

Women in Politics- Trials & Tribulations

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Abstract

Over the last few years, the movement for fairness and equality between men and women has found renewed energy and conviction around the world. In public life, in politics, in business and across different economic sectors, women and men have been working for change and a world where economic opportunity is no longer shaped and constrained by being a man or a woman. Evidence is an essential tool in shaping public policy and social progress. To support the cause of gender equality, we need to understand values, perceptions and attitudes, the speed of change or the failure to realise it, and the drivers and barriers along the way towards building a fairer world. The first and most powerful step in gender parity is participation in politics. Hence, attempt is made in this article to evidence the barriers that obstruct the process in achieving gender parity and suggest measures to overcome it. Although there is no paucity of research in women studies, focus on their political acumen are rare. The methodology has relied on extensive review of literature as secondary source of data and the findings of the study indicated that the continued gender gap in leadership roles around the world is strikingly alarming. Today, women make up half the world's workforce and the majority of college graduates, yet they hold only about a quarter of leadership roles. In politics, women around the world last year held just 25.2% of parliamentary seats and 21.2% of ministerial positions. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap 2020. Only 68 of the 153 countries covered by the report have had a female head of state in the past 50 years. The findings of the study indicated that if we are serious about

achieving the development goals, we've set ourselves, we need to be serious about empowering women, and especially girls, to learn, lead, decide and thrive. Developing the leadership capacity of girls in particular not only helps them to secure better livelihoods and better health today, but can also create a generation capable of delivering future change. Women's political participation is a crucial accelerator of progress. And we need to accelerate change if we are to safeguard development through better decision making.

Keywords: Women, Politics, Trials & Tribulations, Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, the movement for fairness and equality between men and women has found renewed energy and conviction around the world. In public life, in politics, in business and across different economic sectors, women and men have been working for change and a world where economic opportunity is no longer shaped and constrained by being a man or a woman.

Evidence is an essential tool in shaping public policy and social progress. To support the cause of gender equality, we need to understand values, perceptions and attitudes, the speed of change or the failure to realise it, and the drivers and barriers along the way towards building a fairer world. We need to document social norms, the everyday beliefs and behaviours of men and women, and the interplay of the drivers for change against those of stasis.

We need to do this so that we can challenge our social norms, and we need to measure change over time to hold ourselves and our leaders to account. Women Political Leaders (WPL), in cooperation with Kantar, have created The Reykjavik Index for Leadership to support the journey to equality for women and men. It was launched during the Women Leaders Global Forum in Iceland, in November 2018.

There are valuable and powerful indices available which measure progress in economic equality for men and women. However, as yet there are no measures of how people feel about men and women in leadership roles. The Reykjavik Index for Leadership and the wider study behind it illuminate these attitudes and perceptions, as a means to understand how much further we have to go until being a man or woman is a non-issue, when debating the suitability of someone for leadership across the whole economy.

The G7 Reykjavik Index for Leadership Findings:

