

and congresses. Without women representatives and women's activism, most male lawmakers are not inclined to think about rape, domestic violence, women's health issues, and childcare. Men lawmakers are less likely to make laws that serve women and children's interests. But most of the world's lawmakers are men (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2010). The United States, with 16 percent, ranked seventy-fifth among the 186 countries with representatives. Rwanda, Sweden, South Africa, and Cuba had the greatest percentages of women (51, 46, 43, and 43 percent respectively). The Nordic countries have the highest percentages of female representatives (42 percent) and the Arab states the lowest (10 percent; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2010). When men control political systems, they sometimes use their power to create and maintain legal systems that support gender inequality and compel women to conform (Moncrieffe, 2005). As you will learn, in many places, women have fewer legal rights than men and even when laws are in place, male-dominated police and justice systems do not enforce them. Informal justice systems, which include forums of community representatives that decide on local disputes, usually consist of men who uphold customs and religious laws favoring men (UNIFEM, 2009).

Despite their somewhat poor representation in formal politics (parliaments, congresses, heads of state), women are often very political. In later chapters you will see that much of women's political influence comes from their activities in grassroots organizations that place pressure on formal political institutions. Increasing women's political participation and representation has long been a focus of women's activists. In the twentieth century, the focus was gaining women the right to vote (called **women's suffrage**). By 2005, all countries that allow males to vote had granted women that same right (U.S. women received voting rights in 1920). Kuwait was the last of these countries. Box 2.1 discusses the efforts of Kuwaiti women to gain the vote and increase the numbers of women in parliament. Chapter 9 focuses on women in politics and how women gain political power. Another focus for activists is the reform of legal and justice systems that allow the violation of women's human rights. This includes working for the passage and implementation of laws and constitutions that give women legal standing and guarantee women equal rights, increasing women's **legal literacy** (knowledge of their legal rights), improving women's access to legal advice and the courts, and reforming law enforcement institutions such that they are responsive to crimes against women such as sexual assault and domestic violence.

## Males' Higher Status

Although progress has been made, in many ways and in many places, males are still more valued than females and enjoy a higher social standing. **Job prestige** is one example of women's lower status. Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist and one of the first scholars to pay serious attention to the activities of women, noted, "Whatever the arrangements in regard to descent

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"The concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when political policies and national legislation are decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regard for the interests and aptitudes of both halves of the population."  
*Interparliamentary Union, 1994*

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In Liberia, one of the first laws passed following the election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was a law criminalizing rape and making it a nonparole offense.

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Huda Shaarawi (1879–1947) was the founder of the modern Egyptian women's movement and encouraged Egyptian women to participate in politics. She organized meetings of Arab feminists from other countries and led delegations of Egyptian women to international conferences.


**BOX 2.1** *Kuwaiti Women Seeking Political Rights*

Kuwait, an oil-rich, predominantly Muslim country, is located in the Persian Gulf in the Middle East. By law, Kuwaiti women are assured equal rights but they were not granted the right to vote and run for political office until 2005. During the occupation by Iraq in 1990 and 1991, Kuwaiti women courageously smuggled food, weapons, and information to resistance fighters and were surprised that post-war, they were not rewarded with political rights. Those opposed argued that “the man speaks for the family” and that politics would take women away from their home and children. To win their rights, women demonstrated outside parliament chanting “Women’s rights now!” and carried signs saying, “Our democracy will only be complete with women.” The activists wore blue T-shirts with slogans like “Half a democracy is not a democracy.” Wearing their blue shirts, they attended parliamentary sessions.

Less than a month after getting their voting rights, Prime Minister Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah named rights activist Massouma al-Mubarak as Kuwait’s first woman Cabinet minister. However, Massouma al-Mubarak’s swearing-in was marred by Islamist and tribal MPs (ministers of parliament) banging their desks and shouting insults. She was forced to resign in 2008 after intense pressure. In 2008, the Emir appointed Nouriya al-Subaih as Education Minister. She has been under fire since she defied Islamist calls for her to cover her hair when she was sworn in. Since 2006, approximately twenty-five women have run in each parliamentary election and in spring 2009, women finally won four seats in parliament despite resistance from Islamists (fundamentalist Muslims). Islamists then tried to oust those who did not wear traditional dress but were overruled.

or ownership of property, and even if these formal outward arrangements are reflected in the temperamental relations between the sexes, the prestige values always attach to the activities of men” (1935, p. 302). Likewise, anthropologist Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (1974) said it is striking that male activities, as opposed to female activities, are always recognized as predominantly important, and cultures bestow authority and value on the activities of men. According to the UN, although well-educated women have advanced and the share of women managers is increasing, most women remain in low-status, less-valued jobs and face greater barriers to higher-level positions (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2008).

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“The most gifted and beautiful girl is not as desirable as a deformed boy.”  
*Ancient Chinese proverb*

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“Daughters are not for slaughter.”  
*Indian women’s movement slogan*

Not only are male activities valued over female ones, but in many countries, families value male children over female children, in what is known as **son preference**. All over the world, people greet the birth of boys and girls differently (Mosse, 1993). For instance, among the Turkana people of northern Kenya, great feasting accompanies the birth of a boy, but there is no feasting if the baby is a girl.

In countries where there is a combination of son preference and small family size (by choice or by government coercion), some families use female infanticide and neglect and abandonment of girls to achieve the desired number of sons (Hesketh & Xing, 2006). In most countries, the mortality rate for children under age 5 is close to the same for boys and girls. However, in