



Women's Political Participation in Africa 2021-2024

SOUTHERN Region

Fact Sheet

Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe

	Africa	Horn	East	Southern	Central	North	West
Lower houses of parliament 2024	26% (25%)	31% (33%)	34% (33%)	29% (28%)	22% (19%)	22% (24%)	20% (16%)
Upper houses of parliament 2024	21% (20%)	28% (30%)	34% (29%)	31% (29%)	28% (20%)	10% (11%)	7% (12%)
Parliament overall 2024	25% (24%)	30% (33%)	34% (32%)	29% (28%)	23% (19%)	20% (21%)	19% (16%)
Political party leadership 2024	9% (12%)	0% (17%)	11% (15%)	19% (14%)	0% (7%)	0% (0%)	0% (11%)
Election management bodies 2024	29% (28%)	30% (21%)	45% (45%)	37% (40%)	23% (20%)	15% (25%)	27% (24%)
Local government 2024	25% (21%)	29% (N/A)	24% (35%)	25% (20%)	24% (27%)	26% (3%)	28% (2%)
Speakers 2024	25% (21%)	0% (0%)	44% (33%)	43% (35%)	27% (18%)	0% (0%)	16% (16%)
Mayors of capital cities 2024	29% (19%)	25% (20%)	0% (0%)	20% (19%)	29% (43%)	17% (0%)	36% (20%)
Top executive positions 2024	13% (7%)	8% (10%)	28% (12%)	21% (9%)	11% (7%)	0% (0%)	7% (7%)
Cabinet 2024	24% (22%)	19% (17%)	36% (32%)	30% (26%)	18% (20%)	21% (13%)	21% (19%)

KEY	Increased since 2021 (in brackets)
	Decreased since 2021 (in brackets)
	The same as 2021 (in brackets)

QUICK FACTS

- Since 2021 there has been a one percentage point increase of women lower house parliamentarians in Africa since, increasing from 25% to 26%. At this rate of progress, we will reach parity by 2100.
- Southern Africa is considered one of the better-performing regions regarding women's political representation. The region averages about 29% women in lower house parliaments, which is higher compared to West Africa's 20% average.
- Six Southern African countries have met or surpassed the 30% benchmark for women's representation in the lower house of parliament. **Namibia** leads the region with 50% female representation, while **Zimbabwe** has 31%. The other countries reaching this threshold are **Angola, Tanzania, Mozambique, and South Africa**.
- Eight countries in Southern Africa employ some form of gender quota for elections at the national or local level, including **South Africa and Mozambique**, which have strong party-based quotas promoting female candidates.
- Eight Southern African countries have held local and/or national elections between 2021 and July 2024; **South Africa, Mozambique, Eswatini, Angola, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, DRC, Zambia and Mauritius**. These elections have led to varying changes in the representation of women, with some countries experiencing improvements while others saw decline.

Context

Overall, the political context in Southern Africa is characterised by a mix of stable democracies, such as Botswana and Namibia, and countries facing challenges related to corruption, economic instability, and political repression, such as Zimbabwe. Socio-economically, the region continues to grapple with issues of poverty, inequality, and governance and faces ongoing political and economic uncertainties. DRC and Mozambique are both experiencing increasing war and conflict. Six SADC countries (DRC, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe) held national or local elections in 2023 and the first half of 2024.



Lesotho held Local Government Elections in September 2023, a year after the National elections. Women's representation continues to decline at the local level, a low of 39%, since 2005 when the country adopted a 30% quota. Voter turnout continues to decline, with just 26% of eligible voters turning up to vote.



