



Women's Political Representation in Sri Lanka:

Electoral System Analysis and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

Sri Lanka has taken some positive steps to address significant gaps in women's electoral representation and achieve greater gender equality. One such step is the introduction of a quota at the local government level, and Parliament's passage of a law for a new electoral system with a quota at the provincial level. However, women in Sri Lanka continue to face serious barriers to political representation, and the country ranks among the lowest in the world for the percentage of women in national legislatures. The 2020 parliamentary elections resulted in a Parliament in which women make up just over 5 percent of elected representatives.

This persistent underrepresentation of women combined with other recent trends — such as negative impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic that further exacerbated gender inequalities — underscore the need for targeted action. Sri Lanka's 27-member cabinet has only one female minister. Now is an important time for action: despite challenges introduced by the pandemic, post-pandemic recovery provides an opportunity to reevaluate and reimagine social and governmental structures, particularly as elected women leaders, health workers and civil society representatives have demonstrated their leadership in promoting recovery efforts in the country. Civil society representatives and women parliamentarians alike are increasingly focused on addressing barriers to women's representation.

To help inform stakeholders' efforts to sustainably promote women's political leadership and participation in Sri Lanka, this paper analyzes the main reasons behind the underrepresentation of women in politics in the country and offers recommendations for how to address the underlying and persistent barriers.

The design of Sri Lanka's **electoral system and laws** has a negative impact on women candidates. For example, the size of multi-member districts in some elections, which necessitate substantial funds for effective campaigning, disadvantage women, who generally have less access to campaign funding than men. This, combined with **weak political finance laws**, privilege better-resourced and incumbent candidates, who tend to be men. Added to this, Sri Lanka's **highly centralized political parties** are largely led by men. Indeed, in both the 2015 and 2020 parliamentary elections, no major political party was headed by a woman. In interviews, women candidates repeatedly noted that the outsized roles of male party leaders in selecting nominees undermine women's opportunities to contest for office.

Discriminatory media practices further exacerbate issues for women candidates. In its 2020 parliamentary elections report, *Democracy Reporting International* noted that media coverage of the parliamentary elections disadvantaged women candidates because of traditional media's disproportionate news coverage of men candidates, the use of gendered stereotypes and language by traditional media and social media journalists and users and low representation of women among social media journalists and users.¹ Added to this, **violence against women in politics**, including pervasive online harassment of candidates and elected leaders, serves as a further deterrent from contesting for office.

Key Recommendations

Amid these challenges, civil society organizations, elected representatives and other electoral stakeholders are building momentum for the legislative and policy changes needed to address barriers to women's political representation. Under the USAID-funded Inclusive Participatory Processes (IPP), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) is working with civil society partners to advocate for legal reforms and codes of conduct needed to better address emerging electoral vulnerabilities and to further improve and promote women's political leadership in Sri Lanka. Drawing on the challenges identified in this paper, IFES recommends the following practical steps that a range of actors could take to promote women's political engagement more effectively and, in so doing, strengthen Sri Lanka's democracy:

¹ "Gender and Sri Lanka's 2020 Parliamentary Elections: Disparities in covering male and female candidates on Facebook." *Democracy Reporting International*, 2021.

- Adopt or strengthen quotas at the parliamentary, provincial and local government levels that include reserved seats for women, requirements that women make up 50 percent of candidate lists and sufficient enforcement mechanisms for the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL) in the event that quotas are not followed.
- Advocate for greater roles within legislative bodies and political parties for women elected through quotas and general seats to ensure their contributions are heard and valued.
- Ensure more equal media coverage of women elected representatives through legislation, media codes of conduct and/or awareness raising and provide media training and networking opportunities for elected women and women candidates.
- Allow for additional funding to political parties that run and elect more women and, if a system of public funding is adopted, require that a portion of political party funds be reserved for women's campaigns and training in gender sensitivity. Additionally, pass campaign finance laws that limit unrestricted spending and proactively integrate gender-sensitive provisions.
- Promote gender sensitivity within political party frameworks by requiring that women make up a proportion of political party committees, providing gender sensitivity training for political party members and integrating gender considerations into political parties' election codes of conduct.
- Mitigate electoral violence against women through a variety of mechanisms, including establishing partnerships between the ECSL, social media companies and civil society watchdog groups to better monitor instances of online violence against women in politics; including prohibitions against electoral violence against women in media and in political party codes of conduct; and strengthening reporting and enforcement channels within Parliament and other government bodies to provide women representatives with a clearer and more efficient path for reporting violence in the workplace.

Introduction

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) identifies women's equal participation as critical to a country's development. CEDAW asserts that discrimination against women — including in political and public life — is a violation of the principle of equal rights. Sri Lanka, which ratified CEDAW in 1981, has achieved some notable successes in women's political participation: It was the first country in Asia to grant women the right to vote (women now comprise 56 percent of the registered voting population),² and it was the first country to elect a woman head of government when Sirimavo Bandaranaike became prime minister in 1960.³ Chandrika Kumaratunga, Bandaranaike's daughter, served as president from 1994 to 2005. Beyond political participation, Sri Lanka has made progress in improving women's access to health care and education. Advances in the health field have translated to a nearly 80-year average life expectancy for women and a low maternal mortality rate of 29.2 percent.⁴ Sri Lanka has near parity between girls' and boys' primary school education rates, and the number of women university students is now higher than that of men.⁵ All of these are important benchmarks in laying a foundation for greater gender equality.

While gains in health and education, as well as a history of high-profile women political leaders, distinguish Sri Lanka from many other middle-income countries, women remain persistently underrepresented as elected leaders at all levels of government. In 2021, women's representation in the Sri Lankan Parliament is a mere 5.3 percent, the lowest of any South Asian country and far below the global average of 25.4 percent.⁶ Sri Lanka ranks 178th in women's

² Kamdar, Bansari. "Women in Sri Lanka Make up 56% of Voters, But Only 5% of Legislators." *The Diplomat*, September 25, 2020. thediplomat.com/2020/09/women-in-sri-lanka-make-up-56-of-voters-but-only-5-of-legislators

³ She went on to serve from 1960–65, 1970–77 and 1994–2000.

⁴ National Statistics, <https://fhh.health.gov.lk/index.php/en/statistics>

⁵ "Country Gender Assessment: Sri Lanka". *Asian Development Bank*, 2015. <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/172710/sri-lanka-country-gender-assessment-update.pdf>; Perera, Kaushalya. "There Are More Women at Sri Lanka's Universities—but They Remain Spaces Dominated by Men." *OpenDemocracy*, May 8, 2017, www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/sri-lanka-women-universities

⁶ "Global and Regional Averages of Women in National Parliaments." *Parline: The IPU's Open Data Platform*, 2021. data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=6&year=2021

parliamentary representation worldwide.⁷ Women from Tamil and Muslim minorities and women with disabilities are even less likely to be elected to office. The underrepresentation of women from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is even more stark. As noted in Sri Lanka's 2017 CEDAW Shadow Report, no political parties actively engage with these communities, and lesbian and transgender women are "completely invisible in the political arena."⁸

According to the World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Gender Gap Report,⁹ which measures gaps between women and men across health, education, economy and politics, Sri Lanka ranks 116th out of 156 countries, with notably weak scores on women's representation in elected and ministerial positions. Weaknesses in Sri Lanka's legal and regulatory framework, such as a lack of political finance regulations and intraparty oversight, further contribute to women's low rates of political representation. By eliminating the cabinet-level Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Empowerment, the government has further de-prioritized gender equality. Instead, these matters were moved to the State Ministry of Women and Child Development; Preschools and Primary Education; School Infrastructure; and Education Services and the State Ministry of *Samurudhi* (prosperity program), Household Economy, Microfinance, Self-employment and Business Development.¹⁰ Underscoring these challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated key gender inequalities, for example, by further increasing the difference in the amount of time women spend on unpaid care work compared to their male family members.¹¹

However, in line with Article 7 of CEDAW, which calls for all state parties to ensure that women have the right to vote, run for and hold public office and participate in nongovernmental organizations on an equal basis with men, Sri Lanka has taken some steps to address significant gaps in their electoral representation. The Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 2017, for example, introduced a women's quota at the local government level, substantially increasing the number of women elected to local office from 1.8 percent to 22.8 percent. The expectation of new electoral reforms, combined with the recent (2018) implementation of Sri Lanka's first quota, provide an opportunity to adopt specific provisions that would substantially advance women's political representation. Now is the time to introduce additional measures to support women's political participation. This paper reviews the current status of women's political representation in Sri Lanka within the existing legal framework and describes the most pervasive barriers to women's participation. With these barriers in mind, it proposes targeted interventions, such as quotas, stronger campaign finance frameworks and media regulation that could bolster women's representation at all levels of government.

Methodology

For this paper, IFES conducted an extensive literature review of existing country reports, which included IFES' report, *Assessing the Implementation of Sri Lanka's First Women's Quota: Lessons Learned and Recommendations*, and the National Committee on Women (NCW) report on "Quota for Women in Parliament," national and international publications related to women's representation, and international and national election observer reports from the 2018 local government elections, 2019 presidential election and 2020 parliamentary election. During these electoral cycles and beyond, IFES Sri Lanka has provided technical assistance to the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL) and the Gender and Elections Working Group (a coalition of civil society organizations [CSOs] working on gender and elections), which has allowed IFES to experience and evaluate firsthand many of the issues discussed in this paper. The existing country reports and in-country assessments, including the "Sri Lanka: County Gender Assessment" by Asian Development Bank and IFES' *Violence Against Women in Elections Assessment*, included collecting data from a

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Discrimination of Lesbians, Bisexual Women and Transgender Persons in Sri Lanka: Shadow Report." *Women Media Collective*, 2017.

