

VISUALIZE GENDER EQUALITY



Visualize Gender Equality - Viz5 - is an effort to help realize UN Sustainable Development Goal 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

THEME 6 - Women in Power

This month Viz5 wanted to tackle a dataset that explored gender inequality in the context of political appointments and parliamentary representation.

ABOUT THE THEME:

The goal of Viz5 is to both raise awareness of extreme gender inequality, and catalyze global action to end it.

In many of the data themes we explore specific issues that are symptomatic of extreme gender inequality. So far in 2020, we've looked at data on FGM, obstetric fistula, unpaid work, and more issues that are signs of entrenched gender inequality. The myriad themes that we explore in Viz5, will result in a portfolio of data visualizations that will educate and inform communities about gender inequality, and also spur action to create a more equal world.

This month, we're taking a look at some of the systemic issues that prevent progress in the work to achieve gender equality. Specifically, we are going to look at the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%).

Ensuring that women are full and active participants in leadership and decision-making positions is a critically important target within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. [SDG 5 target 5.5](#) seeks

the achievement of: “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.”¹

While the dataset this month explores parliamentary participation at the national level, it remains true that across all positions of power and authority - as elected officials, civil service workers, private sector c-suite positions, board roles, and in academia - women are underrepresented. It comes as little surprise, therefore, that women are also less likely to be voters, and to actively participate in political systems.

Women face myriad obstacles to participating in political life. There are still many discriminatory laws and institutional practices that limit women’s capacity to run for political office. Systemic inequality, lack of access to education, limited options for workforce participation, lack of economic parity and access to income, constraints on personal freedoms, and other diverse barriers limit women from accessing the resources and opportunities to pursue political office.

“Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women.” - 2011 UN General Assembly Resolution on Women’s Political Participation

There are women who have beat the odds and had very successful and lengthy political careers. These women are, however, a small minority in the global political landscape. More needs to be done to enable gender equal, balanced, political spaces. Here are some facts and figures that really illustrate the work that’s left to be done:

FACTS & FIGURES

- Only 24.3 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women as of February 2019, a slow increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995.²
- As of June 2019, 11 women are serving as Head of State and 12 are serving as Head of Government.³
- Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians, with women making up 61.3 per cent of seats in the lower house.⁴
- As of February 2019, there are 27 states in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, including 3 chambers with no women at all.⁵

¹ <https://sdg-tracker.org/gender-equality>

² Inter-Parliamentary Union. “Women in national parliaments,” as of 1 February 2019.

³ UN Women calculation based on information provided by Permanent Missions to the United Nations. Some leaders hold positions of both head of government and head of state. Only elected Heads of State have been taken into account.

⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union. “Women in national parliaments,” as at 1 February 2019.

⁵ Ibid.

Progress towards SDG5 requires direct action from parliamentarians and governments. Acts of parliament can spur legal, social, and cultural change, and directly influence shifts in attitudes and perceptions. The world needs more gender-sensitive parliaments and more gender-balanced representation across power structures and organizations.

*"A gender-sensitive parliament is one in which there are no barriers – substantive, structural, or cultural – to women's full participation and to equality between its men and women members and staff. It is not only a place where women can work, but also one where women want to work and contribute. A gender-sensitive parliament sets a positive example by promoting gender equality and women's empowerment among society both nationally and internationally. A gender-sensitive parliament is therefore a modern parliament; one that addresses and reflects the equality demands of a modern society."*⁶

Viz5 wanted to highlight the barriers that limit women from participating in positions of political power and influence. The fact that, as of February 2019, less than a quarter of all national parliamentarians in the world were women, presents an untenable and unacceptable status quo. Achieving parity of representation in principal decision-making and policy-setting spaces across the world is a key priority within SDG5, and a perfect theme for Viz5 to highlight with this month's data.

*"A strong and vibrant democracy is possible only when parliament is fully inclusive of the population it represents. Parliaments cannot consider themselves inclusive, however, until they can boast the full participation of women. This is not just about women's right to equality and their contribution to the conduct of public affairs, but also about using women's resources and potential to determine political and development priorities that benefit societies and the global community."*⁷

ABOUT THE DATA

This month's Viz5 data comes from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), but has been collated by The World Bank as part of their World Development Indicators database.

The data reveals the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%). IPU defines this as "the number of seats held by women members in single or lower chambers of national parliaments, expressed as a percentage of all occupied seats; it is derived by dividing the total number of seats occupied by women by the total number of seats in parliament."⁸

The data is compiled by the IPU, and is based on information and statistics provided by National Parliaments. The number of countries that are represented in the data varies with suspensions and dissolution of parliamentary powers, for example, if a parliament is overthrown, or there is a military coup, data is not collected. Similarly, the data may not be fully accurate, as it is challenging for bodies

⁶ Plan of Action on Gender Sensitive Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017, p. 5.

⁷ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>.

⁸ Ibid.

like the IPU to obtain accurate data and information on any by-elections or personnel changes as a result of parliamentary member resignation or death. Unlike a national general election, by-elections and other ministerial replacements are not announced internationally, and are therefore difficult metrics to collect accurately.

As a measure of women's contributions to political decision making, this indicator may also be insufficient, as it does not take into account the various obstacles and barriers that women parliamentarians may face in their work to fully execute their parliamentary mandate.

*"Women are vastly underrepresented in decision making positions in government, although there is some evidence of recent improvement. Gender parity in parliamentary representation is still far from being realized. Without representation at this level, it is difficult for women to influence policy."*⁹

In spite of this, the data tells an important story and delivers a clear message: women are grossly under-represented in the world's political parliaments. As a result, not only are women largely unable to influence policy or drive change in these structures of power, but these parliaments also fail to fully include and represent the population they are elected to serve.

Note on the data: National parliaments can be bicameral (i.e. have two chambers, e.g. in the USA the House of Representatives and the Senate) or unicameral (i.e. have one chamber, as in countries like Norway and Denmark). This data covers the single chamber in unicameral parliaments and the lower chamber in bicameral parliaments. It does not cover the upper chamber of bicameral parliaments. Seats are usually won by members in general parliamentary elections. Seats may also be filled by nomination, appointment, indirect election, rotation of members, and by-election. Seats refer to the number of parliamentary mandates, or the number of members of parliament.¹⁰

ABOUT VIZ5

The ultimate goal of Viz5 is to create a space where data advocacy and insights meet impact. This work seeks to ignite a data advocacy effort with the power to not only raise awareness of extreme gender inequality, but also catalyze global action to end it.

Viz5 is led by Operation Fistula, with #MakeoverMonday and Tableau Foundation operating as critical partners.

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⁹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>

¹⁰ Ibid

Viz5 will mobilize the power of the #MakeoverMonday and Tableau communities, to visualize 12 data sets, over 12 months. These data sets will feature 12 themes, curated to present different areas of gender inequality. Collectively, these data sets and visualizations will begin to tell the story of where and how gender inequality is at its most extreme.

The visualizations that are produced during Viz5 will serve as advocacy tools, awareness-raising artifacts, and data-driven insight drivers for anyone working to end gender inequality.

Join us as we work to visualize a more equal world! Sign up to our community at www.viz5.org.