OVERALL AND BY COUNTRY

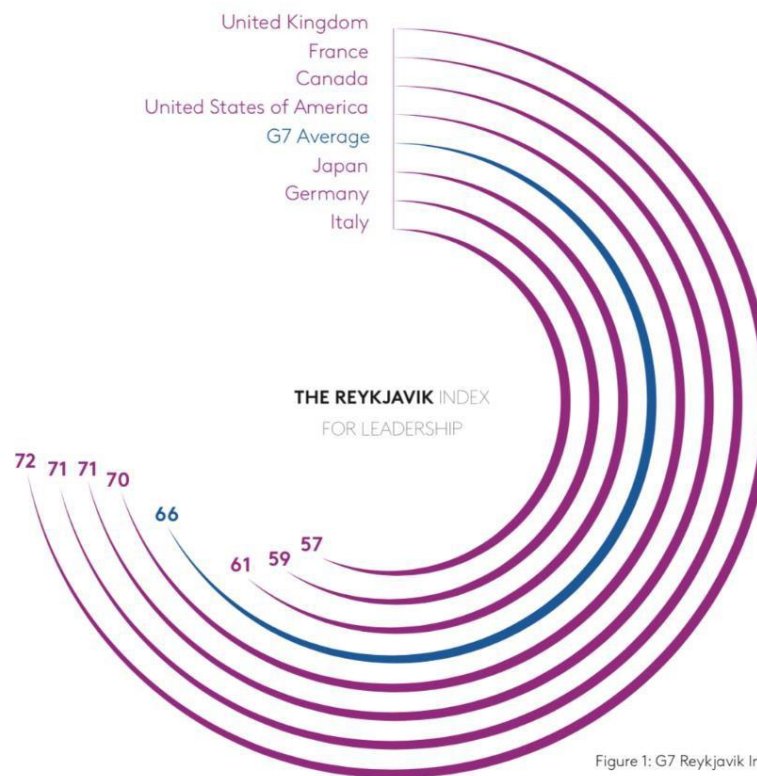


Figure 1: G7 Reykjavik Index for Leadership by country

Equality of attitudes to women in leadership in the G7 nations, scored out of 100¹

The right to leadership is a key factor in the journey to true equality between women and men. Furthermore, equality for both in leadership will diminish prejudices not just against women, but also against men in certain leadership roles in society. This study reveals prejudices against both men and women, but the majority are against women in leadership roles in professional life. Our explicit goal is to reach Index scores of 100, which will

indicate that there is complete agreement that men and women are equally suited to leadership across the economy. This will be a tangible sign of equality - and we believe the evidence will support our endeavours to reach that milestone.

Attitudes to women in leadership across the G7 - the headlines

The Reykjavik Index for Leadership for the G7 nations in this, our launch year, is

66. The Index shows that the G7 divides into two groups of countries. First, a group of four that have higher indices: the UK (72), France (71), Canada (71), and the US (70). The higher scores in these four nations are an indication that progress is happening. However, there is still a long way to go in these countries before we see complete acceptance of men and women in leadership roles - and thus equality for men and women.

There is then a group of three which are a step change below: Japan (61), Germany (59) and Italy (57). Relative to those in the other G7 countries, people in these three nations are more likely to think women and men are not equally suited to leadership positions generally. Furthermore, their views are more likely to vary by sector, meaning in these nations, traditional or sexist stereotypes about men's roles or women's roles are more embedded than in the other four countries.

Male/female dissonance

Across the G7, the Reykjavik Index for Leadership is higher for women (67) than for men (61). This means that women in the G7 are more likely than men to view women and men as equally suitable for leadership roles. This is the case for both

