Indicator 7.3 – Composition of parliamentary bodies

The parliament, as the main representative of diverse political opinions and different groups in society, which comprises equal members who have been elected directly by the citizens, has a unique way of organizing its work. The representative nature of a legislature requires this diversity to be reflected in the composition of all parliamentary bodies, whether in leadership structures or other formats such as committees.

Democratic parliaments ensure a political balance between the majority and minority parliamentary (party) groups in the governing bodies of the parliament (such as the bureau, conference of speakers and administrative and financial bodies). The representation of political parties in the parliamentary leadership is usually proportionate to political party representation, though special consideration may be given to smaller groups to ensure their effective engagement in parliamentary work.

In assessing the representative nature of the composition of parliamentary bodies, different aspects are to be taken into account, including a political balance between the majority and minority parliamentary (party) groups, the rules and practice of selecting committee chairs and members, and the proportion of women and young MPs (and other contextually relevant groups) in the parliamentary leadership.

The assessment of the indicator on the composition of parliamentary bodies comprises the following dimensions:

- 7.3.1 Composition of parliamentary leadership
- 7.3.2 Composition of committees
- 7.3.3 Gender and age balance in the composition of parliamentary bodies
Dimension 7.3.1 Composition of parliamentary leadership

Indicator: 7.3 Composition of parliamentary bodies
Sub-target: 7 Representative parliament
Target: 16.7 Responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative parliament

About the dimension

This dimension outlines the provisions by which the legal framework ensures political balance between the majority and minority parliamentary (party) groups in the governing bodies of the parliament (such as the bureau, conference of speakers and administrative and financial bodies). Parliament, as an institution that reflects society in the diversity of its composition, grants institutional recognition for the representation of opposition parties in the parliamentary leadership.

While the legal status of the opposition in national parliaments varies considerably by country, most legislatures guarantee institutional representation of the opposition in the governing bodies of the parliament, reflecting the proportionality of political party representation. If the system provides for deputy chairmanship, at least one deputy speaker’s seat must be guaranteed for the opposition.

National legislation, or the rules of procedure of the legislature, secures the deputy chairmanship of the parliamentary committees/sub-committees for opposition MPs. In many countries, the chairmanship of the standing committees is shared between the opposition and the majority parties in line with the principle of proportionality.

The establishment of parliamentary groups, which is the main instrument for the representation of the parties in parliamentary structures, is guaranteed by national legislation. The law enables opposition MPs to freely set up political groups, and requires a reasonable number of MPs for group formation. The law also contains no undue barriers that prevent the political parties from fully and easily engaging in parliamentary activities.

In order to achieve proper balance between the majority and the opposition in governing bodies of the parliament, the national legislation provides independent MPs with the same rights as those enjoyed by opposition members of the parliament. This includes the right to be represented in the leadership positions of standing committees and sub-committees (chair or deputy chair). Some legal systems allow independent MPs to set up parliamentary non-party groups, and grant them the right to be represented in the governing structures of the parliament.

On the basis of a global comparative analysis of parliamentary practices and models in parliamentary development, an aspiring goal for parliaments in the domain of composition of parliamentary leadership would encompass the following:

The constitutional and legal framework guarantees a political balance between the majority and minority parliamentary (party) groups in the composition of the parliamentary leadership. Opposition political parties are represented in the governing bodies of the parliament, such as the bureau, conference of speakers and administrative and financial bodies, in accordance with the principle of proportionality. At least one deputy speaker position is secured for opposition MPs.

National legislation guarantees the proportional representation of opposition MPs in the chairmanship of standing committees and sub-committees. The law ensures equal and proportional representation of opposition MPs as deputy chairs of the committees/sub-committees.

The rules of procedure of the parliament establish clear and transparent regulations for the formation of political groups in the parliament, including a reasonable minimum number of MPs.
The rules of procedure of the parliament entitle independent MPs to be represented in the parliamentary leadership. This includes the allocation of seats in the bureau, and in the leadership of standing committees and sub-committees.

