Place, Indonesian Women Face an Uphill Battle Running for Office," *The Conversation*, February 7, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/even-with-a-30-quota-in-place-indonesian-women-face-an-uphill-battle-running-for-office-222387>.

41 Agence France Presse, "Indonesian Women Hope Election Breaks Them Into Boys' Club," *Voice of America*, January 28, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/indonesian-women-hope-election-breaks-them-into-boys-club/7456437.html>.

42 "Concerns Rise Over Women's Representation Setback in 2024 Election," *Indonesia Business Post*, July 2, 2024, <https://indonesiabusinesspost.com/insider/concerns-rise-over-womens-representation-setback-in-2024-election/>; and "Court Orders Revote, Vote Recount in Legislative Elections in Over a Dozen Regions," *The Jakarta Post*, June 13, 2024, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/indonesia/2024/06/13/court-orders-recote-vote-recount-in-legislative-elections-in-over-a-dozen-regions.html>.

43 Niniek Karmini, "As Indonesia Goes to the Polls, Women and Minority Candidates Face Challenges," *Associated Press*, February 10, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/indonesia-election-women-minority-candidates-representation-7a5b3bf50fd1a199d530b2e7d8e8dao3>.

44 Max Lane, "Indonesia's Labour Party After the Elections: Ambiguities Continue," *Fulcrum*, July 1, 2024, <https://fulcrum.sg/indonesias-labour-party-after-the-elections-ambiguities-continue/>.



Emerging *themes*

Victories for *democracy* are not always boons for *women's representation*

In several countries, elections brought encouraging democratic changes. In Senegal, for instance, President Faye's victory was a clear rebuke to Macky Sall's efforts to retain power.⁴⁵ In India, the opposition Congress party performed significantly better than expected, pushing Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party below the majority mark.⁴⁶ In South Africa, the African National Congress' loss of parliamentary majority also signaled an important shift, fueled by citizens' growing frustration with corruption and governance failures. Yet these moments of political renewal have not necessarily translated into women's increased representation, as evidenced by women's underrepresentation in the new Senegalese government. Whether or not the gains of

pro-democratic opposition parties translate into representational gains depends on these parties' commitments to gender equality within their own ranks. In India, for instance, the Congress party's congressional faction includes a smaller share of women than the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's faction, even though women have played key roles in India's pro-democratic resistance in recent years.⁴⁷

The flip side of this dynamic is that in some countries, increases in women's representation occurred in a context of rising authoritarianism, including in El Salvador and Rwanda. In both Cambodia and Thailand, women's representation increased in the upper houses of parliament—but in elections that were far from free and fair.⁴⁸

45 Josph Sany, "Senegal Just Saved its Democracy. That Helps All West Africa," U.S. Institute of Peace, April 4, 2024, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/04/senegal-just-saved-its-democracy-helps-all-west-africa>.

46 Sheikh Saaliq and Krutika Pathi, "India's Opposition, Written Off as Too Weak, Makes a Stunning Comeback to Slow Modi's Juggernaut," Associated Press, June 6, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/india-election-opposition-modi-ofd-ade9aaaod80072c3f15b6759969c>.

47 Sonali Verna, "What 2024 Lok Sabha Elections Tell About Women Representation in Indian Politics," Times of India, August 12, 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/2024-lok-sabha-elections-womens-representation-in-indian-politics/articleshow/111100900.cms>.

48 "Cambodia: Threats, Bribes Tainted Senate Elections," Human Rights Watch, April 3, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/03/cambodia-threats-bribes-tainted-senate-elections>; and Koh Ewe, "What the World's 'Most Complicated Election' Means for Thailand's Democracy," Time, June 28, 2024, <https://time.com/6993473/thailand-2024-senate-election-results-democracy/>.

Limited data on marginalized women's representation

Across the elections analyzed in this briefing paper, systematic data on marginalized women's political participation and representation was difficult to find. Most electoral bodies and newspaper articles only disaggregate candidates and representatives by sex and political party, without including further information about their age, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, or religion. This data gap makes it difficult to analyze *which* women and *which* men are gaining political power.

