



# Women Count

*IFES works to promote equal rights, justice and political participation for women around the world*



**Only one out of every five legislators in the world is a woman, and many countries still deny women the right to cast a ballot.**

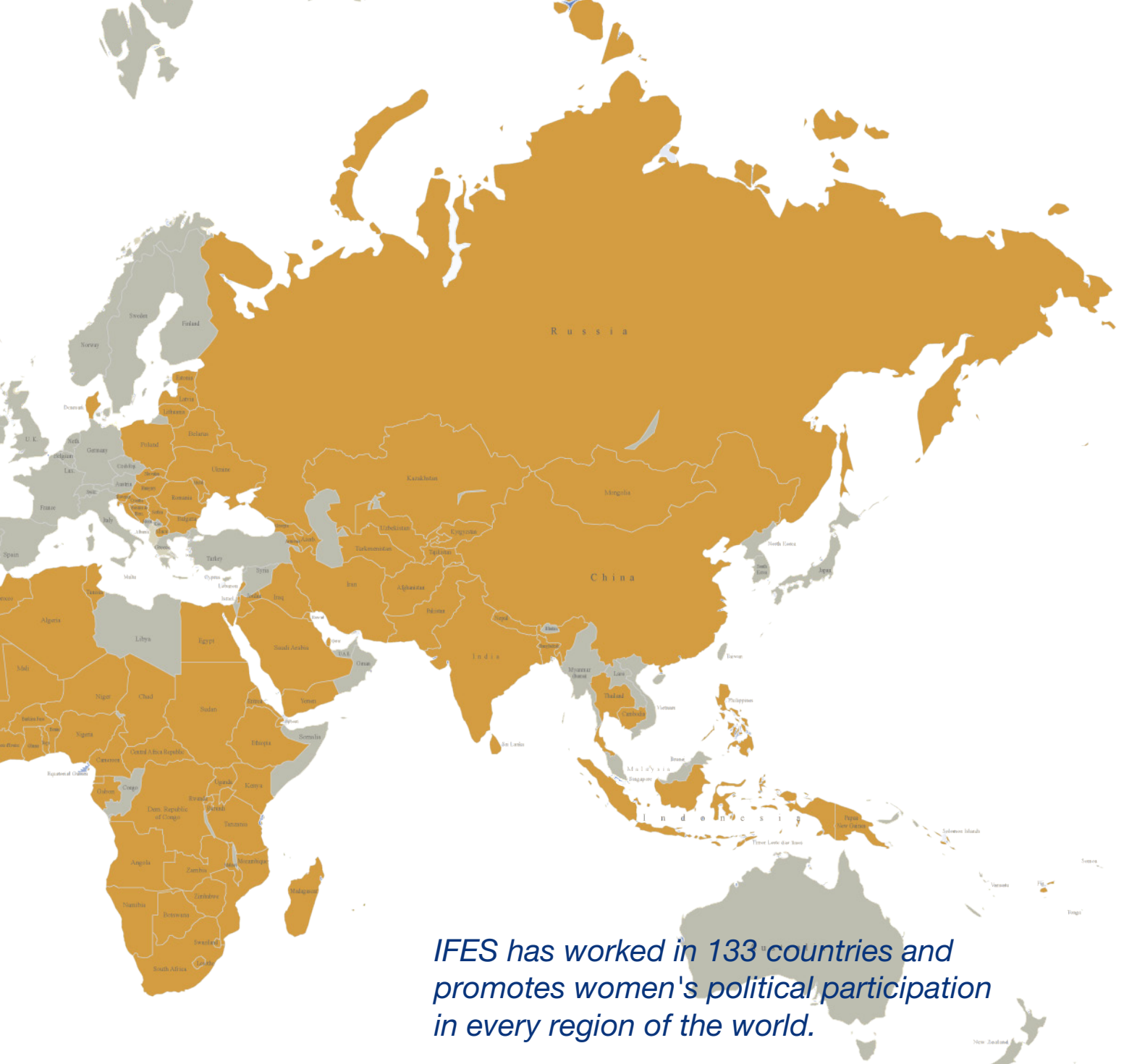
Over the last 25 years, IFES has worked for to ensure all individuals, men and women, participate equally in political processes as voters, candidates, election administrators and civil society leaders. IFES has educated and encouraged millions of women around the world to add their voice to the electoral process. From the Solomon Islands to Mali, from Indonesia to Qatar, and Guatemala to Kazakhstan, IFES strives to strengthen women's role in the democratic process.

Although women's rights are almost universally recognized, advances in women's political participation and representation lag behind other development indicators. In some countries, such as Iraq and Rwanda, significant gains have been made in recent years through gender quotas in legislatures. Despite many successes in women's political empowerment, the number of women legislators, election administrators and political party leaders around the world remains startlingly low. Women's presence in leadership positions along with gender-sensitive male counterparts can play a critical role in reversing this trend.

The full participation of women in political, social and economic life benefits not only themselves, but their families, communities and nations.

**Democracy for half the population is not democracy at all.**





*IFES has worked in 133 countries and promotes women's political participation in every region of the world.*

# Research

The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) aims to improve the condition of women in the region by measuring gender gaps and working with local partners to implement advocacy campaigns using solid data. IFES and the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) partnered with local organizations to evaluate existing data on women's issues and conduct comprehensive surveys in Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen.

The surveys covered four key areas: political and civic participation, economic participation, access to healthcare and social autonomy (education, household decision-making, household resources). The surveys also asked about different laws and rights, violence against women and the role of women in society. To allow cross-country analysis, each survey included a standard section in addition to country-specific gender questions.

