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IFES Bangladesh: Women's Reserved Seats in Parliament

General and Reserved Seats

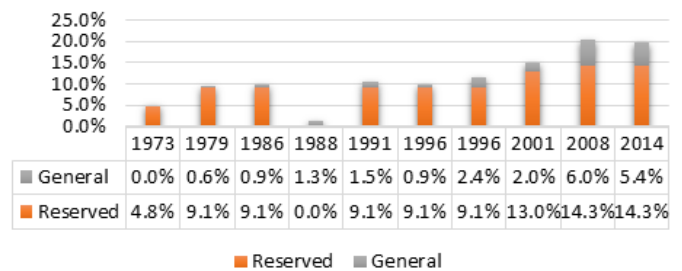
All elections for general seats in Bangladesh are held through a direct, first-past-the-post (FPTP) vote. However, to encourage women's political representation, Bangladesh instituted temporary special measures (TSMs) by reserving a certain number of seats for women at all levels of government¹ – national and local.² This is in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to which Bangladesh acceded in 1984, which specifies that "these types of measures shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention." The TSMs are not intended to be permanent; they are in place until women's representation can be deemed adequate without the assistance of special measures. Although women in Bangladesh can run for general seats, most women opt to run for reserved seats as these are easier for women to contest than general seats. As with general seats, women contesting reserved seats may run on a political party ticket or as an independent candidate.

Number of Reserved Seats in Parliament

The number of reserved seats in the National Assembly (Parliament) is 50 seats as per the 17th amendment to the Constitution of Bangladesh, passed in July 2018, which extended the quota for another 25 years.³

The percentage of women's reserved seats is therefore roughly 14 percent – or 50 out of a total of 350 seats.

Women Elected to Bangladesh Parliament (Percentage of Total Number of Seats)



Electoral System for Reserved Seats

Bangladesh has a FPTP system for general seats in Parliament and a single transferable vote (STV) system for women's reserved seats based on the number of seats secured by a political party. Seats are allocated in proportion to the number of general seats (as opposed to the proportion of votes) won by each party in the parliamentary election in a FPTP election.

1 The variation in the size of the quotas for reserved seats for different tiers of government may be due to the lack of specificity in the Constitution or any other law governing all tiers of government regarding women's reserved seats, except for parliamentary seats, which are set at 50.
 2 District (Zila) Council elections have never been held to date.
 3 Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Article 65.



In contrast with general seats, for which the country is divided into 300 constituencies, the whole country serves as one large multi-member electoral area⁴ for reserved seats, with the general seat members of Parliament (MP) acting as the electorate. The Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) allocates the number of seats to each party in proportion to the general seats won and prepares a voter list for each party consisting of the general seat MPs for that party. The party presents a list of candidates, with each candidate requiring a proposer and seconder from the same party. If the number of candidates and seats are the same, there is no election and the reserved seats are filled as per the list prepared by party leaders. If there are more candidates than seats for the party, the general seat MPs vote by ranking the candidates in their own party using a STV system. If the party nominates fewer candidates than they have seats, the remaining seats can be contested by all parties.

In practice, the STV system has never been used. The reserved seats in Parliament have never gone to vote in Bangladesh because party leaders have nominated only as many candidates as there are available seats for each party. Even if an election for reserved seats were held, it can be argued that the STV used is not a true proportional system, because each MP votes for candidates within his or her party only, and thus it becomes more of a “personal vote” system.

Women in General and Reserved Seats in the 10th Parliament

As women may contest both general and reserved seats, the total percentage of women representatives in Parliament is higher than the 14.3 percent mandated by the reserved seats. In the 2014 elections, 19 women were elected to general seats. Along with the women in reserved seats, the total number of women in elected after the 2014 election for the 10th Parliament was 69 or 19.7 percent. However, in subsequent by-elections, the number of women in general seats increased by four, and the total percentage of women in the 10th Parliament currently stands at 20.9 percent.⁵

Women Representatives in the 10th Parliament of Bangladesh

Position	Number of women	Total number of seats	Percentage of women
General seats	23	300	7.7%
Reserved seats	50	50	100%
All seats	73	350	20.9%

⁴ The term “electoral area” is used to denote what is commonly referred to as a “district” to avoid confusion with the district (zila) as a sub-national level of government in Bangladesh.

⁵ On Election Day on January 5, 2014, 19 women were elected to general seats. Due to the deaths of several male MPs, in subsequent by-elections women, often the MP’s widow, have been elected to fill the seats. The complete list of current MPs is available at: <http://www.parliament.gov.bd/index.php/en/mps/members-of-parliament/current-mp-s/list-of-10th-parliament-members-english>.