Existing reporting nevertheless suggests several interesting themes. First, both South Africa and Senegal have new governments that are significantly younger than their predecessors—though not necessarily more gender-inclusive.⁴⁹ One hypothesis for this pattern is that younger men and women often compete for the same spots, whereas older men are the least likely to give up power. Second, in several countries marked by entrenched patriarchal norms—including in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Solomon Islands—reporting suggests that women who are most likely to succeed in politics are those who come from prominent political families. In contrast, women who are less well-connected struggle to rise from the grassroots and be selected as candidates.

Gender parity requirements produce results

Gender quotas continue to play a critical role in shaping women's numerical representation in politics. Countries that have adopted *gender parity* requirements across political positions, such as Mexico and Senegal, have proven highly successful at bolstering representation and producing a strong pipeline of women leaders. In contrast, countries that held elections with no national quota in place—including Bhutan, India, the Maldives, and the Solomon Islands—had the lowest rates of women's representation, often struggling to meet a 10 percent threshold. The case of Mongolia further underscores that successful quota implementation can drive rapid gains in women's leadership.

At the same time, quotas vary in their design and effectiveness, and they are no panacea. Several countries that held elections in the first half of 2024—such as Pakistan and Bangladesh—rely on reserved seats for women in parliament, which are filled through political party lists rather than through direct elections. Yet in both Pakistan and Bangladesh, the number of women *directly elected* by voters has increased only marginally over the past several election cycles. This pattern suggests that reserved seats, while bolstering women's legislative presence, do not necessarily change political parties' candidate recruitment and selection practices.

49 Deutsche Welle, "Senegal's New Government Full of Fresh Faces," April 6, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/senegals-new-government-full-of-fresh-faces/a-68755722>; and Tannur Anders, "Who Leads the Key Portfolios in South Africa's New Cabinet?" Reuters, July 1, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/who-leads-key-portfolios-south-africas-new-cabinet-2024-07-01/>.

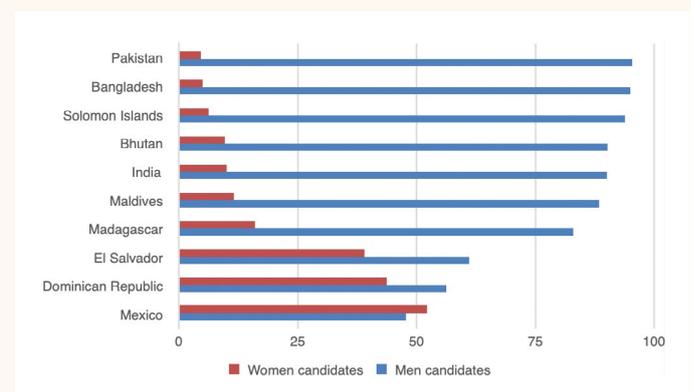
Women’s *mobilization* drives improvements in *legal* frameworks

Strong legal frameworks promoting gender parity in politics are often the product of women’s sustained political mobilization. In Mexico, for instance, representational gains can be traced back to women’s advocacy and informal coalition-building over the course several decades, bringing together women in civil society, women politicians, as well as feminist bureaucrats within state institutions.⁵⁰ Senegal’s gender parity framework is similarly rooted in a strong women’s movement. Under the banner of the Conseil Sénégalais des Femmes, women started campaigning for gender parity as early as the 1990s, with a focus on raising public awareness and building broad alliances across civil society.⁵¹ In South Africa, meanwhile, women came together after the end of apartheid rule to form a Women’s National Coalition that sought to ensure women’s influence in the country’s transitional negotiations and lobbied the ANC to adopt a quota for its party lists.⁵² These examples underscore the importance of civic space and movement-building for women’s long-term political empowerment.

Women remain *underrepresented* among candidates

In many countries, women remain systematically underrepresented not only among elected legislators, but also among candidates included on the election ballot. Women were 4.64 percent and five percent of candidates in Pakistan and Bangladesh, respectively,⁵³ fewer than six percent in the Solomon Islands,⁵⁴ and roughly 10 percent in India and Bhutan (see Figure 5).⁵⁵ The number of women candidates was higher in countries with mandatory candidate quotas with higher thresholds, such as the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Mexico.⁵⁶

Figure 5: Women’s underrepresentation among candidates (in percent)



Source: IPU Parline

50 Jennifer M. Piscopo, “When Informality Advantages Women: Quota Networks, Electoral Rules and Candidate Selection in Mexico,” *Government and Opposition* 51, no. 3 (2016): 487–512.