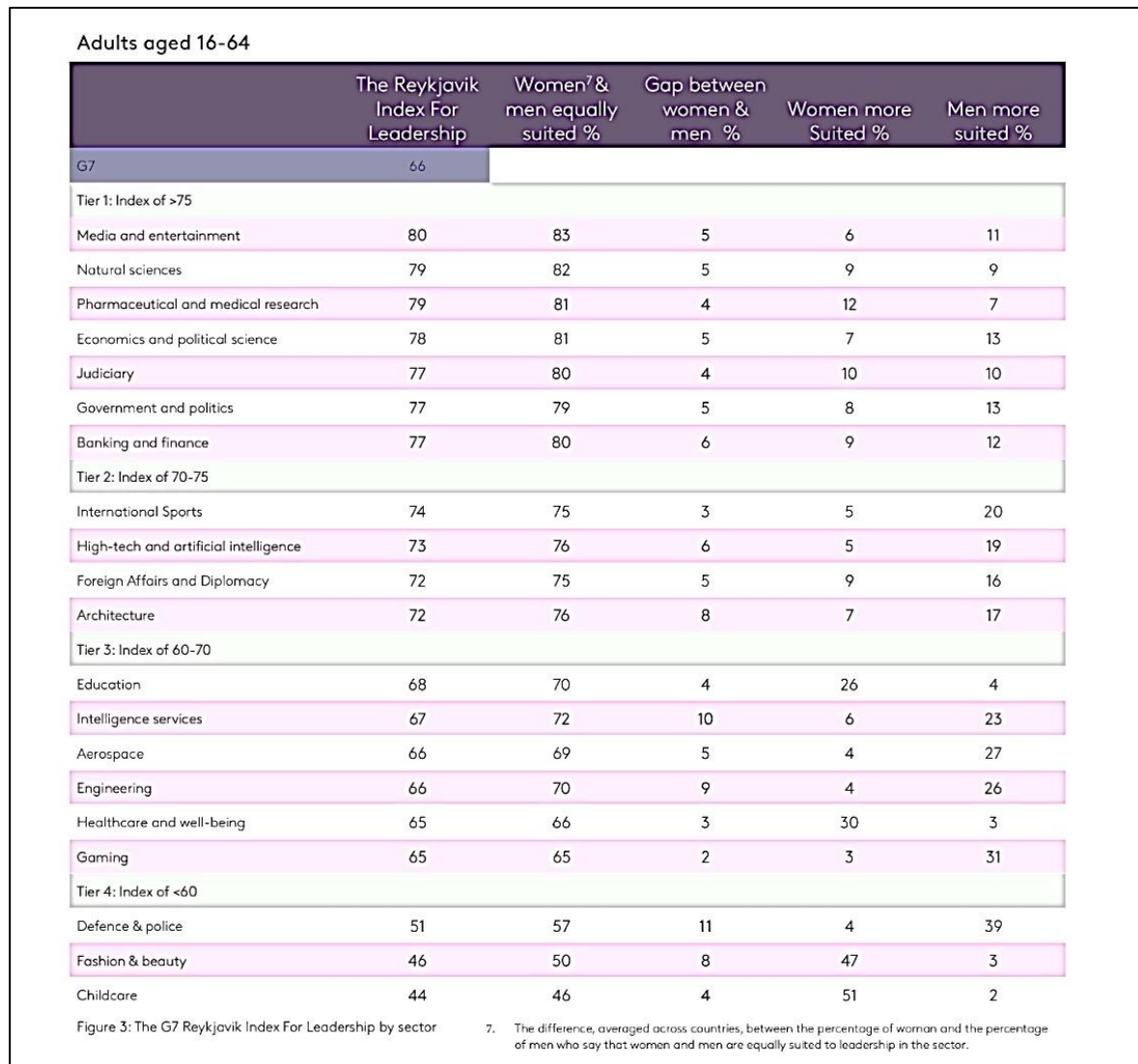
the overall G7 and also within every individual G7 nation and in each of the 20 sectors covered. This dissonance between men and women reflects tensions and barriers that are at play not just at work, but also at home and in people's personal communities.

For example, the views of men and women are most closely aligned in the UK in terms of who is suitable to lead. On average, across the twenty sectors, 78% of women in the UK think men and women are equally suited to lead, compared to 75% of men thinking the same. Nonetheless, for 42% of people in the UK - a country led by Prime Minister Theresa May - a woman as head of government is still an issue of some kind.

We see the highest levels of male/female dissonance in Angela Merkel's Germany. Furthermore, men in Germany are the most likely of all men in the G7 to be perpetuating stereotypes about who should lead in the 20 sectors.

These are just two examples of some of the tensions at play within G7 nations, and where stereotypes may be more resistant to change.

How do attitudes vary between sectors?



There are some surprising and encouraging findings from the Index and the wider study. For example, the sector with the highest Reykjavik Index for Leadership score - that is, perceptions of equal suitability for leadership for men and women - is media and entertainment, with 80. Indeed, 85% of women and 80% of men in the G7 believe men and women are equally suited to leadership in this industry.

Similarly, the Index score is also above 75 for some science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) careers, such as natural sciences, pharmaceutical and medical research, economics and political science, and banking and finance. This may demonstrate attitudes which have developed as a result of the investment and encouragement of women and girls in STEM education in recent years.

However, some strong stereotypes endure in other sectors. The index shows that for childcare, fashion and beauty, and defence and policing, there are majority-held stereotypical views about who is suitable to lead.

These stereotypes are barriers to equality not just for women, but for men also as stereotypes about suitable careers and sexist attitudes continue to be perpetuated.