⁹ "Global Gender Gap Report." World Economic Forum, March 2021. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

¹⁰ State Ministers, Government of Sri Lanka, <https://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/index.php/state-ministers-2/>

¹¹ Jayasekara, Prashanthi, et al. "Care Work, Critical during COVID-19 Pandemic, Is Undervalued and Unequally Shared in Sri Lanka." *UN Women | Asia and the Pacific*, 2021. asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/05/care-work-critical-during-covid-19-pandemic

series of interviews with gender advocates and experts, including local government women leaders. Additionally, this research paper draws on the in-depth reviews of the existing Sri Lanka legal framework related to elections, national and local newspaper articles and media reports. These consolidated and widespread literature reviews informed the identification of broad recommendations to mitigate barriers to women's political representation in Sri Lanka. Additionally, this research paper was reviewed extensively by experts across the political and electoral field, including gender and inclusion experts in Sri Lanka, national observers and IFES' global gender experts in order to ensure the findings and recommendations proposed in this research paper provide robust and inclusive analysis and are in accordance with international standards and best practices globally.

Background on Quotas

Quotas and other temporary special measures¹² — nominally referring to measures that are put into place temporarily to address gendered inequalities until the measures are no longer necessary — are widely integrated into international legal frameworks. While some critics have opposed quotas based on the argument that they fail to

	Country	Quota	Quota type (national level only)
1	Bolivia	Y	Legislated candidate quota and voluntary party quota
2	Costa Rica	Y	Legislated candidate quota
3	Cuba	N	N/A
4	Grenada	N	N/A
5	Mexico	Y	Legislated candidate quota
6	Namibia	Y	Voluntary political party quota
7	Nicaragua	Y	Legislated candidate quota and voluntary party quota
8	Rwanda	Y	Reserved seats and legislated candidate quota
9	South Africa	Y	Voluntary party quota
10	Sweden	Y	Voluntary political party quota

promote meaningful women's representation, quotas are well established as international good practice for ensuring greater gender equality outcomes in elected representation. The Beijing Declaration highlights the use of quotas as a tool for increasing women's political representation, and CEDAW affirms that quotas "shall not be considered discrimination." Additionally, regional bodies like the Venice Commission, which was established to counsel European states on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, have recommended that countries adopt binding or voluntary gender quotas for candidate lists and promote effective enforcement and monitoring mechanisms on gender quotas.¹³ Of the 10 countries with the highest proportion of elected women leaders, eight have adopted some form of quotas at the national level (see Table 1). But while quota use is widely agreed upon,¹⁴ the type of quota adopted impacts women's level of

representation. Given the prevalence of quotas as a tool for increasing women's representation, and the likely implementation of such measures in Sri Lanka, the following section reviews the general benefits and drawbacks of the three primary types of quotas: reserved seats, legislative quotas and party quotas.

¹² Article 4 of CEDAW: — Temporary Special Measures.

1. Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.

2. Adoption by States Parties of special measures, including those measures contained in the present Convention, aimed at protecting maternity, shall not be considered discriminatory.

¹³ "Regional Conference on Gender Equality in Electoral Processes." Venice Commission, 2015. [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-EL\(2015\)015syn-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-EL(2015)015syn-e)

¹⁴ Ballington, Julie, et al. "Political Parties and Special Measures: Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes" U.N. Expert Group Meeting on Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-Conflict Countries, New York, 2004. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/meetings/2004/EGMelectoral/EP8-BallingtonMatland.PDF>

Types of Quotas

Reserved seats: In a reserved seat system, a certain percentage or number of seats are allocated for women representatives. Sri Lanka's Local Authorities (Amendment) Act, discussed below, refers to a reserved seat system in which 25 percent of local-level seats are retained for women. Reserved seat systems are legal mandates and are often passed through reforms of, or amendments to, a constitution or electoral laws. One of the greatest benefits of reserved seats is that they are enforceable given that a certain number of elected seats are set aside for women.¹⁵ Reserved seats ensure that women are actually elected to office rather than merely nominated as candidates, because the quota is applied to the number of elected representatives.¹⁶ Reserved seats are the most widely used type of quota in South Asia¹⁷ (see Table 2). Despite these benefits, reserved seats are often criticized for undermining a candidate's merit by "offering seats without any competition."¹⁸ In some cases the concern about merit is misplaced since, the system may allow for women candidates to compete with other women for a reserved seat position. In Kenya and India, for example, women compete for highly contested reserved seats at the local level. In other elections, however, such as for national-level seats in Pakistan and Bangladesh, women are appointed to seats without contesting. In those situations, the outsized role of the political party in nominating candidates, nepotism and cronyism, combined with the absence of transparent electoral competition, can undermine the legitimacy and authority of the women candidates. Therefore, reserved seats are very effective in achieving greater numerical representation of women but may not be as effective in ensuring substantive representation.

Legislative quotas: Legislative quotas are legal requirements for political parties to nominate a certain percentage or number of women candidates. Sri Lanka's local government election law, in addition to reserved seats, requires parties to allocate 10 percent of candidate nominations to women. To date, almost 80 countries have adopted gender quota laws that impact political parties' preelection choices,¹⁹ but candidate legislative quotas do not necessarily equate to the number of women elected. Without rank-order requirements, political parties can place women candidates in weak positions on the nomination list, so they have little chance of moving beyond the candidate stage to assume office. Or parties run women candidates in constituencies where there is little chance of winning, while placing men in more likely winnable districts for the party. Evidence from Spain and France, for example, demonstrates how candidate quota systems too often follow the letter of the law but not its spirit as parties cluster women at the bottom of party lists where they are unlikely to be elected.²⁰ Similarly in Pakistan, while a 2017 electoral law required that political parties' candidate lists include at least five percent women, the impact was minimal: only

eight women were elected to general seats in the National Assembly in 2018, compared to nine in 2013. To address this manipulation, many countries have adopted "double quotas" requiring both a minimum percentage or number of women on the electoral list and a placement mandate for women on candidate lists. Rwanda, which consistently boasts the highest percentage of women representatives, has adopted such a system. Legislative quotas are often less likely to be enforced than reserved seats due to gaps in electoral legislation. To address this, some countries have coupled this double quota measure

Table 2: Women's representation at the parliamentary level in South Asia

Country	% women's representation	Quota Type
Afghanistan	23.6%	Reserved
Bangladesh	20.7%	Reserved
Bhutan	14.9%	N/A
India	12.6%	N/A
Maldives	4.7%	N/A
Nepal	32.7%	Legislated Candidate
Pakistan	20.2%	Reserved
Sri Lanka	5.3%	N/A

with legal stipulations, such as the nullification of candidate lists for parties that fail to comply with placement

¹⁵ Ballington et al, 2004 (13).

¹⁶ Bjarnegård, Elin, and Pär Zetterberg. "Political Parties and Gender Quota Implementation: The Role of Bureaucratized Candidate Selection Procedures." *Comparative Politics*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2016, pp. 393–417.

¹⁷ Dahlerup, Drude. "Electoral Gender Quotas: Between Equality of Opportunity and Equality of Result." *Representation*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2007, pp. 73–92.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2016 (393).

²⁰ Pande, Rohini, and Deanna Ford, "Gender Quotas and Female Leadership: A Review, World Bank World Development Report on Gender," 2011. http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/rpande/files/gender_quotas_-_april_2011.pdf

mandates for women candidates. Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica and Mexico include sanctions that apply to rank order or placement. Sanctions include nonregistration or rejection of nomination or party candidate lists or allowing 48 hours to rectify the lists before publicly reprimanding the party.²¹ Such measures “restrict party gatekeepers’ room to maneuver” and lead to more women being elected.²²

Voluntary party quotas: The third type of quota is a voluntary party quota through which individual parties commit to nominating a proportion or number of women among their candidates. Voluntary party quotas, such as those in Sweden, are often written into the internal political party rules. Unlike reserved seats and legislative quotas, which require constitutional or electoral legal reform, party quotas are at the discretion of individual political parties. As such, voluntary party quotas tend to be less effective in countries that lack the political will to promote women candidates because they rely on political parties’ ability to break patterns of male political dominance without a legal mandate or sanctions to enforce those mandates.

Impact of Quotas

If effectively implemented, quotas can shift perceptions of women as leaders, increase the number of qualified women running for office and increase women’s meaningful leadership, enabling them to contribute to key policies for the country. Some of these benefits are explored below.

Change public perception: At its root, the chronic political underrepresentation of women, in Sri Lanka and worldwide, is driven by the patriarchal cultural view that they are unfit to lead and govern effectively.²³ The mere presence of women in elected office can slowly help to reverse this misperception. A study on the impact of quotas on attitudes toward women leaders in India, for example, demonstrated that, while people generally viewed first-time women leaders negatively when they were elected to a local reserved seat, the perception of women elected for a second time was much more positive.²⁴ The same study found that, after having two women leaders, Indian villagers’ confidence in women leaders’ competence improved, and that women’s increased access to elected positions continued even after the quota was removed.²⁵ Another study in India found that, in constituencies where a quota was applied and a woman elected, parents were more likely to keep their daughters in school longer than in districts that did not have women leaders, showing that the impact of having women in political positions can upend patriarchal attitudes beyond the political space.²⁶ Such findings underscore that quotas not only increase women’s numerical representation but can also strengthen their chances of winning non-quota seats. Additionally, women village leaders reported feeling as competent as their male counterparts, and after two terms they showed no difference from men in their desire to run again for office.²⁷ This suggests a longer-term attitudinal shift in perceptions of women’s leadership, as well as the realization that it takes time for voters to adjust to quotas and update their beliefs about women as political decision-makers.²⁸

Increase number of women: Quotas and other temporary special measures increase the pool of women running for office.²⁹ One of the primary benefits of legislative quotas in particular is that they force political parties to move beyond recruiting mainly men to recruiting women candidates as well.³⁰ One study of parliamentarians in Sweden found that quotas increased the number of qualified women relative to qualified men in the two elections immediately following the implementation of the quota.³¹ Similarly, there is evidence that, when women see other women run for

²¹ “Gender Quotas.” *IDEA*, 2021, www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/87/35

²² Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2016 (396).

