

Inter-Parliamentary Union: A model in Parliamentary Leadership

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Abstract

Democracy remains the most sought after form of governance globally. The article assesses how the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has fostered democracy, human rights, and the inclusion of women in governance through providing support to national parliaments. The article explains the structure, objectives, and achievements that IPU has advanced to encourage global peace and democracy. IPU recognizes that parliament is a vital agency of democracy because it checks excesses of the government, formulates policies, and represents the public in government decision making. IPU pushes these individual parliaments to enact progressive policies to provide political opportunities for youth and women to ensure equitable representation. Its efforts have contributed to significant global gains and parliamentary leadership in nations across the globe.

1. Introduction

Democracy remains the most sought after form of governance globally. Nations have engaged in revolutions, civil wars and even changed their constitution with an aim of making themselves democratic. A key element ever-present in nations that have embraced democracy and allowed liberal ideals to thrive is a strong legislative body of elected officials. A strong parliament, congress, upper house, or house of commons are central in sustaining and protecting democracies. These legislative houses are not just congregations for legislation. The objective of this report is to assess how the international Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) has demonstrated what a parliament ought to be. IPU seeks to advance democracy and responsible leadership globally through support of cooperation between different parliaments. The report hypothesizes that IPU has provided a leadership model for parliaments all over the world by showing that duties of parliamentary bodies go beyond legislation and holding the executive accountable. The report does a thematic analysis of available literature on the subject as well as draw information from officially published sources to assess how the IPU has provided a model of leadership to parliamentarians from different nations. The central question therefore relates as to the effectiveness of the IPU in advancing issues that are central to modern democracy. IPU has provided a unique global leadership example for parliamentarian and parliaments within the wide international political space to adopt as a way of ensuring that the pursuits of democracy are protected.

2. Parliament as Center of Leadership

Democracy has emerged as the most preferred form of governance globally. It has been on the increase from the close of the Second World War. Data gathered at the end of 2017 showed that 96 out of 167 countries with over 500,000 people enjoyed democracy. About 28% of the other countries demonstrated some elements of democracy (Desilver, 2019). The trend is expected to rise even as more nations come out of dictatorships, and revolutions such as "The Arab Spring" bring more nations into the democratic space. A key element ever-present in nations that have embraced democracy and allowed liberal ideals to thrive is a strong legislative body of elected officials. A strong parliament, congress, upper house, or house of commons are central in sustaining and protecting democracies. These legislative houses are not just congregations for legislation. Events in recent years have shown that parliaments play vital roles in regulating judiciary and legislative overreach, overcoming the bureaucracy that would otherwise limit public participation in governance, and promoting leadership culture aligned to current needs.

The existence of parliament in any democratic nation is to uphold the doctrine of "the government for the people." Its most profound role as an institution is to uphold delegated representation and allow the people to govern through this means. Parliament represents the people by advancing their interests and ensuring that their needs are central during decision making (Kabir, 2019). It could thus be argued that parliament is the bedrock of thriving democracies or the *sine qua non* of an excellent democracy. There is no other institution that can replace parliament in a democracy. Aside from legislation, parliament provides a forum where important national issues can be debated and hold the government (the executive)

accountable by putting checks, raising questions, and approving or vetoing policies pushed forward by the government. Parliament is essentially a link between government and the people. Its leadership is vital to the well-being of democracy. It is therefore crucial that the leadership of parliament and its autonomy is protected. The inter-Parliamentary Union is an inter-governmental organization made of parliaments from different nationalities that seek to advance the gains made in the local, national parliament to a global jurisdiction (Chiniaeva, 2021). The institution has made significant gains in providing global parliamentary leadership through instituting, establishing, and adopting progressive policies and strategies whose localization in various national assemblies would make the parliaments agents of democratic growth and good national leadership.

3. The inter-Parliamentary Union

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is a global institution made up of parliamentary representation from different nations. The organization was founded in 1889 by a group of representatives who sought to promote peace through dialogue and agreements met and formed a cross-national cooperation organization (IPU., 2021a). The organization has since grown into a large modern organization that incorporates about 179 parliament representations and 13 Associate Members. These representatives are drawn from all over the world. The working slogan of the institution, "For democracy. For everyone," captures the drive of IPU, which is to advance democracy globally (IPU., 2021a). The vision of IPU is to create a world where the voice of the electorate or the constituents of those in parliament is heard and where democracy provides service for peace and development. The organization states that its mission is to "...promote democratic governance, institutions, and values, working with parliaments and parliamentarians to articulate and respond to the needs and aspirations of the people...work for peace, democracy, human rights, gender equality, youth empowerment, and sustainable development through political dialogue, cooperation, and parliamentary action" (IPU., 2021a). Its members from public funds finance the group. Its headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland, with a subsidiary office in New York, USA.