Germany and Japan

The study highlights where being a man or being a woman is seen as an issue in terms of who is suitable to lead. Here, two countries stand out.

As part of the wider study, question asked if people would feel 'very comfortable' having a woman as head of government, or as the CEO of a major company in their country.

Only one in four people in Germany feel 'very comfortable' with a woman as head of government, meaning three in four people do not feel very comfortable with this.

In Japan, only one in five men - 21% - say they feel 'very comfortable' with a woman as CEO of a major company in Japan. This

is also true for three in 10 Japanese women (28%).

Being a woman in a position of leadership, business or government is clearly an issue for many people in Germany and Japan. The impacts of these attitudes go beyond polling stations and boardrooms; they affect wider perceptions of women's abilities to lead and indicate sizeable barriers to equality.

Moving forward

This has given a clear insight into the powerful dissonance at play across the G7 and within the group's individual countries. Men and women hold similar degrees of prejudice, reminding us of the efforts needed to overcome the social phenomenon of sexism.

The results also show how women are pulling ahead in their views of men and women being equally suitable to lead. These are signs of progress, yet more work needs to be done to reduce male/female dissonance, and to remove the tensions in our workplaces, homes and communities.

In the future, we will extend this survey to other nations, giving us greater evidence to use to help drive social progress. The index will help us to understand how we

can more quickly see attitudes about men and women in leadership reach equality, to the benefit of all.

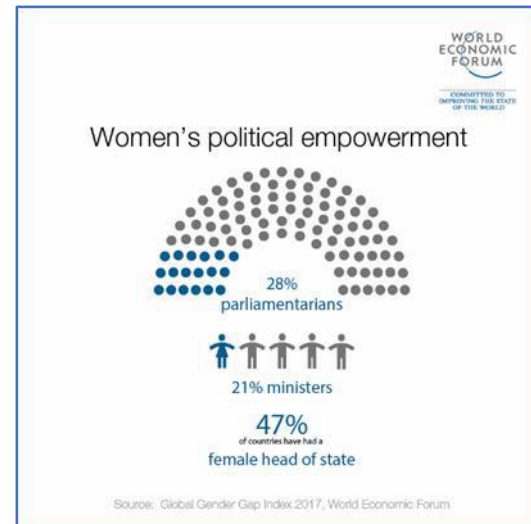
HOW TO INCREASE WOMEN IN POLITICS

Efforts to improve female representation in politics have often focused on quotas and reserved shares. What is really needed is a nuanced approach that tackles the underlying, interconnected barriers that women face in getting nominated for elected office and conducting successful campaigns.

A record number of American women are running for elected office in 2018, many of them motivated by outrage over US President Donald Trump's policies and attitudes. But running is not winning, and outrage alone cannot produce the kind of steady progress needed to achieve political equality. To produce a substantial increase in the number of women in Congress, changes that run deeper than the current electoral "pink wave" will be needed.

With only 19.3% female representation in the House of Representatives and 23% in the Senate, the United States currently ranks 103rd in the world in terms of women's representation in national legislatures. To improve its record, the US

should look to countries with greater gender parity.



At the top of that list is Rwanda, where women make up 61.3% of the lower house and 38.5% of the upper house. In 2003, the country adopted a new constitution that reserves 30% of parliamentary seats for women and requires political parties to ensure that women hold at least 30% of elected internal positions. France is one of 49 other countries that also have statutory quotas or reserved seats for women.

Such quotas may, however, be unnecessary. In seven of the top ten countries for female representation, political parties have voluntarily implemented their own rules on the matter. Globally, over 100 political parties in 53 countries have voluntary measures in place

to increase the number of women candidates and party officials.

But, legislated or not, quotas can be controversial. Some claim that they are undemocratic. There is no doubt that they are a blunt instrument. Can we do better?

A more nuanced approach would focus on eliminating the underlying, interconnected barriers that women face in getting nominated for elected office and conducting successful campaigns. Such obstacles include the election system itself (women fare better under proportional representation than they do in first-past-the-post systems based on single-member districts); lack of access to financing; weaker professional networks; and outside responsibilities that make it harder to take on punishing and unpredictable working conditions.