²³ Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2016 (394).

²⁴ Beaman, Lori, et al. “Powerful Women: Does Exposure Reduce Bias?” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2008.

²⁵ Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2016 (399).

²⁶ Gavel, Doug. “India Sees Gains from Gender Quota.” *Harvard Gazette*, January 13, 2012. news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2012/01/india-sees-gains-from-gender-quota

²⁷ Pande and Forde, 2011 (24).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2016.

³⁰ Dahlerup, 2007 (13).

³¹ Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2016.

office, they are more likely to run themselves.³² With quotas, the number of women running for office automatically increases, encouraging even more women to envision themselves as leaders and candidates. This data suggests that quotas can encourage a sustained increase in the number of women — and qualified women — running for office.

Women's meaningful representation: Women elected through quotas sometimes express stronger “gender consciousness” than their non-quota counterparts, including a propensity to support other women leaders.³³ Evidence indicates that having more women in elected office also tends to decrease corruption,³⁴ although it should be noted that this is not necessarily because women are inherently less corrupt but perhaps because they have historically been less entrenched in political corruption due to their previous exclusion. Studies also suggest that having more women in office may indirectly improve the confidence of other women. For example, a study in India found that women's likelihood of speaking at village meetings increased by 25 percent when the local political leader was a woman.³⁵ Other research has found that increases in women's political representation in India resulted in lower rates of child mortality among girls,³⁶ a possible reduction in sex selection for boys³⁷ and improved school performance among girls.³⁸ However, whether quotas increase both the effectiveness and the numbers of women running for office depends in part on a country's electoral process, since quotas are not in themselves sufficient to ensure women's meaningful participation.

As discussed below, other factors impact the extent to which women are able to lead as effective decision-makers. Quotas provide an important opportunity to increase the pool of women candidates, combat stigma against women leaders through a role-modeling effect, shift perceptions of political leadership as a male space and encourage the participation of future women leaders. However, quotas are not without challenges and should not be seen as a silver bullet for improving women's substantive representation. Some quota-specific challenges include the stigmatization of women who enter politics through affirmative action policies as not having “earned” their posts or as less competent than their non-quota counterparts. There is also evidence that incumbent politicians, threatened by increased numbers of women's seats, seek to “limit the authority of female entrants and sideline women as a group”³⁹ to preserve their political power. Additionally, women's effectiveness depends on the political context, a country's electoral framework and the presence of other gender-related provisions to bolster women's authority as political decision makers.

The next section considers the current legal framework in Sri Lanka related to women's participation, the barriers that women face and, within that context, the impact that quotas and other legal and temporary special measures could have on improving women's representation from the local to the national level.

³² Kuta, Sarah. “Women Who Run for Office Inspire Others to Do the Same, Study Suggests.” *Colorado Arts and Sciences Magazine*, April 22, 2020. www.colorado.edu/asmagazine/2018/07/31/women-who-run-office-inspire-others-do-same-study-suggests

³³ Ibid, p. 6.

³⁴ Pande and Ford, 2011.

³⁵ Bhavnani, Rikhil. “Do Electoral Quotas ‘Work’ After They Are Withdrawn? Evidence from a Natural Experiment in India.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2008.

³⁶ Kalsi, Priti. “Seeing is Believing—Can Increasing the Number of Female Leaders Reduce Sex Selection in Rural India?” *Discussion Papers in Economics*, University of Colorado, 2013, *Working Paper No. 13-14*. <http://www.colorado.edu/Economics/papers/Wps-13/wp13-14/wp13-14.pdf>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Beaman, L., et al. “Female Leadership Raises Aspirations and Educational Attainment for Girls: A Policy Experiment in India.” *Science*, vol. 335, no. 6068, 2012, pp. 582–86.

³⁹ Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2016 (9).

Sri Lanka Case Study

Women's Rights in the Legal Framework

Sri Lanka is signatory to several international instruments that affirm the use of temporary special measures to increase the number of women representatives and strengthen women's political participation. These international instruments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, CEDAW, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sri Lanka therefore has a responsibility to ensure that its laws align with international standards and address the barriers that inhibit women's active and equal political and electoral participation. In addition to international frameworks, national legislation (most notably Sri Lanka's Constitution) legislates equality-based principles. Article 12(1) of the Constitution, for example, establishes that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law. Article 12(2) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion and place of birth, and Article 12(4) allows for special legal provisions to be made for the advancement and protection of disadvantaged groups. This constitutional provision should pave the way for the legislation and implementation of quotas and other temporary special measures.⁴⁰

Beyond formal legal measures, Sri Lanka has approved — but only minimally implemented — charters and action plans to promote gender equality. The 1993 Women's Charter, for example, calls on the country to “take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the Public and Private Sectors, in the political and public life of the country.” Similarly, the Government of Sri Lanka has made a commitment to achieving the SDGs, including the objective laid out in SDG 5 to “ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” (5.5). Sri Lanka's National Plan of Action for Women (2002–2007) sought to implement the goals of the Beijing Declaration, which includes support for 30 percent women's representation at the national level, and to address key issues regarding women's rights. Unfortunately, neither the Women's Charter nor the National Plan have been implemented as national legislation or policy, and both lack enforcement mechanisms.⁴¹

The government is presently drafting a new constitution that includes women's rights in the Fundamental Rights Chapter, and it is examining opportunities to reform electoral laws to promote women's representation in politics. Sri Lanka underwent a similar constitutional reform process in 2016. While women's groups and gender advocates provided inputs into the draft reforms in 2016, the steering committee tasked with drafting the reforms had only one woman among its 21 members. As Sri Lanka undergoes this new round of constitutional and electoral reforms, it should take the opportunity to prioritize women's voices among steering committee leadership and move beyond the equality-based legal model to incorporate affirmative measures that increase the number of women in office. Additionally, in light of the fact that quotas tend to benefit certain groups of women (e.g., those from majority ethnic groups, without disabilities or with other relative forms of privilege), the constitution should also lay the foundation for follow-on legislation or electoral codes that address “disincentives” that deter the vast majority of women from entering politics, particularly those from other historically excluded communities such as women from ethnic minorities and estate sectors.⁴² These disincentives include heightened exposure to online harassment, sexual or other forms of

⁴⁰ While Article 12(4) could be read as legal authorization for the implementation of quotas, in practice, the Supreme Court has dismissed this argument and instead ruled against quotas. In 2012, for example, the Supreme Court characterized women advocates' efforts to pass a quota for women candidates in local government elections as unconstitutional, equating such nominations with unequal treatment. See Wickramasighe, Maithree and Chulani Kodikara (2014). “Women in Politics and the Politics of Women in Sri Lanka” in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments*. Wilson Center.

⁴¹ Asian Development Bank, 2015.

⁴² Irving, Helen. “Gender and the Constitution: Equity and Agency in Comparative Constitutional Design,” *Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge, 2008.

physical violence, social stigmatization and other challenges that women candidates often experience when running for office.

Status of Women in Sri Lankan Politics

Sri Lanka's government structure is divided into three levels of elected leaders: the national level, made up of the president, prime minister and Parliament; the provincial level, made up of nine provincial councils; and the local level, made up of 335 local administrative bodies. At each level, women are significantly underrepresented due to a variety of systemic and institutional obstacles.

Parliament: Sri Lanka is a semi-presidential system with a 225-member unicameral Parliament elected for a five-year term through a proportional representation (PR) system. Of the 225 seats, 196 are elected from 22 multi-member districts under a preferential list system. The remaining 29 seats are allocated to political parties or groups' national list candidates in proportion to the number of votes the party received countrywide.

Despite a PR system that is generally considered more conducive to the election or appointment of women than some first past the post (FPTP) systems,⁴³ this has not translated into higher rates of representation for women in Sri Lanka. In the 2020 parliamentary election, for example, the country's five largest political parties nominated a total of only 59 women, less than 6 percent of their candidates.⁴⁴ Only 12 of the 225 elected Members of Parliament (MPs) were women; four of those MPs were appointed through the national list, and none came from the minority Tamil or Muslim groups. This is a decrease from the last parliamentary election in 2015, when 13 women were elected. Not only do political parties rarely champion women or elected seats, but they are also largely overlooked for ministry and national list appointments. Out of over 50 current cabinet and state ministries, only one woman has been made a cabinet minister and two have been made state ministers.

Year	Total Elected	Number of Women Elected	% Elected
1947	101	3	3.0%
1952	101	2	2.0%
1956	101	4	4.0%
1960 (March)	157	3	1.9%
1960 (July)	157	3	1.9%
1965	157	6	3.8%
1970	157	6	3.8%
1977	168	11	6.5%
1989	225	13	5.8%
1994	225	12	5.3%
2000	225	9	4.0%
2001	225	10	4.4%
2004	225	13	5.8%
2010	225	13	5.8%
2015	225	13	5.8%
2020	225	12	5.3%

Provincial councils: Below the national-level Parliament, Sri Lanka's provincial councils are the legislative bodies that govern the nine provinces. Provincial council members are directly elected for five-year terms. As of 2016, women represented less than five percent of provincial seats. To date, no special measures are in place at the provincial level to elect women candidates. However, the Provincial Councils Elections (Amendment) Act, No. 17 of 2017, which was passed by two-thirds of Parliament, provides for the following framework for a mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral system and a quota for women:

1. For the nomination of candidates, 50 percent of the PR nomination list and one-sixth of FPTP candidates should be women (legislative candidate quota).