Mozambique held local elections in October 2023, and the ruling party, FRELIMO, was declared the winner in 64 out of 65 municipalities in Mozambique's sixth local elections. However, the results are being contested by the main opposition party. There are allegations of electoral fraud and Independent election observation groups and partner countries have expressed concern and called for the appeals lodged by the opposition to be decided with impartiality and transparency.¹



The DRC held elections in December 2023 when President Felix Tshisekedi won re-election with more than 70% of the vote. However, the

opposition and some civil society groups called for the vote to be rerun due to massive logistical problems that questioned the outcome's validity.²

Zimbabwe President of the ruling ZANU PF party, Mnangagwa Emmerson, won 53% of the vote compared with 44% for Nelson Chamisa, his main challenger in national and local government elections that took place in August 2023, amid a context of fear and oppression. The elections were marred by delays that fuelled opposition accusations of rigging and voter suppression.³



On the positive side, **South Africa's** National and Provincial elections held on 29 May 2024 have been lauded as a watershed moment for the country and an excellent example of democracy at work. The election was the most contested since the advent of democracy thirty years ago when the ruling African National Congress (ANC) won 63% of the vote. As predicted, the party lost significant ground, attaining just 40% of the vote and losing its outright majority for the first time since it came to power in 1994. This shifts the country from a one-party dominant state to a multi-party democracy. The ANC has now formed a **Government of National Unity (GNU)** with ten other political parties, including the centrist Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Inkatha Freedom Party, which has its roots in KwaZulu Natal. Other parties in the GNU include the Patriotic Alliance (PA), GOOD; Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC); Vryheidsfront Plus FF+ United Democratic Movement (UDM); Rise Mzansi and Al Jama-ah.



These contexts directly impact women's rights in general and WPP in particular.

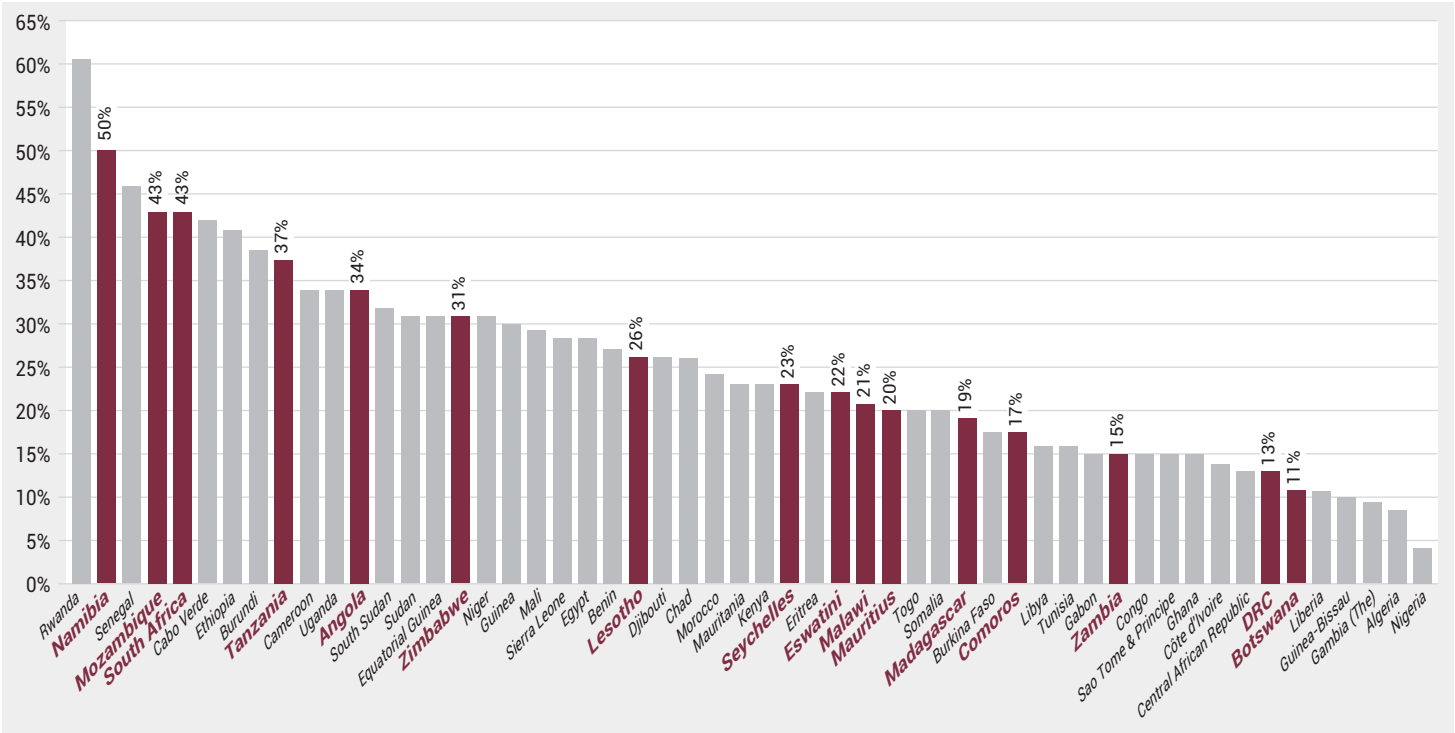
¹ <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/fraudulent-municipal-elections-cripple-democracy-in-mozambique>