Overcoming such structural barriers requires a comprehensive strategy for supporting women candidates. One of the most powerful tools is money.

In many countries, the cost of campaigning is becoming prohibitively high for most aspirants, regardless of gender. But women seem to have it worse than men. In a 2008 survey of 292 parliamentarians around the

world, the Inter-Parliamentary Union found that female MPs viewed lack of finance as a more significant deterrent to entering politics than their male counterparts did.

This problem is particularly pronounced in the US, where parties and candidates can spend almost unlimited amounts to get elected. Wealthy candidates (usually men) finance their own campaigns, with some women, such as Nancy Pelosi and Dianne Feinstein, relying on their husbands' fortunes. Overall, this system disadvantages women.

Fortunately, some countries are introducing innovative measures to address this problem. In Georgia, for example, political parties that include at least 30% of each gender on their electoral lists receive a 30% supplement from the state budget. Similarly, in Ireland, political parties lose 50% of their state funding if their candidate pool includes less than 30% of either gender.

Beyond financing constraints, women face high social and cultural barriers to political participation. In particular, greater care obligations, reinforced by public perceptions of a "woman's role," severely

undermine women's ability to run for public office.

These issues are difficult to address directly. One step that could help would be for male politicians to assume more care responsibilities, thereby making the playing field more level, while demonstrating that family is a high priority for everyone.

Likewise, new mothers should be able to bring their children to work. In 2015, a photo of Argentinian MP Victoria Donda Pérez breastfeeding while taking part in a parliamentary hearing went viral, as it demonstrated the commitment, capabilities, and challenges of working mothers. Such challenges were exemplified by the experience of Madeleine Henfling, a member of Germany's Thuringia state parliament, who last month was barred from entering the legislative chamber with her six-week-old baby.

Concrete policies should also be put in place to support working parents, by giving them more flexibility to meet family responsibilities. That is why the United Kingdom's House of Commons is considering introducing proxy voting, as part of a broader effort to give members – male and female – parental leave.

Women may also benefit from targeted training. UN Women's recent Political Academy in Tunisia trained women candidates on local governance, the missions and roles of municipal councils, and media relations. Some may one day follow in the footsteps of Souad Abderrahim, who was elected the first woman mayor of Tunis with the support of the Islamist Ennahda Movement.



Some leaders have made powerful statements in support of greater female participation in government. In 2015, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gave his country its first cabinet with an equal number of men and women. His Spanish counterpart Pedro Sánchez has gone a step further, appointing a cabinet where women outnumber men.

Political parties, which serve as gatekeepers for aspirants to public office, also have significant power to find creative ways to support women candidates. In 2019, one Cambodian party provides

women candidates with basic campaign resources, including clothing and a bicycle.

In past Canadian elections, political parties have reimbursed women candidates for child-care and travel expenses, and provided subsidies to women seeking nomination in constituencies where a male incumbent is retiring. The New Democratic Party and Liberal Party have endeavoured to have women candidates run for “winnable” open seats.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to gender inequality in politics. But there is plenty that can – and should – be done to ensure that women’s voices are heard

Do men and women really have different leadership styles?^{iv}

In many ways, 2018 has been a monumental year for women’s political leadership around the world. In the United States, women played a bigger role in the midterm elections than they have in any other election in American history.



A record 255 women ran for office in the two major parties; of those, 117 won. As of October 2018, Ethiopia’s president is, for the first time ever, a woman - as is the president of the country’s Federal Supreme Court. Half of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s cabinet is female, including the minister of defence. In Spain, Bahrain, and Mexico, too, women have also made significant political strides this year.

Greater female leadership is often associated with gains on issues like health, sexual violence, gender gaps in employment and financial inclusion.



Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Female leadership is also often championed as a harbinger of improved governance. UN Women’s executive director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka observes: “Where there are more women in decision-making positions, we see more inclusive decisions, and we find different solutions to long-standing problems.” This notion is rooted in the belief that men and women have fundamentally divergent

leadership styles and that, once in office, women will advance a feminist agenda.