⁴³ "Joint Guidelines on Engaging the Role of Women in Post-Conflict Electoral Processes." *UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations*, 2007. http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/undpa/shared/undpa/pdf/women_electoral_guidelines.pdf

⁴⁴ "Only 59 Female Candidates from 05 Mainstream Alliances. Which Party Has the Most Female Candidates?" *NewsWire*, August 1, 2020. www.newswire.lk/2020/08/01/only-59-female-candidates-from-05-mainstream-alliances-which-party-has-the-most-female-candidates

2. A minimum of 25 percent of seats are allocated for women in each council. Seats will be allocated to women if the number of women elected through the FPTP and PR lists is under 25 percent despite the nomination quotas (reserved seats).
3. The Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL) has the authority to ensure that the 25 percent quota is met and that 25 percent of the total number of members to be elected and returned from each administrative district within a province are women. However, if a provincial council that is constituted is unable to meet this threshold, it will not be automatically deemed unlawful for the mere inability of meeting the threshold.

While the ECSL has been given the authority to ensure that a 25 percent quota is met, in reality it is unable to take any action or provide redress if a provincial council is unable to meet this quota, especially when few women contest for seats. Additionally, there are concerns that the amendment passed in 2017 and the 25 percent quota for women may never be implemented due to a dispute regarding boundary delimitation for the provincial council electoral districts. Elections are therefore overdue, and the delays may result in a return to the previous PR system without quota provisions for women's representation.⁴⁵

Local authorities: In February 2016, Sri Lanka's government passed a 25 percent women's quota through the Local Authorities (Amendment) Act, No. 1. This was further amended by Act No. 16 of 2017. The following provisions were established by law to institute an MMP system with a 25 percent quota for women:

- For the nomination of candidates, 50 percent of the PR nomination list and 10 percent of the FPTP candidates should be women (legislative candidate quota).
- A minimum of 25 percent of seats are allocated for women in each council. Seats are allocated to women if the number of women elected through the FPTP and PR lists is under 25 percent despite the nomination quotas (reserved seats).

The 2017 act outlines two exceptions to the quota: if a political party or independent group has an overhang situation,⁴⁶ or a political party or independent group receives less than 20 percent of the total number of votes in a local authority and obtains fewer than three seats, then the quota does not apply for the relevant local government body.

As outlined in the 2017 act, the ECSL has the authority to reject nomination papers submitted by a political party or contesting independent group if they do not meet the basic legal requirements for the number of women candidates. However, the ECSL was not granted a sufficiently explicit mandate to enforce quota provisions beyond the candidate nomination process.

There were numerous delays in the finalization of results for the local government election in 2018, due in part to lack of political will among parties to meet the quota provisions and limited understanding of the specific quota exceptions. These held up the formation of the local government authorities. The absence of a proper system or criteria for selecting women candidates from the PR list, for example, meant that competence and relative popularity was not taken into account. As noted above, although the PR list was publicized before the elections, it was technically a closed list for voters — but political parties were able to change the order of the names in their lists after publication, and even after the election, making it a de facto open list for political party leaders. The selection of counselors was at the sole discretion of the organizers of the political parties, and women candidates expressed frustration at the perception that some party leaders were adjusting the order of names in the lists following the election to ensure their preferred candidates obtained the PR seats.

⁴⁵ "Fresh Dialogue on PC Elections." *Daily News*, December 16, 2020. www.dailynews.lk/2020/12/16/features/236222/fresh-dialogue-pc-elections

⁴⁶ An overhang occurs when the number of members elected for a local authority exceeds the apportioned number of seats.

In total, political parties and independent groups fielded 17,128 women candidates in the 2018 local government elections,⁴⁷ representing 30 percent of the political candidates.⁴⁸ Ultimately, women made up 23 percent (1,919)⁴⁹ of the newly elected local government counselors, with 1,384 appointed from the PR list and 535 elected through the FPTP list.⁵⁰ In addition to women making up 23 percent of local government representatives nationwide, it is important to note that more than 95 percent of Sri Lanka's 341 individual local authorities met the 25 percent quota following the election.

Barriers to Women's Political Participation

While women in Sri Lanka now graduate from college at higher rates than men, have greater economic opportunities than ever before and assume leadership positions across civil society, there has been no similar increase in their representation as political leaders. To identify targeted interventions to improve their access to political leadership, this section highlights key barriers that women face when contesting for political office in Sri Lanka.

Electoral system structure: Without affirmative measures, aspects of Sri Lanka's electoral structure disadvantage women candidates. One challenge is that candidates contesting national-level seats must canvass for votes within very large electoral districts.⁵¹ In general for multi-member districts, women are disproportionately negatively affected by larger districts due to economic inequalities between men and women candidates. Weak political or campaign finance regulations exacerbate issues with contesting large districts, as candidates must expend more funds to campaign over a large area. Additionally, women can find travel more difficult due to disproportionate care work and other household demands and, even more dangerous for them, curtailing their ability to campaign far from home.

A second challenge is that Sri Lanka's electoral system allows voters in parliamentary elections to both vote for a list of candidates and indicate their preference for up to three candidates through an open list system. In this context, parties select and fund candidates based on their perceived "capacity to command votes," a reality that rarely favors women since political parties view them as "poor winners"⁵² due to their low likelihood of gaining office. Additionally, the five percent electoral threshold, which establishes a minimum share of the vote that a political party or group is required to win to secure any representation and was initially intended to open doors for a more diverse range of ethnic groups, has proven too high for independent women's groups to contest for seats.⁵³ In general, the election of a number of smaller parties to Parliament can negatively impact women, as parties are typically headed by men, and male leaders often take first slots.⁵⁴ These and other seemingly gender-neutral measures in Sri Lanka's electoral system have disproportionately harmed women's representation.

Political party frameworks: Major social and cultural barriers undermine women's participation and representation in politics. Sri Lanka's political parties are largely characterized by weak intraparty frameworks that reflect undemocratic intraparty governance. This lack of bureaucratized party structures tends to make it more difficult for women in particular "to devise a strategy to break into the inner circle of power."⁵⁵ The combination of a weak intraparty framework; a non-transparent candidate nomination process; and a lack of enforceable, gender-sensitive regulations that could encourage party leaders to champion women candidates undermines women's electoral

⁴⁷ Ramanayake. "Names of Members Elected to 10 LG Bodies Published." *News.Lk*, March 18, 2018. www.news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/19856-names-of-members-elected-to-10-lg-bodies-published

⁴⁸ "LG Elections: Voting Concludes." *Sri Lanka News – Newsfirst*, February 10, 2018. www.newsfirst.lk/2018/02/10/local-government-election-3

⁴⁹ Notice under S. 66(2), Local Government Ordinance, Extraordinary Gazette Notification, March 9, 2018. http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2018/3/2061-42_E.pdf

⁵⁰ "Increase Female Representation by 30–70%." *CeylonToday*, June 25, 2021, ceylontoday.lk/news/increase-female-representation-by-30-70

⁵¹ Wickramasighe and Kodikara.

⁵² Transparency international (6).

⁵³ Wickramasighe and Kodikara.

⁵⁴ Ballington and Matland (6).

⁵⁵ Ballington and Matland (4).

opportunities. The 2017 CEDAW Shadow Report⁵⁶ highlighted Sri Lanka's continued failures to address key challenges to women's political participation, including lack of political will to introduce or implement quotas for women, failure to nominate women within political parties and tolerance of widely shared stereotypes that women's low representation is due to their lack of interest in politics.⁵⁷ Sri Lanka has neither legal provisions nor mechanisms to regulate the internal functioning of its political parties and hold parties accountable to internal democratic practices.

A study by International IDEA and the Centre for Policy Alternatives notes, "the most prominent feature of political parties in Sri Lanka is that they are highly centralized, with power structures that can best be described as being 'leader-centric.'"⁵⁸ Such power structures are often oriented around men,⁵⁹ as evidenced by the fact that no major political party was headed by a woman in either the 2015 or the 2020 parliamentary election cycle. When women do participate in party structures, they tend to do so at the local level rather than the central or committee level, where party decisions are made.⁶⁰ A survey conducted by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies found that 60 percent of polled women candidates were active only in village-level party committees. Additionally, all surveyed women candidates who ran for provincial council seats but had contacts only at the provincial council level — rather than the national level — lost elections.⁶¹ The election laws in Sri Lanka also do not clarify how political parties and independent groups select candidates, nor is there much clarity or transparency within political parties' selection processes. One of the biggest issues highlighted by women candidates is that grassroots-level political party organizers — the majority of whom are men — have the authority to select the candidates of their choice.

