

# ADVANCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

*Women's empowerment and gender-related barriers are on the agenda of several global and regional organizations. This article focuses on the role of International IDEA as a global organization in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG) in order to achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls, and presents some of the gender-responsive initiatives implemented by International IDEA in undertaking its mandate to support democracy worldwide and contribute to the achievement of SDG 5. As Chair of the Board of Advisers, I would like to share some insights and first-hand information on the issue. I am going to explore the successes, challenges, and opportunities surrounding this issue in relation to advancing SDG 5 to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls by 2030 from the perspective of a global democracy organization.*

Emine Bozkurt\*



TURKISH POLICY  
QUARTERLY

Spring 2019

\* Emine Bozkurt is Chair of the Board of Advisers of International IDEA and Director of Human Rights Policy at Amnesty International in the Netherlands. She is also a former Member of European Parliament and rapporteur on women's rights in Turkey. This article was written in cooperation with Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, Head of the Political Participation and Representation Program at International IDEA.

**T**he Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development apply universally to all countries to mobilize efforts that will end all forms of poverty and eradicate inequalities at national, regional, and global levels. The 2030 Agenda's call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income, is premised on the principle that "no one is left behind." The ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognize that ending poverty and inequalities require multidimensional strategies to be implemented at national, regional and global levels by different entities in the private and public spheres. The role of regional and global organizations such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)<sup>1</sup> in promoting the progress towards the achievement of SDG 5 flows from the internationally agreed upon commitments and ambitions to attain sustainable democracy and development worldwide.



Hence, International IDEA's vision and mandate are firmly anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (International IDEA Strategy 2018–2022). International IDEA believes that democratic principles are important enablers for the realization of the entire 2030 Agenda. Democracy, while of intrinsic value, is also a key enabler for sustainable development and draws its sustainability and strength from its capacity to meet people's expectations that it will deliver socially inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development. While democracy is core to (and a wider enabler) the 2030 Agenda, the driving force for International IDEA's mandate are SDG 16 (promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels), SDG 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), and SDG 10 (reduce inequality within and among countries).<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on the role of International IDEA as a global organization in advancing SDG 5 in order to achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls and presents some of the gender-responsive initiatives implemented by International

<sup>1</sup> International IDEA, [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

<sup>2</sup> "International IDEA Strategy 2018–22," International IDEA, [https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/reference\\_docs/international-idea-strategy-2018-2022-screen.pdf](https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/reference_docs/international-idea-strategy-2018-2022-screen.pdf)

IDEA in undertaking its mandate to support democracy worldwide and contribute to the achievement of SDG 5. The global progress towards SDG 5 is tracked through one of the 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.”<sup>3</sup>

### ***Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment***

International IDEA is committed to ensuring that gender equality and women’s empowerment is attained in democracy building processes and institutions across the world. This entails that the pursuit for democracy should institutionalize systems, processes, practices, and policies that transform unequal power relations and promote the equal distribution of power and influence between women and men. The participation, representation, and influence in decision making by women remains as one of the sought after strategic goals that contribute to reducing the inequalities between women and men in all spheres of life.

---

*“Gender equality has seen remarkable progress over the past 42 years and this improvement has occurred across every region in the world.”*