² <https://www.africanews.com/2023/12/31/president-felix-tshisekedi-declared-winner-of-drc-election/>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/27/zimbabwes-president-mnangagwa-wins-second-term-opposition-rejects-result>

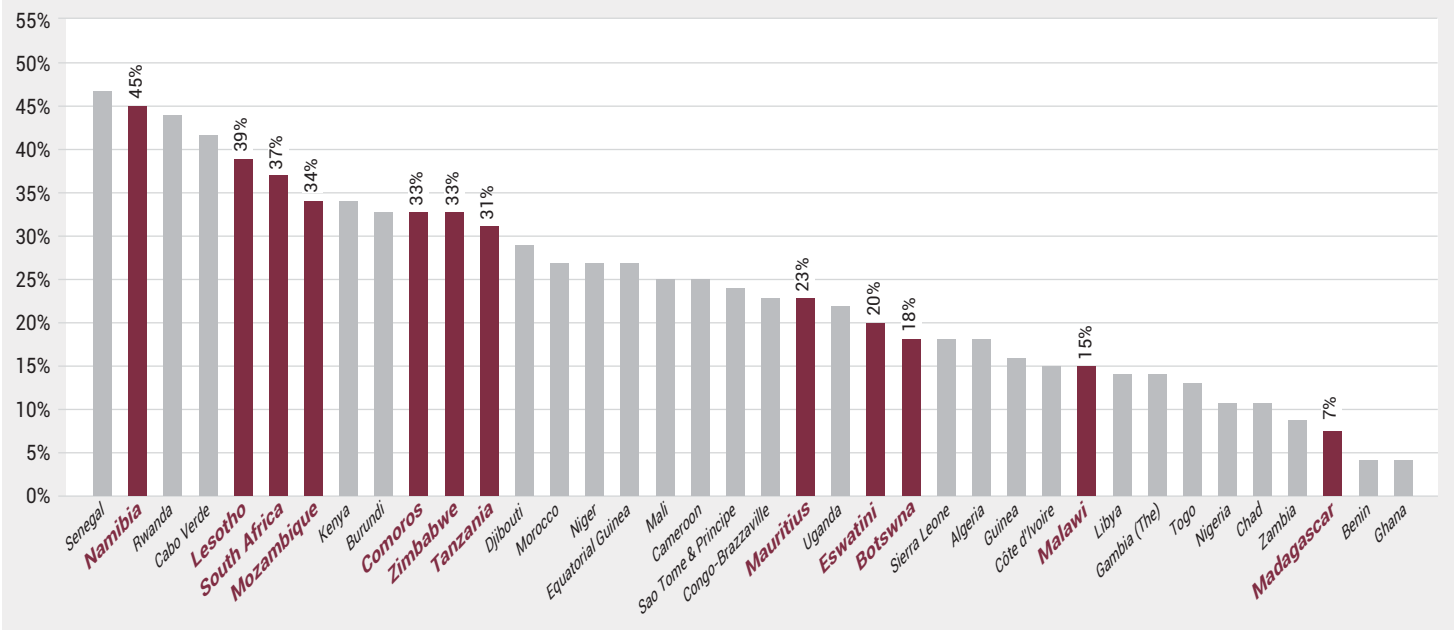
WPP in lower houses of parliament in Africa range from a high of 61% in Rwanda to a low of 4% in Nigeria. Namibia has the highest proportion of women in Southern Africa (50%) and Botswana the lowest (11%).