51 Marianne Tøraasen, “Gender Parity in Senegal – A Continuing Struggle,” Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2017.

52 Saskia Brechenmacher and Caroline Hubbard, “Breaking the Cycle of Gender Exclusion in Political Party Development,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and National Democratic Institute, 2020.

53 IPU Parline, “Bangladesh,” <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/BD/BD-LC01/election/BD-LC01-E20240107/>; Free and Fair Election Network, “General Elections 2024: 34 Political Parties Field Legally Required Women Candidates on General Seats,” <https://fafen.org/general-elections-2024-34-political-parties-field-legally-required-women-candidates-on-general-seats/>.

54 “Women Make Up Just 6% of Candidates for Solomon Islands Election,” RNZ, March 13, 2024, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/511591/women-make-up-just-6-percent-of-candidates-for-solomon-islands-election>.

55 “Women and Elections,” Kuensel, January 13, 2024, <https://kuenselonline.com/women-and-elections/>; and *National Election Watch*, “Lok Sabha Elections 2024 – Phases (I–VII),” <https://www.myneta.info/LokSabha2024/>.

56 IPU Parline, “Mexico,” <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/MX/MX-LC01/election/MX-LC01-E20240602/>; OAS, “Preliminary Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in El Salvador,” February 6, 2024, <https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/PRELIMINARY-REPORT---Preliminary-Report-OAS-Electoral-Observation-Mission-in-El-Salvador.pdf>; and IPU Parline, “Dominican Republic,” <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/DO/DO-LC01/election/DO-LC01-E20240519/>.



Several factors may explain these lasting gender gaps in candidacies in countries without strong candidate quotas. First, women are still less likely to run for office than their male counterparts, due to a combination of patriarchal gender norms, lack of family support, domestic responsibilities, lack of financial resources, fear of violence, and limited political knowledge and networks. Second, political parties in many countries remain weakly committed to recruiting, selecting and promoting women candidates to non-reserved seats, whether due to entrenched gender biases or because they believe male candidates will be more electorally competitive in the eyes of voters. These patterns underscore the importance of party-internal commitments to gender equality alongside comprehensive efforts to support and encourage women interested in running for office.

Appendix: *Elections in 2024*

Countries that have held *legislative* elections in 2024

Bangladesh, *January 7*
Bhutan, *January 9*
Tuvalu, *January 26*
Pakistan, *February 8*
Belarus, *February 25*
Cambodia, *February 25*
Portugal, *March 10*
Republic of Korea, *April 10*
Solomon Islands, *April 17*
Croatia, *April 17*
India, *April 19 - June 1*
Maldives, *April 21*
Togo, *April 29*
Madagascar, *May 29*
South Africa, *May 29*
Belgium, *June 9*
Bulgaria, *June 9*
San Marino, *June 9*
Thailand, *June 9 - 26*
Mongolia, *June 28*
UK, *July 4*
France, *June 30 - July 7*

Countries that have had *presidential* elections

Comoros, *January 14*
Finland, *January 28*
Azerbaijan, *February 7*
Russia, *March 15 -17*
Slovakia, *March 23 - April 6*
Senegal, *March 24*
Iceland, *June 1*
Mauritania, *June 29*
Venezuela, *July 28*

Countries that have had *presidential* and *parliamentary* elections

Taiwan, *January 13*
El Salvador, *February 4*
Indonesia, *February 14*
North Macedonia, *April 24 - May 8*
Panama, *May 5*
Lithuania, *May 12 - 26*
Dominican Republic, *May 19*
Mexico, *June 2*
Rwanda, *July 15*

Elections still to occur

Kiribati, *August 14 - 19*
Austria, *September 29*
Bulgaria, *October 27*
Botswana, *October 30*
Lithuania, *October 13*
Georgia, *October 26*
Mauritius, *November 30*

Algeria, *September 7*
Sri Lanka, *September 21*
Tunisia, *October 6*
Moldova, *October 20*
Somaliland, *November 13*

Mozambique, *October 9*
Lithuania, *October 13 - 27*
Uruguay, *October 27*
Palau, *November 5*
United States, *November, November 5*
Romania, *November 24 - December 1*
Guinea Bissau, *November 24*
Namibia, *November 27*
Ghana, *December 7*

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