---

### ***Global Trends and Milestones***

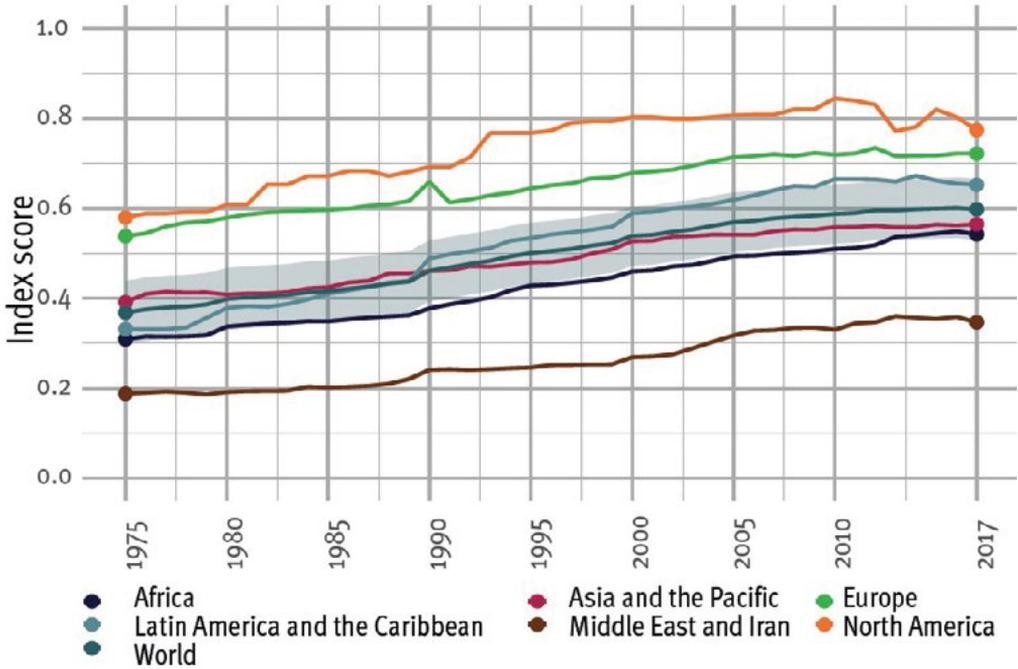
International IDEA’s Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices provide global and regional data around trends on the progression of gender equality. The GSoD Indices are International IDEA’s measurement of democracy for 158 countries between 1975 and 2017. Trends in the GSoD Indices Gender Equality subcomponent show improvement in gender equality in every region of the world (see Figure 1: Trends in Gender Equality Measurement). Women are more active in positions of political power, are represented more in the political sphere, have higher access to education and fewer barriers to civil society participation. In 1997, only three percent of countries had a lower chamber legislature made up of more than 30 percent women; in 2017, this had risen to 28 percent of countries. Though these gains are to be celebrated, a lot remains to be accomplished to ensure that countries have women’s participation of at least thirty percent in parliament. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the global share of women Members of Parliament (MPs) is 24.3 percent. Women’s representation in top-level leadership has decreased from 7.2 percent of elected Heads of State to 6.6 percent (10 out of 153) and from 5.7 percent of Heads of Government to 5.2 percent (10 out of 193).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> “Decisions by Topic: Gender equality and women's empowerment,” Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/women/decisions>

<sup>4</sup> UN Women, “One in five ministers is a woman, according to new IPU/UN Women Map,” 12 March 2019, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/3/press-release--ipu-un-women-map-women-in-politics>

Figure 1

**Trends in Gender Equality measurement**



*Note:* Scoring runs from 0 to 1, with 0 representing the lowest achievement and 1 the highest.

*Source:* International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2018), <<https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>.

Gender equality has seen remarkable progress over the past 42 years and this improvement has occurred across every region (see Figure 1). Latin America and the Caribbean is the region that has shown the greatest improvements, nearly doubling its score from 0.33 in 1975 to 0.65 in 2017. Africa has shown the second fastest rate of improvement, progressing from 0.32 in 1975 to 0.54 in 2017. Asia and the Pacific have had the second slowest rate of improvement after the Middle East and Iran, the region that started with the lowest levels in 1975 and has shown the slowest rate of improvement since then. At the country level, Spain, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Nepal and Rwanda (in descending order) are countries that have seen the greatest improvements in the Gender Equality measurement since 1975.

20 years ago, there were only two regions (Europe and North America) where, on average, women made up over 10 percent of legislators in the lower chamber. Latin America and the Caribbean region have seen the most rapid gains in this indicator, by increasing its average percentage of women legislators by 16 percentage points. This is followed closely by Europe and Africa, which have both seen an average increase of 13 percentage points. Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East and Iran, and North America have all seen improvements of less than 10 percentage points, with North America showing the lowest level of improvement—although North America is still one of the best-performing regions in the world in terms of gender equality. Overall, the global rate of improvement has slowed in the last decade. From 1997 to 2007, the global average of women in parliament improved by 7.2 percentage points—from 10.4 to 17.6 percent. However, in the last decade, the rate of improvement has slowed.

