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The Countries Where Women Have the Best Lives, in Charts

By Olga Khazan

On International Women's Day, a look at the regions where women are healthiest, happiest, make most, and are most likely to hold positions of power



The first National Women's Day was celebrated on March 8, 1909, [a day designated](#) by the Socialist Party of America to honor of the 1908 garment workers' strike in New York. From there, the day expanded internationally to include women's movements agitating for the right to vote, work, and hold public office. It joined with other movements working to topple the Czarist regime in Russia and protest World War I. In some places, it's even a public holiday. (In 1965, the Soviet Union declared March 8 a non-working day "in commemoration of outstanding merits of the Soviet women in

communistic construction.")

In honor of International Women's Day somewhat left-leaning origins, here's a look at the countries where work, life and health conditions for women are the best. There's no clear stand-out country or region, but in general, it seems like you'd be better off somewhere in either Scandinavia or Southern Europe. Peru (and the U.S.) don't come off that well, but New Zealand and even Rwanda might not be a bad option:

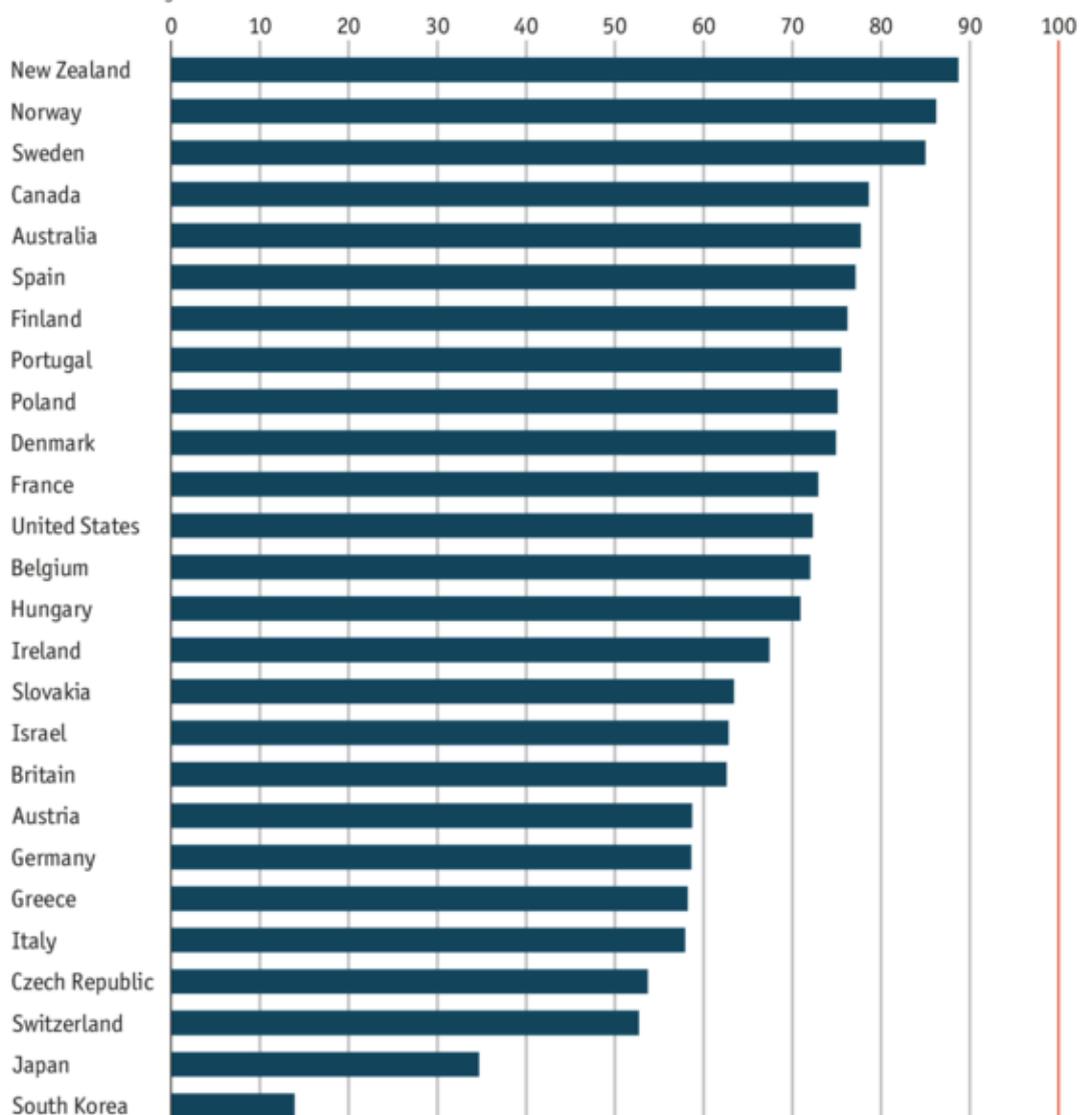
Women in New Zealand have the best working lives:

