

**Seventy-seventh session**

Item 149 of the preliminary list\*

**Report on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services****Evaluation of women and peace and security in field-based missions: elections and political transitions****Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services***Summary*

In its evaluation of women and peace and security in the context of electoral processes and political transitions in field missions, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) focused on the three relevant pillars of participation, protection and prevention and five outcome areas, ranging from mitigation of political violence against women to improvements in public goods and services driven by women's leadership. The evaluation covered the three peacekeeping operations in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali and the three special political missions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia.

Across all six countries, structural and systemic factors hindered the equal participation of women in public and political life, deterring them from turning out to vote or from running successful campaigns. Four challenges were commonly noted: (a) social and cultural norms; (b) security concerns; (c) high levels of female poverty coupled with low literacy; and (d) a lack of political will to support women candidates.

Insecurity and political violence targeting women trended upward or remained high in all countries. Peacekeeping operations with protection mandates made efforts to mainstream gender into their activities, but fell short of addressing politically motivated physical and non-physical violence targeting women in the context of elections. Existing conflict data were neither adequately nuanced nor systematically utilized to tailor security plans to the realities of violence on the ground. Activities by the special political missions were limited to monitoring violence (except in Iraq) in the absence of protection mandates.

Across all countries, voter turnout declined and women faced specific challenges in exercising their voting rights. Lack of gender-responsive electoral security was exacerbated by the Missions' limited support to the election management

\* [A/77/50](#).



bodies, which limited the Missions' effectiveness in alleviating women's growing sense of insecurity and distrust in the electoral process.

Missions were most influential in advocating and supporting consistent and enforceable implementation of gender quotas as the most effective temporary special measure to increase or maintain the percentage of women candidates and elected officials. Notable gains were made in Mali, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan up until 2021. Mission collaboration with civil society organizations was noteworthy in sustaining those gains in the longer term.

In most instances, there was a limited increase in the percentage of women appointed to ministerial positions. While maintaining impartiality, not all of the Missions evaluated targeted elected women officials in their programming, except in advocating the appointment of women chairs to the election management bodies or to ongoing peace processes.

Lastly, elected women were not especially influential in improving the delivery of public goods and services. Although limited available evidence showed that higher rates of political representation by women were positively correlated with spending that was more focused on education than the military, elected women officials nevertheless faced significant challenges in garnering support for laws to advance gender equality, thus underlining the need for wider changes in the social, cultural and security spheres.

OIOS made three important recommendations to the six Missions:

- (a) To develop both long-term prevention and short-term protection measures to address political violence targeting women;
- (b) To develop mission-specific strategies to promote the political participation of and representation by women, grounded in the evidence-based analysis of the specific country context;
- (c) To harmonize data strategy, advocacy and support efforts with the relevant United Nations country teams, in order to further the women and peace and security agenda.

OIOS also made one important recommendation to the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs: that they support and coordinate the contextualized efforts made by the Missions with regard to women and peace and security, to enhance learning and enable knowledge exchange.

## I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of the evaluation conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of outcomes relating to women and peace and security achieved in the context of electoral processes<sup>1</sup> and political transitions<sup>2</sup> across the three pillars of participation, protection and prevention in selected peacekeeping operations and special political missions. The evaluation topic emerged from a programme-level risk assessment and a detailed scoping process described in the evaluation inception paper produced at the outset of the evaluation.<sup>3</sup>

2. The peacekeeping operations and special political missions selected were:

(a) United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA);

(b) United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA);

(c) United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO);

(d) United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA);<sup>4</sup>

(e) United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI);

(f) United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

3. Management comments were sought on the draft report and have been included in the annex.

## II. Background

4. The women and peace and security agenda refers to a normative framework based on a set of 10 Security Council resolutions<sup>5</sup> in which the Council emphasized the importance of gender equality to peace and security efforts. Beginning with the adoption of resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), the principles proposed in the resolutions on women and peace and security guide United Nations policies and programmes in the translation of emerging norms on the role of gender in peace and security into action. Those principles were articulated into three “pillars” of activity relating to women and peace and security: the protection of women’s rights and bodies, especially in conflict situations; the participation of women in all forms of peace and security governance and decision-making; and the role of women in the prevention of conflict and violence, specifically, but not limited to, conflict-related sexual violence and conflict resolution processes.<sup>6</sup> The women and peace and security agenda complements the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5 (on gender equality) and Goal 16 (on peace, justice and strong institutions), by dismantling

<sup>1</sup> These include the pre-election period, the period during the elections and the post-election period.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the process that bridges a country’s return to constitutional order and democracy from authoritarian regimes.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Internal Oversight Services, Inspection and Evaluation Division, document IED-21-012, inception paper.

<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding the dramatic changes experienced in Afghanistan effective August 2021, the analysis of UNAMA from 2017 to August 2021 was included in the evaluation.

<sup>5</sup> See Security Council resolutions [1325 \(2000\)](#), [1820 \(2008\)](#), [1888 \(2009\)](#), [1889 \(2009\)](#), [1960 \(2010\)](#), [2103 \(2013\)](#), [2122 \(2013\)](#), [2242 \(2015\)](#), [2467 \(2019\)](#) and [2493 \(2019\)](#).

<sup>6</sup> The fourth pillar, on relief and recovery, is not covered herein.

obstacles to substantive gender equality, including through advancing the equal participation of women in public and private institutions.

5. Recently, in his call to action on women transforming peace and security<sup>7</sup> and his Action for Peacekeeping initiative, the Secretary-General has encouraged all peacekeeping partners to reinvigorate the implementation of commitments relating to women and peace and security. This has led to an explicit focus on enhancing the leadership and full participation of women to transform peace and security by peacekeeping operations, coupled with an increasing number of missions with explicit mandates on women and peace and security covering the participation pillar.

6. The Department of Peace Operations and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs work in close cooperation with relevant United Nations partners in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, notably with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).<sup>8</sup> Within the Missions, gender advisers provide overall guidance on the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and, together with mission components, implement activities relating to women and peace and security.

7. The Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs serves as the General Assembly-mandated focal point for electoral assistance activities across the United Nations system. With the support of the Electoral Assistance Division, the focal point develops and disseminates the United Nations internal electoral policy, including the policy on promoting the electoral and political participation of women.<sup>9</sup> Based on recommendations from needs assessments led by the Division, the focal point also sets the parameters for all United Nations electoral assistance, pursuant to the request of Member States. In field settings, electoral assistance is generally provided through components of the missions. Military and police components of peacekeeping operations support national law enforcement agencies in providing security for electoral processes. The Secretary-General mandated that all electoral assistance in peacekeeping operation and special political mission settings be delivered in a fully integrated manner and that all electoral components report to the relevant special representative of the Secretary-General or through the deputy special representative, who also serves as resident coordinator.<sup>10</sup>

8. In practice, all of the Missions covered in the present evaluation, except for MONUSCO, had an electoral unit, which led electoral assistance activities and coordinated the work of other agencies, notably the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Women. UNDP focused on supporting electoral processes and logistical arrangements, while UN-Women provided training and advice in enhancing the participation of women in electoral processes.