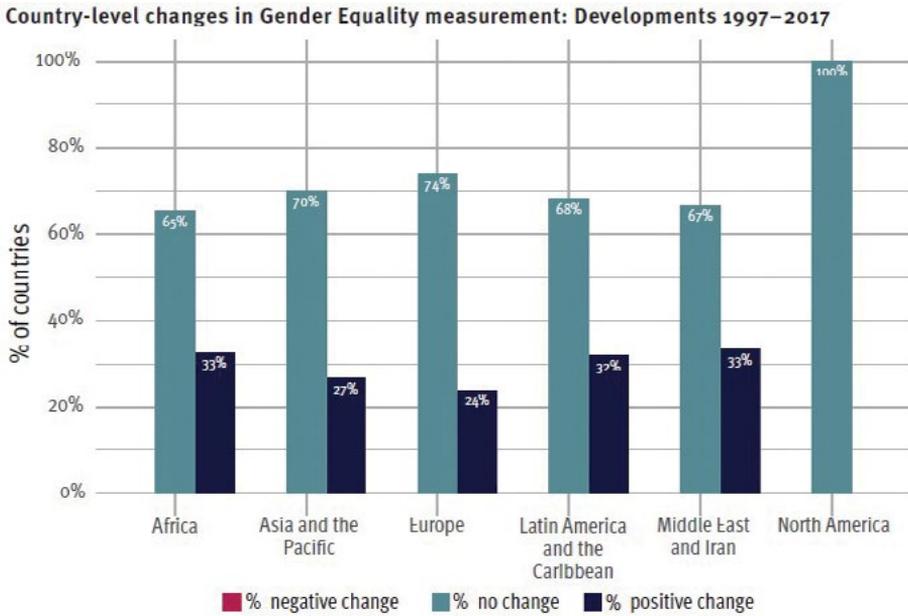
---

*“Women often have less access than men to the resources needed to successfully contest for a party nomination or in an election.”*

---

At the country level, there have been improvements over the last 20 years (See Figure 2). Notably, not a single country saw a significant decline during this 20-year period. However, in the short term (2012–2017), three countries have seen a statistically significant decrease in gender equality: Brazil, Pakistan, and the United States. All three of these countries had elections in 2018, which may affect their scores moving forward.

Figure 2



*Note:* This figure shows the percentage of countries per region that have seen a negative, neutral or positive change on the Gender Equality measurement from 1997 to 2017. Only statistically significant changes are included.

*Source:* International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy Indices* (2018), <<https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>.

In 2018, the United States saw a record number of women legislators elected, following a two-year period of women-focused political activism, such as the record-breaking Women’s March and the #MeToo movement. These movements grew as a response to what activists considered sexist political discourse during the United States 2016 presidential election, and to the sexual assault and harassment cases by men in positions of power. In 2018, Pakistan saw its first election since the Elections Act of 2017 was passed, which implemented a five percent quota in party lists, criminalized stopping women from voting, and nullified the results from any constituency where women’s turnout was less than 10 percent.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> “Political Gender Equality and the Global State of Democracy Indices,” *International IDEA*, 6 March 2019, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/political-gender-equality-and-global-state-democracy-indices.pdf>; Ghulam Dastageer, Sairah Zaidi and Rizwan Safdar, “A look into the turnout of women voters for the 2018 elections,” *Herald*, 18 September 2018, <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398671/a-look-into-the-turnout-of-women-voters-for-the-2018-elections>; Sara Mahmood, “An uphill battle: Women’s participation in the 2018 Pakistan elections,” *South Asian Voices*, 28 August 2018, <https://southasianvoices.org/an-uphill-battle-womens-participation-in-the-2018-pakistan-elections/>

## *Measures for Political Parties*

There are numerous barriers for women to participate and be represented in political leadership and decision making at all levels. These barriers are entrenched within countries' social and cultural systems and practices, political parties and systems, electoral systems and processes, and political financing frameworks. The need for sustained and systematic socio-cultural, political, and legislative transformative reforms in several countries across the world cannot be overemphasized. Some critical reforms are needed in electoral systems and processes, political party laws, intra-party democracy processes and systems, and political financing. Women often have less access than men to the resources needed to successfully contest for a party nomination or in an election. Furthermore, political parties tend to nominate men for elective decision-making positions.<sup>6</sup>