Assessment

The dimension is evaluated on the basis of several criteria that should be assessed separately. For each criterion, select one of the six descriptive grades (Non-existent, Poor, Basic, Good, Very good and Excellent) that corresponds best to your parliament, and provide details of the evidence on which the assessment is based.

The evidence for assessment of this dimension might include:

- Specific articles of the constitution or national legislation defining the authority of opposition MPs to be represented in the governing structures of the parliament (such as the bureau, conference of speakers and administrative and financial bodies)
- Specific articles of the rules of procedure granting the seat of a deputy speaker to an opposition MP
- Specific articles of the rules of procedure granting the leadership of the standing committees/sub-committees to the opposition MPs, in accordance with the proportionality principle
- Specific articles of the rules of procedure granting independent MPs representation in the governing bodies of the parliament (such as the bureau, conference of speakers, and administrative and financial bodies)
- Specific articles of national legislation establishing clear and transparent procedures for the formation of political groups in the parliament
- The number of opposition MPs represented in the governing bodies of the sitting parliament (such as the bureau, conference of speakers, and administrative and financial bodies)
- The number of opposition MPs chairing the standing committees/sub-committees in the sitting parliament

If relevant, additional comments or examples that support the assessment (such as references to external national, regional or international surveys and reports) can be provided.

Assessment criterion No. 1: Constitutional or legal framework

There is evidence of constitutional or legal provisions by which MPs from minority parliamentary (party) groups are represented in the governing structures of the parliament (such as the bureau, conference of speakers and administrative and financial bodies).

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 2: Legal framework on the allocation of a deputy speaker’s position to the opposition

There is evidence of legal provisions that guarantee at least one seat of a deputy speaker of the parliament for an MP from a minority parliamentary (party) group.
Sub-target 7 – Representative parliament

Indicators for democratic parliaments, based on SDG targets 16.6 and 16.7

Assessment criterion No. 3: Legal framework on the allocation of standing committee/sub-committee leadership roles for opposition MPs

There is evidence of legal provisions that ensure the representation of MPs from minority parliamentary (party) groups in the leadership of standing committees/sub-committees in accordance with the proportionality principle.

Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 4: Legal framework on the representation of independent MPs in the governing bodies of the parliament

There is evidence of legal provisions by which independent MPs are entitled to be represented in the governing bodies of the parliament (such as the bureau, conference of speakers and administrative and financial bodies). This encompasses the right to take up the position of chair in standing committees and sub-committees.

Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 5: Legal framework on the formation of political groups

There are legal provisions establishing clear procedures for setting up parliamentary political groups, as well as a reasonable number of MPs required for the formation of a group.

Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 6: Established practice of balanced political representation
In practice, there is balanced representation of minority parliamentary parties in the governing structures of the legislative branch (such as the bureau, conference of speakers and administrative and financial bodies). Balanced political representation can be reflected through the practice of sharing leadership roles between the majority and the minority parliamentary parties in accordance with the principle of proportionality.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Recommendations for change

Sources for further reading
**Dimension 7.3.2 Composition of committees**

Indicator: 7.2 Composition of parliamentary bodies
Sub-target: 7 Representative parliament
Target: 16.7 Responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative parliament

**About the dimension**

The committee is one of the key elements of the structure of the legislature, and has a vital role in the organization of parliamentary work. Parliaments are authorized to organize their work through committees by the standing order/rules of procedure and the committee statute. This dimension outlines only the rules and practices regarding the composition of committees, as the other aspects of committee work are addressed in dimension 1.4.4 Committees.

Committee membership is usually determined at the start of a parliamentary term, after an election. It is the right of an elected representative to engage in the thematic work of the legislature, in accordance with personal expertise and/or interest, as well as political party selection and decision-making processes. Legislatures usually require each representative to sit on at least one committee, while some legislatures also limit the number of committees on which each member can sit.

The individual members are usually assigned to committees by the party groups. While larger parties normally have more flexibility in the assignment of members to various committees, smaller parties or independent MPs may face difficulties. Generally, the composition of committees reflects that of the entire parliament. Special consideration may be given to smaller groups or independent MPs to ensure their proportional representation in committees. Parliaments often allow substitute members to represent the same political group as the member who is to be replaced. The rules of procedure also can provide for the representation of independent MPs or MPs from smaller party groups in particular committees.

