

IS THE UN REALLY MOVING TOWARD GENDER EQUALITY?

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NEW RESEARCH RAISES THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE UN IS BURYING STATISTICS ON GENDER REPRESENTATION IN ORDER TO COVER UP LACK OF PROGRESS.

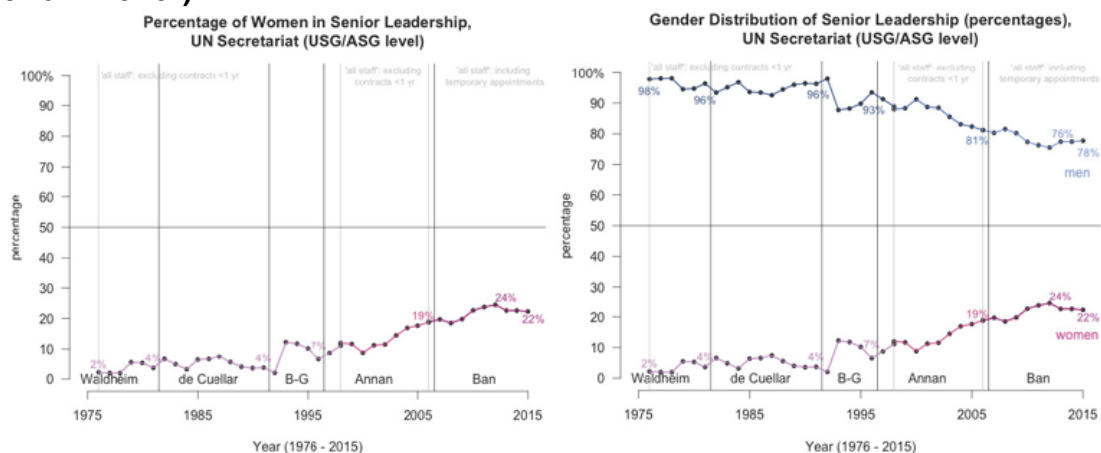
The United Nation's founding charter highlights not only the mission "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," but "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights" - specifically, "in the equal rights of men and women." Moreover, the organization claims that a female perspective should have greater influence in its humanitarian and peace-promoting efforts, insisting that women are central to economic development and conflict prevention. To this end, much has been made of improving female representation at the most senior levels of UN leadership, especially under current Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

In a speech given just last month, before 2,000 people and thousands more via web-cam, Secretary General Ban, claimed to have appointed "50 or 60 women" at the UN's most senior level - "all Assistant-Secretary-Generals and Under-Secretary - Generals" and thereby claimed to have single-handedly "changed the whole landscape for women." This month he claimed to "have signed nearly 150 letters of appointment to women" in these high positions. Such discrepancies raise questions about the UN's rate of progress toward gender balance in its senior ranks.

So, has progress really been made? And why is it so hard to tell? The UN's convoluted data practices mean there is no single, consistent way of knowing the gender composition of its senior staff. There are serious inconsistencies in official data about senior staff numbers. Sex-differentiated tables were only introduced in 1971. Periodically, methods for recording staff numbers change to include, variously, those appointed to an internal formula for ensuring fair shares of positions to all geographic regions, or those appointed under specific types of contracts. An investigation I conducted using UN published and publicly available data attempts to piece together the proportion of women in UN leadership since its founding.

Table 1 shows the percentage of women holding USG/ASG level posts by year, broken down by each Secretary General's tenure. The graph on the left shows the percentage of women USG/ASG over time. The graph on the right shows both the percentage of women and men USG/ASG over time to visualize the UN's progress toward gender balance in the Secretariat's leadership from 1976 – 2015. Relevant definitions are also explained.

TABLE 1: TRACKING THE UN'S GENDER IMBALANCE OVER TIME (1976 – 2015)



*1976 – 1998: Total number of UN staff holding appointments of one year or more (excluding “one dollar a year” contracts). Assembled from Composition of the Secretariat: Report of the Secretary General, 1976 – 1997. Documents available in print from the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and online at undocs.org.

