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ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE EQUAL
REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN
IN MAURITIAN POLITICS

50/50 POLICY BRIEF



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1. SIGNIFICANCE OF EQUAL REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Mauritius falls short of the gender parity target in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals – **with only 20% and 23.99% of women in parliament and local government respectively** as shown in the table below.



	YEAR OF ELECTION	TYPE OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM	NO. OF SEATS/ CANDIDATES/ APPOINTMENTS	NO OF WOMEN	% WOMEN
Legislative Assembly	2019	First Past the post	70	14	20
Cabinet	2019		24	3	13
Local Government	2020	First Past the post	1288	309	23.99

The gender-neutral quota introduced at the local government level in 2011 resulted in a substantial (17%) increase in women’s representation in the December 2012 elections but there is no such quota at the national level.

2. BARRIERS TO THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

- **Patriarchal Society:** The Mauritian society is patriarchal and women are expected to shoulder the bulk of domestic responsibilities. This leaves them with less time (than men) for political activities. The political arena is stereotyped as being a male territory and women are socialized to accept their perceived inadequacies, resulting in poor self-esteem. Similarly, unconscious biases towards men are also observed in the lack of gender sensitive reporting in the Mauritian media by both male and female journalists.
- **Socio-economic factors:** Although a large majority of women are economically independent, they have to juggle household responsibilities and their professional lives. This contributes to the fact that women do not prioritise participation in politics because of the stereotypical social roles assigned to them.
- **Cultural Factors:** In certain ethnic groups women still have to ask for permission from their husbands/partners and in-laws to join politics. Cultural, religious and ethnic barriers limit women’s participation in politics and hence the political arena is viewed as a male field.
- **Financial Factors:** Participation in politics comes with a financial cost. As such, women have not been trained on how to raise funds for their electoral campaign and access to finance is a major impediment.
- **The First Past the Post Election system:** It is less favourable to women being elected into political office.

3. CONTEXT

Constitutional provisions

The Constitution does not explicitly promote gender equality, but Article 3 recognises the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals free from discrimination based on race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex; and Article 16(2) of the Constitution highlights that “no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting in the performance of any public function conferred by any law or otherwise in the performance of the functions of any public office or any public authority.”

The electoral system and quotas (Affirmative Action)

Mauritius uses the First Past the Post (FPTP), or constituency based, electoral system both at local and national level. Women generally do not fare well under the FPTP system, as candidates are chosen on the basis of their ethnicity in Mauritius. Political leaders tend to favour men over women in Mauritius due to its patriarchal nature where men have advantages over women.

Contrastingly, in a Proportional Representation(PR) system, voters choose based on the party and its policies, rather than on a particular individual. This works in favour of women – at least as far as getting their foot in the door – because of socialised prejudices against women in politics. The chance of women being elected is even higher when the PR system works in concert with a quota.

Amendments to the Local Government Act 2011

In December 2011 The Local Government Act was enacted requiring that political parties field a minimum of one third of candidates of either sex for the municipal and village council elections. Sections 16 and 111 of the Mauritian Constitution were amended in 2011 to allow for affirmative action.

As a result, representation of women in local government increased from 9% to 26% in the December 2012 elections and decreased to 23.99% for the 2020 elections. There is no quota for women at the national level resulting in fewer women being elected at this level (currently at 20%). These facts represent an opportunity to debate on a 50/50 policy about electoral reform at national elections.

4. FACTS AND FINDINGS

A few political party candidates list for 2019 elections

The table below shows the candidates who stood for the 2019 general elections according to their political party and by constituency and sex for the three main political parties in Mauritius.

POLITICAL PARTY	NUMBER OF FEMALE CANDIDATES	NUMBER OF MALE CANDIDATES	TOTAL NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	% FEMALE CANDIDATES FIELDIED	NO OF FEMALES IN TOP 3 PARTY POSITIONS	NO OF MALES IN TOP 3 PARTY POSITIONS	% OF FEMALES IN TOP 3 PARTY POSITIONS
Alliance National	12	48	60	20	0	14	0
Alliance Moricien	11	49	60	18	8	30	21
Mouvement militant Mauricien	13	47	60	22	2	6	35
TOTAL	36	144	180	20	10	50	17

The table shows that the three main political parties fielded only 20% women in total, which is not only below what they promised but well below the SADC target of 50%.

