

## Facts Friday

# Women's legislative representation

February 16, 2024

## Citizens perceive decisions to expand women's rights as more legitimate than decisions to limit women's rights

Researchers investigated how women's participation in legislative decisions affects the perceived legitimacy of those decisions in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. Researchers asked respondents about the legitimacy of a legislative committee that was deciding whether to raise penalties on domestic violence, varying whether the committee was (1) *all male* vs. *gender-balanced* and whether its decision (2) *expanded* or *limited* women's rights. In all three countries, gender balance on the committee only marginally increased perceived legitimacy of the decision. However, expanding women's rights was perceived as substantially more legitimate regardless of the gender composition of the committee. This research demonstrates the importance of women's *substantive* representation; it also shows that there is a global convergence on attitudes against domestic violence.

## Women's legislative representation does not always lead to women's substantive representation

Women's representation in African parliaments has doubled in the last 15 years – how does that affect the substantive representation of women's policy preferences? Using data from 17 fully or partially democratic regimes in Africa, researchers found that more women in parliament does not necessarily mean more substantive representation of women's policy preferences. Women legislators vote with their parties more than men, which can prevent them from prioritizing women's rights. The research suggests that women vote with their parties because (1) parties more strongly control women's access to political power and (2) there are gendered

[expectations of legislative behavior](#). This research shows that electing women to the legislature is only part of the fight for gender-inclusive democracy.

*Do you have a study we should share for a future Factly Friday? Send an email to [drg.el@usaid.gov](mailto:drg.el@usaid.gov)!*

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