

Women in  
**Leadership**



# The State of Women in Politics

Women are increasingly gaining power in the political arena. While the election of Kamala Harris as vice-president in the 2020 election was a giant leap forward, there is much work to be done in reaching parity.

The Council on Foreign Relations' Women's Power Index tracks how well women are represented in the 193 United Nations countries. According to CFR, only 21 countries have a female head of state or government, 14 have at least 50% women in the national cabinet, and only four have at least 50% women in the national legislature.

Despite big gains in the 2018 and 2020 elections, the United States is ranked 128th by the CFR for political parity, with only 17% women in the Cabinet and 24% in Congress.

The top 10 countries for parity, according to CFR, are Costa Rica, Rwanda, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Nicaragua, Andorra, Norway, South Africa and France.

## WHAT DOES PARITY LOOK LIKE?

Parity means women are represented equally as heads of state, as government min-



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isters and Cabinet members, and in national and local legislatures, according to the CFR. When women make up 25-30% of a legislature, "they are more likely to challenge established conventions and policy agendas," including working across party lines and compromising, says the CFR. Women also are more likely to advocate for education and health policy, gender

equality, and legislation about domestic violence, rape and harassment, according to the organization. UN Women reports that areas with higher percentages of women with political power have seen increases in drinking water projects, as well as legislation regarding child-care, parental leave, pensions and electoral reform.

Women in government also

have been linked to increased confidence in national governments, and women ministers and Cabinet members have been correlated with increased public health spending.

Another benefit of having more women in power is stability, according to the CFR. It cites research showing that governments run by women are less likely to respond to

international conflict with violence or experience civil war or human rights abuses.

"Ensuring that governments reflect the diversity of the societies they represent guarantees a balanced perspective which enables an inclusive approach to policy-making and service delivery," writes the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.



# Kamala Harris

Kamala Harris' election as vice-president shattered many barriers.

Women and girls were able to say for the first time in 2020 that they saw someone of their own gender win the nation's second-highest office. She also is the first woman of color, the first Black woman and the first South Asian woman in the role.

The rise of Kamala Harris to the vice-presidency has inspired and encouraged many women, making real the possibility that the highest levels of our government could reflect the diversity of its citizens. Here's a closer look at how Harris became a political superstar and trailblazer.

## HER LIFE

Harris was born in Oakland, Calif., to Indian and Jamaican immigrants, who were civil rights activists. She was raised primarily by her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, a breast cancer scientist.

She graduated from Howard University and the University of California, Hastings College of Law, and her law career led to her role as district attorney of San Francisco and then attorney general of California. She was elected to the Senate in 2016 and became President Joe Biden's running mate in 2020.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE

Harris has been breaking



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barriers for her whole career. She was the first female district attorney of San Francisco, the first female attorney general of California and the first Indian American in the US Senate.

She took office as vice-president in January 2021, just as

a record number of women had been elected to serve in Congress.

Her election came just months after the centennial of the ratification of the 19th amendment, which gave women the right to vote.

Debbie Walsh, director of

the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, put it this way: "To women and girls of all walks of life, of every political persuasion, Harris's ascension to the vice presidency broadens the horizons of the possible."

Harris herself acknowledged the significance in her first speech as the nominee for vice-president. She said, "While I may be the first woman in this office, I won't be the last, because every little girl watching tonight sees that this is a country of possibilities."



# Angela Merkel

One of Europe's most popular leaders, Angela Merkel will retire in 2021 after 16 years as the first female chancellor of Germany.

At the helm of Europe's largest economy, Merkel's tenure has been marked by economic and social reforms, as well as strong leadership on the environment. For 18 years, she led Germany's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, and she's worked with four U.S. presidents, four French presidents and seven Italian prime ministers, according to CNN.

## LIFE AND CAREER

Born on July 17, 1954 in Hamburg, Merkel grew up the daughter of a Lutheran pastor in Communist East Germany. She obtained a doctorate in quantum chemistry from the University of Leipzig in 1986 and worked as a chemist at the Central Institute for Physical Chemistry, Academy of Sciences until 1990, when she was elected to the German parliament, the Bundestag.