9. All of the Missions had explicit references to the participation of women in peace and security in their mandates, while the peacekeeping operations had specific protection mandates with regard to women and peace and security (see table 1). They also all had had mandates to support elections, except for MONUSCO, whose mandate did not include electoral support, owing to certain political considerations. The presidential and parliamentary elections covered in the present evaluation are shown in the table.

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<sup>7</sup> See [peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo\\_call\\_to\\_action-final.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_call_to_action-final.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Other partners may include the Development Coordination Office, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

<sup>9</sup> See [dppa.un.org/en/elections](https://dppa.un.org/en/elections).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, Focal Point for Electoral Assistance Matters, "Policy: principles and types of UN electoral assistance", 3 March 2021.

Table 1  
References to mandates on women and peace and security and on elections in Security Council resolutions adopted in 2020

	Security Council resolution					
	2552 (2020) (MINUSCA)	2531 (2020) (MINUSMA)	2556 (2020) (MONUSCO)	2543 (2020) (UNAMA)	2522 (2020) (UNAMI)	2540 (2020) (UNSOM)
Women and peace and security						
Protection of women	X	X	X			
Participation of women in political processes and institutions	X	X	X	X	X	X
Elections	X	X		X	X	X
	<i>Central African Republic</i>	<i>Mali</i>	<i>Democratic Republic of the Congo</i>	<i>Afghanistan</i>	<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Somalia</i>
Elections covered in the evaluation	2020–2021 <sup>a</sup>	2018 <sup>b</sup> 2019–2020 <sup>c</sup>	2018 <sup>b</sup> 2019 <sup>c</sup>	2018 <sup>c</sup> 2019 <sup>b</sup>	2018 <sup>c</sup> 2021 <sup>c</sup>	2016 <sup>c</sup> 2017 <sup>b</sup> 2021 <sup>a,d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Presidential and parliamentary.

<sup>b</sup> Presidential only.

<sup>c</sup> Parliamentary only.

<sup>d</sup> There is no universal suffrage in Somalia. Elections to both houses of the parliament are indirect, with members elected by electoral colleges whose delegates are selected by traditional clan elders.

### III. Scope and methodology

10. On the basis of available data, the evaluation team examined the quality and adequacy of the Missions' inputs and outputs/activities and their contributions to observable changes in the outcomes presented in table 2.

Table 2  
Assessed outcomes

Pillar	Outcome
Prevention and protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mitigation of political violence targeting women participating in elections</li> </ul>
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in turnout of women voters</li> <li>• Increase in women candidates elected/appointed at the national and subnational levels (with a focus on the implementation of constitutional and legislative guarantees for gender-equal electoral processes)</li> <li>• Increase in women appointments in the government/executive branch</li> <li>• Improvements in public goods and services due to the quality of women leadership and influence (with a focus on women-friendly policies and shifts in public spending and good governance)</li> </ul>

11. To avoid overlap in the coverage of evaluations and audits, the scope excluded gender mainstreaming, gender parity, sexual exploitation and abuse, outcomes related to the political participation of women in peace processes and political dialogues and activities relating to women and peace and security at the Department of Peace Operations and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs headquarters level.

12. For the present evaluation, a case study methodology was employed, to analyse the six Missions systematically. The evaluation covered the period from January 2017 to December 2021. The study used a mixed-method approach, triangulating diverse data sources using qualitative and quantitative methods (see table 3).

Table 3  
**Methodology and analytical tools**

<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Data source</i>	<i>Method and analysis</i>
Prevention and protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) geocoded and curated data set on political violence targeting women<sup>a</sup></li> <li>Mission data sets on gender-based violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trends and patterns on the level of political violence targeting women in elections</li> </ul>
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer-reviewed research articles and United Nations documents</li> <li>Inter-Parliamentary Union data</li> <li>Global Women, Peace, and Security Index 2019/20</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Descriptive pattern analysis and expert review of women voter turnout and women's representation</li> </ul>
Mission effectiveness and contributions to outcomes on women and peace and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activity matrix on women and peace and security completed by the Mission</li> <li>Country-specific election data from Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and Mali</li> <li>World Development Indicators and Country Policy and Institutional Assessment of the World Bank</li> <li>Key internal and external stakeholders encompassing staff of the Missions, United Nations Headquarters and partners, as well as government officials and civil society organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regression analysis of mission activities relating to women and peace and security and turnout of women voters in Mali and women candidacy rates in the Central African Republic</li> <li>Analysis of gender affinity in Afghanistan</li> <li>Scatterplots of women's representation and national spending and perception of good governance</li> <li>Structured content analysis using NVivo of 120 interviews (78 women and 42 men) and more than 200 documents</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> ACLED tracks political violence targeting women, which refers to the use of force targeting women and girls for a political purpose or motivation.

### Limitations

13. Most of the Missions lacked gender-disaggregated and location-specific data on women and peace and security relating to voter turnout, electoral violence and individual candidates (such as incumbency status, party affiliation and constituency represented). In addition, most of the Missions lacked a purposeful and context-specific strategy driving their efforts with regard to women and peace and security,

which made it difficult to establish direct linkages between mission activities and outcomes achieved at the country level.

## IV. Evaluation results

### A. Structural and systemic factors created barriers to the full and equal political participation of women across all six countries

14. All six countries experienced medium- to high-intensity conflict and suffered from high rates of poverty and pervasive gender inequality (see table 4).

Table 4  
Country statistics

	<i>Central African Republic</i>	<i>Democratic Republic of the Congo</i>	<i>Mali</i>	<i>Somalia</i>	<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Afghanistan</i>
Population (millions of people) <sup>a</sup>	4.9	92.3	20.8	16.3	41.1	39.8
Women's literacy (percentage) <sup>b</sup>	24.4	62.9	18.9	n/a	69.0	17.0
Urban population (percentage) <sup>a</sup>	41.8	45.0	43.1	45.6	70.7	25.8
Gender inequality index rank out of 189 countries <sup>c</sup>	159	150	158	n/a	146	157
Human development index rank out of 189 countries <sup>d</sup>	188	175	184	n/a	123	169

*Abbreviation:* n/a, not available.

<sup>a</sup> Population data from [data.un.org](https://data.un.org) (2021).

<sup>b</sup> Literacy data from [en.unesco.org/countries](https://en.unesco.org/countries).

<sup>c</sup> Gender inequality index data from [hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii](https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii).

<sup>d</sup> Human development index data from [hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index](https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index).

15. Across all six countries, structural and systemic factors created barriers to the full and equal political participation of women, four of which were found to be common:

(a) Patriarchal social and cultural norms precluding the participation of women as both candidates and voters, such that access to political and economic power was retained by elites and powerful men;

(b) Higher levels of poverty and illiteracy rates for women as compared with men, with women lacking the necessary resources and skills to turn out to vote or to run a successful political campaign;

(c) Security concerns, including political violence targeting women, which reduced women's mobility, while also creating personal distress for women and their families, potentially dissuading women from exercising their political rights;

(d) Lastly, the lack of political will to shape the development of interventions to promote women's political participation.