3.1 Structure

The IPU is governed by different bodies with differing responsibilities and roles. These bodies have specialized functions like committees in parliamentary houses. The top branches are the Assembly, the governing council, the executive committee under the president, and a secretariat under a secretary-general (IPU., 2021b). Several committees operate under these top branches. The committees address pertinent issues such as peace and international security, human rights of parliamentarians, gender issues, sustainable development, The Middle East, and Finance. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is divided into three primary organs. These organs are the Assembly, the Governing Council, and the Executive committee. The Assembly congregates biannually and is made up of parliamentarians, also known as delegates. The work of the Assembly is reinforced by standing committees whose jurisdiction is determined by the Governing Committee. This council sits twice annually. The council is made up of three representatives drawn from all nations represented. The primary roles of the governing council include electing the head of the IPU whose term takes three years. The governing council also elects those who sit in Executive committee as well as the IPU's Secretary-General. The Executive Committee comprises the head of IPU and 15 members drawn from different national parliaments and a president who coordinates the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians (IPU., 2021b). The final section is the secretariat which constitutes staff of the institution who work under the Secretary-general.

3.2 Union Goals

The Inter-Parliamentary Union's primary aim is to develop personal contacts between members of all parliaments that make up the national division. The union carries out joint action that fully contributes to the development of the member countries and sustains global peace. IPU seeks to advance global peace by supporting the United Nations' goals by expressing its opinions on all registration applications. It should be noted that union goals have remained consistent from its founding days. IPU was formed during the era of the great wars. There was an understanding that peace was a crucial element of democracy. IPU pursues peace by fostering contact, coordination, and user experience between delegates from different parliamentarians from all countries (Wagner, 2019). IPU also addresses issues of national interests and advances its views on such to encourage action by delegates. IPU defends and promotes universal human rights. These rights are recognized as vital in the advancement of democracy and national development. The institution contributes to an increase in knowledge for the delegates to strengthen action and the means through which its goals are attained. The IPU shares the objectives of the United Nations (fostering global peace). It closely supports the efforts and objectives which seek to foster global peace. IPU also cooperates with other regional Inter-Parliamentary organizations and specific government and cross-governmental agencies that seek to advance similar ideals to those of the IPU ((Borońska-Hryniewiecka, 2021). The institution generally seeks to provide leadership for specific parliamentary.

4. Inter-Parliamentary Union Leadership

National parliaments act as the gatekeepers of democracy. IPU provides leadership by playing a supportive role and providing consultations for members to promote democracy to sustain global peace. IPU provides leadership by advancing ideas that promote democracy through its programs (Cutler, 2016). The organization has engaged in efforts that seek to create strong democratic parliaments, advancing equality of genders and the respect of the rights of women, the protection and promotion of human rights, contributing to peacebuilding, the prevention of conflict and upholding security, promoting inter-parliamentary consultation and cooperation, empowering youth, sustaining advocacy for global development agendas and promoting democracy to provide a liberal and free platform for the pursuit of these objectives.

4.1 Building Strong and Democratic House of Representatives

Nations with strengthened parliaments are more likely to enjoy democracy and high development standards. The IPU seeks to advance its primary objective through establishing common standards, which will facilitate parliaments to gain control of the progress of the institutional development agendas. IPU frequently provides capacity-building support to nations. The support ranges from strategic planning to the assessment of public policies. IPU adopted 10 Common Principles of Support in October 2014, whose primary aim was to develop stronger, better institutions (IPU., 2021c). The principles have been endorsed by 161 parliament and partner organizations. The underlying mantra in the Common Principles is that parliaments are the only institutions that are best placed to articulate needs and define the approaches and strategic objectives (The first common principle). The organization developed a *Guide to the Common Principles for Support to Parliaments* which sought to aid parliamentary leaders to articulate their development objectives via a self-development parliamentary process. The action-oriented document is based on practices picked from across the globe and gives examples of parliaments that have progressed positively towards an excellent future. This document was made in consultations with over 40 parliaments, indicating that the processes of the IPU are consultative (a practice that is expected of parliaments globally). An example of a parliament that has benefitted from these pursuits is that of Zambia. The Zambian parliament underwent an IPU training in 2018. It subsequently adapted the IPU self-assessment toolkit, which led to the evaluation of its 49 MPs and 37 staff (IPU., 2021c). The training sessions and assessments have also targeted Djibouti, Tunisia, Chad, Pakistan, and Myanmar parliaments. These pursuits have established the leadership of IPU in strengthening parliament.