WPP in Lower Houses in African countries, 2024



At the local government level, WPP ranges from 45% in Namibia (the highest in the region) to 7% in Madagascar.

WPP in local government by region



Recent elections in Southern Africa (2021-2024)

Eight countries in Southern Africa held national or local elections or both. Two countries increased by over 10 percentage points, three increased by five percentage points or less, two remained stagnant and four countries experienced declines in women's representation in the national or local government elections.

The table shows that in the lower house, Eswatini stands out with a notable increase of 12%, reflecting a significant improvement in political representation following the recent elections. Meanwhile, Angola, Lesotho, and the DRC show minimal or no changes in representation, with percentages ranging from 0 to 5%. While Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa declined by between one and three percentage points.

% Change	Lower House	Local Government
Over 10%	Eswatini (12%)	Zimbabwe (19%)
0-5%	Angola (4%) Lesotho (3%) DRC (0)	Eswatini (5%) Mauritius (1%) Zambia (0)
-5%	Zimbabwe (-1) Zambia (-2) South Africa (-3%)	Lesotho (-1%)

In contrast, at the local government level, Zimbabwe saw a significant increase in WPP, mainly due to the adoption of a quota at this levels before the elections.

Eswatini, and Mauritius improved by five and one percentage points respectively, and Zambia remained stagnant. In Lesotho, WPP declined once again, by one percentage point.

Obstacles to WPP

Progress has been made, however, research shows that women continue to face several barriers, not only in accessing political spaces but also in exercising their agency and power once elected.

Electoral systems and quotas

Electoral systems and quotas (TSMs) have been shown to enhance WPP at all levels. The electoral system is the way in which representatives are elected, these systems.

In Africa, three main types of electoral systems are used:

- **Constituency** or "First Past the Post" (FPTP)/ plurality/majority systems - Winner takes all, generally yield poorer results for women and minority groups.
- **Proportional Representation (PR)** - Most conducive to increasing women's representation, especially using the zebra list system.
- **Mixed system** using both PR and constituency systems - Middle ground, more countries moving to this system.

Quotas are temporary special measures (TSMs) to increase WPP. At the national level 45 of the 54 African states have some form of quota at the lower house level. At the local level of the 41 countries for which we could get data, 28 have some form of quota, with similar results to those in the LH.

Any type of quota can be combined with any type of electoral system to increase women's political representation, with varying degrees of success. It shows that the best combination for increasing WPP in Africa is the PR system where political parties provide for quotas voluntarily at the national level, while the mixed system with legislated candidate quotas is the most effective at the local government level. In the FPTP system voluntary party quotas are the least effective, while the most effective quota in the FPTP system is reserved seats for women.

Lower House					Local Government		
Country	Rank LH	Electoral system	Quota	%Women	Electoral system	Quota	%Women
Namibia	4	PR	Voluntary Party (SWAPO)	50%	PR	Legislated Candidate Quotas	45%
South Africa	17	PR	Voluntary Party (ANC)	43%	Mixed	Legislated Candidate Quotas	37%
Mozambique	20	PR	Voluntary Party (FRELIMO, RENAMO)	43%	PR	Voluntary party quota (FRELIMO)	34%
Tanzania	41	Mixed	Reserved seats	37%	Mixed	Reserved seats	31%
Angola	50	PR	Legislated Candidate Quotas	34%	PR	Legislated Candidate Quotas	
Zimbabwe	61	Mixed	Reserved seats	31%	FPTP	Legislated Candidate Quotas	33%
Lesotho	88	Mixed	Legislated Candidate Quotas	26%	Mixed	Reserved seats	39%
Seychelles	102	Mixed	None	23%	Not elected	Not elected	
Malawi	110	FPTP	Voluntary party (UDF, MCP)	21%	FPTP	None	15%
Mauritius	113	FPTP	Voluntary Party (MMM)	20%	FPTP PR	Legislated Candidate Quotas	23%
Madagascar	126	Mixed	None	19%	FPTP	None	7%
Eswatini	134	FPTP	Reserved seats	22%	PR	None	20%
Comoros	137	FPTP	None	17%	FPTP	Legislated Candidate Quotas	33%
Zambia	143	FPTP	None	15%	Mixed	None	8%
DRC	154	Mixed	None	13%	FPTP	None	
Botswana	157	FPTP	Voluntary party (BCP, BNF)	11%		Voluntary party (BCP, BNF)	18%
TOTAL SOUTHERN				29%			25%