**B. In already volatile security environments, the Missions’ efforts could not mitigate or fully address political violence targeting women**

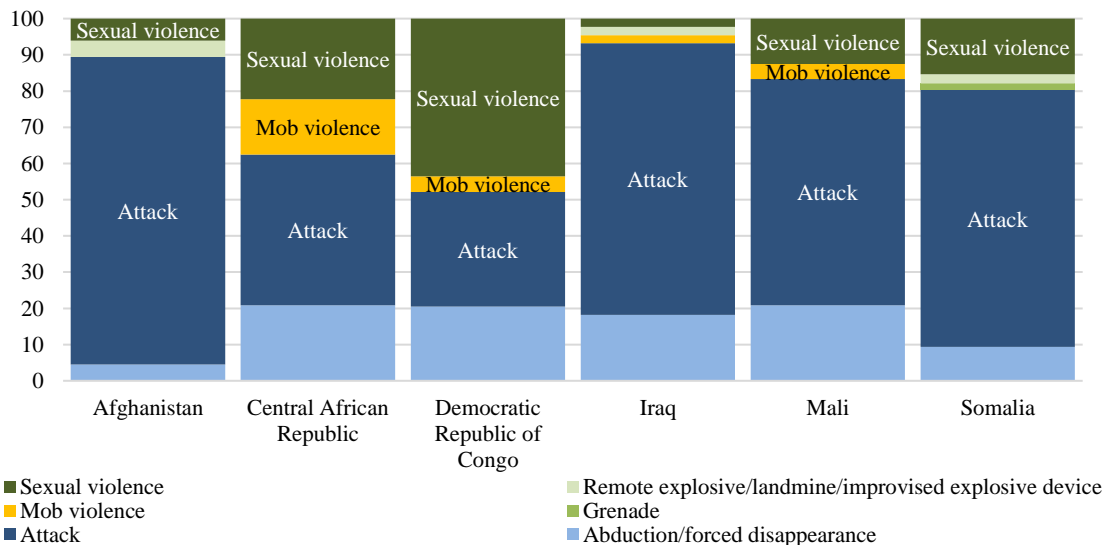
**1. Across all country cases, women voters, activists, candidates and officials continued to face higher risks of political violence, which reduced women’s mobility and undermined candidates’ credibility and voters’ trust, dissuading them from fully participating in political processes and elections**

16. A lack of adequate security affected all aspects of the electoral process, and women in particular faced several gender-related challenges linked to the idea that women did not belong in politics.

17. Political violence and, specifically, political violence targeting women<sup>11</sup> trended upward or remained high in all countries, except for a slight downward trend in Somalia. Political violence targeting women increased in varying degrees in the lead-up to the elections during the period 2017–2021 in all countries, except Mali.

18. Types and targets of political violence targeting women varied across the six countries (see figures I and II). The targeting of women through attacks was prevalent in all countries. Sexual violence was more prevalent, and significantly so in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali. In Afghanistan and Somalia, remote violence tactics (e.g. use of grenades, remote explosives and landmines) were more common. Across all countries, unidentified armed groups were the most common perpetrators of political violence targeting women. In Afghanistan, while both men and women cited insecurity as their main reason for not voting, women were significantly more likely to be deterred because of fear of violence from armed rebel groups.<sup>12</sup>

Figure I  
**Types of political violence targeting women**  
(Percentage)



19. Across all six countries, most of the women targeted had no specific affiliations (categorized as “civilian”) and were from a wide swath of women, including aid

<sup>11</sup> The trends reviewed herein covered events of physical violence involving at least one victim, tracked by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) Project.

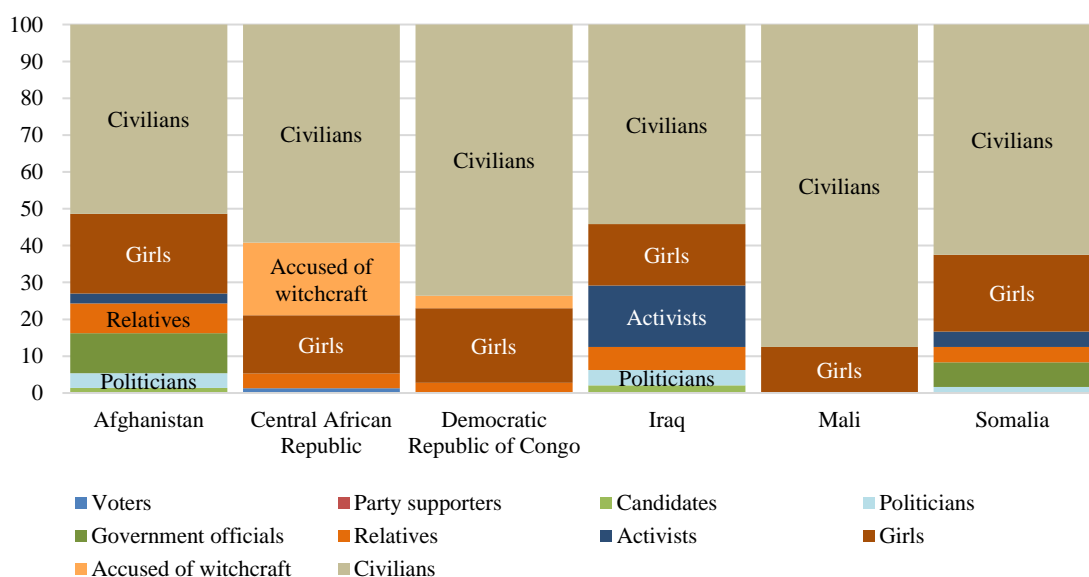
<sup>12</sup> The Asia Foundation, *A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2019* (2019).



workers, refugees and internally displaced persons, journalists, students, health workers, prisoners, lawyers and women from ethnic or religious groups; others targeted were girls (see figure 2). In the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to a lesser degree, women were targeted with accusations of witchcraft and sorcery and by vigilante-style groups, which were often violent mobs. In Afghanistan and Iraq, women candidates, activists and women relatives of specific individuals were targeted disproportionately, coinciding with an increase in the number of women candidates in 2018 elections. Such trends in the political mobilization of women produced a backlash, not only against those that aspired to political office, but also against women with no specific affiliation.

Figure II  
**Types of women targeted**

(Percentage)



20. Overall, non-physical forms of violence against women also increased, with equally negative ramifications on their participation in political processes. Most violations cited were intimidation, threats, attacks on women's election posters, defamation, cyberbullying, disinformation campaigns and harassment on social media.

## 2. Despite attempts to mainstream gender into plans and activities, the Missions (except for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq) often inadequately accounted for the gendered aspects of violence in and around elections

21. Missions employed various measures to prevent and respond to security concerns, with varying degrees of effectiveness.

22. The peacekeeping operations with protection mandates endeavoured to mainstream gender as an overarching principle into their early warning mechanisms and protection plans during elections. For example, MONUSCO identified election violence hotspots and, together with civil society actors, mobilized local protection teams – with women ideally representing one third of all team members – to further sensitize communities and address any conflicts through peaceful dialogue. Similarly, MINUSMA provided training to national security officers on the prevention of electoral violence and supplied pocket cards on election security, which featured vulnerable groups such as women. MINUSCA, in collaboration with UNDP and

UN-Women, monitored election-related violence against women through local women monitors in the lead-up to elections in 2020 and 2021. Those efforts, however, were not commensurate with the magnitude of the challenge at hand. In Mali, during the 2018 presidential elections, nearly 500 polling stations (2 per cent of the total) were forced to close, owing to threats by extremist groups.<sup>13</sup> In the Central African Republic, close to 800 of the country's polling stations (14 per cent of the total) were closed as a result of violence, according to the National Elections Authority.