The strengthening of parliament has occurred through a variety of other approaches and strategies advanced by the IPU. These efforts have targeted strengthening the core actions of parliament. IPU has trained MPS from countries such as Chad and Pakistan to understand their roles of legislation better. These training sessions have focused on legislative drafting and policy evaluation roles. IPU has also advanced the use of ICT resources in parliamentary functions. The institution has engaged some parliament (most recently the parliament of Myanmar) to launch a parliament intranet that provides remote access and easy access to important documents and information which can be accessed online by the members of parliament (IPU., 2021c). IPU has also proceeded to build a network of innovative parliamentary hubs. These hubs bring together houses that seek cooperation in pursuing action-boosting innovation that will improve the performance of those houses. The IPU has an innovation tracker (a quarterly publication) to encourage information sharing among the parliaments (Gijzenbergh, 2015). The objective of the information tracker, aside from encouraging cooperation, is to highlight innovation within the hubs. The tracker has so far featured stories from many parliaments globally. Examples include Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Greece, Jordan, Finland, Myanmar, and Zambia. The flagship report, "The Global Parliamentary Report," published every four years in collaboration with UNDP, gives the state of global parliament (IPU., 2021c). The publication focuses on vital issues like the participation of citizens and the state of democratic processes within these jurisdictions.

4.2 Gender Equality and Women's Rights

Another leadership demonstration of IPU concerns its efforts in advancing gender equality and, particularly, the respect for women's rights. The organization engaged the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It established a cooperation that would advocate for increased global commitments and binding agreements to attain a 50/50 parity in all political leadership positions by 2030. These efforts have been instrumental in increasing the number of women in political positions. The number of parliamentary houses with over a 40% female membership rose from 15 to 22 in 2019. Six of those countries had their first female speakers (IPU., 2021c). The data provided by IPU on women's leadership has been cited in several global institutions' reports, such as the World Economic Forum. As a leader in advancing the inclusion of women in parliamentary compositions and leadership, IPU has established stiff internal policies that aim to promote gender equality by amending statutes and rules that limit single-sex delegations attending the IPU assemblies. These practices are under the collective strategies of gender mainstreaming pursued by the institution. The organization has helped several parliaments improve their gender composition or challenge laws that infringe on

women's rights (Cutler, 2016). Its efforts have seen parliaments of Mali, Turkey, and Benin adopt proactive and progressive gender policies.

IPU supports national and regional parliaments in their quest to adopt more progressive gender-sensitive policies. The organization has facilitated and has worked with Turkey, where it enabled a shift in the debate about gender electoral quota. MPs from different political entities gathered at an IPU Congress that sought to promote women's rights and agreed to institute temporary measures that would be useful in demolishing the obstacles that women faced when seeking to be elected. The organization has also aided the Malian parliament to address the loopholes in the new law, which has sought to ensure that women occupied 30% of all elected seats. IPU aided the MPs in assessing the constitutional impact of these changes. IPU (in 2019) also lobbied and successfully had a member of the Benin Parliament unanimously adopt a new constitutional amendment that sought to allow the inclusion of women in vital decision making (IPU., 2021c). IPU has been vocal and led the charge to address women's low inclusion in parliaments in the Pacific region. The institution has facilitated dialogue, including adopting laws that promote equitable distribution of leadership positions and pushing for political parties to change their internal policies to allow women to become more engaged in party politics and leadership mentoring. IPU has also facilitated the adoption of gender-sensitive parliament through its Gender-sensitivity plan of action.