In Southern Africa, 11 countries employ some form of gender quota system at the national or local government levels, to enhance women's political participation. Among these, **Namibia** leads with a 50% representation of women in the lower house, supported by a voluntary party quota from the ruling party, SWAPO. **South Africa** follows closely with 43%, utilising a voluntary party quota from the ANC. **Mozambique** also exhibits strong representation, with 43% of women in the lower house, thanks to voluntary quotas from the FRELIMO and RENAMO parties.

The table indicates that countries implementing legislated candidate quotas, such as **Angola** and **Zimbabwe**, exhibit higher levels of women's political participation in both the lower house and local government. For instance, **Zimbabwe** has 31% female representation in the lower house and 33% in local government due to reserved seats and legislated quotas. In contrast, other countries, like **Zambia** and **Botswana**, show lower levels of women's representation at 15% and 11%, respectively, highlighting the varying effectiveness of different quota systems.

Comoros uses two different electoral systems. At the national level, the FPTP is used, with no quota, while at the local government level, there is a legislated candidate quota in the PR system. The result is that there are 33% women in local government compared to 17% in the lower house, illustrating the need for quotas in the short term to level the playing field.

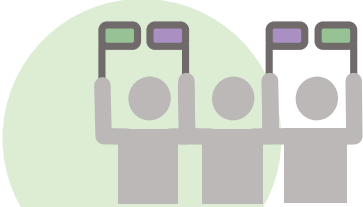
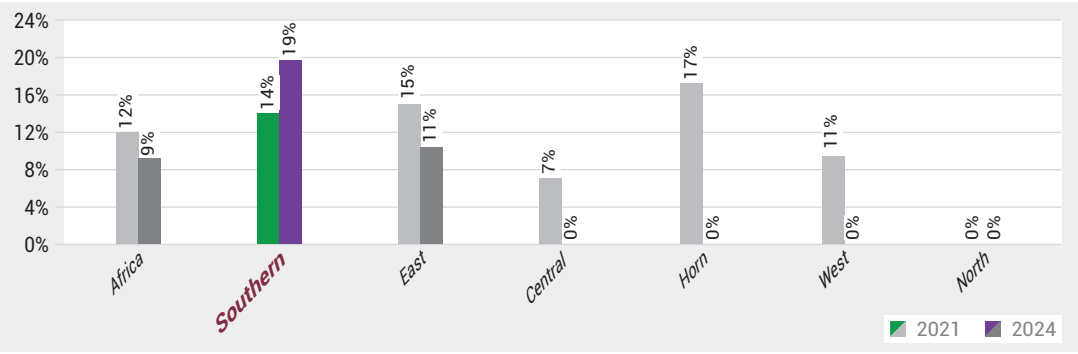


In **Zambia** women's representation has vacillated between 15% and 18% in the lower house and 7% and 9% at the local government level over 15 years from 2006 to 2021. The principle of gender equality is clearly defined in Zambia's Gender Policy of 2014, which highlights three measures to increase WPP, including reviewing the electoral system, revising political party manifestos to promote the nomination of women candidates, and lobbying for a quota system. None of these proposals have been taken up, making Zambia a clear example of why there is a need for quotas and electoral systems that are more conducive to women entering parliament.



Political parties

Women's representation in political party leadership in Africa, by region, 2021-2024



Political parties are instrumental to advancement into national leadership, and male dominance of top leadership (Leader, Secretary General (SG) and DSG) is a feature in every country.

