

# Mapping Gender Data Gaps in Public Participation

## INTRODUCTION

Women's representation and leadership at all levels of political office and within the public, private, and civil society sectors is a key determinant of their broader rights and wellbeing in development. Unfortunately, there is very little comparable, regularly produced data on women's public participation at the sub-national level. The same is true for barriers to women's public participation due to lack of national identity documentation, the threat of sexual harassment, and violence against women in public spaces.

In 2019, the most pressing gender data gaps for public participation are:

- women's representation in local government and political organizations;
- private sector, professional and NGO representation and leadership;
- national identity documentation;
- voter registration and turnout; and
- violence against women in politics

## WHERE WERE THE GENDER DATA GAPS IN 2014?

Under the MDGs, women's public participation was captured by indicator 3.3 tracking the "proportion of seats held by women in national parliament." Between 1990 and 2015, women gained ground in parliamentary representation in nearly 90% of the 174 countries with available data and the average proportion of women in national parliaments nearly doubled (UN 2015). Yet today, still just one in four members of national parliament are women, and women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of political leadership (UN ECOSOC 2019).

In 2014, Data2X identified women's representation in politics and leadership roles, national identity

documentation, and voter registration and turnout as the most pressing gender data gaps in this area.

## GENDER DATA AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE SDG ERA

Under the SDGs, the focus on women's public participation has broadened to include not just women's representation in national parliaments but also in local governments (SDG 5), in public institutions (SDG 16), and in managerial positions (SDG 5). Furthermore, SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions monitors birth registration for children under five, which has implications for women's ability to exercise their right to vote, to seek employment (including in public institutions), and to run for political office. In total, there are five gender-relevant public participation indicators within the SDGs (full list available in appendix).

Much work remains to close gender data gaps in public participation today. Through Data2X research, one additional gender data gap has been identified since the initial mapping exercise: data on violence against women in politics.

### Women's Representation in Local Governments and Political Organizations

Since the previous exercise by Data2X in 2014, international standards for measuring women's participation in local governments have been developed under SDG 5.5.1; this is important progress. Yet comparable data on women's representation at the sub-national level remains scarce, and for nearly half of all countries it does not exist at all (UN ECOSOC 2019). Countries that have adopted women's political quotas at the sub-national level are more likely to regularly collect and report these figures.

On women's representation in political organizations, there is no international source of data showing the share of women in international



decision-making bodies or representation and leadership in grassroots political organizations. Intersectional data on the share of women of color, indigenous women, disabled women, and LGBTQIA+ individuals are also needed to document the persistent inequalities that exist in terms of political representation.

### **Private Sector, Professional, and NGO Representation and Leadership**

Data on women's representation and leadership in local groups and private sector institutions is not available for most countries and international standards do not exist to measure this. This data can include women's roles in labor unions, community organizations, professional associations, and representation on corporate boards. Women's share of managerial positions in public institutions — including the legislature, the public service and the judiciary — is tracked by the SDGs, but this must be broadened to include women's representation and leadership in other key professions, like health, humanitarian, environment, and policing in order to get a more comprehensive picture of women's voice and influence across public and private sectors.

### **Civil Registration and National Identity Documentation**

National identification provides legal identity for women and girls, which is crucial for them to exercise their rights, including for example, their right to vote, to seek employment in public institutions, and to run for political office. Data on the number of people without identity documentation disaggregated by sex and income level are available for 99 countries as of 2019 from the World Bank's ID4D initiative. This is an accomplishment to be noted but increased country coverage and disaggregation beyond sex and income would be beneficial. It is also not clear from available data how many countries accept diverse gender identities in national identity documentation and how that impacts individual's access to key rights and services.

### **Voter Registration and Turnout**

Voter registration and turnout information disaggregated by sex is not consistently available for all countries, despite its importance for tracking women's voices in the political process. Voter registration data are easier to obtain than actual voter turnout. Though governments may have this information, it is politically sensitive and may not be readily shared. There is currently no international body aggregating this information and while some country forms have a field for the sex of the voter, others do not. Ensuring this data are sex-disaggregated would require working through electoral management bodies and potentially reforming national legislation.

### **Violence Against Women in Politics**

Violence against women is increasingly being recognized as a barrier to women's political participation following a troubling rise in reports of assault, intimidation, and abuse directed at female politicians, including the use of the internet and social media to threaten, harass, and demean women running for political appointments (Krook et al. 2019). The exact contours of this phenomenon remain conceptually unclear and there is no international established methodology or standards for data collection. The best-known prevalence estimates come from a 2016 study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the first-ever global study on violence against women in politics. More than 80% of women politicians interviewed said they had experienced some type of psychological violence related to their work in politics; about one third said they had experienced economic violence; one quarter had experienced some form of physical violence; and one fifth had experienced some form of sexual violence (IPU 2016).