But the link between gains in numerical representation and gains in strategic representation isn't so clear. And the record of female political leadership (like that of male political leadership) is mixed.



During her eight years in office, for example, Argentina's Cristina Fernández de Kirchner helped narrow the country's gender poverty gap. She also imposed a ban on abortions and defaulted on international loan payments. Dilma Rousseff appointed record numbers of women to Brazil's highest offices, including some of the most important cabinet positions. Yet her presidency ended with an embattled economy and a government ensnared in corruption investigations. Female political leaders have engaged in conflicts (such as the ex-prime minister of the UK Margaret Thatcher and the Falklands War) and have

traded arms to nations outwardly repressive of women's rights (such as Swedish arms sales to Saudi Arabia under foreign minister Margot Wallström's "feminist foreign policy").

This begs the question of the metrics against which female leaders are judged, as well as whether the emphasis on simply increasing the number of women in political positions doesn't obscure more sophisticated debates over good governance and women's empowerment. If the history of women's political leadership varies, then perhaps there is more to the story.

Two misapprehensions that continue to inform discussions of women's political leadership are the notion that 'women's issues' somehow diverge from other policy issues — and, equally, that other policy issues are somehow not 'women's issues' — as well as a disregard for the institutions in which female leaders, like all leaders, are embedded.

Rethinking 'women's issues'

What constitutes a 'woman's issue' remains a matter of debate, but the term is generally understood to include matters of wage equality, childcare coverage, reproductive rights, girls' education,

violence against women, political participation and property ownership. History teaches that not all women advance these issues. Two women, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, served as prime ministers of Bangladesh for 15n consecutive years (1991–2006). During that time, little to no effort was made to enhance women’s rights. History also teaches that successful political leadership entails more than promoting women’s issues at the expense of other policy initiatives. Brazil under Rouseff and Argentina under Kirchner are two of several cases in point. Women leaders should of course be championed for their efforts to advance other women. But more importantly, they should be championed for their efforts to advance societies overall.

Such thinking requires breaking down the barriers between what are considered ‘women’s issues’ and other issues. Matters of national security, tax reform, trade and economic policies, technology regulations, energy policies, criminal justice reform – these affect women around the world directly and in significant ways. Equally, including women in national financial systems has been shown to drive sustainable economic growth. Educating girls brings long-term gains in national

living standards and institutional quality. These issues are not simply ‘women’s issues’, but prudent economic and social policies.

We need to reframe the narrative around ‘women’s issues’ and broaden the scope of policy outcomes expected from female political leaders. National security and strong economic growth matter. So do combatting violence against women and equal wages for equal work. We need to work more earnestly to blur the line between what are perceived as women’s issues and other issues. This will lead to a more holistic appreciation of women’s political leadership and will shift the matter away from the contested realm of identity politics in which it so often appears to be stuck.

Institutions over individuals

Debates over women’s political leadership also tend to subscribe to the school of thought that prioritizes individual over institutional agency. They hinge on a kind of Weberian notion of leadership in which the distinctiveness of the individual (however defined) makes her uniquely able to lead. What may be said to be at least partially exceptional about Angela Merkel, Hillary Clinton, Theresa May, and

other female leaders, then, is their woman-ness.



Moreover, these women on their own matter more than the institutions of which they are members.

Of course, women's lived experiences diverge from men. Increasing the number of women in positions of political power increases the diversity of political viewpoints. But the muddled history of women's leadership teaches that this is not enough on its own. Like their male counterparts, the political actions of women are institutionally constrained. These constraints are formal — rules, laws, procedures — as well as informal — institutional cultures and norms. Kersti Kaljulaid, Estonia's youngest and first female president, has made remarkable strides in advancing her country toward an inclusive, digital society. But violence against women remains a pervasive challenge in Estonia, and the country's gender pay gap is the highest in Europe

and among the highest in the world. Leadership matters, but often institutions matter more. By overestimating the clout of female leadership, we underestimate the importance of its contextual settings.