*1998 – 2005: Total number of UN staff holding appointments of one year or more (excluding “one dollar a year” contracts) (A/53/375 para 12)

*2006 – 2015: The population used in previous reports was based on staff with contracts of one year or more (excluding “one dollar a year” contracts). The definition was expanded to include all staff with valid contracts irrespective of source of funding, type of engagement, duration of contract, level, or duty station (A/61/257 para 2)

My analysis is limited to the UN's Secretariat, and does not include its many funds and agencies. Headed by the Secretary-General, the Secretariat serves as the U.N.'s diplomatic face and contains the organization's core entities for addressing political affairs, peace and security, as well as communications. This main organ comprises over 41,000 international staff members and is led by “Under-Secretaries-General” (USG) and “Assistant-Secretaries-General” (ASG). In 2015, the Secretariat's leadership was concentrated in 166 individuals of USG/ASG status. According to UN reports, these senior staff members - heads of important U.N. departments and offices, directly appointed by the Secretary-General - make up over 50% of the entire UN system's senior leadership.

The Secretary General's report on the *Composition of the Secretariat*, released annually since 1946, presents demographic data on staff. In the report, many of the data are

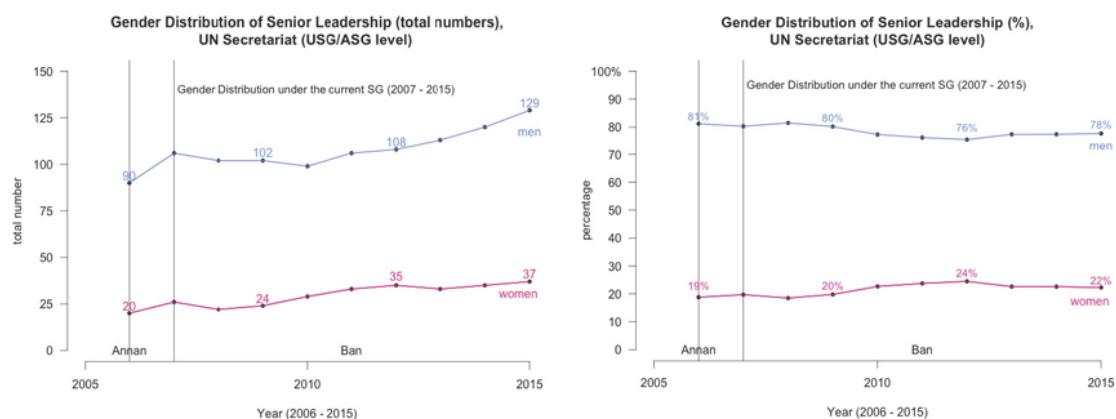
buried in tables, and public claims, such as those made by Mr. Ban, refer to *subsets* of the U.N.'s total population, which are difficult to understand and sometimes seem only to obscure the broader picture. Only since 2006 has the *Composition of the Secretariat* reports included all staff, regardless of their contract type, term, or source of funding. Indeed, most would consider the overall numbers of the combined USG and ASG population — not the subsets — to be most relevant and reflective of gender representation in senior leadership of the Secretariat, and these percentages are the most disappointing.

As of June 30, 2015, just 37 of the 166 total USG/ASG Secretariat population were women, or about 22 percent.

As visualized in Table 2, changes over time are even more troubling.

TABLE 2: THE UN'S "PROGRESS" TOWARD GENDER BALANCE IN THE LAST DECADE (2006 – 2015)

Despite optimistic rhetoric, the overall expansion of USG and ASG numbers has diminished the impact of new female appointments:



Representation of women has actually dropped from an unimpressive, though record high, of 24 percent in 2012 (35 women, 108 men) to 22 percent in 2015 (37 women, 129 men). At the current rate of increase during the current Secretary General's tenure—from 20 percent in 2007 to 22 percent in 2015—it would take another 112 years to reach 50/50 gender parity in the UN's senior leadership.