Merkel served as minister for women and youth, and later as minister for the environment and nuclear safety, in Helmut Kohl's cabinet. She became secretary-general of the CDU in 1998 and became the party leader in 2000. In 2005, she was elected chancellor, narrowly defeating Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

She has led Germany through financial and immigration crises, and is known

as a deal-maker and a diplomat. She has been named 12 times to Forbes' list of the most powerful women in the world. In 2011, President Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011.

## CHALLENGES

Merkel has faced her fair share of challenges in office. Kohl sometimes referred to her as "the girl." CNN writes that when she was elected chancellor, "many deemed her too inexperienced and uncharismatic to last." She was not only the first woman chancellor but the youngest.

Merkel has even faced intimidation tactics from her own colleagues. Vladimir Putin once brought a dog into a meeting with Merkel, who is known to be afraid of dogs.

During Merkel's fourth term, she faced a fractured government after the far-right Alternative for Germany party took 13% of the Bundestag, and her party had difficulties forming a government.

Through it all, Merkel has remained popular. Even as she announced her retirement, she was experiencing record popularity. A 2020 Pew Research Center survey of 14 countries around the world showed Merkel to be the most highly regarded head of state.





# Jacinda Ardern

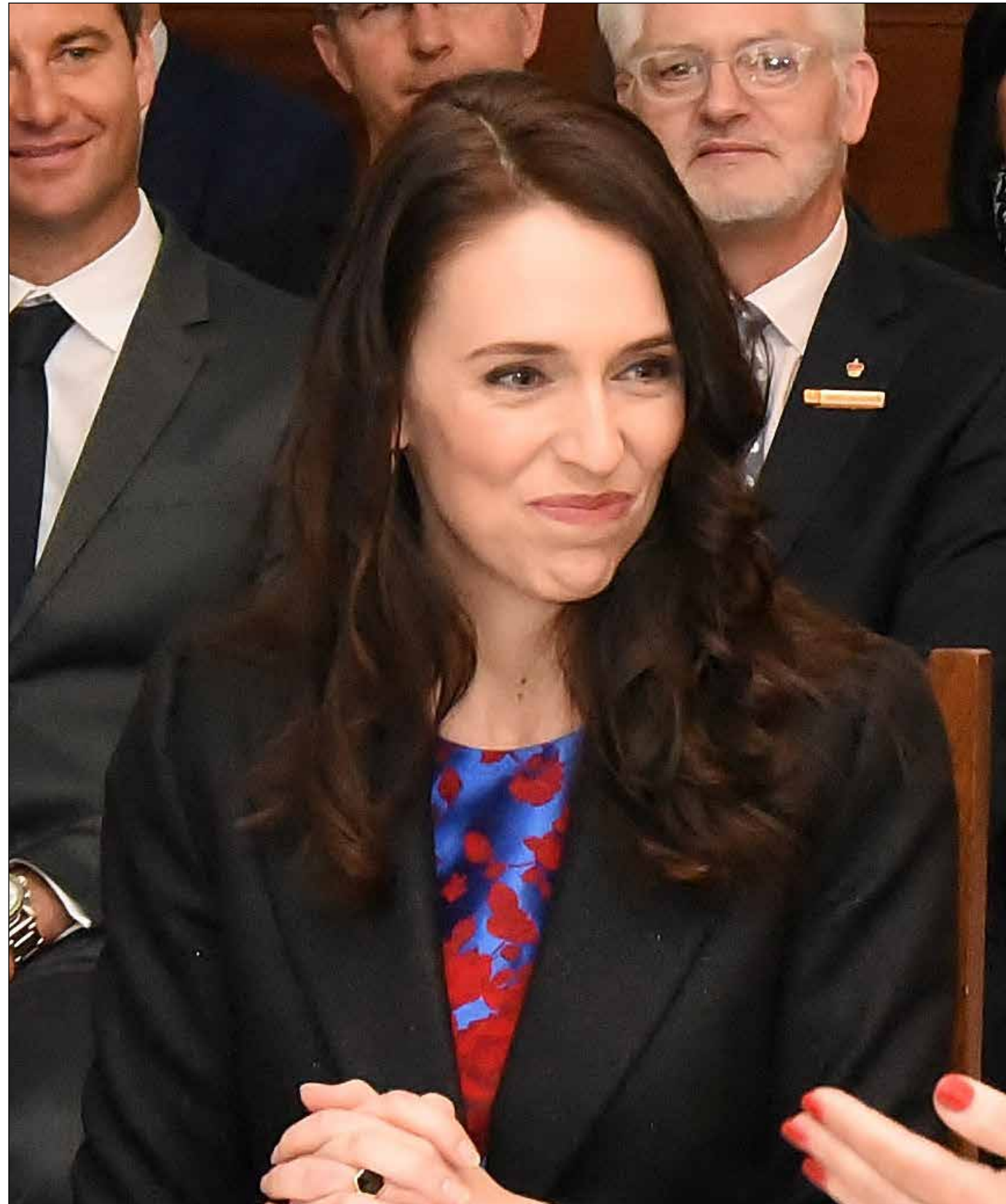
New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has largely been credited with the country's effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She was a political star before the pandemic, however, and has long been a groundbreaking politician.