The dearth of women in political party positions is notable in Sri Lanka. This is despite the fact that, for example, the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act of 2009 states that "In order to guarantee better representation of women in political parties and in politics, every recognized political party shall ensure the inclusion of one or more women office bearers in the list of office bearers of such party." In reality, as noted by the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), women make up only 8 percent of office bearers among all registered political parties nationwide.⁶²

According to Transparency International Sri Lanka, the "nondemocratic style of power sharing within political parties"⁶³ discourages inclusive representation since women are typically on the outside of male-dominated political networks.⁶⁴ The importance of political connections to consolidate votes has become entrenched as "an acceptable political practice" in Sri Lanka.⁶⁵ This is due in part to the lack of transparency in the candidate nomination process, an issue that leaves systems open to candidate selection based on politically expedient decisions, financial power and family connections, all of which tend to favor more politically connected men. In addition, women's advocates have highlighted the deeply concerning use of sexual bribery to barter for nominations (See Violence Against Women in Elections, page 8 for more details).⁶⁶

There are many examples of how patronage politics, discrimination and a lack of democracy or transparency in the candidate nomination process have disadvantaged women's nominations in Sri Lanka's elections. For instance, although women made up 30 percent of candidates contesting the municipal council election in Jaffna and other

⁵⁶ As part of the CEDAW reporting process, civil society organizations in countries signatory to CEDAW are asked to produce regular shadow reports to assist the CEDAW committee in evaluating government reports and assessing a country's progress in implementing CEDAW commitments to women's rights.

⁵⁷ "Sri Lanka Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women," *Women and Media Collective*, February 13, 2017, [INT CEDAW NGO LKA 26306 E.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/docd/26306_E.pdf)

⁵⁸ "Sri Lanka Country Report based on Research and Dialogue with Political Parties", *International IDEA & Centre for Policy Alternatives* 2004–2005, <http://www.idea.int/parties/upload/SriLankaCountryReport.pdf>

⁵⁹ Ballington and Matland (7).

⁶⁰ Basu, Amrita. "Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia." *U.N. Research Institute for Social Development*, 2005, p. 7, sacw.net/Wmov/BasuOP5.pdf

⁶¹ International Centre for Ethnic Studies (forthcoming).

⁶² Ibid.; *Ceylon Today*: Increased Women's Representation in Politics.

⁶³ Transparency International Sri Lanka (187).

⁶⁴ Ballington and Matland (7).

⁶⁵ Wickramasighe and Kodikara.

⁶⁶ Samuel, Kumudini. "ANALYSIS: Sri Lanka: The Link Between Women's Political Representation and the Peace Process." *PeaceWomen*, February 8, 2015, www.peacewomen.org/content/analysis-sri-lanka-link-between-womens-political-representation-and-peace-process

municipal seats in 2009, no political party nominated women from the conflict-affected North to stand for parliamentary election in 2010.⁶⁷ In another example, in the 2015 parliamentary elections, Bernadine Rose (Rosy) Senanayake, a former MP and current mayor of Colombo, contested unsuccessfully as part of the United National Party. According to civil society representatives,⁶⁸ her surprising defeat was due largely to the fact that party leaders asked her to limit her campaigning for fear that she would be an unwinnable candidate for the party. If true, such an example highlights party members' unwillingness to promote women candidates, as well as a lack of transparency and democracy in the intraparty nomination process.

Weak political finance regulations: A 2009 survey of 300 women parliamentarians from around the world by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and a 2013 study of elected women representatives by U.N. Women found that lack of finances is one of the strongest deterrents to women entering politics or contesting electoral campaigns.⁶⁹ The lack of financial resources for women candidates is particularly prevalent in Sri Lanka, where a number of political finance issues coalesce to impede women's political participation.

Sri Lanka is one of the few countries that has no political or campaign finance regulations to monitor campaign fundraising or expenditures.⁷⁰ Candidates and political parties are free to receive campaign funds from any source, no laws limit campaign spending by political parties and candidates, and neither political parties nor candidates are legally required to report itemized contributions and expenditures during election campaign periods or at any other time. This reality undermines the transparency and fairness of the political funding process and creates an uneven playing field, with disproportionately negative impacts on women.⁷¹

In its 2015 parliamentary observer report and 2019 presidential election observer report, the European Union noted that the absence of campaign finance provisions and public financing resulted in "high campaign spending from candidates' own resources"⁷² in the parliamentary election. This disproportionately disadvantages women, given that they are statistically less likely to have access to sufficient financial resources—either personal or party—due to gender inequalities. In 2013, the per capita income (purchasing power parity) was \$5,078 for women, compared with \$13,616 for men, while the difference in estimated earned income was similar: \$5,030 for women compared to \$13,180 for men.⁷³ A 2015 survey of local-level women candidates in Ampara, Badulla and Kurunegala districts found that only 1 percent of respondents received resources from their political parties. Tamil and Muslim women in the North and East, areas that were most affected by the civil war, are even more disadvantaged as women and minorities with fewer resources in a post-conflict context.

In addition to drawing from their own resources, candidates — and minority women in particular — are also expected to engage in substantial fundraising efforts. Here again, women are disadvantaged because fundraising relies on connections to male-dominated political or business networks and favors incumbents whose "campaign expenditure tends to be lower overall."⁷⁴ Representing merely 5.30 percent of national, 4.39 percent of provincial and 23 percent of local-level seats, women are far less likely to be incumbents and therefore must expend, on average, *greater* resources to contest the election. Additionally, as noted above, the absence of established guidelines for candidate nominations can sometimes force candidates to engage in bribery and leverage political connections and funders to secure seats as party nominees.⁷⁵ Weak political finance regulations not only harm women, but they also undermine principles of inclusion by robbing the electorate of the opportunity to choose diverse representatives — men or women — across different socioeconomic classes.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ As disclosed to IFES by civil society organization representatives in interviews in March 2012.

⁶⁹ Ballington, Julie, and Muriel Kahane. "Women in Politics: Financing for Gender Equality." In *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns: A Handbook on Political Finance*. International IDEA 2014.

⁷⁰ IFES (2016).

⁷¹ Ballington and Kahane.

⁷² "Presidential Elections—Final Report." European Union—Election Observation Mission, November 16, 2019, p. 26 https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/sl2019_final_report_24_january_2020.pdf

⁷³ "Asian Development Bank. "Country Gender Assessment: Sri Lanka- An Update." <https://www.Adb.Org/>, 2015, www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/172710/sri-lanka-country-gender-assessment-update.pdf

⁷⁴ Ballington and Kahane.

⁷⁵ IFES (2016).

Discrimination in the media: The media can be a powerful tool to enable candidates and elected leaders to communicate their messages to voters and educate citizens about priority issues. Conversely, media coverage can also reinforce negative behaviors and practices. In Sri Lanka, the exclusion of women candidates from more serious media coverage related to national security, economics and politics undermines their role as decision-makers on national and international issues. Under the current legal framework, Sri Lanka offers little incentive to address this exclusion. The country does not have affirmative measures or protections regarding media coverage during campaigns, nor does it impose penalties for airing hate speech or content that incites misogynistic views. In its 2020 parliamentary elections report, Democracy Reporting International noted that parliamentary media coverage negatively affected women candidates due to disproportionate news coverage by traditional media, use of gendered stereotypes and language by traditional media and individual social media users, and low numbers of women social media users.⁷⁶ The European Union 2015 parliamentary observation report noted that women candidates in Sri Lanka received low levels of coverage across all outlets, with state channels devoting only 10 percent of their election coverage to women and private media only five percent.⁷⁷ This unequal coverage is compounded by women's more limited access to resources, resulting in less funding for media coverage. Sri Lanka's lack of media regulations limiting discriminatory language against women candidates creates yet another barrier. An example of this is the fact that hate speech on social media in Sri Lanka is disproportionately directed at women,⁷⁸ which is likely to have an inhibiting effect on a woman's desire to be a public figure.

A 2010 study of 108 countries by the Global Media Monitoring Project revealed that women make up less than one-quarter of the subjects of information in the news, whereas men account for the vast majority of media personnel, interviewed candidates and experts worldwide.⁷⁹ Similarly, in Sri Lanka, underrepresentation extends beyond women candidates to Sri Lankan media personnel. According to a 2015 study on gender in Sri Lanka's media by the International Federation of Journalists, women journalists report being regularly sidelined from covering issues related to politics, conflict or economics, and that sexual harassment and pay inequality are issues in most major media organizations.⁸⁰ Taken together, weak or gender-insensitive coverage of women candidates, combined with failures to engage women on serious political topics, replicates negative stereotypes that continue to downplay women's role as serious political contestants qualified to run for office.⁸¹

Violence Against Women in Elections to intimidate women candidates and discourage women's participation in politics: IFES defines violence against women in elections (VAWE) as any harm or threat of harm committed against women with the intent and/or impact of interfering with their free and equal participation in the electoral process during the electoral period.⁸² In 2018 and 2019, IFES conducted evaluations to identify instances of VAWE, focusing on women contesting for the 2018 local government election and the impacts on women's participation. The high rates of VAWE identified in both on- and offline spaces during the 2018 election underscore VAWE as a significant challenge to women obtaining elected office. Highlighting this challenge, the Women's Action Network released a statement in January 2018 noting that "[w]e have not set up enough structures and mechanisms to safeguard female candidates. There isn't a level playing field for women entering politics."⁸³

Through interviews and social media analysis, IFES identified disturbing examples of VAWE. One woman candidate reported that another male candidate assaulted her, locked her in a house and demanded that she withdraw a complaint to the police. Another woman candidate reported being attacked by a neighbor in front of the police,

⁷⁶ "Gender and Sri Lanka's 2020 Parliamentary Elections: Disparities in covering male and female candidates on Facebook", Democracy Reporting International, 2021, https://democracy-reporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/DRI-LK-Gender-and-SLs-2020-Parliamentary-Elections-SMMA_Final.pdf

⁷⁷ Ibid. (22).

⁷⁸ "Monitoring Hate and Harmful Speech Online in Sri Lanka: Monthly Report", *Hashtag Generation*, June 2021.

