

*representation*  
**matters**  
PREVIEW

October 2024



## *A Call to Action:*

# **Achieving Political Parity and Gender Equality**

Despite progress, gender equality remains elusive. Women face significant barriers to full participation in society and the economy. This is a global issue that impacts everyone.

### *The Economic Stakes*

**Closing the gender gap** could double global growth and boost GDP by over 20%.

**Women are an untapped resource** for economic growth.

### *The Power of Representation*

**More women in politics** leads to better legal gender equality and economic rights.

**Women leaders** champion policies benefiting women and addressing their unique challenges.

### *The Path Forward*

Governments and Political Parties can

**Create Equal Opportunities:** Implement gender quotas, incentives for parity, and anti-harassment laws.

**Reform Discriminatory Laws:** Remove barriers preventing women from participating fully in the economy, for example related to safety, childcare, and financial access.

**Leverage data:** Leverage data, such as that provided by *Women, Business and the Law*, and engage with leaders in civil society to identify legal gaps and craft interventions.

### *Act Now*

Achieving political parity and gender equality is a strategic necessity. By uniting efforts, we can ensure women have equal opportunities to contribute to a just and prosperous future for all.

*Preview:*

## **Representation Matters**

While the world has made progress toward gender equality, improvements have slowed significantly and even reversed in some areas, leaving the goal well out of reach. Women have two-thirds of the legal rights available to men, earn 80% of what men do, and have far fewer opportunities to run for public office.

But what if women were treated as equals? What if they had the same opportunities to study, work, and wield political power as their brothers, fathers, and sons?

Sound far-fetched? It's not. Countries that have more women in political offices typically pass more laws that increase women's economic rights and opportunities, which can lead to greater female labor force participation and economic growth, according to new research conducted for Representation Matters, a joint program of Women Political Leaders (WPL), the Oliver Wyman Forum (OWF), and the World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law* project (WBL). WPL initiated the idea of launching the program, reflecting its mission to increase both the number and the influence of women in political leadership positions. The co-authors of this report formed the Representation Matters program to research the crucial intersection of women's political representation and legal equality.

This upcoming report comes at a critical time. Many of the forces that drove economic growth during the last three decades have reversed or are in jeopardy.

The global economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic remains sluggish, with growth expected to slow for the third straight year, to 2.4% in 2024, and edge up to just 2.7% in 2025, according to the World Bank's latest *Global Economic Prospects* report. Such weak growth is insufficient to make progress on

the key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that global leaders have endorsed for ending extreme poverty and spreading prosperity around the world.

Greater representation can play a critical role in promoting equal opportunity for women and in providing a much-needed stimulus to world economic growth. Women's leadership — in politics and business alike — can help more women fulfill their true potential and benefit their families and societies. According to the World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law* project, **full female workforce participation could increase global GDP by nearly 20% and help reduce poverty.**

## **Create equal opportunities to political representation and legal equality**

Men have traditionally dominated the political arena and agenda in most countries. Women need more seats at the political table to ensure that their voices are heard and their unique perspectives become part of future solutions. They can help bring attention to issues that disproportionately affect women and champion laws that oppose discrimination and make it easier for women to join the workforce or start a business.

Greater women's representation in political decision-making bodies, including legislatures and executive cabinet positions, is correlated with improvements in women's economic rights, according to new research conducted for Representation Matters. The analysis compares data on women's political representation in 165 countries from 1970 to 2023 with country scores on the WBL index, which measures legal gender equality and assesses whether a country's laws create an enabling environment for women to participate in the economy.

The report offers short- and long-term recommendations as well as insights from female political leaders making a difference today, including Maria Rachel J. Arenas, MP, the House of Representatives, The Philippines (WPL Ambassador); Donna Dasko, Senator, Senate

of Canada (WPL Community); Frances Fitzgerald, Member, G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council (GEAC) and Member of the European Parliament (2019–2024) (WPL Community); Neema Lugangira, MP, Parliament of Tanzania (WPL Ambassador); Martha Tagle Martínez, Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Mexico (2018–2021) (WPL Community); and Millie Odhiambo, MP, National Assembly, Kenya (WPL Community).

Governments and political parties must play a leading role in creating equal opportunities for women to run for and hold office. Nearly half of countries surveyed by the United Nations operate some form of gender quotas that either apply to parties' candidate lists or that set aside a certain percentage of seats for women. Other measures like anti-harassment laws can encourage more women to enter politics.