Today, on the 107th International Women's Day, marked by the [#PledgeForParity](#) campaign slogan, we are reminded of just how difficult it is for any organization to reach true gender parity. If it is *this* hard for an international organization

overtly dedicated to achieving it, how can we expect national governments and corporations to live up to it?

Take the United States: according to a McKinsey/Lean-In study, women in corporate America “are underrepresented at every level in the corporate pipeline.” In the Senate, of the 31 women who have ever been elected, 20 are serving now (compared to 80 current male counterparts). Of the 112 Supreme Court Justices in history, four have been women, and three of them are currently serving. And the most obvious: of 44 U.S. Presidents, not one has been a woman.

The truth is that Mr. Ban's track record *is* better than his predecessors'. But “better” is relative. If we focus on absolute numbers, 37 women in the UN's most senior posts might seem impressive. However, as has been recently pointed out, the overall number of total senior staff has markedly increased overall. And so, while there are now 37 women in 166 senior posts (compared to 20 out of 110 in 2006), the overall expansion of the UN's senior leadership - and consistent hiring of men over women - has diluted the impact of new female appointments. While the *absolute number* of women in the UN's senior leadership has grown, the *proportion* of women leaders has not increased so dramatically.

Additionally, in the UN's most high-level body, chaired by the Secretary General - the Senior Management Group - only 12 of the team's 39 members are women. That's 30 percent - far short of the 50/50 goal.

Considering the confusing, even misleading rhetoric of the UN system that papers over the glacially slow progress in women's share of senior staff positions at the UN Secretariat, it is important to check these findings against another source. A visualization of the comparison of these data with the Chief Executive Board's list of “regular budget staff” shown in Table 3 below, show how this analysis is in fact correct.

TABLE 3: BEARING IN MIND DEFINITIONAL CHANGES, A DIFFERENT WAY OF COUNTING PRODUCES SIMILAR RESULTS

Bearing in mind definitional changes, a different way of counting produces similar results:



*Reports of the UN System Chief Executives Board (CEB) can be found online at <http://www.unsceb.org/content/hr-statistics-reports>. The reports, available from 1991 - 2015, present annual statistical tables on UN staff with appointments for a period of one year or more. While the *Composition of the Secretariat* reports cover data from the end of the fiscal year (30 June), CEB reports cover data from the end of the calendar year (31 December).

*The CEB defines staff as all persons appointed within the meaning of its staff regulations and rules for a period of one year or more. The report excludes all staff members appointed for less than 1 year and those persons employed "under special contracts"

*Ungraded (UG): The CEB defines "UG" as all staff above the D-2 level: USG, ASG, Deputy Director-General, Assistant Director-General, Director-General, and Secretary-General (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/ianwge/Factsheet%20as%20of%20FEB%202010.pdf>)

The CEB's reports provide annual statistical tables on UN staff, employed by the regular budget, with appointments for a period of one year or more. In contrast to the *Composition of the Secretariat* reports that cover data from the end of the fiscal year (June 30), CEB reports cover data from the end of the calendar year (December 31). In spite of these definitional and time-line differences, the CEB reports confirm our previous findings - women hold about 22 percent of senior leadership positions in the Secretariat, and there is a recent trend of even further privileging men over women in the U.N.'s most senior leadership.

But we must recognize that the United Nations *is* making some progress. As Mr. Ban prepares to step down at the end of 2016, the election process for his successor, which has traditionally been cloaked in mystery, is becoming more transparent. For the first time, member states will not only nominate but also interview official candidates. And for the first time, these official nominees include women.

Still, the disappointing statistics on gender representation are not addressed to any serious degree in the most recent UN annual reports; they are instead presented as raw numbers in tables, absent any analysis. It takes hours and hours to sift through thousands and thousands of pages to find these numbers, suggesting the UN is interested in burying them.

Now, with these data published and publicly available, everyone will be watching.

Now, it is up to the United Nations to a better job at meeting its commitments.