The [Economist](#) created an index showing the countries where women are most likely to be treated equally at work, based on the labor-force participation rate, the wage gap, the proportion of women in senior jobs and child care cost compared to wages, among other factors. New Zealand comes out on top, and other notorious lady-paradises such as Finland and Sweden also score high. The countries where working women have it worst are South Korea and Japan, largely because so few women there are in top jobs. The U.S. is roughly in the middle of the pack:

Glass-ceiling index

Weighted average of five indicators*, 2011 or latest, 100=best for working women

Out of the following 26 countries



*Weighting of 23% for: difference between female and male population with tertiary education; female labour-force participation; difference between female and male median earnings of full-time employees; women in senior management as % of total. Weighting of 8% for: net child-care costs as % of average wage

Sources: OECD; ILO; Catalyst; *The Economist*

[Economist.com/asia/detail](http://economist.com/asia/detail)

The biggest gender gaps in employment, though, are in Ecuador and Saudi Arabia.

Women are most likely to feel satisfied with their health in the Middle East and North Africa

...Or at least they're just as satisfied with their health as the country's men are. Gallup surveyed both men and women across 147 countries last year and found that women in the former Soviet Union were much less likely to say they were happy with the status of their health as the country's men were. (They were also far less likely to say they were well-rested). Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa had the smallest overall gender gaps across all of the health indicators -- but that could be because health care access in those countries is lower across the board, so sickness is equal-opportunity:

Mean Gender Gap on Six Measures of Physical and Emotional Health

Gap is the percentage of women minus men

| | Satisfied with health | Experience physical pain | Have health problems | Experience sadness | Experience worry | Feel well-rested |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| GLOBAL | -4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Former Soviet Union | -13 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 8 | -9 |
| Asia | -4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | -1 | 5 |
| Europe | -3 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 5 | -7 |
| Americas | -3 | 6 | 3 | 11 | 5 | -5 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | -1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| Middle East/North Africa | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |

2011

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Women feel safest in the tiny, former-Soviet country of Georgia:

According to Gallup, the countries where women feel safest walking around alone at night aren't the ones you'd think: Georgia, Rwanda and Singapore top that list, but only because their more rigid governments keep a close watch on things:

Many of the countries on this list -- including Rwanda, Tajikistan, and Laos -- are authoritarian regimes in which security forces exercise a high degree of control over the population, suggesting that in some cases personal security may come at the expense of personal freedoms.

Countries Where Women Are Most Likely to Say They Feel Safe Walking Alone at Night

Ranked by percentage of women who feel safe

| Country | Women | Men | Gap |
|-------------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| Georgia | 90% | 93% | -3 |
| Rwanda | 89% | 94% | -5 |
| Singapore | 88% | 91% | -3 |
| Indonesia | 84% | 92% | -8 |
| Hong Kong | 84% | 92% | -8 |
| Qatar | 83% | 96% | -13 |
| Niger | 81% | 87% | -6 |
| Tajikistan | 81% | 89% | -8 |
| Laos | 80% | 88% | -8 |
| Somaliland region | 79% | 81% | -2 |
| Ghana | 78% | 79% | -1 |
| Bangladesh | 78% | 82% | -4 |
| Turkmenistan | 78% | 89% | -11 |
| Sri Lanka | 77% | 76% | +1 |
| China | 77% | 82% | -5 |
| Slovenia | 76% | 93% | -17 |
| Austria | 75% | 90% | -15 |
| Uzbekistan | 75% | 85% | -10 |
| Montenegro | 75% | 83% | -8 |
| Jordan | 72% | 90% | -18 |
| Comoros | 72% | 85% | -13 |
| Canada | 71% | 88% | -17 |
| Mali | 71% | 75% | -4 |
| Sudan | 71% | 78% | -7 |
| Denmark | 70% | 88% | -18 |
| Djibouti | 70% | 73% | -3 |
| Armenia | 70% | 80% | -10 |

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Think it's safer to live in a richer country? Not really. Women in poorer countries are actually likelier to feel safe, but then again, definitions of "feeling safe" aren't exactly universal:

Standards for personal security may also be much lower in developing than in developed countries, which helps explain why many low-income countries appear high on the list.