In addition to creating opportunities, governments should tackle discriminatory laws and regulatory barriers that prevent women from participating fully in the economy. Measures can include strengthening laws around women's safety from violence and sexual harassment and expanding access to paid leave and childcare services. Governments should leverage data such as that provided by *Women, Business and the Law* and engage with leaders in civil society to identify legal and regulatory gaps and craft appropriate interventions.

For too long, the constrained political influence of women in many parts of the world has perpetuated a vicious cycle of limited legal rights and economic power. We hope our findings will inspire business, government, and individuals to act and turn that cycle into a virtuous one. We can turn what ifs into reality.

*More is to come in our full report being released soon — stay tuned.*

Sources: "Women, Business and the Law 2024," World Bank, 2024; "Facts and Figures: Economic empowerment," UN Women, February 2024; "Global Economic Prospects," World Bank, January 2024; Steven Pennings, "A Gender Employment Gap Index (GEGI): A Simple Measure of the Economic Gains from Closing Gender Employment Gaps, with an Application to the Pacific Islands," World Bank, February 2022; "UN Gender Quota Portal," UN Women, 2023; "The New Growth Agenda," Oliver Wyman Forum and the New York Stock Exchange, 2024

# impact story



## Millie Odhiambo

MP, National Assembly, Kenya;  
WPL Community

Millie Odhiambo became interested at a young age in politics, but was told by many that it wasn't something "good Christian girls did," especially because her husband isn't from Kenya and she isn't a biological mother. Fortunately, others encouraged the human rights lawyer to run, and she has been a member of parliament since 2008, most recently appointed minority whip.

Odhiambo has earned a reputation as a strong advocate for girls and women, encouraging them to shed traditional views of what a "good woman" is and instead act boldly, as she has. "Good girls don't succeed. Be a bad girl like me," she tells young people. "I am a bad girl, and as a bad girl I'm here serving my fourth term," she says.

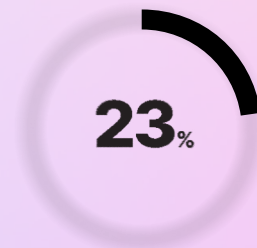
While Kenya still hasn't met its goal of women holding at least a third of seats in parliament, Odhiambo has seen significant changes in recent years as more women are elected. "Women who have come in, even in the affirmative action seats, are now also bringing bills that seek to empower women further," says Odhiambo. One such bill would require the government to provide free sanitary napkins "because it has been documented that a lot of our girls drop out of school because of period shame, because they're not able to afford sanitary towels."

Sources: V-Dem, WhoGov, UN Women

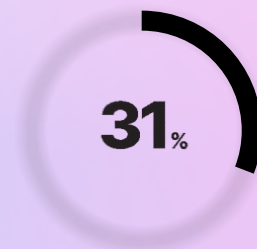
## Women's representation in Kenya

As of year-end 2023

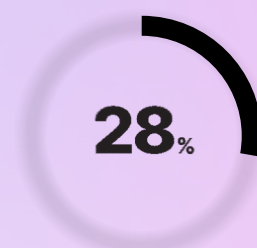
Parliament's lower house  
(National Assembly)



Parliament's upper chamber  
(Senate)



Cabinet positions



Woman currently serving in the highest position of the state

**No**

*Women across the  
world currently enjoy  
**less than  
two-thirds**  
of the legal rights  
available to men*

Source: *Women, Business and the Law*, World Bank, 2024



# impact story



## Martha Tagle Martínez

Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Mexico (2018-2021); WPL Community

For former Mexican congressional deputy Martha Tagle Martínez, women’s power and democracy are two sides of the same coin.

The recent election of Claudia Sheinbaum as Mexico’s first woman president provides an opportunity to transform the country’s male-dominated political culture and govern with a different, broader set of priorities. “We believe that when a woman comes to power, she should not strip away her womanhood and what it means to live with inequalities,” Tagle Martínez says. “A woman president should come with the vision that we need more than just police and armed forces to guarantee the population’s safety. We also need infrastructure, cultural change.”

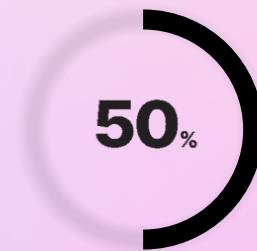
Tagle Martínez, who has been campaigning to extend access to abortion for nearly 20 years (it’s currently legal in less than half of Mexico’s 32 states), acknowledges that change won’t come overnight. But she is a firm believer in the power of women’s networks to provide support and champion change. “As we say around here, ‘My girlfriends save me.’”