Women's representation in political party leadership is highest Southern Africa. There has been a notable increase, from 14% in 2021 to 19% in 2024. This upward trend reflects growing recognition of the importance of women's voices in political decision-making and governance.

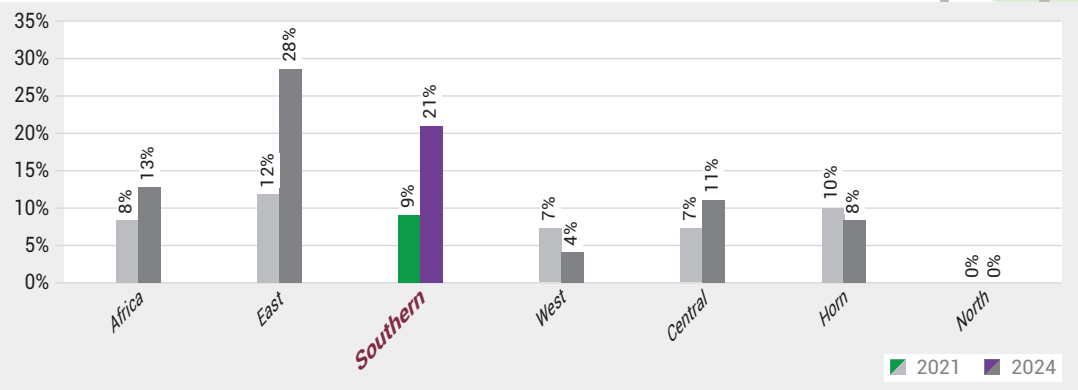


As one of the newer and most participatory democracies in Africa, **South Africa** makes a good case study for women's rise to the top. South Africa follows the PR electoral system at the national level. Thanks largely to the African National Congress' (ANC) fifty percent voluntary quota, however, the ANC has never had a woman leader. In the 2024 elections, only one party, Patricia de Lille's GOOD party, had a woman leader, which she occupies.

The ruling parties in **Namibia** and **Tanzania** have female leaders. Ntembu Nandi-Ndaitwah has occupied this position in the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia since the passing of former leader Hage Geingob. Ndaitwah is SWAPO's presidential candidate for the elections set to take place in November 2024. Samia Suluhu Hassan is the became Tanzania's first female vice-president following the 2015 general election, after being elected on the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) ticket with Magufuli. Suluhu was re-elected to a second term in 2020.

Top Executive

Women in top executive of governments in Africa, by region, 2021-2024



There is a significant increase in Southern Africa, where women's representation rose from 9% in 2021 to 21% in 2024. This growth is an encouraging sign of progress towards gender parity in executive leadership within the region.

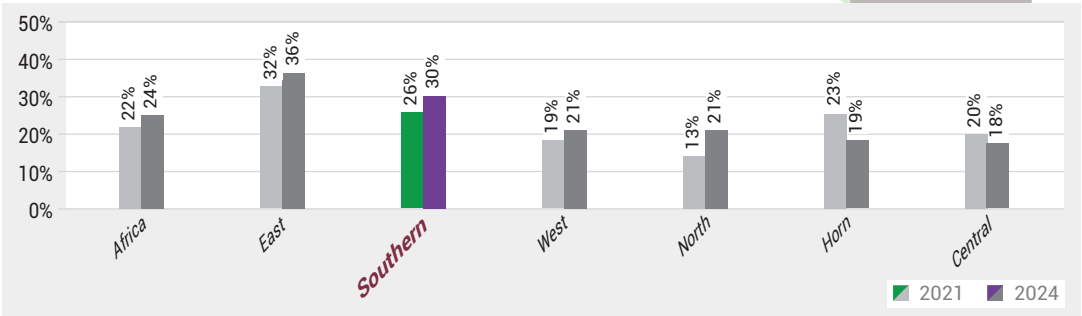
These appointments demonstrate a trend towards greater inclusivity and recognition of women's roles in leadership within Southern Africa. The increase from 9% to 21% indicates a substantial shift in empowering women in decision-making positions, contributing to a more diverse and balanced governance landscape. It reflects an ongoing commitment to addressing gender inequality and promoting women's participation in politics and leadership.