In the city or area where you live, do you feel safe walking alone at night, or not?

Percentage "yes, feel safe"

| | Women | Men | Gap |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|
| Worldwide | 62% | 72% | -10 |
| Low-income countries | 59% | 67% | -8 |
| Lower middle-income countries | 70% | 75% | -5 |
| Upper middle-income countries | 40% | 54% | -14 |
| High-income countries | 59% | 82% | -23 |

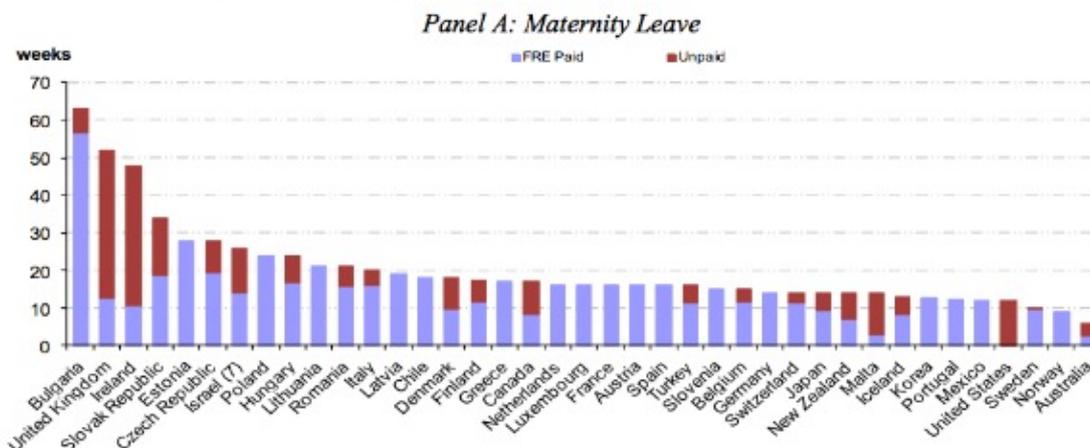
2011

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Women have the most maternity leave in Bulgaria

Among OECD countries, Bulgaria offers more than 56 paid weeks of maternity leave to women. But others, like Norway, offer generous paternity leave, and some countries allow parents to divide up leave between the two parents however they choose. In all, the OECD average is 19 paid weeks off post-baby. The U.S. is [one of only three countries](#) in the world that doesn't require paid maternity leave: Employers are only mandated to provide 12 weeks of unpaid time off. (The other two countries are Papua New Guinea and Swaziland). Here's a look at maternity leave by country, [via the OECD](#):

Chart PF2.1.A: Child-related leave periods by duration of unpaid leave and the duration of the full-rate equivalent of the leave period if paid at 100% of last earnings, 2011/2012