Her championing of progressive causes and efforts to bolster women have made her an incredibly popular public figure.

## PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The country saw its first case of COVID-19 on Feb. 26, 2020, and by May, had stopped the spread of the disease. The success is due largely to a strict national lockdown, which Ardern issued in late March, when the country had only 102 COVID-19 cases and no deaths. New Zealand conducted a robust testing program and performed contact tracing to keep its infection numbers low. It also relied heavily on science to set metrics the country needed to meet before lifting restrictions.

It wasn't just Ardern's leadership, however, that has been widely recognized but her



GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF NEW ZEALAND/CREATIVE COMMONS

relatability.

She posted daily on social media to provide updates on COVID-19, but also posted

photos of herself and her family during the pandemic. They included a photo of her working from home in jeans and

socks, and watching netball with her fiancée, Clarke Gayford. For her social media prowess, she has been called

“the Facebook prime minister.”

According to an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, “Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern provided empathic leadership and effectively communicated key messages to the public — framing combating the pandemic as the work of a unified ‘team of 5 million’ — which resulted in high public confidence and adherence to a suite of relatively burdensome pandemic-control measures.”

## LIFE AND CAREER

Ardern was born July 26, 1980, in Waikato. After college, she worked as a senior policy advisor for British Prime Minister Tony Blair's Cabinet. She was first elected as an MP in 2008, and in 2017, at age 37, she became the country's youngest prime minister ever.

In 2018, she became only the second head of state to give birth while in office, following Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1990. She was the first New Zealand prime minister to be pregnant while in office. In 2018, she notched another first when she brought her infant daughter into a speech at the UN General Assembly in New York.

Following a deadly mass shooting in New Zealand in 2019, Ardern led a successful effort to enact strict gun control in the country. She has long championed LGBTQ+ rights, and in early 2021, she pledged to provide free period products to girls.

In October 2020, she was re-elected in a landslide.

# Helping Women Run for Office

Since 2016, multiple organizations have sprung up in the U.S. to help train women to run for office. The result has been a surge in female candidates and elected officials.

If you're a woman interested in running for office, a plethora of organizations stand ready to help provide inspiration and support.

## EMILY'S LIST

Focused on the issue of abortion, EMILY's List helps pro-choice candidates get elected. The organization was started in 1985 by Ellen Malcolm but found the lime-light after the 2016 election, when it supported Hillary Clinton's campaign and four women elected to the Senate. The name is an acronym for "Early money is like yeast," a reference to a Malcolm quote that "it makes the dough rise." According to EMILYSList.com, it references the political convention that early monetary donations attract more donors later.

EMILY's List provides online training and webinars as well as in-person trainings and endorses candidates at the federal level.

## SHE SHOULD RUN

She Should Run is a



MICKEY MYSTIQUE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

non-partisan organization that has set an ambitious goal of getting 250,000 women to run for office by 2030. It offers courses on leadership, networking, communications and basic campaign operations.