23. One common measure employed by most of the Missions was to support the national police forces to set up women's situation rooms and/or desks to receive, analyse and respond to complaints and reports of incidents of violence, harassment and intimidation against women and follow up with security forces, as appropriate. MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and, more recently, UNSOM, together with UNDP and UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), put in place women's situation rooms and hotlines dedicated to protecting women candidates and voters from electoral violence, with direct participation and engagement by women.

24. Nevertheless, many candidates and civil society organizations remained critical of those desks and hotlines, citing their underperformance and a lack of follow-up to reported incidents. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the hotline was not election-specific and was unsustainable owing to a lack of funding, while in Mali, the situation rooms were managed by civil society organizations with limited support from the Mission. In the Central African Republic, little evidence was found on response efforts to more than 5,000 calls received through the hotlines by 11 situation rooms between December 2020 and May 2021. In Somalia, the fees to file a complaint with the election dispute resolution mechanism remained prohibitive, at \$3,000, especially for women candidates who lacked financial means. A lack of response, coupled with weak rule of law institutions, further eroded women's confidence in the electoral processes and their sense of safety and security required to participate in the elections.<sup>14</sup>

25. In countries where special political missions operated in the absence of a protection mandate, their protection efforts were limited, by default. In the lead-up to the 2021 elections, UNSOM support for the development of women's situation desks and an online incident reporting platform was introduced, but their impact on trends in political violence was not apparent. UNAMA support did not go beyond election monitoring and reporting.

26. By contrast, UNAMI offered a good illustration of purposeful prevention and protection interventions that adequately accounted for gendered aspects of electoral violence. To prevent political violence similar to that experienced by women candidates in 2018, the Mission served as the depository of the Electoral Charter of Honour and a new electoral code of conduct signed by the political parties in 2021, while advocating at the highest level in favour of strict adherence to the law and of refraining from using tactics that undermine the participation of women. Close collaboration with the country's Higher Committee for Women's Political Empowerment resulted in the establishment of hotlines, the assignment of a dedicated judge to follow up on reports of incidents, the criminalization of cyberattacks, and on-demand protection for women candidates.

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<sup>13</sup> Tiemoko Diallo, "Low turnout in Mali election due to security fears, opposition charges fraud", Reuters, 13 August 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with women candidates and elected officials in sampled countries.

27. In comparison with the special political missions, which have no specific protection mandates, peacekeeping operations, which have uniformed components and security expertise, missed the opportunity to utilize available gender-disaggregated data on conflicts and elections to inform the implementation and location of their protection and prevention activities relating to women and peace and security, such as setting up context-specific and gender-responsive prevention measures.

### **C. Mission efforts to educate women and mobilize them to exercise their right to vote could not reverse the negative trend in voter turnout in all country cases**

#### **1. Women, who constituted half of the eligible voters in most of the six countries examined, faced disproportionate challenges in registering and voting**

28. Across all six countries overall, voter turnout declined significantly in both presidential and parliamentary elections. In 2021, Iraq saw the lowest voter turnout (41 per cent) since 2005 (78 per cent). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, voter turnout for parliamentary elections declined from 70.3 per cent (in 2006) to 45.4 per cent (in 2018). Documents reviewed reflected widespread violence around election times and overall discontent with the political landscape and perceived levels of corruption eroding trust in election results as the main factors of declining turnout.

29. Voter registration data suggested that women constituted approximately half of the electorate, ranging from 46.7 per cent in the Central African Republic to 51.0 per cent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The main outlier was Afghanistan, where women constituted only one third (35 per cent) of registered voters, as well as the special case of Somalia, where at least one third of the delegates of the electoral colleges were women.

30. Sex-disaggregated voter turnout data, by comparison, were more difficult to obtain. The national election management bodies did not consistently publish such data, except in the case of Afghanistan, where the proportion of women voters declined from 37 per cent in 2004 to 31 per cent in 2019.<sup>15</sup>

31. In addition to the factors mentioned above, women faced specific challenges in exercising their voting rights across all countries:

(a) A low level of female literacy, at 17.0 per cent in Afghanistan and 18.9 per cent in Mali, for example, presented a systemic barrier limiting women's awareness of their civic rights and their ability to cast an informed vote;

(b) A lack of adequate security at polling places – and, in some cases, threats specifically directed at women-only polling stations – deterred women from voting;

(c) A lack of adequate women election personnel, which could have helped women voters feel more at ease with photograph and fingerprint requirements;

(d) Reported coercion by family members, with women being expected, or forced, to vote based on decisions made by men in their families;

(e) A lack of, and difficulty in obtaining, national and voter identification cards owing to women's reduced mobility and cultural norms. For example, the introduction of biometric registration cards in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali and the use of voting machines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to address election fraud

<sup>15</sup> United States of America, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Support for Gender Equality: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan* (Arlington, Virginia, 2021).

prohibited some women from having their photos taken, owing to cultural norms and their reduced ability to use machines that required some level of literacy.

**2. Missions' public outreach efforts and support for election management bodies were insufficient to counteract women's increasing sense of insecurity, largely owing to weak gender-responsive protection and electoral processes**

32. Efforts by the Missions to increase the participation of women in elections consisted of public outreach and civic education activities, as well as technical support for election management bodies on gender-responsive electoral processes.

33. For public outreach activities, they made use of traditional media (i.e. radio and television) and social media to reach the rural and youth populations. Those activities served to sensitize voters and broadcast messages promoting the importance of the equal participation of women. MONUSCO, for example, used Radio Okapi to disseminate information on election procedures. In 2021, UNSOM produced a video clip and song, entitled Let's Make the Women's Quota a Reality. In 2018, UNAMI launched the #WhyNot (#Shakobeha) awareness-raising campaign featuring successful women political activists. Civic education, for its part, was often delivered through civil society organizations (MINUSCA and UNAMI) and regional offices (UNAMA), which conducted door-to-door campaigns, held community meetings and made loudspeaker announcements in caravans to sensitize the public. UNAMA and UNSOM also sensitized religious and tribal actors on supporting the participation of women and called on them to do so.

34. Missions supported election management bodies in varying degrees to develop gender-responsive electoral processes, such as women-only polling stations, the recruitment of women election workers and mobile registration units. In 2018, Afghanistan's election management body employed 12,000 women as election workers, and there were 7,429 women-only polling stations compared with 11,667 for men. In Iraq, all voter registration offices employed women to assist in taking fingerprints and photographs. Mobile registration units were also sent to camps for internally displaced persons, which enabled women who lacked identification and permanent addresses to vote. In the case of the Central African Republic and Mali, there was little evidence of the use of women-only polling stations or women election officers, despite available voter survey data indicating specific gendered challenges that women faced in polling stations.