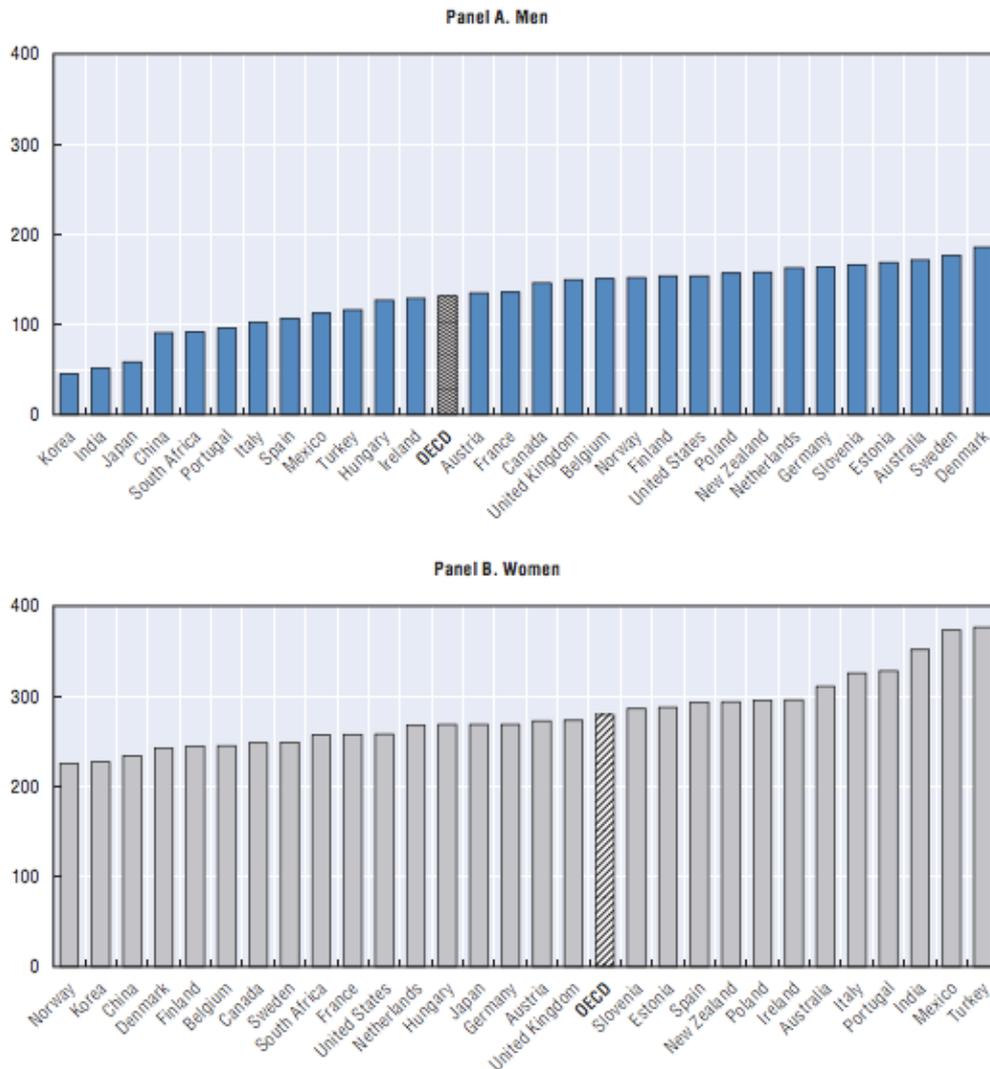


Women do the least unpaid work in Norway

The OECD also looked at how many minutes of so-called "unpaid work" people do each day -- the cooking, the cleaning, the fixing the wobbly leg of the coffee table -- and Norwegian women do the least, at just over 200 minutes per day. Meanwhile, Turkish and Mexican women did the most, which the OECD chalks up to long hours slaving in the kitchen and caring for children. Unsurprisingly, the graphs are somewhat mirror images of each other -- the more unpaid work women do, the less men tend to do, and vice-versa:

Figure 1.5. **Asian men spend the least hours in unpaid work, Mexican and Turkish women the most**

Minutes of unpaid work per day



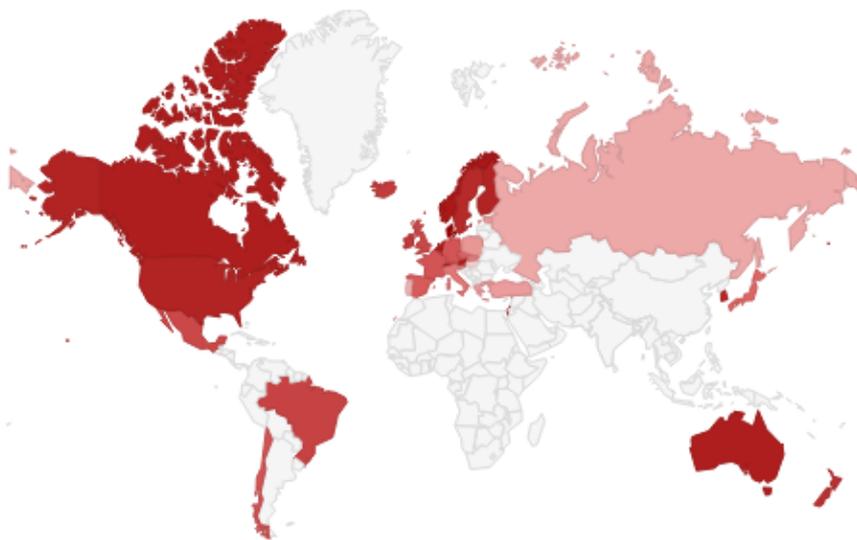
Note: See Figure 1.1 for country-specific notes.