There is a female Vice President in **Angola**. **Lesotho** made history by appointing its first female Deputy Prime Minister, who also served as Chief Justice. In **Namibia**, there could be the first female presidents after the November elections, if the ruling SWAPO retain power, Samia Suluhu Hassan has been President of **Tanzania** since 2015, while **Zambia** has a female Vice President.

Cabinet

Overall Female Cabinet ministers increased by two percentage points to 24%. In Southern Africa, women make up 30% of cabinet positions.

Women in Cabinet in Africa, by region, 2021-2024



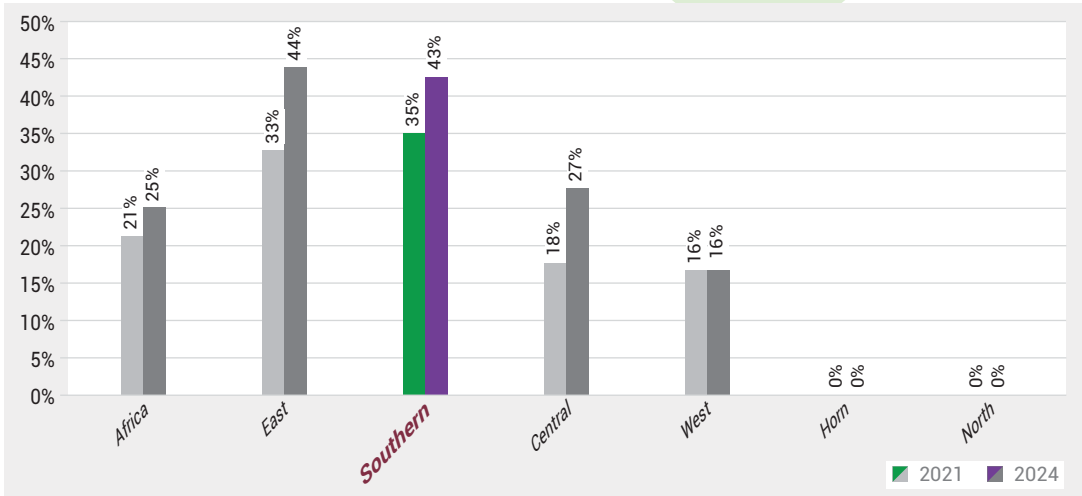
The region's highest representation is in **Mozambique**, where women hold 50% of ministerial roles. **South Africa** experienced a decline following the May 2024 election from 50% to 40%, following the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU).

Speakers

In 2024, Southern Africa emerged as the second-best performing region, with women speakers accounting for 43%, up from 35% in 2021.

Southern Africa's progress is supported by the fact that several countries in the region now have female speakers, including **Angola, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe**.

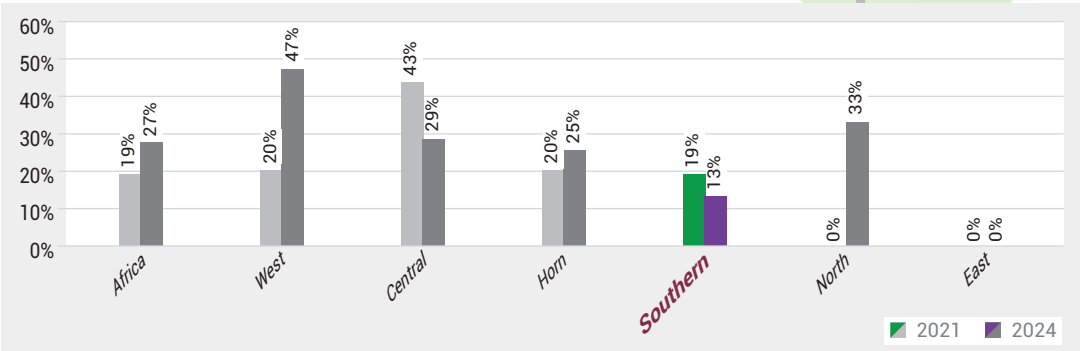
Women speakers in Africa, by region, 2021-2024