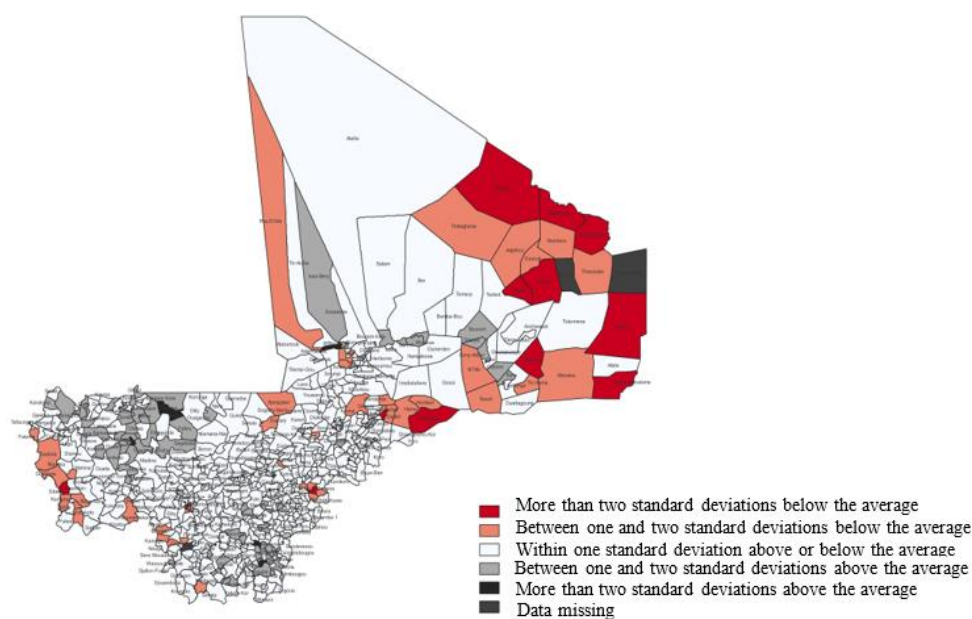
35. The effects of mission support for an increase in women voters were limited in the wake of contextual challenges exceeding the Missions' sphere of influence. Overwhelmingly, security remained the biggest challenge in all countries. In Afghanistan, the greater number of polling stations available to men put women voters at a disadvantage, requiring them to travel longer distances to vote. Finding women poll workers was also a challenge, especially in remote areas. Intense efforts from UNSOM to swiftly build the capacity of the election management body to hold direct elections based on universal suffrage, including gender-responsive electoral processes, were suspended owing to the political agreement to continue holding indirect elections. MONUSCO support for the election management body in 2018 was limited, owing to the absence of an election mandate.

36. Detailed voter data from the 2020 elections in Mali were examined to determine the relationship between the Mission's activities with regard to women and peace and security and turnout rates for women voters. First, the analysis showed that there were considerable differences in the turnout rates for women at the commune level (see figure III). The largest number of communes with low turnout rates (i.e. with at least one standard deviation below the national average) were found in several border areas in the north, as well as in a few border areas in the south. Second, the regression

analysis established that activities carried out by MINUSMA with regard to women and peace and security were negatively correlated with the female voter turnout rates in the regions. That negative relationship could be explained by insecurity, which was likely to adversely and disproportionately affect women's willingness to participate in the political process.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the Mission's activities with regard to women and peace and security were likely to have targeted localities in which low turnout rates for women voters were expected and in which there was limited presence of State authorities. The analysis underscored the primacy of security as a precondition to promoting the participation of women.

Figure III

**Deviations in the turnout rate of women voters compared with the national average for the 2020 elections in Mali**



37. Using provincial-level turnout data from Afghanistan, an analysis of gender-affinity voting was performed to test the hypothesis that women voters were more likely to vote for women candidates. The analysis found that, where women comprised a larger proportion of voters who cast ballots, the number of votes cast for women as a proportion of all votes cast in that district was higher. Although the analysis did not indicate a causal relationship, it underscored the significance of the Missions' specific activities to support the electoral participation of women and their spillover effects. Where such dedicated activities improved turnout rates for women voters, electoral wins by women were likely to improve. Similarly, where activities relating to women and peace and security improved candidacy rates for women, the turnout of women voters might improve.

<sup>16</sup> Mali faced two coups d'état during the period, in August 2020 and May 2021, impeding the progress made.

**D. Missions' advocacy and technical support for the development and implementation of temporary special measures, notably gender quotas, significantly contributed to increasing or sustaining the percentage of women candidates and elected officials**

**1. The percentage of women in national parliaments varied across the six countries and was a direct result of the existence and enforcement of legislative gender quotas and other temporary special measures**

38. The percentage of women in national parliaments varied across the six project countries (see table 5). In 2021, women constituted roughly one in four members of parliament in Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali and Somalia. In the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, women constituted roughly one in eight members of their parliaments. While Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Iraq had seen moderate changes over the past decade, Mali and Somalia witnessed dramatic shifts in recent elections. In Somalia, the proportion of women in parliament increased from 14.0 per cent in 2012 to 24.2 per cent following the 2016 elections.

Table 5  
Percentage of women in national parliaments, by quota type

	Country	2017	2021
Quota on results	Afghanistan	27.7	27.0
	Iraq	25.3	28.9
Candidate quota	Central African Republic	8.6	12.9
	Democratic Republic of the Congo	8.9	12.8
	Mali	8.8	26.5 <sup>a</sup>
Other	Somalia	24.2	24.4
World average		23.3	25.5

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women, "Women in politics: 2021", 1 January 2021.

Data updated for Central African Republic and Iraq with 2021 election results.

<sup>a</sup> Including the National Transition Council appointed in December 2020.

39. All six countries instituted electoral gender quotas, and their enforcement was a key determinant in increasing women's representation in parliaments. Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia had set quotas on results, requiring that the composition of the elected body reflect a minimum percentage of women. That requirement was consistently met in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the system of indirect elections in Somalia required greater discretion by clan leaders to meet the quota. The Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali had quotas applying to the candidate lists put forward by political parties, which were less effective, as they only applied to the percentage of candidates and thus did not necessarily translate into women getting elected. Parties in Mali largely respected the quota for women on candidate lists, while political actors in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo reportedly ignored those rules, with no adverse consequence, producing marginal change in the percentage of women elected over time.

40. Missions' advocacy actions and technical support provided to Governments to institute and maintain gender quotas were effective when political will and accountability were present. In Iraq, electoral assistance headed by UNAMI provided expert advice, ensuring that the new electoral system developed following the 2019

reform would be conducive to increased participation of women. The quota was no longer considered as a ceiling but as a floor, and the new electoral arrangements led to a 4 percentage point increase in women's representation in 2021.

41. Women's political representation in Mali saw the most dramatic increase among the six countries, attributable to a well-designed candidate quota in 2015, with accountability measures. Its impact was visible in having significantly increased women's representation in the country's parliament from 9 per cent in 2013 to 27 per cent in 2020. MINUSMA followed up on the implementation of the law through high-level advocacy and technical support provided to the Government, as well as through the mobilization of civil society organizations to ensure its accountable implementation by parties.

42. Similarly, in Somalia, high-level advocacy by UNSOM and the Mission's support for the Committee of Goodwill Ambassadors<sup>17</sup> were cited as key factors in the inclusion of the gender quota in political agreements preceding the elections. The role that quotas play was also evidenced in Puntland. Puntland recently organized universal suffrage elections and ensured that every third candidate on the list was a woman, and every tenth candidate was a person with disabilities, which resulted in 26.4 per cent of those elected being women. The sustainability of those gains remained in question, however, as the quota was not enshrined in law.