Source: OECD's Secretariat estimates based on national time-use surveys (see Miranda, 2011).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932381513>

Women have the most life satisfaction in Denmark

According to the OECD's "Better Life Index," women in Denmark have the most overall life satisfaction ... but then again, so do the men, so perhaps it's just a happy place. A whopping 89 percent of people in Denmark reported having more positive experiences in an average day (feelings of rest, pride in accomplishment, or enjoyment) than negative ones (pain, worry, sadness, or boredom). The OECD average is 80 percent. Here's a look at countries worldwide according to that same metric (darker red means more satisfied):

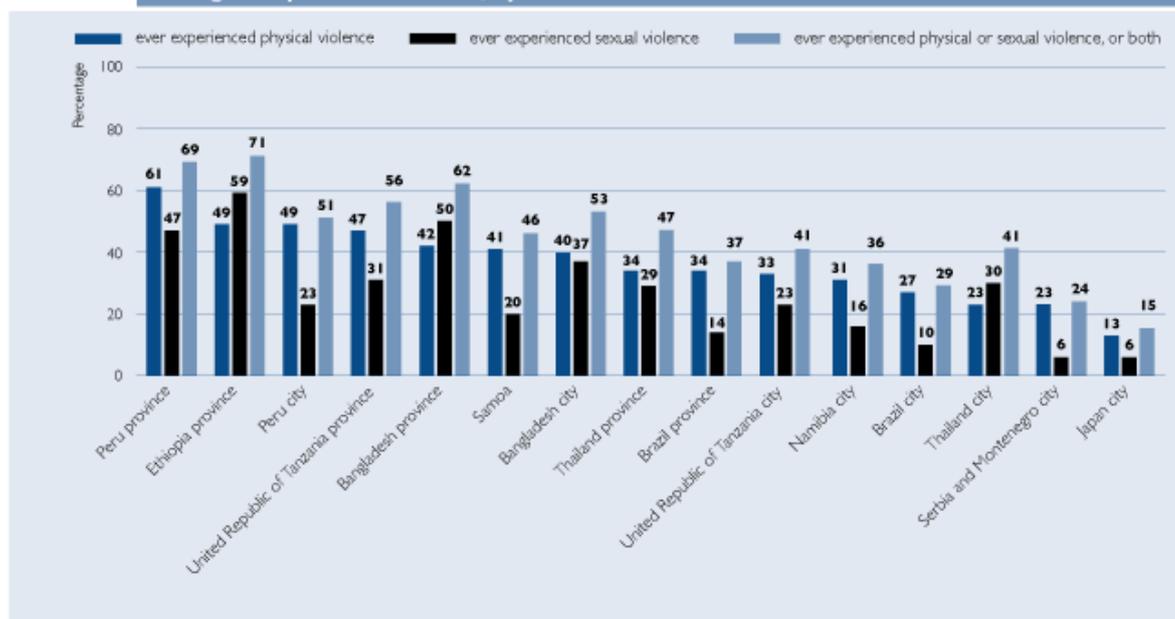


Women in Japan experience the least domestic violence

Analyzing data from 10 countries, the [World Health Organization found](#) that cities in Japan and rural areas in Peru represent the extremes of domestic violence (though to be fair, the survey didn't measure very many Central Asian, European or North American countries):

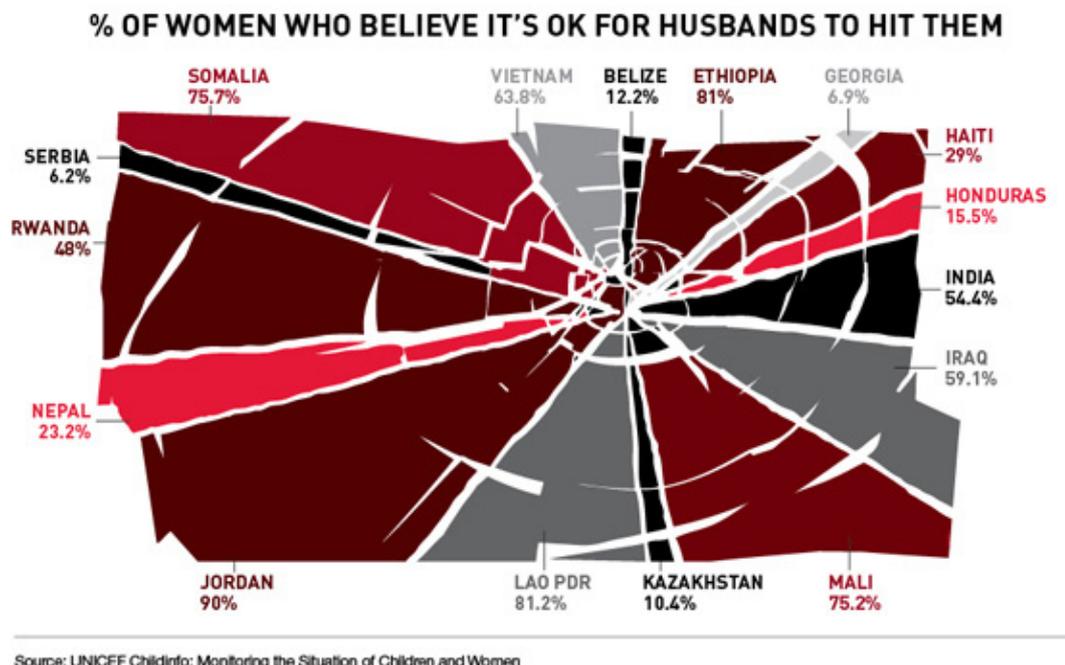
The proportion of women who had ever suffered physical violence by a male partner ranged from 13 percent in Japan to 61 percent in provincial Peru. The most common act of violence experienced by women was being slapped by their partner, from 9 percent in Japan to 52 percent in provincial Peru. This was followed by being struck with a fist, for which these two settings again represented the extremes (2 percent and 42 percent, respectively).