*“The survey and data analysis provided solid ground for strengthening women’s political representation and tools for advocacy. Advocating for social justice and gender equality will allow us to change women’s status in Morocco.”*

— **Fatima Outaleb**  
SWMENA Advisor, Union de L'Action Feminine

IFES and IWPR publicly released the survey findings to civil society groups, government officials, parliamentarians and academics. IFES then trained women's advocates on ways to use the data and findings to continue monitoring the status of women, create policy recommendations and implement sustainable solutions to address gender gaps. As this initiative moves forward, small grants will be given to local organizations to help women voice their needs and advocate for change.



# Advocacy

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In India, Women Power Connect (WPC) is a national coalition of women's organizations established in 2005. IFES played a major role in its formation and provided technical assistance and funding to WPC from its inception to the present.

Leaders of women's groups in India realized that piece-meal advocacy was not working and that the establishment of a national advocacy coalition would apply additional pressure on politicians to embrace and deliver fundamental gender policies. Shortly after its formation, WPC was instrumental in ensuring passage of the Domestic Violence Act and it continues to advocate for policy on gender equity.

WPC enabled women's organizations and advocates to communicate directly and in a sustained manner with elected officials and shape national legislative outcomes. Gender Ginger Group (G3) is one example of many successful strategies employed by WPC. Members of the G3 are parliamentarians who cut across party lines and commit to the cause

of women's empowerment and gender equality. G3 members regularly raise women's issues in parliament, in members' home constituencies and political parties.

WPC has trained government officials to analyze budgetary allocations and prepare gender-responsive budgets. At times, WPC has participated in preparing annual state budgets. With over 1,000 groups and individuals as its members, WPC is a vital link between grassroots organizations and state and national legislatures.

WPC was part of a comprehensive IFES program which supported over 40 Indian organizations from the grassroots to the national level to advocate for gender equity. The program included work with men and boys as partners in promoting women's rights; combating female feticide in collaboration with the corporate sector; using the Right to Information Act as a tool for gender equity; and empowering Muslim women in India.



# Participation

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On September 28, 2009, a peaceful demonstration by opposition parties in Guinea turned violent when the military intervened. Amid chaos, several women and girls were systematically raped and abused. From that moment and up to the presidential elections in 2010, animosity grew between women from military families and women from civilian families.

In light of this worrying trend, IFES implemented a traveling women's caravan of peace to promote dialogue in the spirit of reconciliation. IFES was able to bring together the Ministry of National Solidarity, the Association of Military Wives, the Association of Military Women, the Association of Female Victims of September 28 and women from Guinean political parties and civil society.

The peace caravan traveled to each of the seven regions and the capital of Conakry. Bringing together a cross-section of society, the women discussed ethnic and political sensitivities and focused on fostering solidarity and understanding prior to the historic 2010 presidential election.

At the caravan's final destination, the participants created an action plan. This plan guided the efforts of women's groups, the government and partners from the grassroots level upward to bring peace and reconciliation to Guinea.

The inclusion of women's voices is key to peace-building and reconciliation. By developing an action plan, these women created a viable process for political participation now and for the future.

*"The caravan improved the understanding between women and played a large role in the fight against ethnocentrism and regionalism... Traditionally, it has always been the women who are the vehicles for peace and national unity in Guinea."*

— **Madame Traoré**

Deputy National Director for the Promotion of Women



# Leadership

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Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) held a roundtable discussion in 2008 to develop a gender strategy. The discussion resulted in a meeting with the Kabul-based mullahs (religious leaders) and the Ministry of Hajj (pilgrimage) and Islamic Affairs, and led to a ruling in favor of women's participation in the electoral process.

IFES provided the IEC with technical and financial support to establish a Gender Unit in May 2009. The Gender Unit's primary mandate is to promote and increase women's effective participation in electoral institutions and processes.

The Gender Unit first focused on raising awareness within IEC headquarters in Kabul. All staff were trained in the meaning of a safe and productive working environment for women, including appropriate workplace behavior and how to address harassment. The Unit also provided professional development opportunities for women of the IEC. For the 2009 and 2010 elections, the

Unit had a place at the table in all internal strategic discussions. The Unit tried to ensure that gender is accounted for in all activities of the IEC, from procurement and human resources management, to election regulations and security. In mid-2010, the Gender Unit held a series of workshops for IEC female support staff, such as cleaners and cooks who, due to their gender and limited education, are vulnerable to harassment. The training focused on communication, conflict resolution, negotiation and responsibilities.

The Gender Unit then turned toward the provinces. A gender advisor was identified in each province. These individuals, men and women, received extensive training on management and leadership, empowerment, gender issues, gender planning and budgeting, and conflict management. The advisors strengthened relationships with women's organizations, highlighted gender-related issues and participated in planning, budgeting and implementing activities within their province.



# About IFES

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) is the global leader in election assistance and democracy promotion.

IFES promotes democratic stability by providing technical assistance and applying field-based research to the electoral cycle in countries around the world to enhance citizen participation and strengthen civil societies, governance and transparency.

Every IFES project is staffed by national and international personnel while partnering with local election management bodies and civil society organizations. This homegrown approach ensures that the expertise offered by IFES fits the needs of the country or context and the benefit of assistance outlasts the life of the project. Our work is nonpartisan and also includes projects that:

- Help citizens participate in their democracies
- Increase politicians' accountability to the electorate
- Strengthen government institutions

Since its founding in 1987, IFES has worked in 133 countries — from developing to mature democracies.

For more information, visit [www.IFES.org](http://www.IFES.org).



1850 K Street NW • Fifth Floor • Washington, DC 20006 • [www.IFES.org](http://www.IFES.org)