43. The Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo offered insights into the importance of accountability measures to back up quotas and/or parity laws. In the Central African Republic, electoral assistance headed by MINUSCA provided advice to develop the 2019 electoral code, which included the 35 per cent candidate quota, following the provisions of the 2016 gender parity law. Despite the existence of a parity law and a candidate quota, 27 political parties failed to meet the quota and, as a result, the proportion of women candidates was a mere 15.6 per cent. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mission advocacy to amend article 13 of the electoral code, which stipulates that the non-achievement of gender parity in party candidate lists does not constitute grounds for inadmissibility of the list concerned, faced the challenge of political parties that blocked efforts to hold them accountable for not achieving gender parity.

44. Missions advocated in favour of implementing additional temporary special measures<sup>18</sup> to augment women's representation, with varying degrees of success, such as by revising candidate registration requirements that had, historically, disproportionately excluded women. In the Central African Republic, civil society organizations, supported by MINUSCA, successfully lobbied to remove property, literacy and numeracy requirements in the 2019 electoral law, which had, until now, affected women disproportionately. Meanwhile, although UNSOM successfully advocated to have registration fees for women candidates in Somalia reduced by half, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, fees remained prohibitively high, with minimal influence from the international community and MONUSCO.

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<sup>17</sup> A committee appointed by the Prime Minister to advocate in favour of the 30 per cent quota for women representatives in the parliament, through sensitization and outreach campaigns with clan leaders and the international community.

<sup>18</sup> Temporary special measures include gender quota laws, women situation desks and rooms, women-only polling stations, women election workers, election registration reforms (for both candidates and voters) and the reduction of high campaign costs.

**2. Missions' high-level advocacy for accountable implementation of the gender quotas were reinforced with capacity-building support for women leaders and civil society organizations and contributed to an increased pool of women candidates in several countries**

45. To augment the effects of gender quotas, mission programming on the political participation of women often provided training to prospective women candidates. Capacity-building actions were developed and conducted mainly by UN-Women and UNDP, occasionally in collaboration with the Missions, which focused efforts on monitoring and identifying needs. For example, in Somalia, through a joint programme by UNSOM, UNDP and UN-Women, needs and gaps were identified in the capacity and skills of women candidates, activists and networks. UNAMI, using extrabudgetary funds, developed a three-phase project to undertake research on challenges for women in politics, provided needs-based training to 67 candidates and monitored political violence targeting women in the 2021 elections. Across all case studies, most capacity-building activities were focused on candidates. Several women parliamentarians highlighted the need to continue capacity-building for women in office.

46. The effectiveness of such capacity-building activities was demonstrated in the case of the Central African Republic. MINUSCA, in collaboration with UN-Women and UNDP, organized workshops for women leaders during campaign registrations. The detailed candidate-level records from 2020 (including information on electoral district, partisan affiliation, ballot position, first- and second-round individual vote-share, incumbency status, gender and whether the candidate was eventually elected) were used to understand the electoral context and conduct analyses of the relationship between participation-oriented activities with regard to women and peace and security and representation by women. The regression analysis found that the presence of such activities had a positive and statistically significant effect on women's candidacy rates – women comprised 15.6 per cent of candidates in 2020 compared with 10.0 per cent in the previous election – although not on their chances of being elected. Such activities might have led to an expansion of women's political ambitions, leading to more women coming forward as potential candidates. That hypothesis gains credence when considering that 95.7 per cent of women candidates in 2020 were non-incumbents.

47. The presence of vibrant and well-organized civil society organization networks was another influential factor in increasing women's representation. Support and capacity-building for women's civil society organizations and networks appeared to have also contributed to increasing women candidacy rates and to strengthening advocacy actions for the establishment of temporary special measures. In the absence of an election mandate, MONUSCO devoted efforts to organizing, capacitating and mobilizing civil society organizations, who advocated the expansion of the political space for women. Civil society organizations in Mali were instrumental in advocating in favour of the consistent implementation of the quota law by political parties in enlisting their candidates. MINUSCA and UNAMI supported the establishment of women advisory groups, who advised the Special Representatives on issues pertaining to the participation of women; those issues were then brought to the attention of influential political actors in the countries in question.



**E. Missions’ influence on the percentage of women appointed to government positions was limited, given the political nature of such appointments and sensitivities associated with perceived interference**

**1. Across the board, fewer women than the indicated quotas were appointed to executive and government positions**

48. Despite the gains made in overall representation of women in the national parliaments, the appointments of elected women to government positions or executive functions fluctuated across the case countries (see table 6). A significant structural barrier in this regard appeared to be the political parties (and clans), which were reluctant to put forward women party members as candidates for positions of influence within the executive Government.

Table 6  
**Percentage of women in ministerial positions**

<i>Country</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2021</i>
Afghanistan	16.7	6.5
Iraq	10.5	9.1
Central African Republic	17.4	20.7
Democratic Republic of the Congo	11.6	27.0
Mali	24.2	21.0
Somalia	6.7	18.5

*Source:* Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women, “Women in politics: 2021”, 1 January 2021.  
Data updated for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali.

49. Between 2017 and 2021, while Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali registered higher percentages of women elected officials across all country cases (see table 5), attributable to well-designed gender quotas, the percentage of women in ministerial positions declined, with rates of representation in Afghanistan and Iraq remaining lower than the other cases during the same period (see table 6). Since 2019, Iraq has had two women ministers, and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs was downgraded to a directorate in 2015. In Afghanistan, efforts by the former President to appoint more women to senior positions received backlash from certain groups perceived to represent elite background. Similarly, in Mali, women representatives complained about a lack of adherence by the political party leaders to the quota law in government appointments.

50. The percentage of women in ministerial positions increased in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia between 2012 and 2021, with some caveats. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the more than 400 Congolese political parties with low female membership (between 0 and 16 per cent) were considered to be a significant gatekeeper towards women’s appointments. Owing to the commitment of the incumbent President, who declined the list of cabinet members proposed by the first Government in 2019 on grounds of gender imbalance, several women were later appointed to influential portfolios as ministers or deputy ministers (including for mining, labour and the central bank). In the Central African Republic, despite an increase from 2017 to 2021, the percentage of women in ministerial positions did not meet the terms of the parity law and remained highly susceptible to party leaders’ political will. In Somalia, the increase in appointments was downplayed owing to a perceived lack of influence of their portfolios in the country’s development trajectory.

## **2. Missions' advocacy in favour of the appointment of women chairs of election management bodies was effective in mainstreaming gender into the operations and activities of these entities**

51. Efforts by the Missions to address the disproportionate representation of women within government positions were limited, owing to the political nature of these appointments. The Missions' activities or strategies did not often purposefully target the political parties as influential gatekeepers to such appointments. Nevertheless, the Missions explored other avenues to advocate in favour of appointing women to portfolios that could be catalytic for gender-responsive political and elections processes.

52. The most common avenue was advocacy to appoint women as chairs of the election management bodies. The good offices and advocacy of MONUSCO, UNAMA, UNAMI and UNSOM were successful in that regard, with far-reaching positive consequences for women voters and candidates. The woman who acted as Chair of the election commission in Somalia designed an institutional gender-mainstreaming strategy and worked closely with UNSOM to implement gender-responsive election processes (i.e. registration and outreach to women voters), while preparing for potential universal suffrage in 2021. Similarly, in Iraq, the only woman election commissioner out of nine commissioners instituted gender-parity measures in the election management body and chaired the Higher Committee for Women's Political Empowerment, with effective actions to mitigate political violence targeting women, as indicated above.