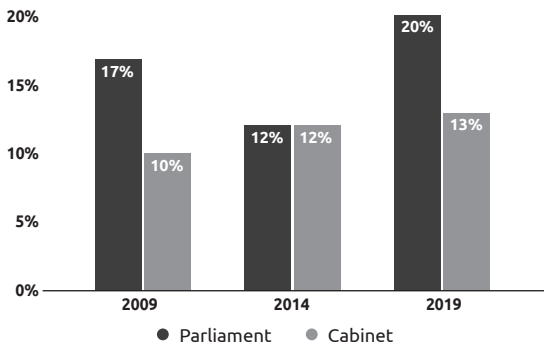
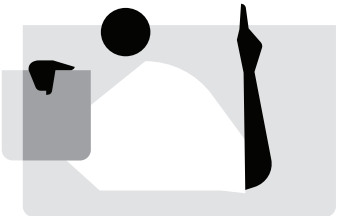
2019 National Election Outcome

The table below shows that women garnered 20% of the vote overall with the MMM having the highest proportion of women at 33% - two elected and one Best Loser (BL), followed by the Alliance Moricien at 23.8% women, with eight elected and two BL, while the Alliance National has no elected woman but one BL.

PARTY	SEATS INCLUDING BEST LOSER (BL)	FEMALE	MALE	% FEMALE
Alliance Mauricien (AM)	42	8+2 BL	30+2 BL	23.8
Alliance National (AN)	17	1 BL	14+2 BL	5.8
Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM)	9	2+1 BL	6	33
Organisation du Peuple Rodriguais (OPR)	2	0	2	0
TOTAL	70	14	56	20

Election outcomes over the last three elections

The graph below shows that women’s representation in parliament and cabinet have increased marginally over the last three elections.



Recent Municipal and Village Council Elections

The gender quota at local government level saw an overall 17% increase in women's representation in both municipal and village elections from 9% in 2005 to 26% in 2012. On the other hand, during the 2020 Village council elections, the percentage of women elected was at 22.82%. Thus, the total percentage of women elected at local government as of now is 23.99%.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION	MUNICIPAL	VILLAGE	TOTAL
Last Election	2015	2020	
No. of councillors	118	1170	1288
No. of women	42	267	309
% women	35.59%	22.82%	23.99%



5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- All political parties must have a gender policy and gender action plan. Gender equality and the 50/50 Agenda must be an integral part of their Constitutions.
- Mauritius needs to sign the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.
- Legislation mandating voter education can increase election turnouts.

Electoral Reforms:

- Lobby for electoral reform to replace the FPTP electoral system with the PR system.
- Lobby for the gender quota to be extended to the national level.
- Lobby to increase the local government quota from 33% to 50% and ensure that the sector-based Gender Policy already in place at the level of the Local Government is complied with.
- Lobby political parties to set quotas for the equal representation of women within their structures – at least ensure that neither gender represents less than 33% of the candidates on party lists.
- Accompanying any temporary special measures to increase women's participation with advocacy and capacity building for women in politics to ensure effective participation and gender responsive governance.

Electoral Management Bodies:

- Develop a Gender Policy to ensure that policies and practices of the electoral bodies work to improve the status of women.
- Work with civil society to advocate for legislative reforms that will ensure equal representation of men and women.
- Ensure women are given decision making positions.

Media:

- Review the communication code to include gender parity as a requirement.
- More capacity-building for the media to ensure balanced and gender sensitive reporting which reflects the views of everyone who stands for political office including women candidates, sources and voters.

Civil Society Organizations:

- CSOs should work collaboratively to strengthen their monitoring, lobbying and advocacy roles through:
 1. Increasing fundraising efforts for lobbying and advocating for electoral reform and the equal representation of women in politics.
 2. Equipping women with knowledge and skills to campaign and take up political decision-making positions and promote gender equality.
- Lobbying political parties to implement quotas within their parties.
- Concerted 50/50 campaigns to raise amongst voters about the importance and benefits of electing women into political decision making positions.