---

*“Gender-responsive parliaments are a key driver for progress towards SDG 5.”*

---

Due to the slow-paced increase in the number of women in political positions of power and decision-making levels, International IDEA designs measures and policy options that can accelerate the progress towards the SDG 5 target on women's participation and representation in political leadership. Measures such as electoral gender quotas institutionalize the opening up of “the secret garden of nominations” by making the recruitment process more transparent and formalized. In most cases, the lowest level of women's representation remains in the first-past-the-post systems (FPTP) with single-member constituencies and no quotas or any affirmative action measures. It is equally important to highlight that a quota system that does not have a good fit with the electoral and political system may be merely symbolic.<sup>7</sup>

It is evident that the equal access and participation of women and men in political and electoral processes are largely determined by the intra-party democracy cultures, systems, and processes, particularly the identification, selection and nomination of candidates. In many instances, the low participation and representation of women are, in fact, part of the broader issue of cultural and traditional attitudes that are entrenched within and perpetuated by political party norms, systems, practices, procedures, and access to leadership positions which are patriarchal and

---

<sup>6</sup> Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, “#BalanceForBetter,” *International IDEA*, 28 March 2019, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/balanceforbetter>

<sup>7</sup> “Gender Quotas Database,” *International IDEA*, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/quotas>

male-dominated. For instance, one of the manifestations of the patriarchal nature of politics is increasing violence against women in the political sphere. International IDEA is part of the growing global initiatives to tackle violence against women in politics.

Due to the crucial role of political parties in the functioning of democracy and achievement of gender equality in politics and decision-making, International IDEA focuses on supporting intra-party organization and democracy processes, political finance, gender equality and inclusion, interparty dialogue, and citizens' engagement. The promotion for gender equality in political parties and politics is broadly implemented through the development and adaptation to national contexts of comparative knowledge/resources that provide measures and mechanisms which political parties across the world can implement as entities that are crucial for the attainment of gender equality in democracy building. For example, a *Framework for Developing Gender Policies for Political Parties*<sup>8</sup> provides the measures and mechanisms that create and foster a sustainable enabling environment for gender equality in politics and decision making at all levels. Equally important are the gender-responsive measures and mechanisms on political financing and the gender dimensions in accessing financial resources for political campaigning.

The comparative analysis on gender in political financing illustrates that over the past two decades, measures on gender targeted public funding for political parties have become increasingly common.<sup>9</sup> The gender targeted political finance measures exist in countries in almost all the regions of the world and in both older and emerging democracies. International IDEA promotes these measures because their overarching aim is to address the gender representation gap in elected bodies, to reduce gender inequality among nominated candidates from political parties and elected representatives, and ultimately to enhance the empowerment of women and the gender balance in political life. In many countries with gender quotas where compliance is required in order to be included on the ballot, failure to comply would also mean ineligibility for public funding, since public funding is only available, fully or partially, to parties that participate in elections or that win a certain percentage of the vote or seats. Rules of this kind exist in Armenia, Argentina, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Greece, Macedonia, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Timor-Leste, and Uruguay.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Nana Kalandadze, "A Framework for Developing Gender Policies for Political Parties," *International IDEA*, 12 September 2016, <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/framework-developing-gender-policies-political-parties>

<sup>9</sup> Magnus Ohman, "Gender-targeted Public Funding for Political Parties: A comparative analysis," *International IDEA*, 6 March 2018, <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/gender-targeted-public-funding-political-parties-comparative-analysis>

<sup>10</sup> Magnus Ohman (2018).