Figure 2 Prevalence of lifetime physical violence and sexual violence by an intimate partner, among ever-partnered women, by site



Interestingly, Japan also had the lowest level of sexual violence, at 6 percent, but Ethiopia had the

highest, at 59. In a different survey, [UNICEF found](#) that a staggering 90 percent of women in Jordan think their partner is justified in hitting them:



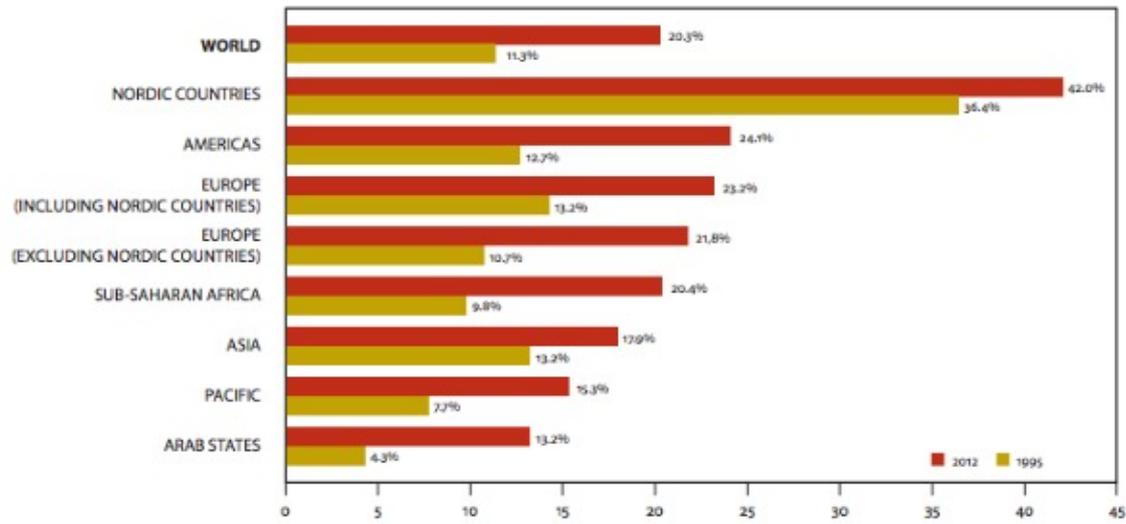
Rwanda has the most women in public office

[Out of 190 countries](#), Rwanda, Cuba, Andorra and Sweden have the most female representatives in their congress or parliament. More than half of Rwanda's lower house is female. Palau, Qatar and Vanuatu are near the bottom of the list, while the U.S. is near the middle, at 77th place.

Rwanda's place at the top was not by accident: The population was about 70 percent female after the genocide of the mid-90s, so the government adopted policies to try to help boost women's role in public life, as the [Washington Post reported](#). Rwanda's constitution requires that at least 30 percent of all parliamentary and cabinet seats go to women.

Here's [a look](#) at how far various regions of the world have come, from 1995 to 2012, via the [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#):

TABLE 2
World and Regional Averages of Women in Parliaments, 1995 and 2012
Situation for all chambers of Parliaments combined in December of each year



The percentages do not take into account parliaments for which data is not available.

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<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/03/the-countries-where-women-have-the-best-lives-in-charts/273848/>

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