Its online Starter Kit lets women take a quiz to determine which public office might be a good fit for them, a step-

by-step guide and workbook to help them get started, a Civics 101 course and advice about tackling barriers to running for office, among other resources. It also offers an incubator, which is a set of online courses to help women make a plan to run, overcome barriers and meet other women with political goals.

## HIGHER HEIGHTS FOR AMERICA

Founded by Black women, Higher Heights for America's goal is to expand representation and voting participation for Black women. The non-profit offers financial support, online training, research and communications assistance to candidates.

Its #BlackWomenLead Toolkit offers access to training programs from the high school level up, and resources for electing women to offices from the municipal to federal levels. Training topics include digital organizing, fundraising, strategy, crisis leadership and more. Its webinar guests have included Stacey Abrams.



# Mia Mottley

In 2018, Mia Mottley became the first female prime minister of Barbados, after her Barbados Labor Party won over 70% of the popular vote and all 30 seats in the legislature.

With a 30-year career in politics, she has become known for her advocacy for education and women.

## LIFE AND CAREER

Born Oct. 1, 1965, Mottley's father and uncle were politicians. She trained as an attorney at the London School of Economics before beginning her political career in 1991. She was first elected to parliament in 1994. She served in the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Culture, and became general secretary of the Barbados Labour Party in 1996.

In 2001, she was the first woman appointed attorney general and minister of home affairs. Other roles she has held include deputy prime minister and chairman of the Social Council of Barbados, as well as deputy chairman of the Barbados Economic Council. In 2008, she became the chairwoman of the BLP.

Mottley was also the youngest Queens Council for Barbados. During the 2018 election, she was endorsed by



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Barbadian pop star Rhianna.

## BARBADOS' FINANCIAL CRISIS

From the day Mottley was sworn in as prime minister, she faced the task of hauling the country out of an economic slump that had lingered since the Great Recession. Mottley also serves as the

minister of finance, economic affairs and investment.

With the country's credit rating in junk status and debts at 175% of gross domestic product, it was in dire financial shape. Within a year of Mottley's election, the government had a financial support plan approved by the International Monetary Fund

and received a \$290 million loan, and the European Union had lifted its financial blacklist of the island, opening the country up to foreign investment, according to Caribbean Life.

At the time, the IMF announced that, "Barbados continues to make strong progress in implementing its

ambitious and comprehensive economic reform program."

The COVID-19 pandemic posed more challenges to Barbados' economy, driving it down by 18% in 2020 alone. The IMF reported, however, that Barbados continued to reduce its debt and make progress toward economic reform.

# Stacey Abrams

Although Stacey Abrams came up short in her bid for the Georgia governor's office in 2018, since then, it has seemed that everything has been going her way.

Her efforts have largely been cited as crucial to Georgia's recent blue wave. Abrams has been on a mission since she started her nonprofit Fair Fight in 2019. The 2020 national elections and Senate runoff in 2021 showed the fruits of her labor, as Georgia's two Senate seats flipped to blue, propelling Democrats to equal footing with Republicans in the Senate.

## LIFE AND CAREER

Born in Madison, Wisconsin, on Dec. 9, 1973, Abrams grew up in Gulfport, Miss. and Georgia. She studied political science, economics and sociology at Spelman College and holds a master of public affairs from the University of Texas at Austin, as well as a law degree from Yale Law School. In 2002, at age 29, she became Atlanta's deputy city attorney.

She was first elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 2006, serving for 11 years, and in 2010, she was the first woman to



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lead a party in the Georgia General Assembly.

## 2018 ELECTION

Abrams was the first black female nominee for governor by a major party in the United States.

Following the 2018 election,

Abrams did not concede, citing voter disenfranchisement. "Let's be clear: This is not a speech of concession," she said. "Because concession means to acknowledge an action is right, true or proper. As a woman of conscience and faith, I cannot concede

that." She soon got to work on efforts to make change.

She launched Fair Fight to "ensure every American has a voice in our election system," according to the organization's website. This included a goal of registering at least 800,000 new voters in Georgia ahead

of the 2020 general election, as well as funding and training voter protection teams in 20 battleground states.

Abrams is also an accomplished writer, having written eight novels and two New York Times best-selling non-fiction political books.