53. Another avenue that the Missions explored was the inclusion of women in ongoing peace processes, to carve out a larger space for women in politics. In Mali, MINUSMA organized a high-level workshop on the participation of women in peace and political processes that resulted in the articulation of women's needs and priorities and mobilized the inclusion of more women (including those from signatory armed groups) on the Agreement Monitoring Committee. Similarly, MINUSCA mobilized civil society actors to advocate in favour of the inclusion of women in the peace negotiations (resulting in the selection of 8 women out of 78 delegates) and the monitoring mechanisms of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic (consisting of 16 per cent women at the national level in 2021). Notwithstanding the innate differences in engagement in peace and political processes, mission staff believed that the inclusion of more women early on in peace talks and negotiations presented a window of opportunity for more expansive political space for women later on.

54. In all of those efforts, direct advocacy by senior mission leadership with national counterparts was noteworthy. All of the Missions covered had at least one female senior official at the special representative or deputy special representative level, following the Organization's commitment to achieve gender parity at the highest levels. Especially in the case of UNSOM, MONUSCO, MINUSMA and UNAMI, mission leadership made the political agency of women an integral part of their advocacy efforts.

**F. Missions, together with the relevant United Nations country team, attempted to form and empower multiparty women caucuses to the extent possible, yet investments in quality female leadership and influence did not translate into improvements in public goods and services**

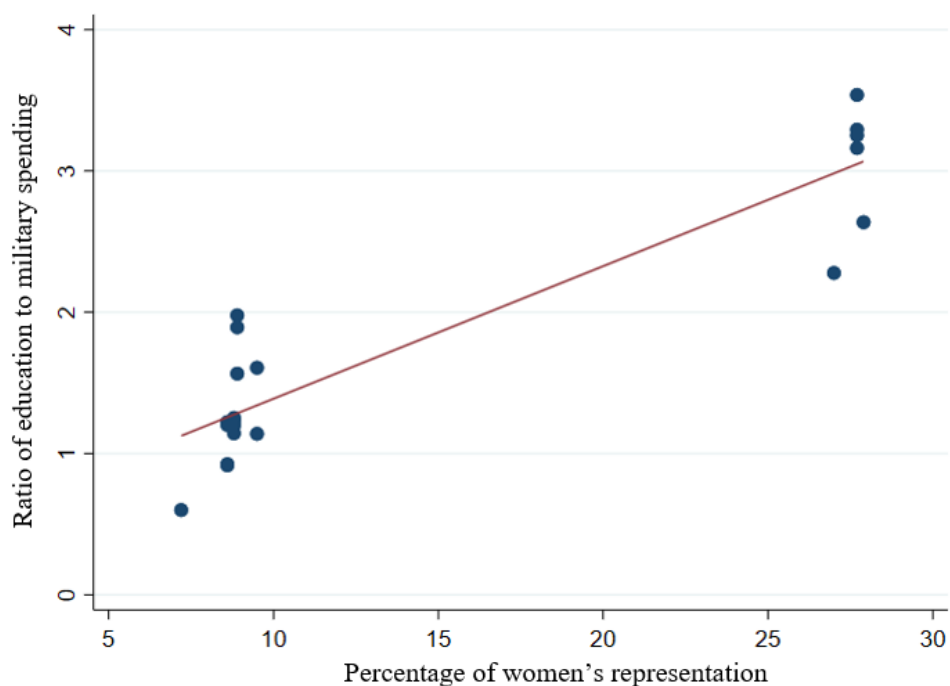
**1. Higher rates of women's representation in project countries were associated with an increase in the ratio of education to military expenditures; however, elected women officials faced significant challenges in introducing women-friendly policies in their respective parliaments**

55. The relationships between the proportion of women representatives in legislative assemblies and shifts in spending priorities and between the proportion of women representatives and greater societal confidence and trust in government as indicators of peace durability were examined.

56. In all six cases, only one aspect of peace durability was present. A review of two cross-national data sets<sup>19</sup> indicated that higher rates of women's political representation were positively correlated with spending that was more focused on education than the military (see figure IV). By contrast, the perception of good governance slightly declined in those countries (see figure V).

Figure IV

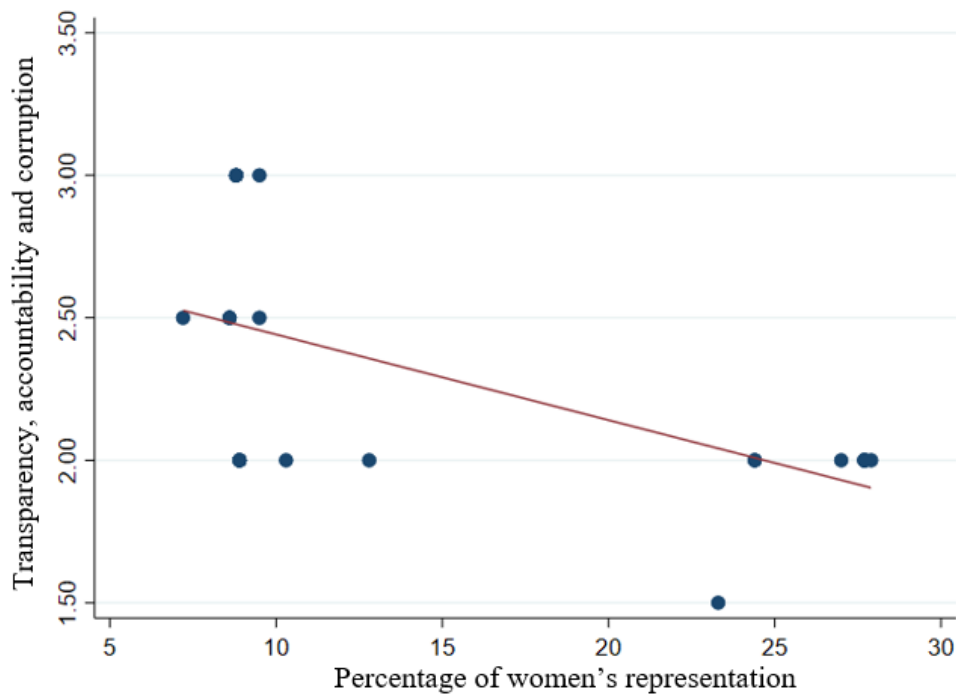
**Government spending patterns, by rate of women's political representation**



Source: World Development Indicators, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> World Bank World Development Indicators and Country Policy and Institutional Assessment data sets.

Figure V  
**Perception of good governance, by rate of women's political representation**



Source: World Development Indicators and Country Policy and Institutional Assessment, 2020.

57. There are limitations to these analyses. First, given the time-bound nature of the data and analysis,<sup>20</sup> it was not possible to establish whether the shift to education spending from military spending had an impact on peace durability. Second, perceptual values of good governance cannot be directly associated with a change in rates of women's representation, as the former are mostly the result of major policy innovations or laws, which were not observed during the evaluation period.