Sources: IPU, El Economista, IFES

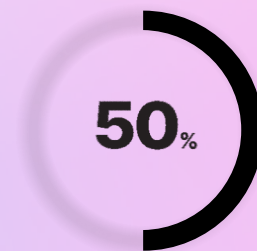
### Women’s representation in Mexico

Following June 2024 elections

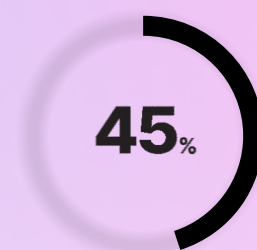
Parliament’s lower house (Chamber of Deputies)



Parliament’s upper chamber (Senate)



Cabinet positions



Woman currently serving in the highest position of the state

**Yes**



***Closing  
the gap  
in employment  
rates between  
men and women  
could boost  
global GDP by  
more than **20%*****

Source: Steven Pennings, World Bank, February 2022

# impact story



## Frances Fitzgerald

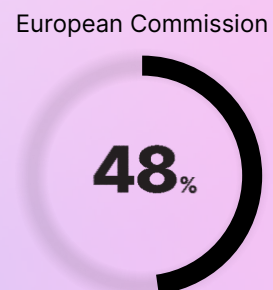
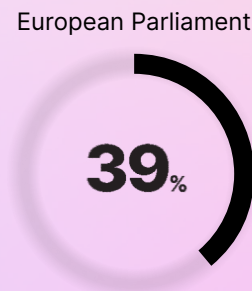
Member, G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council (GEAC); Member of the European Parliament (2019-2024); WPL Community

Addressing domestic violence is a priority for Irish politician Frances Fitzgerald, who served as a member of the European Parliament from 2019 until 2024 and pushed the EU directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence — a law that aims to prevent gender-based violence and protect victims, especially women.

“It was not an easy process to pass this directive, and there were a number of obstacles and hurdles that had to be faced and overcome, particularly when it came to the idea of including an offense of rape based on lack of consent,” says Fitzgerald.

Having a critical mass of women in the European Parliament and the European Commission made a crucial difference. “Having women in positions of power matters, and we must collectively work together, cross-party, to make that a reality,” she says.

### Women’s representation in the European Union Following July 2024 elections



Woman serving as President of the European Commission

**Yes**

Sources: European Parliament, European Commission

**1**

*percentage point increase  
in violence against women  
is associated with a*

**9%**

*lower level of  
economic activity*

Source: IMF, July 2022; focus on sub-Saharan Africa

# impact story



## Maria Rachel J. Arenas

MP, the House of Representatives, The Philippines; WPL Ambassador

Maria Rachel J. Arenas was first elected to the House of Representatives in 2007. She studied in the Philippines and the United States before returning home to learn more about politics.

Running for office was challenging, but Arenas wasn't intimidated, not even when a local mayor — a strong ally — was assassinated while he was standing beside her. "That didn't stop us from showing people that we were not scared, that we were there to fight for the marginalized, for the vulnerable, to give them a better future," says Arenas.

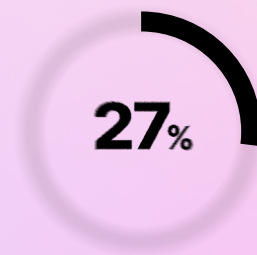
Many more women have been elected, and Arenas has seen considerable progress, including the passage of the Philippine Magna Carta of Women, a law that seeks to eliminate discrimination against women. "Since its enactment, we have seen a significant increase in women's participation in leadership roles," says Arenas. "There's also now a balanced representation of women and men in local judiciaries and in local government." Arenas says the newly elected women are having an impact on society. "These women often prioritize issues like gender equality, healthcare, education, and social welfare, reflecting their focus on inclusive policies. They also push for laws addressing women's rights, such as anti-violence measures and reproductive health, alongside advocacy for climate action and youth empowerment. Their presence brings fresh perspectives, moving away from traditional politics and promoting more progressive, people-centered legislation."