In other words, the character and capacity of the state is more critical to the success of 'women's issues,' (both narrowly and broadly defined) than the number of women in power. The state must have the political commitment as well as the ability to challenge certain norms, engage in self-reflection, enforce some types of policies and promote their value within government and society. This is a structural feature separate from the political strength of any particular administration or individual. The state must also be democratic insofar as it allows for a well-developed civil society able to engender dialogue and support women's rights. In other words, 'women's issues and women's political leadership require a focus on the institutions of leadership — on the reforms they must undergo — not just on the leaders themselves.

The time for women's political leadership has undeniably come. Now it is time to rethink how we think about and judge this

leadership, and what must be done to ensure its success — for all.

3 times women shut down sexism in politics^v



Politics is still a man's world, but these women are calling it out²

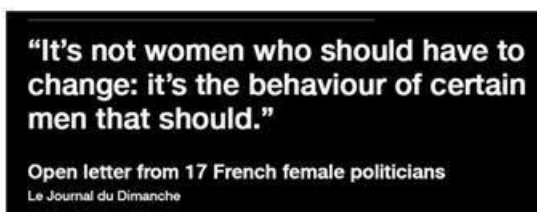
Gender Parity

By the end of the year, two of the world's most powerful political institutions – the United Nations and the US government – could be led by women.

It's an encouraging sign of the progress being made in the traditionally male-dominated field of politics. But it's also brought to the surface somewhat fewer progressive attitudes and opinions, revealing something many women already suspected: in politics, sexism and misogyny live on.

The latest example comes from France, where 17 female politicians – including IMF chief and former French finance

minister Christine Lagarde – have signed an open letter calling for an end to gender discrimination and sexual harassment in politics. “The scourge of sexism is not limited only to our field. Far from it. But as politicians, we must be role models,” the former ministers, who come from across the entire political spectrum, wrote. “We won't stay quiet anymore,” the women warn, before going on to describe the sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour they and others have had to endure – from breast-grabbing to underwear ping-pong. “It's not women who should have to change: it's the behaviour of certain men that should.”



The letter has been making headlines around the world, but it's not the first-time female politicians have been forced to call out chauvinistic behaviour.

'Iron my shirt'

If the gendered attacks she faces seem to roll off her back, it's perhaps because US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton has been dealing with them for years. “From

her first appearance on the national stage in 1992 on the arm of a future president, Clinton has faced an unending litany of gender-based criticism and calumny,” Scott Bixby of Mic points out. But it really took off in 2008, when she was first running for the top spot in US politics. “Iron my shirt! Iron my shirt!” a man shouted at Clinton in an event on the campaign trail. Unperturbed by the misogynistic heckler, Clinton told a cheering crowd that it was because of people like him that she was running for president:

“The remnants of sexism are alive and well. As I think has just been abundantly demonstrated, I am running to break

through the highest and hardest glass ceiling.”

‘Ditch the witch’

As Australia’s first female prime minister, Julia Gillard knew she’d face her fair share of challenges. “But I thought that after a few months, I would be judged on the job I was doing,” she told Fortune recently. The opposite happened. “The reaction about gender heightened because it became the convenient cudgel of criticism when you wanted to take a shot at the government.” After being mocked for her appearance and having to endure calls to “ditch the witch”, she reached a breaking point when opposition leader Tony Abbott attempted to school her on sexism.

Julia Gillard / Previous offices

Prime Minister of Australia
2010–2013

Deputy Prime Minister of Australia
2007–2010

Minister for Social Inclusion
2007–2010

Minister for Industrial Relations of Australia
2007–2010



27th Prime Minister of Australia

In office

24 June 2010 – 27 June 2013

<https://youtu.be/fCNuPcf8L00?t=434>

“The speech was a crack point,” Gillard said. “I thought after everything I have experienced; I have to listen to Tony Abbott lecture me about sexism.” Instead, she went on to deliver a searing speech on misogyny that was watched by millions of people around the world.