The committee leadership is usually elected by and from the committee members after the composition of the committee is determined and, as a rule, these elections take place soon after the first gathering of the newly elected parliament. Different legislatures might have various rules for distributing committee leadership positions among political groups. In some systems, the party with majority seats obtains chairmanship of all committees, while in others, the committee leadership positions are distributed among various political groups based on the principle of proportionality.

In democratic parliaments the rules of procedure often explicitly assign leadership of some committees (such as a budget monitoring committee, human rights committee and/or other) to opposition MPs. Political plurality in the committee leadership must be defined by the rules of procedure, and the roles of committee chair and deputy chair should be assigned to representatives of different political groups. The distribution of the seats of committee chairs and deputy chairs may also be subject to political consensus. In any system, it is important for parliament to establish and follow a transparent and fair method for the composition of committees and the selection or election of the committee leadership.¹

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¹ Please also see dimension 7.3.1 Composition of parliamentary leadership.
The law provides for transparent, fair and clear rules and procedures with regard to committee composition, as well as for the selection/election of the committee leadership.

The political proportionality of political representation is ensured when the composition of committees is defined and when committee chairs and deputies are selected.

Special consideration is given to smaller groups or independent MPs to ensure their representation in the committees, either as full members or as observers.

**Assessment**

The dimension is evaluated on the basis of several criteria that should be assessed separately. For each criterion, select one of the six descriptive grades (Non-existent, Poor, Basic, Good, Very good and Excellent) that corresponds best to your parliament, and provide details of the evidence on which the assessment is based.

The evidence for assessment of this dimension might include:

- Specific articles of the constitution or laws that regulate the composition and governance of committees
- Specific articles of rules of procedure on the distribution of committee leadership positions among political groups
- The number of committees or sub-committees chaired by opposition MPs

If relevant, additional comments or examples that support the assessment (such as references to external national, regional or international surveys and reports) can be provided.

**Assessment criterion No. 1: Legal framework on the composition of committees**

There is evidence of constitutional or legal provisions by which parliament defines the composition of committees, and ensures proportional political representation and transparency of the process.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

**Assessment criterion No. 2: Composition of the committee leadership**

There is evidence of the proportional distribution of committee leadership positions (chair and deputy chairs) among different political groups, with special consideration given to relatively small political groups and independent MPs.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

**Assessment criterion No. 3: Practice**
There is evidence that opposition MPs are elected/selected as chairs or vice-chairs of committees and sub-committees.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

**Recommendations for change**
**Dimension 7.3.3 Gender and age balance in the composition of parliamentary bodies**

Indicator: 7.3 Composition of parliamentary bodies  
Sub-target: 7 Representative parliament  
Target: 16.7 Responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative parliament

**About the dimension**

Effective, accountable and inclusive parliaments should represent women, youth and other groups in society not only through their membership, but also in leadership positions within parliament and parliamentary bodies, thus directly influencing how the institution functions. This dimension outlines how a balance can be achieved in the representation of women and young MPs in key positions and in parliamentary bodies, including as speakers or deputy speakers, in the bureau or on the board, on administrative and financial bodies, as committee chairs and vice-chairs, and as members of different portfolio committees. This could also include the leadership of the parliamentary secretariat, such as the positions of secretary-general, deputies and assistants of the secretary-general, in parliaments where these political positions exist and are elected or appointed by the parliament.

Achieving a gender and age balance in the leadership and composition of parliamentary bodies enable women and young MPs to be in a position to influence the policies of parliament, assess and revise parliamentary procedure and practices, serve as role models to others, and provide varied perspectives in parliamentary debate. It also helps women and young MPs to achieve career progression inside parliament and hold positions with higher allowances and resources. Attaining such a balance helps to ensure that parliament functions as an institution that is fully representative of society, and can advance causes of gender equality and contribute to meeting the needs of young people and other groups.