Mayors of capital cities

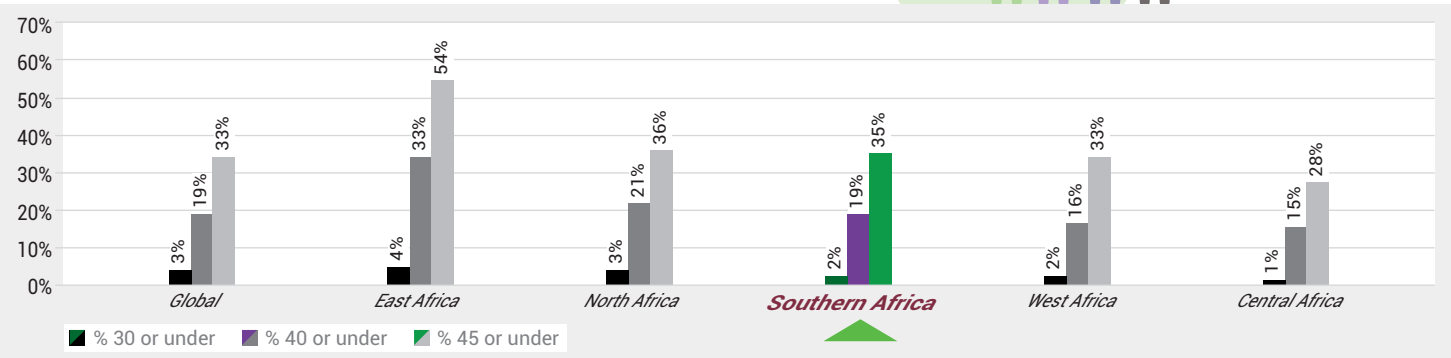
Southern Africa has experienced a decline, dropping from 19% in 2021 to 13% in 2024. Out of the 16 countries in the region, only three Angola, Namibia, and Seychelles currently have female mayors in their capital cities. This indicates a setback in the progress toward gender equality in mayoral leadership within the region, contrasting with the upward trends seen in other areas like West and Central Africa.

Women mayors of capital cities in Africa, by region, 2021-2024



Youth representation

Youth representation in parliament in Africa by region



Globally 33% of MPs in the lower houses of parliament are under 45 years old, 19% under 40 years, and just 3% under 30. In Southern Africa, only 2% of MPs are under 30, 19% are under 40, and 35% are 45 or younger,

slightly above the global average. Despite progress, there remains a need to boost young representation, particularly for those under 30, to better reflect the region's demographic realities.

Representation by age bracket

Country	Chamber	Average age	% 30 or under	% 40 or under	% 45 or under
Angola	National Assembly	-	1	13	27
Botswana	National Assembly	-	0	8	16
Eswatini	House of Assembly	-	3	19	37
Lesotho	National Assembly	50	3	18	33
Madagascar	National Assembly	50	0	15	35
Malawi	National Assembly	47	3	29	52
Mauritius	National Assembly	49	1	21	40
Mozambique	Assembly of the Republic	51	1	22	33
Namibia	National Assembly	53	4	13	29
Seychelles	National Assembly	47	3	26	43
South Africa	National Assembly	-	3	20	36
Tanzania	National Assembly	-	5	28	45
Zambia	National Assembly	49	1	17	34
Zimbabwe	National Assembly	48	6	26	47

The 2024 Africa Barometer data reveals varying levels of youth representation across Southern African parliaments, with few countries showing significant participation of younger MPs. Notably, **Malawi** has

the youngest MP, with more than half (52%) under the age of 45. **Botswana** has the lowest proportion of youth in parliament, with just 16% of MPs being under the age of 45.

All graphs, tables and information are sourced from the second edition of the WPP Africa Barometer, read the full version [here](#).