



CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

Women in Power and Decision-Making

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Prioritizing women's leadership is a catalytic mechanism critical to fulfilling the Beijing Platform for Action and achieving a sustainable and equitable future for all. The Beijing Platform calls for developing a critical mass of female leaders, executives, and managers (para 192a) that must include all sectors of the economy, business, entrepreneurship, STEM, artificial intelligence, government, and international organizations. It highlights the need to collect and disseminate data on women in decision-making positions, both public and private (para 190e), and to monitor women's access to senior levels of decision-making (para 192b).¹ To advance gender equality, female leadership is integral to ensuring that women's perspectives are included in policymaking, treaties, and instruments of authority.

US Achievements - Impactful Leadership for Systemic Change

Since the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995, **US women entrepreneurs and chief executive officers** have contributed directly to national prosperity and economic growth through diverse, innovative, out-of-the-box thinking and decision-making, creating inclusive solutions and providing opportunities for future younger generations.

- The number of businesses owned by women is on the rise in the United States. In 1997, women owned 5.4 million businesses in the US.² By 2019, women owned over 12 million³ or 42% of all US businesses,⁴ employing over 10 million Americans and generating \$2.1 trillion in sales.⁵
- While still far from parity, more and more companies have female chief executives. In 1995, fewer than 1% of Fortune 500 companies, the largest US companies, had female executives. By 2023, more than 10% were female, a steady improvement.⁶
- In 2021, the US Securities and Exchange Commission approved new board diversity rules for companies listed on the Nasdaq stock exchange, requiring at least two diverse directors, including one woman.⁷ California legislation on board diversity led the way for the Nasdaq requirement.⁸
- Despite efforts to increase female representation on boards, the number of women on Russell 3000 boards of directors increased only 1% from 2022 to 2023, and the percentage of new female directors dropped by 7 percentage points. Women of color held only 7.7% of Board seats.⁹

Women in political leadership have made progress in governance and politics since 1995 when only 10 heads of state or government were women.¹⁰ US progress towards more women in elective office has been steady though far from equal.

- The US elected the first female Vice President in 2020, Kamala Harris (CA), who became the Democratic candidate for President in 2024.
- Women held 25% of US Senate seats in 2024, up from 8% in 1995.¹¹ In the US House of Representatives, women held 125 seats, up from 47 in 1995.¹²
- In 2007, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (CA) was elected the first female Speaker of the House and served for eight years in two terms.¹³
- In 1995, the US had one female governor, Republican Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey. In 2024, there are 12 female governors, including 8 Democrats and 4 Republicans.¹⁴
- Over 2,400 US women serve in state legislatures, up from 1500 in 1995.¹⁵

Barriers to Entry - Paradigm Shifts are Needed to Fast-Track Women in Power in all Sectors

Board-ready women face discriminatory paradigms and resistant mindsets when seeking to enter or fast-track to positions of power and reach an effective mass representation. Barriers that women face include:

- Breaking the male exclusivity culture and gaining access to networks, mentors, and opportunities
- Overcoming required prior board experience in finance and technology open only to males
- Difficulties in reaching critical mass, to effectively influence key decision-making
- Combatting biased male leadership traits that hinder women's advancement
- Bias, harassment, hostile work environments, and lack of work-family flexibility biases.¹⁶

Recommendations - Measurable Action for Success

Collaborate with multi-sectoral leadership in the economy, politics, law, finance, and STEM fields to re-position women as co-leaders in all sectors and shift the paradigm of diversity and inclusion. Include civil society as the largest mass of influencers of women at cabinet and other high levels.

Urge the US electorate to choose a female president, and recruit and retain women at senior levels in all sectors and international organizations to promote a culture of gender parity and gender mainstreaming. Require financial regulations to be evaluated for positive impact on female and minority candidates.

Be intentional in promoting policies and legislation and take other actions that recognize women-inclusive boards perform better financially and non-financially. Create a paradigm shift in mindset towards intentional listening and openness to new perspectives towards the "equal empowerment model" by:

- A. Passing legislation and policies requiring equitable inclusion of women in companies and political parties
- B. Changing mindsets and organizational culture with critical inclusive action and messaging
- C. Proactively inserting women in power positions and building pipelines to high leadership
- D. Increasing access to capital and equitable financial practices of loans and credit to women
- E. Moving from gender neutrality to recognizing gender strengths to avoid skewed results
- F. Presenting inclusive slates of candidates to achieve a critical mass of representation of women
- G. Training and mentorship for women-friendly infrastructure enlisting male leaders' allies
- H. Prioritizing STEM training and Artificial Intelligence essential to leadership.

¹ [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.](#)

² United States Census 2017. [Women-Owned Businesses.](#)

³ Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy 2024. [Facts About Small Business: Women Ownership Statistics 2024.](#)

⁴ Small Business Administration. [National Women's Small Business Month.](#)

⁵ [Facts About Small Business 2024.](#)

⁶ Pew Research Center 2024. [Women CEOs in Fortune 500 Companies, 1995-2023.](#)

⁷ David A. Bell, Ron C. Llewellyn, and Julia Forbess 2021. [SEC Adopts Nasdaq Rules on Board Diversity.](#)

⁸ California Secretary of State 2024. [Women on Boards.](#)

⁹ 50-50 Women on Boards 2024. [Gender Diversity Index Fourth Quarter 2023 Key Findings.](#)

¹⁰ Wikipedia 2024. [List of Elected and Appointed Female Heads of State and Government.](#)

¹¹ United States Senate 2024. [Women Senators.](#)

¹² Center for American Women and Politics 2024. [Women in the US House of Representatives 2024.](#)

¹³ Center for American Women and Politics 2024. [Milestones for Women in American Politics.](#)

¹⁴ Center for American Women and Politics 2024. [History of Women Governors.](#)

¹⁵ Center for American Women and Politics 2024. [Women Elected Officials by Position.](#)

¹⁶ World Economic Forum 2021. [How Can We Create Space for More Female Leaders?](#)