## *Constitutional Measure, Parliamentary Support, and Global Platforms*

Across the world, laws which establish equal rights and opportunities for women and men provide an important basis for demanding and pursuing the substantive equality and empowerment of women. International IDEA's knowledge resources and tools such as the *Constitution Assessment for Gender Equality*<sup>11</sup> provides advocates with the fundamental principles and issues that should be enshrined in national constitutions. Gender-sensitive constitutions are a significant conduit for women's empowerment and gender equality if effectively implemented and reinforced through legislation, policies, systems, and practices that are well resourced.<sup>12</sup>

---

*“There are numerous barriers for women to participate and to be represented in political leadership.”*

---

Parliaments are pivotal democratic institutions, and democracies are more durable where parliaments are most effective in their law-making, representation, and oversight mandates. Gender-responsive parliaments are a key driver for progress towards SDG 5 and International IDEA's work places emphasis on parliamentary measures and initiatives that promote gender equality. Through the implementation of the *Inter Pares | Parliaments in Partnership – EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments*, the aim is to strengthen representative and inclusive democracy. This is accomplished through supporting the effective functioning of parliaments in partner countries by enhancing legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary, and administrative functions with particular attention to gender equality and women's empowerment.

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) is a unique global platform that serves as a one-stop shop for women's political participation, as well as a platform that fosters exchange, dialogue, and knowledge creation for all who are engaged in promoting women's political participation and representation.<sup>13</sup> The iKNOW Politics platform shows the concerted efforts of global organizations in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

---

<sup>11</sup> Melanie Allen, “Constitution Assessment for Women's Equality,” *International IDEA*, 11 July 2016, <https://www.idea.int/publications/constitution-assessment-womens-equality>

<sup>12</sup> Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, “Resilience of Women's Empowerment 2017,” *International IDEA*, 8 March 2017, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/resilience-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-2017>

<sup>13</sup> “Focus Areas,” *iKNOW Politics*, <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/focus-areas>

## *Conclusion*

This article focused on the possible role of a global organization in advancing SDG 5 in order to achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls and presented some of the gender-responsive initiatives implemented by International IDEA. The global progress towards SDG 5 is tracked through one of the 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.” Democracy, while of intrinsic value, is a key enabler for sustainable development and draws its sustainability and strength from its capacity to meet people’s expectations that it will deliver socially inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. The participation, representation, and influence in decision making by women remains one of the sought after strategic goals that contribute to reducing the inequalities between women and men in all spheres of life. Trends in the GSoD Indices Gender Equality subcomponent show improvement in gender equality in every region of the world. Women are in more positions of political power, are represented more in the political sphere, have higher access to education, and fewer barriers to civil society participation. However, the global rate of improvement has slowed in the last decade. There are numerous barriers for women to participate and to be represented in political leadership and decision making at all levels. These barriers are entrenched within countries’ social and cultural systems and practices, political parties and systems, electoral systems and processes, and political financing frameworks.

The countries with the lowest level of women’s representation are in most cases those with first-past-the-post voting, single-member constituencies, or with no quotas or any other affirmative action measures. It is evident that the equal access and participation of women and men in political and electoral processes is largely determined by the intra-party democracy cultures, systems, and processes, particularly the identification, selection and nomination of candidates. In many instances, the low participation and representation of women is, in fact, part of the broader issue of cultural and traditional attitudes that are entrenched within and perpetuated by political party norms, systems, practices, procedures, and access to leadership positions which are patriarchal and male-dominated. Across the world, laws which establish that women and men have equal rights and ought to have equal opportunities, provide an important basis for demanding and pursuing the substantive equality and empowerment of women. Gender-sensitive constitutions are a significant conduit for women’s empowerment and gender equality if effectively implemented and reinforced through legislation, policies, systems, and practices that are well resourced. Parliaments are pivotal democratic institutions and democracies are more

durable where parliaments are most effective in their law-making, representation, and oversight mandates.

The net benefits of democracy are still unevenly distributed according to gender and other forms of exclusion based on class, race, and ethnicity. The reality is that no country in the world, no matter how advanced, has achieved substantive gender equality in terms of comparable decision-making power and influence, equal opportunity for education and advancement, equal access to and control of resources, and equal participation in all spheres of life.<sup>14</sup> Globally, it is evident is that there is no shortage of internationally agreed upon commitments, national laws, and declarations about advancing gender equality and women's empowerment goals. However, the evident challenge across the globe is the lack of political will to implement comprehensive and transformative commitments. In most countries, women and men have equal rights to vote and to stand for positions of power and decision making through electoral processes. Yet, equality in law has not fully been translated into substantive equality for women.

---

<sup>14</sup> "The Women's World 2010," 2010, United Nations.