4.3 Protection and Promotion Human Rights

The advancement of human rights is closely tied to the pursuit of democracy. Nations that are highly democratic have good human rights records. It is not surprising that IPU chooses to pursue human rights advancement as a means of promoting democracy. The IPU's promotion of human rights occurs through its committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. The committee mobilizes the international community through delegates to lobby national authorities, provide support for MPS in danger and send trial observers to monitor political cases. The committee is very active. For instance, it actively monitored and followed about 533 parliamentarians from 40 nations (IPU., 2021c). Most of the interest cases came from nations where governments were putting political pressure on the opposition. The majority of the violations registered occurred from the suspension of the power and privileges due to parliamentarians and the violations of freedom of speech. IPU fights against threats and acts of intimidation, torture, and mistreatments. IPU was able to conduct missions in countries such as Turkey and Mongolia in 2019, including observing the trial of Mr. Selahattin Demirtas, the leader of opposition in the Turkish Opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). The committee also identified and closed Over 60 cases of suspected violations of the rights of MPS in 9 countries. The committee has also handled additional costs in Cambodia, Palestine, Israel, Eritrea, and Turkey (Canton, 2021). IPU recognizes that there is immense pressure that committee members often face. There is a need to provide a mechanism to support them in carrying out their duties.

IPU is also committed to protecting and helping parliamentarians deliver on their responsibilities. The organization works with other bodies such as the UNHCR and its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to offer training to parliamentarians and give recommendations for their countries to improve the human rights records. Delegates and MPs have become increasingly involved in the process of improving human rights records. Direct exchanges between parliamentarians have helped identify good examples of human rights practices and established ways to advance such practices to other parts of the world (Murphy, 2020). As part of the efforts to advance human rights and promote global peace, IPU has also adopted resolutions against recruitment financing and the use of foreign mercenaries. The resolution at the 140th IPU Assembly in Doha urged parliamentarians to take active measures in instituting policies that will prevent their nationals from carrying out such activities. The resolutions also urged parliamentarians to support individuals whose rights will be violated in such circumstances. Other issues that have been addressed by IPU that relate to the well-being of different nationals in their nations relate to the impact of climate on human activity and its destabilizing effects. IPU also advocates for disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation through its 2014 IPU resolution of a nuclear-free world. IPU has consistently lobbied members of parliament to encourage their nations to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. These efforts all demonstrate leadership in protecting the.

5. Challenges Faced by IPU

IPU faces several challenges in its bid to integrate both women and youth in its programs. These groups are a key component in any democratic space. IPU has actively sought to integrate them with strategies like the Forum of Young Parliamentarians. This global platform seeks to advance the agenda of young people. However, it is difficult to fully integrate young people because of unemployment that faces young people. Globally, over 70 million youths are unemployed (Bidadanure, 2016). Youths are three times more likely to be unemployed compared to the elderly. The problem has contributed to an increase in immigration and the violation of human rights globally. Close to 70% of immigrants are below 30 years. Additionally, close to 73% of the world's countries have placed some restrictions which

prevent young people from being elected. About 1.9% of all parliamentarians are below 30 years (Bidadanure, 2016). These challenges largely lock out the youth from the leadership programs of IPU.

The integration of women has also been a key challenge because of cultural issues in some jurisdictions. IPU has enjoyed significant growth and attainment of over 40% representation of women in some of its member states. However, this representation is limited to less than half of its members (Borońska-Hryniewiecka, 2021). The difficulties to fully prop women into a political leadership position and encourage them to contest as members of parliament has to do with the cultural positions of those nations. It is difficult to change such occurrences because they are not advanced by deficiencies in law but by active cultural values that are encouraged and present in those jurisdictions. IPU does not presently have any means through which it could encourage cultural change. However, the organization has actively sought to encourage an increase in the representation of women in parliament by pushing for laws that advocate for an increase in the share of party positions of political parties for women.

6. Conclusion

IPU has provided a leadership model for parliaments all over the world by showing that duties of parliamentary bodies go beyond legislation and holding the executive accountable. IPU has driven legislators to adopt more proactive policies that improves the welfare of women, played a supportive role and providing consultations for members to promote democracy to sustain global peace, provided logistical support for parliamentarians to access important policy resources and advanced the protection of human rights. The body has worked together with the United nations to improve the policies adopted by the UN. IPU primary quest of advancing democracy globally by strengthening parliamentary power has made it a beacon of parliamentary leadership. Its operations and approach towards global issues have made it an institution whose framework should be adopted by national parliaments that want to provide leadership and a fertile space for democracy.

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