

## Women are winning

### *Quota systems are transforming African parliaments*

Of the 36 lower houses of parliament worldwide that have reached the 30% threshold considered necessary for women to have an impact on decision-making, 11 are African. At the end of 2012, one-fifth of sub-Saharan MPs on average were female, according to figures of the Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union. That may not sound a lot, but marks an increase of seven percentage points on 2002, and puts the continent on a par with the global mean. By comparison, women MPs make up 23% of Britain's House of Commons, and 18% of America's Congress.

In many cases, the gains are because of quota systems, which are increasingly popular. Last year Senegal's parliament saw the fastest advance in female representation globally after it enforced a parity law. Women make up almost half of it. In September Aminata Touré was appointed as Senegal's prime minister.

South Africa is not far behind, ranking eighth in the world, with women taking 42% of Parliament's seats, almost double the rate in 1994 when the ruling African National Congress (ANC) created a voluntary party quota, allocating 30% of posts to women. And they run some of the country's grandest ministries, such as home, defence and foreign affairs. The central bank governor is a woman, too.

Women will also vie for South Africa's presidency in next year's election. Most prominent is Helen Zille, head of the liberal Democratic Alliance, the main opposition. Mamphela Ramphele, founder of a new party called Agang, is also set to run. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, a former wife of President Jacob Zuma, has been urged to bid for the ANC leadership when he goes; she has been minister of foreign and then home affairs and now chairs the African Union's executive commission. Liberia and Malawi have elected women to be their presidents.

Even in less democratic countries female representation is on the march. After the genocide in 1994, Rwanda's authoritarian president, Paul Kagame, engineered the election of the world's highest proportion of women in a legislature. When a new parliament assembled in October, women had a world-record 64% of the seats. The president jokes that "women are almost taking over everything" and says that soon it will be the men who need help.

Botswana, by contrast, has dipped from 17% in 2003 (ranking it 54th in the world) to 8% (putting it 125th). Nigeria has increased its proportion up a shade from 5% to a still paltry 7%.

It takes time for female MPs to improve women's lot. Despite law changes in South Africa, the World Economic Forum's gender-gap report shows that women earn 35% less than men doing the same jobs.

In Rwanda a higher proportion of girls than boys enroll in primary and secondary education, but they perform worse, and the balance reverses in university, when household duties call daughters and wives away from their studies.

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