At the highest level in parliament, relatively few women serve as speakers or presiding officers of their respective parliaments. While the number of women chairing committees has increased, the committees that they chair tend to specialize in specific ‘soft’ portfolio areas, such as women’s affairs, employment and education, rather than ‘hard’ policy areas such as foreign affairs, defence and finance. A balanced representation in different committees ensures different perspectives across all sectoral areas addressed by parliament.

Parliament should have strategic plans and policies that reflect the need to promote women and young MPs in senior positions in the parliament. Amendments to internal rules to create special measures, such as giving preference to women and young MPs where qualifications are equal, could also support more balanced representation. Other means that parliaments have used include the rotation of positions of parliamentary leadership between men, women and other groups, and dual leadership of parliamentary structures, for example, through the appointment of both a man and a woman.

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2 The IPU defines MPs as ‘young’ if they are under 45, due to the fact that some countries limit access to some houses of parliament to only men and women aged 45 or above. However, the IPU collects data on young MPs in three age ranges: under 30, under 40 and under 45 years old.

3 Globally, 58 women held speaker positions in national parliaments in 2020. Regarding young MPs, one speaker of parliament was under 30, 20 were under 40 (of whom one was a woman) and 34 were under 45 (two of whom were women). Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Youth participation in national parliaments* (IPU: 2021).

There is representation of different genders and ages of MPs in positions of parliament leadership, including as speakers or deputy speakers, in the bureau or on the board, on administrative and financial bodies, and as committee chairs and vice-chairs.

Measures exist to ensure that women and young MPs and other groups are represented across different portfolio committees.

The legal framework, rules of procedure, parliament’s strategic plan, policies or plans of action include measures to promote the representation of women and young MPs in different parliamentary bodies.

Parliament implements special measures or rule changes to help women and young MPs to take up leadership positions in parliamentary bodies, such as quotas in leadership structures.

**Assessment**

The dimension is evaluated on the basis of several criteria that should be assessed separately. For each criterion, select one of the six descriptive grades (Non-existent, Poor, Basic, Good, Very good and Excellent) that corresponds best to your parliament, and provide details of the evidence on which the assessment is based.

The evidence for assessment of this dimension might include:
- The number of women and young MPs holding senior positions in parliament
- The number of women and young MPs holding positions of committee chairs and vice-chairs
- A list of members of different portfolio committees in a parliament
- Articles in national legislation and/or parliament’s standing orders or rules of procedure that ensure a gender and age balance in parliamentary bodies and in the positions of chair and members of parliamentary committees
- Objectives and actions in parliament’s strategic plan and other policies outlining steps or special measures to ensure balanced representation of women and young MPs on parliamentary bodies
- Parliament’s communication material showcasing the positive role that women and young MPs play across parliament’s work

If relevant, additional comments or examples that support the assessment (such as references to external national, regional or international surveys and reports) can be provided.

**Assessment criterion No. 1: Presence of women MPs in leadership positions in parliament**

Women are equally represented in leadership positions in parliament, including as speaker or deputy speaker, in the bureau or on the board, in administrative and financial bodies, as committee chairs and vice-chairs and across different portfolio committees including in ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ areas.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

**Assessment criterion No. 2: Presence of young MPs in leadership positions in parliament**

There are young MPs in leadership positions in parliament including as speaker or deputy speaker, in the bureau or on the board, in administrative and financial bodies, as committee chairs and vice-chairs and across different portfolio committees including in ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ areas.
Non-existent ☐ Poor ☐ Basic ☐ Good ☐ Very good ☐ Excellent ☐

Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 3: Measures to ensure a balance in composition of parliamentary bodies

Parliament’s strategic plan, policies or action plans identify special measures or affirmative action to ensure that women and young MPs serve in leadership positions. Measures can include quotas, rotation of positions, or dual positions. Parliament has mechanisms to assess, report on and take action to address imbalances in leadership bodies and committees, including the encouragement of political parties to balance their selections for key parliamentary roles.

Non-existent ☐ Poor ☐ Basic ☐ Good ☐ Very good ☐ Excellent ☐

Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Recommendations for change

Sources for further reading

- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Gender-Sensitive parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice (IPU: 2011).
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Women in parliament in 2020: The year in review (IPU: 2021).
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Youth participation in national parliaments (IPU: 2021).