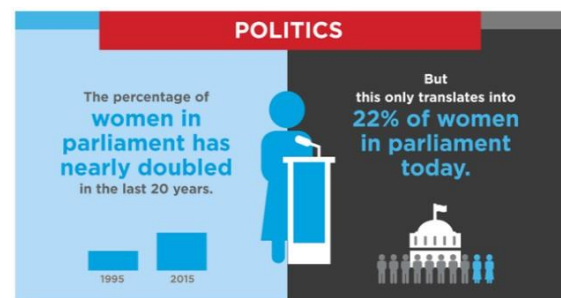
If we truly want to change the world, we need more female leaders^{vi}

The world could be a very different place if more women were in charge. You just need to look at what we did on International Day of the Girl last year to see what that world could look like. By persuading leading public figures, including the President of Nepal and the President of the National Assembly of Ecuador, to stand aside for the day, over 300 girls and young women in more than 50 countries were able step into their shoes and call on governments around the world to tear down the barriers that deny millions of them their rights.

I took part myself by supporting a 17-year-old girl from Zambia to take my place for the day. It was a humbling experience, and I learned so much from Loveness about her life, her ambitions and about her potential. Across the world, the "takeovers" were a brief but powerful glimpse of the world we want to see. Our

aim was to change perceptions about what is possible for young women and girls, and to inspire millions of them around the world to demand that their voices be heard. Our challenge now is to make a future in which every girl has the chance to take up positions of political leadership – for more than just one day.

It's a big challenge. Things are improving, though progress is slow. The proportion of women in parliaments globally has more than doubled since 1995, but still stood at only 23% in 2016; and while only Haiti, Micronesia, Qatar and Vanuatu have yet to elect any female legislators, just three countries have achieved gender parity in their national parliaments.



Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation - UN Women

Image: United Nations

Last year saw examples of women entering high office – while Hillary Clinton narrowly missed out, Theresa May became the United Kingdom's second female prime minister, and Estonia,

Taiwan and the Marshall Islands all elected their first female presidents. The cities of Tokyo, Rome and Bucharest elected their first female mayors. Yet these advances are against a low base. In March 2015, only 14 governments around the world were led by women, with representation at local level lower still: fewer than 5% of the world's mayors are women.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say that Parity is only one indicator of progress, however. Unfortunately, we know that female leaders are often treated more harshly in the media based on their looks; taken less seriously by their peers; and women in politics and in business must still navigate systems that were designed and maintained by men for centuries. Is it any wonder so few young women and girls consider putting themselves forward for leadership positions or elected office?

These matters. If we are serious about achieving the development goals, we've set ourselves, we need to be serious about empowering women, and especially girls, to learn, lead, decide and thrive. Developing the leadership capacity of girls in particular not only helps them to secure better livelihoods and better health today,

but can also create a generation capable of delivering future change. Women's political participation is a crucial accelerator of progress. And we need to accelerate change if we are to safeguard development through better decision making.

Of course, democracy that excludes half the population from leadership positions will ultimately fail: reducing the gap is an essential part of creating the responsive and responsible leadership we need in a changing world. But a case can also be made that it is smart to invest in encouraging female leadership: when women have an equal footing in making choices, things change faster. For example, research on panchayats (local councils) in India found that the number of drinking water projects in areas with female-led councils was 62% higher than in those with male-led councils. Moreover, greater female participation not only increased the provision of public goods, but also reduced levels of corruption.

Of course, Plan International has a long track record of promoting the empowerment of girls and young women. Our 'Because I am a Girl movement' is committed to working with and for girls,

supporting them to safely speak up for themselves in every setting.

Investing in the leadership skills of girls is vitally important, but must sit alongside investment in economic, social and environmental improvement. It should not be seen as secondary. It is an essential part of the package. Closing the gender gap in the realm of political leadership will accelerate progress on narrowing the social and economic gap too.

We should not lose sight of the fact that girls have equal rights as boys to lead. We will continue to support them to speak up for them, to make decisions about their own lives and take the positions of power to which they are entitled. And we will continue to encourage men – fathers as much as male authority figures and leaders – to make space into which the world's daughters can grow.

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