⁷⁹ "Who Makes the News." Global Media Monitoring Project, 2010, <http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2010-reports>

⁸⁰ "Country Report: Media and Gender in Sri Lanka." *International Federation of Journalists*, 2015, p. 17, http://www.ifj.org/uploads/media/SRI_LANKA.pdf

⁸¹ "Gender, Media and Elections." *ACE*, 2012, <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me/me10/me10e>

⁸² "Violence Against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring, and Response" *International Foundation for Electoral Systems*, 2017, https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/vawie_framework.pdf

⁸³ "Women candidates marginalized despite mandatory 25% quota." *Daily FT*, January 27, 2018, <https://www.ft.lk/opinion/Women-candidates-marginalised-despite-mandatory-25-quota/14-648190>

requiring hospitalization. Sexual violence was widespread; for example, in Polonnaruwa District, a woman candidate reported being raped by a campaign supporter during the election period. Additionally, according to election monitoring organization PAFFREL, there have been incidences of male political party leaders soliciting sexual bribes as a condition for obtaining nominations.⁸⁴ In Monaragala District, a woman candidate reported that a male candidate threatened to take “revenge” on her and her father if she didn’t withdraw her candidacy. Other women candidates reported that supporters of other political parties threatened their children (Puttlam District) and that “fake news” documents intended to insult a woman candidate and her husband were widely distributed in her locality (Kalutara District).⁸⁵

VAWE is also rampant online, including the widespread use of social media as a platform for violence against women candidates. In an interview with Sri Lanka’s *Daily Mirror*, for example, a woman candidate from Arayampathy noted that a photograph taken at an opening ceremony of a road development project, where a male MP was standing next to her, was edited to make her look like a “loose woman” in a compromising position. The image was circulated widely on social media, and copies were posted around her relatives’ homes and in public places such as markets and bus stops. Another candidate from Puttlam District explained how hate speech on social media tarnished the integrity of women candidates: “Some of our women candidates published portraits of themselves along with their husbands in brochures to reduce harassment and rumors against them and their families, but one had been edited and filthy materials included and shared widely on social media.” In a particularly troubling case, religious leaders used internet platforms to share messages that attacked Muslim women candidates and their family members in Puttalam District, portraying them as un-Islamic for contesting for office.⁸⁶

Options to Achieve Greater Political Representation for Women in Sri Lanka

CEDAW recommends that countries adopt sustained policies aimed at the promotion of the full and equal participation of women in decision-making in all areas of public, political and professional life, and the adoption of temporary special measures, such as financial support to women candidates. To be most effective, these policies must respond to a country’s specific challenges and local context. Drawing on international best practice, this section highlights possible interventions that could be adopted in Sri Lanka’s electoral and legal framework to mitigate the most salient barriers to women’s political participation and to foster a more gender-positive electoral environment.

Adopting quotas: Adopting quotas has proven to be one of the most effective ways to increase women’s numerical representation. Quotas reflect not only international standards and best practice but also public opinion in Sri Lanka. One of the key recommendations of the European Union’s parliamentary election observation report, for example, was to introduce temporary special measures “to increase the representation of women in politics as well as their role in key positions in the public sector.”⁸⁷ Similarly, most Sri Lankans recognize the need to improve women’s representation, specifically through quotas. A December 2015 public opinion poll conducted by the Center for Policy Alternatives found that nearly 65 percent of Sri Lankans agree that there should be a fixed quota for women’s representation in Parliament.⁸⁸ The 2017 CEDAW Shadow Report noted that the 2016 constitutional reform process saw “resounding calls for special measures to ensure greater representation of women in political bodies and all other decision-making bodies.”⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Ibid.; Ceylon Today: Increased Women’s Representation in Politics.

⁸⁵ PAFFREL report (unpublished).

⁸⁶ “Sri Lanka Brief: Women Action Network Condemns Attacks on Woman Candidates.” January 24, 2018, <http://srilankabrief.org/2018/01/women-action-network-condemns-attacks-on-woman-candidates/>

⁸⁷ EUEOM 2015.

⁸⁸ “Democracy in Post War Sri Lanka.” *Center for Policy Alternatives* 2015, p. 46, http://www.cpalanka.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/12/Democracy-survey-DEC-2015_Final-report_Dec18.pdf. It should be noted that support for quotas has steadily decreased over time, from 78.6 percent in 2013 and 90.4 percent in 2011.

⁸⁹ Women Media Collective 2017 (13).

Sri Lanka has already adopted a reserved seat system for local-level representation and passed a new electoral law for provincial councils that includes a quota (although it remains unimplemented) and, at the time of this report, is considering adopting a quota for the national level as well. The type of quota — whether for legislated reserved seats for elected candidates, legislated party quotas for fielding candidates or voluntary political party quotas — will significantly impact the extent of women's numerical and substantive representation. The analysis below highlights key considerations for each of these options.

The first option, mandating reserved seats, has an impressive track record of ensuring that more women not only run for but also enter office. Depending on the design, however, there can be drawbacks with the reserved seats system, as evidenced in the recently adopted local level quota. While acknowledging the milestone, gender advocates in Sri Lanka have identified some concerns with the new local level quota, or the Local Authorities (Amendment) Act, including that political parties' control over the nomination of women candidates gives an outsized role to party leaders and could increase candidates' vulnerability to sexual or financial bribery in exchange for seats. There are also concerns that additional seats will create a "dichotomy" between the general seats and reserved women's seats if the holders of the latter are viewed as less credible and lacking the popular mandate of those who contested in open races. In addition, the law fails to challenge the incumbency of the entrenched male political class by creating and designating additional seats for women. Further, the failure to tie the additional reserved seats to a particular constituency limits women leaders' capacity to build credibility with and connections to a specific constituency that might support their candidacy for future general elections.⁹⁰

The second option, legislated candidate quotas, avoids some of the sensitivities noted above because additional "women only" seats are not necessarily created, thus avoiding a hierarchy between seats. However, in order for women to not only run for but also be elected to office, legislated candidate quotas should include a second level of affirmative action, such as placement mandates, to ensure that women are either contesting in winnable districts for FPTP positions or are placed high enough on candidate lists to ensure their election.⁹¹ Quotas could also be legislated within political parties to help offset the gender imbalance in political party leadership. In Bangladesh, for example, political parties were required to have 33 percent women in all party committees by 2020 (a goal that none of the major parties met) — a measure that could be considered for Sri Lanka.

The third option, voluntary party quotas, are generally insufficient to translate to implementation as, by definition, they lack an enforceable mandate. Major political parties in Sri Lanka have already adopted voluntary platforms and manifestos on the importance of women's participation with few results, further underscoring the need for legal quotas.⁹²

If a national-level quota is adopted, it must be either a reserved seat system or a legislated quota to be effective; if a reserved seat system is adopted, women should be required to compete for the seats rather than be nominated through internal party channels. Additionally, to the extent possible, reserved or legislated seats should be integrated with general seats, including by ensuring that women elected through a quota system are given portfolios and budgets similar to general seat members. Public outreach campaigns are also needed both to raise awareness about the importance of women's representation, including an explicit emphasis on Tamil and Muslim women, and to dispel the misperception that women candidates elected through quotas do not compete for their positions. Such a public outreach campaign, and the design of the national-level quota itself, should be informed by careful monitoring of the local-level quota when it was introduced during the 2018 local government election to help avoid any deficiencies of the new system at higher levels in the constitutional reform process.

Additionally, given that Sri Lanka's political parties are characterized by opaque, weakly institutionalized and highly centralized party procedures, any quota must be accompanied by sufficient sanctions for noncompliance, which the ECSL could oversee. Clarity in the process for determining who is awarded a seat, and making it more difficult for changes in party lists to occur after Election Day, could help to stem confusion and assure voters of transparency. It

⁹⁰ Kodikara, March 2016.

⁹¹ Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2016 (363).

⁹² EUEOM, 2015 (26).

would also assure women candidates that political dealings after Election Day would not interfere with the likelihood that they would take office. Finally, quotas are important steps but not in themselves sufficient to address the gender barriers that inhibit women's influence and participation as elected leaders. Other measures are needed to address the diverse challenges that women in Sri Lanka face in contesting for office.

Meaningful representation of women: To achieve gender equality goals, it is necessary to promote the meaningful — not only numerical — representation of women by advocating for greater decision-making roles within legislative bodies and political parties for women elected through quotas and general seats to ensure their contributions are heard and valued. Also, it is necessary to ensure more extensive media coverage of women elected representatives and to provide training and networking opportunities for elected women and women candidates. Additionally, providing space and support for more women to run for local government elections and presenting a diverse pool of women candidates running for office by ensuring that all underrepresented groups — from all ethnic and religious minorities — are identified, trained and accepted to political party nomination lists. There is an additional need to raise awareness of the importance of women's leadership for democratic and equitable outcomes, to ensure the representation of cross-party women in parliamentary caucuses at all levels of government and to build the capacity of elected women leaders and candidates. Finally, adopting mechanisms such as gender mainstreaming, gender equality infrastructure and gender-sensitive policies will institutionalize a more gender-inclusive legislative environment by mitigating backlash against women candidates and elected leaders and ensuring proper integration of women as decision-makers in elected office.

Strengthening political and campaign finance provisions: To improve women's opportunities to contest for office and increase access to political finance resources and party support, new campaign finance regulations are needed to address the importance of equality between men and women candidates.⁹³ This is in keeping with international best practice. The Venice Commission, for example, identifies the need to establish transparent public funding systems and promote financial incentives for better representation of women within political parties.⁹⁴

Addressing political finance regulations could help level the playing field for both men and women candidates and help reverse the perception that only the most affluent women with powerful connections are able to access office.⁹⁵ Such a reversal requires a combination of a bolstered legal framework, affirmative action measures (including incentives for women candidates) and enforcement mechanisms for noncompliance. From a legal framework perspective, as Sri Lanka undergoes a constitutional reform process and engages in discussion to reform the country's electoral laws, the Parliament could consider establishing a cap on election-related expenditures, disclosure requirements, asset declaration mandates and restrictions on contributions to political parties and candidates. To enforce these provisions, it is critical that an independent and credible public institution, such as the ECSL, be given the necessary legal mandate and capacity to oversee compliance — including scrutiny and audit functions — with provisions relating to money in electoral campaigns. While such provisions are not explicitly gender-related, establishing a more transparent and open legal framework will reduce the focus on candidates' fundraising capacity and economic resources.