Sources: V-Dem, WhoGov, UN Women

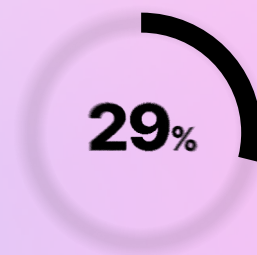
### Women's representation in the Philippines

As of year-end 2023

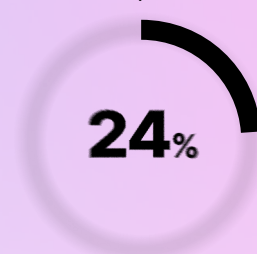
Parliament's lower house (House of Representatives)



Parliament's upper chamber (Senate)



Cabinet positions



Woman currently serving in the highest position of the state

No

**55%**

*of women interviewed  
had experienced at least*

***one form  
of violence***

*while carrying out their  
political party functions*

Source: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2018; study conducted in 2017 and 2018 in Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Tanzania, and Tunisia



# impact story



## Neema Lugangira

MP, Parliament of Tanzania;  
WPL Ambassador

Female officials are leaving office because of vicious attacks on social media. Neema Lugangira, a member of Tanzania’s Parliament, hasn’t let harassment discourage her from using the technology to communicate with constituents.

“I told myself that if I stop using social media, I’m giving them a win. Instead, I decided to use my experience to address this issue and work with the African Parliamentary Network. And I’m grateful that a lot of other organizations — the UN Population Fund (UNPF), UN Women, UNESCO — are all addressing the issue of online abuse.”

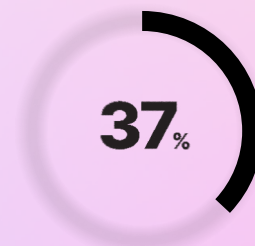
She says it’s crucial for women to get elected because they inspire others and introduce legislation that positively impacts women. “For example, when President Samia Suluhu Hassan was vice president, one of her first priorities was improving access to water to make sure that women stop carrying buckets on their heads,” says Lugangira. “Why? Because she knew as a woman that having to go fetch water removes a woman from access to economic activities, removes a girl from schoolwork, and paves the way for gender-based violence.”

Sources: V-Dem, WhoGov, UN Women

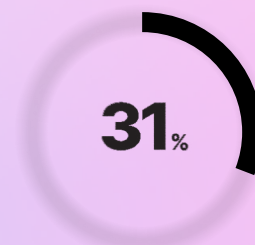
## Women’s representation in Tanzania

As of year-end 2023

Parliament  
(National Assembly)



Cabinet positions



Woman currently serving in the  
highest position of the state

**Yes**



*More than three-quarters of economies have laws covering childcare services, but fewer than half maintain a database of caregivers or provide families with financial support or tax breaks for childcare services*

Source: *Women, Business and the Law*, World Bank, 2024

# impact story



## Donna Dasko

Senator, Senate of Canada;  
WPL Community

Senator Donna Dasko believes greater female representation is making a difference in Canada. Legislators tried in 1988 and 2005 to pass childcare legislation but didn't succeed. "We finally passed a national childcare policy during COVID, and I'm convinced it was because we have our first female finance minister, Chrystia Freeland," says Dasko, who was appointed in 2018 to the Canadian Senate by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. "It shows very clearly that when you have women in these positions, you can get legislation passed that is really helpful for women."

More needs to get done, says Dasko, who cofounded Equal Voice, a nonpartisan organization that seeks to get more women elected in Canada. The Canadian Senate currently is gender-equal because Trudeau appointed a fair number of women, but the House of Commons — the elected chamber — has a share of only 30% women.

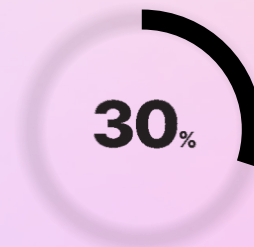
"Our voices should be represented in our parliaments in proportion to our population," says Dasko. "It's actually a principle of democracy, and democracy is in trouble in the world. This is one of the ways to strengthen it."

Sources: V-Dem, WhoGov, IPU, UN Women

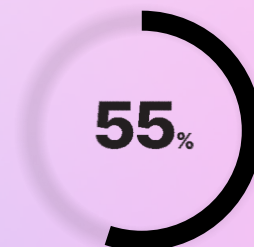
### Women's representation in Canada

*As of year-end 2023;  
for the House of Commons,  
as of June 2024*

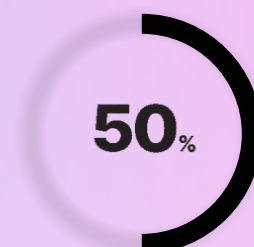
Parliament's lower house  
(House of Commons)



Parliament's upper chamber  
(Senate)



Cabinet positions



Woman currently serving in the  
highest position of the state

**No**

## Get in touch!



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