

**COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES  
WORKSHOP ON BUILDING THE RESILIENCE OF DEMOCRACIES THROUGH  
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION  
November 15, 2023, High Commission of Canada to the United Kingdom, London, U.K.**

## **SUMMARY**

Governing Council members of the Community of Democracies (CoD), members of the diplomatic community, and civil society in London were invited to attend the fourth workshop organized by Canada in its capacity as President of the Governing Council. The event, focused on “Building the Resilience of Democracies through Women’s Political Participation”, was hosted by Canada’s High Commission to the UK. Following in-person opening remarks from Canada, the panelists discussed how women’s political participation results in tangible gains for democracy and the actions that governments and other civil society actors should do to eliminate barriers for their participation.

### **Key takeaways for CoD members:**

- Women face differential challenges to their political participation, including pressure driven by gendered social norms, which can sway them from political engagement.
- Formal and informal networks are important tools for women to utilize to engage in politics.
- Discussing the barriers that women experience when entering politics and the obstacles they face is important for building resilient democracies. However, these discussions may overshadow positive developments and can discourage up-and-coming women in politics.
- Pathways for women’s leadership in politics and in political spaces are not linear and more effort needs to be attributed to understanding how women organize.
- Gender quotas are an effective way for bringing women into political spaces and have lasting benefits. Even in cases where quotas were later removed, more women continued to be involved in politics because of the positive examples created as a result of the quota.

### **Moderator:**

- **Ayesha Malette**, Director of the Democracy Division, Office of Human Rights, Religious Freedom, and Inclusion, Global Affairs Canada.

### **Panelists:**

- **Mina Cowper-Coles**, Research Fellow, Global Institute for Women’s Leadership.
- **Cecilia Makonyola**, Head of Practice, Inclusion at the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.
- **Catherine McKenna**, former Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Government of Canada.

### **Key Remarks:**

1. **Celeste Kinsey**, Minister Counsellor of the High Commission of Canada to the United Kingdom.
2. **Thomas Garrett**, Secretary General of the Community of Democracies.

## **DISCUSSION**

The panelists had the opportunity to answer and discuss reflection questions. The experts presented the following key takeaways:

**Question 1: How does women's political participation enhance the responsiveness of democratic governments and strengthen the resilience of democracies?**

- Increased representation of women in politics improves representativeness of the diversity of a population, and results in greater trust in democracy and political engagement.
- According to research by the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, increased participation of women in politics results in lower levels of corruption, a more stable state, and greater focus on social metrics, like increased life expectancy, education, welfare, and health.
- Obstacles to women's political participation include attitudes and stereotypes, caretaker responsibilities, financial barriers to entry, fewer opportunities, the threat of violence and abuse, persistent gender norms and stereotypes within political and party structures, and that women typically have less networks than their male counterparts.

**Question 2: What tangible actions can we take to ensure continued progress in women's political participation?**

- Governments should implement more gender quotas to increase the engagement and visibility of women in politics.
- Violence against women political leaders needs stronger policy responses and more action. An effective approach to addressing violence views structural barriers, and not women, as the problem.
- More research should be allocated to learning about how women organize outside of formal channels and on the value of informal networks for women.
- Additional resources need to go towards preventing the spread of hate and perpetuation of violence towards women in politics on social media.