### **WHERE DOES GENDER DATA ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION COME FROM?**

The primary source for data on women's public participation is administrative data. Data on women's political representation is collected by national electoral management bodies and through dedicated research conducted by political organizations. The share of women heads of state,



government ministers, and parliamentarians is tracked systematically by the IPU and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and published as a map every two years by IPU and UN Women, with some of the administrative data archives going back to 1945.

Data reported from civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) authorities is another form of administrative data — the key source for monitoring levels and trends in birth registration. In low- and middle-income countries where reliable CRVS data are unavailable, household surveys represent the sole source of this information. The main household surveys that collect data on birth registration are the USAID Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS).

## WHAT EFFORTS ARE UNDERWAY TO IMPROVE GENDER DATA ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?

Key actors providing guidance on gender data on public participation:

- [UN Women](#) and the [IPU](#) are co-custodian agencies for SDG 5.5.1 monitoring women’s national and local political representation while the [ILO](#) is the custodian agency for SDG 5.5.2 monitoring the proportion of women in managerial positions.
- [IPU](#) and [UNDP](#) are co-custodian agencies on indicator 16.7.1 on the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in public institutions.
- [UNSD](#) and [UNICEF](#) are co-custodian agencies on indicator 16.9.1 on birth registration for children under five.

Organizations calling for, supporting, or using gender data on women’s public participation include:

- [The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics \(iKNOW Politics\)](#) is a platform that fosters exchange, dialogue, and knowledge creation for organizations engaged

in promoting women’s political participation. iKNOW Politics is a joint project of International IDEA, IPU, UNDP, and UN Women.

- The [IPU](#) also runs an open data platform called New Parline with comprehensive data on 193 national parliaments, including information on structures, working methods, gender parity, and women’s caucuses. The information on the platform comes directly from national parliaments.
- The [National Democratic Institute \(NDI\)](#) is one of the leading organizations working to advance women’s political participation around the world, with a specific focus on stopping violence against female political candidates, voters, and activists. In addition to working closely with the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women to establish a form that allows for the safe and secure reporting of incidents of violence against politically active women, NDI’s new Women’s Political Participation Risk Index (WPPRI) assesses the risk of being a politically active woman with data from 172 countries.
- [UN Women](#) has been doing methodological work on the typology and measurement of women’s participation in local government under SDG 5.5.1 to develop a global baseline.
- The [Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics](#) at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) advocates for stronger CRVS systems to monitor and support progress towards gender equality, including on public participation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Data on women’s public participation at all levels should be collected and deployed with an awareness that equal representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions does not necessarily translate into gender-equitable policies or programs. Similarly, increased representation of some women does not equate to representation of all women. Data with multiple disaggregations that can reveal intersectionalities would be helpful in this regard.



Data efforts that currently collect information on women's representation in national parliaments should be expanded to capture representation at sub-national levels, while national and international professional associations could be tapped to provide similar information for women in key professions, like finance and policing.

Cell phone data combined with dedicated surveys could be used to study women's experiences of violence related to their work as political candidates, voters, and activists.

In addition to increasing country coverage of sex-disaggregated data on the number of people without identity documentation, efforts should be made to disaggregate beyond sex and income in order to capture other important determinants of social and political exclusion such as race, age, location (urban/rural), disability status, and indigenous status. This information can be gleaned in part by increasing birth registration rates (SDG 16.9) but efforts should be made to expand identity documentation if it is not obtained at birth.

Techniques for the digital recording of sex-disaggregated birth registrations and provision of national identity documentation could play a key role in governments having accurate population data — including voter registration and turnout data disaggregated by sex — and providing legal identity for women and girls to access their rights. Increasingly, countries are using cell phones and biometric identification to provide a unique digital identity to citizens and record birth registrations.

*This brief is part of "Mapping Gender Data Gaps: An SDG Era Update." The full report can be accessed here: [data2x.org/MappingGenderDataGaps](https://data2x.org/MappingGenderDataGaps).*



## REFERENCES

Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2016). [Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians](#). IPU, Geneva.

Krook, M. and J. Restrepo Sanin. (2019). "[The Cost of Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians.](#)" Perspectives on Politics: 1-16.

National Democratic Institute. (2017). [#NotTheCost: Stopping violence against women in politics](#). NDI, Washington.

United Nations. (2015). [The Millennium Development Goals Report](#). UN, New York.

United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2019). [Report of the Secretary-General, Special edition: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#). UNECOSOC, New York.



# Appendix: Gender-Relevant SDG Public Participation Indicators (5 total)

- 5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments (Tier I (a)/ Tier II (b))
- 5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions (Tier I)
- 16.1.4 Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live (Tier II)
- 16.7.1 Proportions of positions in national and local public institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups (Tier II)
- 16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age (Tier I)