⁹³ Cigane, Lolita and Ohman, Magnus, "Political finance and gender equality: IFES White Paper." *International Foundation for Electoral Systems*, 2014, https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/political_finance_and_gender_equality.pdf

⁹⁴ Venice Commission, 2015.

⁹⁵ Ballington and Kahane, 2014 (23).

In addition to these improvements to the legal framework, Sri Lanka could consider adopting affirmative finance-related measures and public funding provisions that explicitly promote women's political representation. International IDEA's political finance database lists at least 28 countries that have adopted provisions linking political parties' public funding with gender equality.⁹⁶ This could include adopting public funding mechanisms that proactively promote women candidates, such as requiring political parties to reserve a certain portion of public funds specifically for women candidates. It could also include the promotion of gender-positive activities and providing financial incentives to political parties if they run or elect women candidates. In Georgia, for example, political parties receive 30 percent more public funds if they maintain a 30 percent gender balance in their party lists; in South Korea, political parties receive subsidies for fielding women candidates; and in Bolivia, Colombia and Niger, parties receive additional funds depending on the number of women elected.⁹⁷ Brazil has adopted both incentive mechanisms and penalties for noncompliance (see text box).

Brazil

Brazil's National Election Law No. 13 (2015) legislated a combination of financial-related incentives and penalties aimed at increasing women's representation. Key provisions of the law include requirements that political parties allocate at least five percent of party funds to air public awareness programs on the importance of women's political participation and between five and 15 percent of party funds to finance women's campaigns specifically. Parties that fail to meet these requirements are required to allocate 12.5 percent of their total funds to initiatives aimed at promoting women's participation.

Source: International IDEA Political Finance Database

Improving intraparty procedures: In many countries, political parties are gatekeepers in promoting women as candidates and elected leaders and thus have critical roles in advancing gender equality in the political process. Sri Lanka should adopt various measures to make political parties more gender-sensitive, fairer and more transparent for all candidates. One of the most important steps would be to establish clear and transparent candidate nomination processes, given that a lack of clarity during candidate selection results in decisions being made by the party elites (typically men).⁹⁸ In its publication, *Guidelines on Political Party Regulation*, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) identifies numerous gender provisions to be integrated into internal party rules. These include establishing women's sections or wings within parties to monitor gender sensitivity and run capacity-building trainings; implementing requirements for gender-balanced boards for selecting party candidates; establishing mentoring programs for women; requiring gender-sensitivity training courses for political party members "to minimize the effect of historical inequalities in political life;" and adopting gender strategies and action plans that are developed and owned by the political parties themselves.⁹⁹

These measures are echoed by the Venice Commission, which has called on political parties to enhance women's participation, including through promotion of women's associations, capacity building efforts and gender-balanced candidate nomination boards. Other measures, such as adoption of gender-sensitive codes of conduct, can help identify gender equality as part of normal party procedures. Nigeria's Code of Conduct for Political Parties, for example, prohibits political parties from using "inflammatory language, provocative actions, images or manifestation that incite violence, hatred, contempt or intimidation against another party or candidate or any person or group of persons on grounds of ethnicity or gender or for any other reason."¹⁰⁰ It is important to note, however, that such measures are more a symbolic than enforceable, intended to reverse negative attitudes toward women. Another important consideration is to ensure that, if women's wings are adopted, representatives are integrated into other decision-making bodies and leadership positions.¹⁰¹ Additionally, women's wings should include male allies within the party who are invested in promoting women's representation in the party process.

Promoting a gender-positive legislative environment: Political backlash from incumbent leaders who view women's gains in representation as undermining the incumbents' own seats can rob women representatives of a safe

⁹⁶ "Political Finance." *IDEA*, 2020, www.idea.int/political-finance/question.cfm?field=280@ion=-1

⁹⁷ Political Fund Act, No.10395.

⁹⁸ Ballington, Julie. "Equality in Politics: A Survey of Men and Women in Parliament." *Inter-Parliamentary Union*, 2008, <http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/equality08-e.pdf>

⁹⁹ "Guidelines on Political Party Regulation." *OSCE*, 2011, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/77812?download=true>

¹⁰⁰ "Code of Conduct for Political Parties." *Independent National Electoral Commission – Nigeria*, http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Code_of_Conduct_For_Political_Parties_Preamble.pdf

¹⁰¹ Ballington, 2008.

work environment and discourage their participation.¹⁰² There is evidence that incumbent leaders around the world who worry that their positions are under threat often adopt “survival tactics” ranging from overt acts of violence to more subtle strategies such as preventing women from attending political meetings, changing the time and place of meetings, cutting off microphones and using sexist language. These actions marginalize women and render them less effective.¹⁰³ As it considers adopting gender quotas in its Constitution, Sri Lanka should proactively adopt mechanisms that will institutionalize a more gender-inclusive legislative environment by mitigating backlash against women candidates and elected leaders and ensuring that women are properly integrated as decision-makers in elected office.

Drawing on other country examples, Sri Lanka's mechanisms could include establishing an independent women's commission to conduct research on gender inequality and monitor violations of women's rights, including in the political sphere and by political parties; requiring that women be represented on important parliamentary committees; implementing trainings for candidates and women elected leaders on parliamentary procedures and budgeting, among other areas, so they can more effectively promote their interests and influence decision-making; and adopting parliamentary rules that encourage a more inclusive parliamentary atmosphere by, for example, requiring that meeting times be posted in advance and that parliamentary facilities be more family-friendly, such as by providing child care.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps most importantly, Sri Lanka should adopt strict laws and enforcement mechanisms to mitigate gender-based violence, including sexual violence against women candidates and leaders (see below).

While none of these measures will necessarily increase incumbent leaders' support for new women candidates and representatives, taken together they can provide checks on individuals' capacity to

undermine women by institutionalizing more gender-positive rules and legislative procedures and by raising awareness about the roles that both men and women play in promoting gender equality.

Media codes of conduct: How the media portrays women candidates can have far-reaching effects on their electoral success. The media serves as a pivotal source of information during election periods for 86 percent of Sri Lankans, and 51 percent of Sri Lankans say that the information they get from the media influences how they vote.¹⁰⁵ Media coverage that perpetuates negative stereotypes or otherwise discriminates against women candidates in the country is therefore a significant obstacle to increased women's representation. Facing similar challenges, other countries have taken affirmative steps to mandate and enforce more gender-positive coverage of women during elections.

Rwanda

In 1996, Rwanda's women parliamentarians formed a cross-party Forum of Women Parliamentarians with a mandate to ensure gender-sensitivity in parliamentary, legislative and government oversight. Formally recognized as a parliamentary body, the forum has focused on:

- Researching legal issues that affect women;
- Obtaining funding for and organizing training workshops for women parliamentarians; and
- Providing gender analysis of legislation and promoting a gender-positive legislative agenda which, among other accomplishments, resulted in the passage of a gender-based violence bill.

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2011). [“Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice.”](#)

¹⁰² Pande and Forde, 2011.

¹⁰³ Krook, Mona Lena, and Juliana Restrepo Sanin (2016). “Gender and Political Violence in Latin America: Concepts, Debates, and Solutions.” *Política y Gobierno* 23 (1).

¹⁰⁴ Ballington, 2008.

¹⁰⁵ “General Election 2015 Pre-Election Opinion Poll: Top Line Report”, *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, August 2015, <http://www.cpalanka.org/general-election-2015-pre-election-opinion-poll-top-line-report/>

The Venice Commission recommends adopting affirmative measures to increase awareness of women in politics among media and to ensure fair coverage of women.¹⁰⁶ In keeping with its commitments under CEDAW to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country, Sri Lanka could adopt media codes of conduct for state media — radio, television and print — to provide impartial and independent election news and analysis that includes an emphasis on increasing women's role in politics through fair and gender-sensitive coverage. Tanzania's 2000 Media Code of Conduct for Election Reporting, for example, calls on journalists to "refrain from coverage that is biased and that reinforces the existing prejudices against women" and to "encourage women contestants by raising public awareness of the importance of women's participation in public life and by rebuking all moves aimed at suppressing them."¹⁰⁷ Codes of conduct should also commit media to expand beyond narrow definitions of "women's issues" to cover women as experts and political candidates on an equal footing with men.

Name it. Change it.

Civil society has an important role to play in bolstering media efforts to end discriminatory coverage. In 2010, three advocacy groups — She Should Run, Women's Media Center and Political Parity — came together to launch the Name it. Change it. initiative in the United States. Name it. Change it. aims to end misogynistic coverage by challenging pundits, radio hosts, bloggers and journalists when they make sexist remarks about women candidates. The online resource serves as an education source about women candidates and a platform for citizens to report sexist incidents in the media and pledge to support gender positive media messaging.

Additionally, as Sri Lanka's legal framework undergoes changes, the country could adopt measures to provide free airtime on public television and radio stations for men and women candidates to lessen the financial burden on women.¹⁰⁸ Civil society also has a role to play in bolstering media coverage. Efforts in other countries — such as Name it. Change it. in the United States (see text box) — engage citizens as watchdogs against misogynistic coverage of women candidates, raising the profile of the importance of gender-sensitive media coverage.