58. Significant challenges were faced by elected women officials in introducing bills and/or having influential policies passed on gender equality and the empowerment of women. First, powerful political party blocs generally dominated by male officials protected the status quo. In Mali, the former female Minister of Women was reportedly harassed, and later ousted, following her tabling of a draft bill in the country's parliament on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, which was publicly rejected by powerful religious groups. Second, the nature of politics and need for political survival meant that, rather than advancing the agenda on women, some women elected officials reportedly gravitated towards the interests of their political blocs. The bill on domestic violence in Iraq did not receive support from some women officials. In Somalia, some women parliamentarians were observed to vote for the draft electoral code, which excluded the gender quota provisions.

<sup>20</sup> Measurements of good governance were difficult to obtain, owing to data collection challenges in post-conflict environments.

## 2. Significant gaps remained in women's capacity to influence policymaking upon being elected, necessitating follow-up support that the Missions could not adequately provide

59. Across all countries, women parliamentarians faced limitations in advancing policy agendas towards the promulgation of woman-friendly laws or leading to improvements in the conditions of their constituents. Missions reported conducting few activities addressing those gaps, to avoid any perception of interference and to maintain impartiality. In Afghanistan, for example, some women parliamentarians refused the Mission's support for capacity-building in order to minimize the perception of pursuing a Western agenda.

60. Recognizing those limitations affecting women parliamentarians, MINUSMA and UNSOM shared concrete plans to incorporate women officials as a target group in their prospective gender strategies. Together with the United Nations country team, MINUSMA recently endeavoured to form a women observatory to monitor and provide continuous support to women in politics.

61. Typically, UNDP and UN-Women took the lead in forming and capacitating multiparty women parliamentarian caucuses, as in the case of the Central African Republic, where the Forum of Women Parliamentarians was established. Compared with United Nations country team entities that were considered to be better equipped to provide technical and operational support, the biggest advantage held by the Missions appeared to be high-level advocacy; their specific support to women elected officials was therefore indirect, either through technical support to female civil society actors or capacity-building support for women representatives in local or national peace processes, as in the cases of UNAMA, MINUSCA and MINUSMA. Civil society actors pointed to occasional overlap and a lack of synergy across trainings offered by these entities.

62. Owing to the pervasive structural barriers that women could not overcome alone, the absence of long-term capacity-building activities for women elected officials across party lines remained a gap. In addition, the Missions made limited efforts to develop inclusion strategies encompassing underrepresented sections of society, including non-elite women, thereby missing the opportunity to nurture a more diverse cohort of decision makers in the future.

## V. Recommendations

63. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS makes three main important recommendations to the Missions, with the understanding that UNAMA may not be able to implement recommendations 1 and 3 in its current context. The Division also makes one important recommendation to the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Responsible entity</i>
Protection and prevention	1. Develop both long-term prevention and short-term protection measures that specifically address gendered violence targeting women in the context of elections, with efforts to be backed by and based on reliable gender-responsive conflict, political and/or electoral analysis that includes gender-disaggregated data on	1. Gender-responsive electoral security strategy addressing the elections cycle 2. Documentary evidence of support for national efforts for the establishment of short- and long-term measures (including temporary special measures discussed in the present	All six Missions

<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Responsible entity</i>
	elections, as well as violence type, targets and location	evaluation report) to prevent gender-based political violence	
Participation	<p>2. Anchor the Mission's existing strategy (or develop a new one) to promote the political participation of and representation by women in evidence-based analysis of the specific country context (security, humanitarian, and developmental), in line with the Mission's mandate and capacities. The strategy should include:</p> <p>2.1. Advocacy and technical support to strengthen temporary special measures, including laws to address context-specific barriers faced by women</p> <p>2.2. High-level advocacy for the establishment of accountability, enforcement and incentive mechanisms for the national political actors and parties to ensure the implementation of such favourable laws</p>	<p>Updated and/or new strategy with country-specific analysis and data, building on the needs assessment checklist on gender and electoral assistance completed by the Mission</p> <p>Documentary evidence of tailored advocacy and technical support for temporary special measures and related accountability measures</p>	All six Missions
System coherence	<p>3. Harmonized data strategy, advocacy and support activities to improve coherence with the United Nations country team, in line with the principle of integrating electoral assistance in mission settings to further the women and peace and security agenda in the following ways:</p> <p>3.1. As part of the Mission's data strategy in the country, reinforce the Mission's performance monitoring frameworks and coordinate data gathering and tracking to inform programming on women and peace and security</p> <p>3.2. Target political parties and clans more deliberately, to advocate and provide incentives for the inclusion of women on party lists and for the inclusion of non-elite candidates, taking into consideration existing policies on electoral assistance</p> <p>3.3. Mobilize extrabudgetary and peacebuilding funds for long-term capacity-building of women in politics across party lines</p>	<p>Mission tracks specific women participation and/or representation indicators and shares responsibility for data collection with relevant United Nations country team entities</p> <p>Documentary evidence of advocacy efforts with political parties and clans</p> <p>Evidence of resource mobilization</p>	All six Missions

<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Responsible entity</i>
	3.4. Coordinate the strategies and activities required to address long-term barriers facing women, such as literacy levels, political awareness and the sensitization of male leaders	Specific activities and indicators of achievements in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, coordinated with specific entities, to address long-term barriers	
	4. Support and coordinate the contextualized efforts of missions with regard to women and peace and security in order to enhance learning and knowledge exchange	Periodic knowledge exchange among peace missions on context-specific learning, best practices, risks and mitigation measures and tactics	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Department of Peace Operations

**Annex\*****Comments received from the Under-Secretaries-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and for Peace Operations**

We refer to your memorandum (OIOS-2022-00479) of 7 April 2022 transmitting the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of women, peace and security in field-based missions: elections and political transitions. Thank you for undertaking a consultative process and for incorporating many of the initial comments that our offices and relevant missions had submitted on the earlier draft of the report.

Promoting the participation of women in electoral and political processes as well as ensuring prevention of violence against women and providing the necessary protection for women, particularly in conflict situations and political transitions, are among the key priorities of the United Nations. In this regard, and as also noted in the report, numerous steps have been taken so far in all the above key areas. But there is a lot of room for improvement, and the report and its recommendations will certainly help us to address the existing gaps/challenges and build on the past experiences to further strengthen the Organization's support to women in all the various areas highlighted in the report.

The missions and the Headquarters have reviewed the evaluation and its related recommendations. We are pleased to inform you that Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and Department of Peace Operations (DPO) will be accepting the recommendations of the OIOS set forth in the draft report, to the extent that they are addressed to those two departments. You will find attached concrete action plans from DPPA and DPO but also from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) to implement the recommendations of the report.\*\* As noted in your report, particular considerations apply to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), given the developments in Afghanistan.

In implementing the recommendations, where actions fall within the realm of electoral assistance, the relevant framework established by the General Assembly will apply, including the clear leadership role of the focal point for electoral assistance matters in ensuring system-wide coherence and consistency. This may include providing policy and technical support to the relevant missions in the implementation of their action plans.

As per the request of UNSOM we also wish to note the reference made in the report to the uniqueness of Somalia's indirect electoral process and that the wording in the report on this matter could have been further strengthened. Somalia's unique context makes the electoral process different and sometimes challenging as its features are different from that of popular elections models and this needs to be more clearly reflected in the report.

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\* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

\*\* On file with the Office of Internal Oversight Services.