Mitigating electoral violence against women: Violence against women in elections is often most prominent in countries like Sri Lanka that are facing political transition or experience intense religious and ethnic divisions.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, violence against women in elections is rampant online, including the widespread use of social media as a platform for hate speech and threats against and harassment, bullying and intimidation of women candidates. Given women's historic marginalization from Sri Lanka's peace process, establishing a quota for women in formal reconciliation efforts could be one step to ensure that they are integrated in higher numbers as decision-makers in peacebuilding.¹¹⁰ However, recognizing that women's increased presence in parliaments and peace processes does not necessarily equate to diminishing political violence against women, broader interventions are needed to mitigate electoral violence.¹¹¹

Confronting sexual harassment in Bolivia

In 2012, following decades of advocacy by women's rights groups, Bolivia passed the Law Against the Harassment of and Political Violence against Women. The law specifically applies to women in public office and women exercising political/public roles. It provides comprehensive definitions of political harassment and political violence, establishes three possible reporting mechanisms and adjusts the categories of crime in Bolivia's Penal Code to allow for prosecution of gender-based political harassment or violence.

Source: UN Women. "[Bolivia: Gender-Based Political Violence](#)."

In her paper, *Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence*, Gabrielle Bardall highlights interventions throughout the electoral cycle that could mitigate political violence against women. Recommendations include revising training manuals and handbooks for election monitors so they are better equipped to identify and

¹⁰⁶ Venice Commission, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Tanzania Media Code of Conduct for Election Reporting, 2010.

¹⁰⁸ "Political Finance in Bangladesh: Assessment and Recommendations for Reform" *International Foundation for Electoral Systems*, 2013.

¹⁰⁹ iKNOW Politics, 2015.

¹¹⁰ The Women, Peace and Security agenda was formally initiated by the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which was adopted on October 31, 2000. UNSCR 1325 affirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding initiatives. Both the Women Peace and Security agenda and UNSCR urge member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.

¹¹¹ iKNOW Politics, 2015.

record instances of electoral violence against women; adapting preelection technical evaluations to include systematic analyses of women's legal rights and levels of violence against women; integrating information on gender and electoral violence into voter and civic education materials; and conducting gender-sensitivity training for police involved in election activities.¹¹² A number of countries provide examples that could help mitigate high rates of violence against women. In Afghanistan, hotlines were established for women who experienced harassment for political reasons ahead of the 2010 elections, and women MPs received additional travel stipends so they could take safe, private transport to campaign within their provinces.¹¹³ Another important initiative is establishing laws and accompanying enforcement mechanisms to prohibit violence against and harassment of women as candidates and elected representatives. There are many examples of countries adopting such legislation: Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, South Africa and others have laws or bills that criminalize political and gender-based violence in an effort to reverse high rates of violence, including sexual violence, targeting women leaders.

Key Recommendations

Gender Quotas

- National and subnational constitutional bodies and decision-making structures should ultimately seek to achieve equal representation of women and men. It is important for the Constitution to mandate that women are equally represented in constitutional bodies — including commissions and all national and subnational level decision-making bodies, policy bodies, parliamentary select committees, management bodies, councils and other offices. The quota recommendations below for each current electoral system are based on the assumption that a single electoral system has not been adopted.
 - **Parliamentary elections:** For both the national list and district lists, there should be a closed, zippered list that alternates between men and women candidates, ideally ensuring women account for 50 percent of the list. Changes to the lists should be prohibited once submitted to the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL), and the ECSL should be able to enforce the correct implementation of the quota.
 - **Provincial council elections:** While the Provincial Councils Elections (Amendment) Act No. 17 of 2017 is a solid foundation, it could be improved with the following revisions: changing the quota for distribution of seats so they are divided evenly between women and men, increasing it from the current 25 percent and removing the “overhang” and vote percentage exceptions to the quota. Provincial council elections have not yet been held under the new mixed-member proportional system. If Sri Lanka reverts to the previous proportional representation system, which is being discussed as an option in Parliament, a 50 percent or increased candidate quota along the lines of the above quota for parliamentary elections is recommended. Changes to the lists should be prohibited once submitted to the ECSL, and the ECSL should be able to enforce the quota.
 - **Local government elections:** Local Authorities (Amendment) Act, No. 1 of 2016 and Act No. 16 of 2017 should be amended as follows: change the quota for distribution of seats so they are divided evenly between women and men, increasing it from the current 25 percent; and remove the “overhang” and vote percentage exceptions to the quota. Changes to the lists should be prohibited once submitted to the ECSL, and the ECSL should be able to enforce the quota.
- Parliament should pass and the ECSL should implement a political party quota requiring that women comprise at least one-third of the members of all political party committees.

¹¹² Bardall, Gabrielle. “Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence.” *International Foundation for Electoral Systems*, 2011, http://ifes.org/sites/default/files/gender_and_electoral_violence_2011.pdf

¹¹³ iKNOW Politics, 2015.

- Parliament should pass laws that empower to the ECSL to enforce sanctions against parties that violate quota regulations. The ECSL should be empowered with the necessary authority to hold political parties accountable for noncompliance.

Women's Meaningful Political Leadership

- Sri Lanka should proactively adopt mechanisms that will institutionalize a more gender-inclusive legislative environment to ensure that women are properly integrated as decision-makers in elected office.
- Electoral stakeholders, including the ECSL, women and inclusion focused CSOs and political parties should advocate for greater roles within the legislative bodies and political parties for women elected through quotas and general seats.
- Journalists and media companies should ensure equal and more positive media coverage of women elected representatives.
- Political partners and Parliament should provide training and networking opportunities for elected women and women candidates.
- Electoral stakeholders, including the ECSL, women and inclusion focused CSOs and political party leadership should conduct awareness raising about the importance of women's leadership for democratic and equitable outcomes.
- Political parties and Parliament should build the capacity of elected women leaders and candidates.

Political and Campaign Finance

- Parliament should pass laws that establish campaign finance regulations in Sri Lanka's electoral framework, such as a cap on election-related expenditures, disclosure requirements and asset declaration mandates.
- The ECSL or a similar independent commission should be given the authority and legal mandate to enforce party compliance with campaign finance laws.
- Parliament should establish a system of public funding for political parties and create incentives for political parties to increase women's representation by providing additional funds to those that run or elect more women. If a system of public funding of political parties is established, there should be a mandate that political parties reserve a portion of the funds for women's campaigns and gender-sensitivity training.
- Civil society groups should engage in generating a network of financial support for women candidates.

Political Parties

- Political parties should establish women's sections or wings that include men party leaders to champion gender equality.
- The Parliament and/or the ECSL should mandate political parties to establish gender quotas for political party committees, such as those responsible for budgeting and for the candidate nomination process.
- Political parties should conduct gender sensitivity trainings and technical trainings on budgeting, campaigning and campaign finance regulations that are accessible to all party members.
- Political parties and/or the ECSL should develop gender-sensitive codes of conduct for political parties and engage civil society groups and the media in monitoring parties' compliance with the codes.

Legislative Environment

- Parliament should establish an independent women's commission to expand its mandate to monitor broader issues in addition to gender inequality and violations of women's political rights.

- Parliament should require that all parliamentary committees have a minimum number or proportion of women MPs.
- As with political parties, Parliament should conduct gender-sensitivity trainings and technical trainings on budgeting and parliamentary procedures that are accessible to all MPs.
- Parliament should require that the times for formal parliamentary procedures — such as voting on bills — be publicized in advance so all MPs are able to attend.
- Parliament should adopt strict laws and enforcement mechanisms to mitigate sexual violence against women candidates and leaders.

Media

- The ECSL should establish gender-sensitive media codes of conduct and engage civil society in monitoring media and social media coverage.
- The ECSL should establish mechanisms for free or subsidized public television and radio spots to enable all candidates to access media channels regardless of their funding sources.
- International and national electoral actors should promote civil society's role as watchdogs against gender-based hate speech and stereotypes in traditional and social media coverage of women candidates.

Mitigating Electoral Violence Against Women

- Observer groups should develop gender-sensitive training manuals and handbooks for election monitors so they are equipped to identify and record instances of electoral violence against women, including online violence.
- Observer and electoral organizations should adapt preelection technical assessments that include systematic analyses of women's legal rights and levels of violence against women, including online violence.
- Parliament should establish laws and accompanying enforcement mechanisms to prohibit violence against and harassment of women as candidates and elected representatives.
- The ECSL should integrate information on gender and electoral violence into voter and civic education materials.
- The security sector should conduct gender-sensitivity training for police involved in election activities.
- Partnerships should be established between the ECSL, social media companies and civil society watchdog groups to better monitor instances of violence against women in politics on online platforms.
- The ECSL should prohibit electoral violence against women in media and in political party codes of conduct.

Conclusion

When it was first ratified in 1978, Sri Lanka's Constitution reflected a relatively progressive legal framework that enshrined the equal rights of men and women. However, since that time, while other countries have adopted more equity-based affirmative action measures that have effectively promoted women's political representation, Sri Lanka has not adjusted its laws to respond to the gender-specific barriers that women face when contesting for and entering office. Sri Lanka's recent adoption of a local-level gender quota, combined with plans to further reform the Constitution, provide an opportunity to integrate laws that proactively promote women's meaningful representation. While Sri Lanka's legal framework should respond to specific challenges and draw on existing gender gains — such as the high rates of education among women nationwide — other country models provide ample evidence and best practice examples for addressing some of the most salient issues women face when contesting office. These include adopting mandatory quotas for candidates and elected leaders; strengthening political finance regulations; providing financial incentives for parties to nominate more women; promoting public access to more gender sensitive media; and formalizing candidate nomination processes.



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