

CHOICE ON THE BALLOT

2024 is the biggest election year in history, **with at least 64 national, presidential, or parliamentary elections taking place around the world.** The outcome of these elections will shape the future of sexual and reproductive health and rights for generations to come.

Reproductive rights on the ballot for hundreds of millions

MSI's analysis has found that there are an estimated **823 million** women of reproductive age living in countries that have national, presidential, or parliamentary elections this year. This represents nearly half (43%) of all women of reproductive age globally.

The rights of many of these women will be directly impacted by these elections. And with elections also taking place in countries like the US, which influence reproductive health and rights globally via international funding and harmful policies like the Global Gag Rule, it is likely that more people will see their reproductive health and rights impacted.

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CHOOSE CHOICE



The future of reproductive rights – a snapshot from four countries

MSI Reproductive Choices works across **36 countries** and **six continents** to support reproductive choice, providing and advocating for abortion and contraception. This year, elections will take place in **14 of these countries**. We interviewed advocacy experts in a handful of MSI's country programmes to hear about the impact the elections could have on choice.



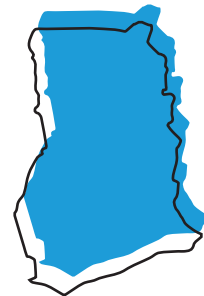
TURNING THE GREEN WAVE MOVEMENT INTO ACTION IN MEXICO

**Araceli Lopez Nava, Managing Director
for MSI's Latin America Region**

This year, for the first time in history, Mexico will see their first female president elected – and with cases of gender-based violence at a record high, presidential candidates have made bold commitments to women's rights.

The green wave and strong feminist community in Mexico have ensured that abortion remains prominent on the political agenda, with both leading candidates committing to supporting abortion access. We hope this will see more states moving to decriminalise abortion.

However, even in states that have already decriminalised abortion, access for women in Mexico remains low. Most public hospitals lack the trained providers and correct medical supplies to deliver care, and to access abortion medication via a pharmacy (often the closest health facility), women need a prescription that can only be provided by a private gynaecologist, pricing out many. Whichever presidential candidate succeeds, MSI Mexico will continue to support not only changes in law, but also the changes needed to ensure women have access, with quality training, products, and funding in place.



RESISTING AN ANTI-RIGHTS AGENDA IN GHANA

**Esi Asare Prah, Advocacy & Donor Relations
Manager at MSI Ghana**

For the past few years, opposing sides in Ghana have been wrangling over a bill that would significantly roll-back the rights and autonomy of LGBTQIA+ people, by criminalising LGBTQIA+ relationships and identities.

Although the bill received cross-party support, it was spearheaded by eight members of parliament, seven of whom were members of the opposition party, who are seen as the most likely to win this year's national election. This means there is a high chance that the anti-LGBTQIA+ bill will proceed to law.

The legislation passed by Ghana's Parliament in February was heavily influenced by the US-based anti-choice and anti-rights groups, Family Watch International and the World Congress of Families. If it is signed into law, it risks opening the floodgates to a wider rollback of sexual and reproductive rights.

The bill has been blocked to date by the current President, following successful advocacy by a united civil society, the international development community, influential members of the Ghanaian diaspora, and members of the academia – these learnings and partnerships will put Ghanaian civil society in a stronger position to hold the line on LGBTQIA+ rights and reproductive rights if the opposition party is successful this year.



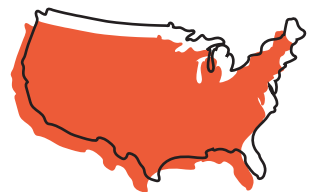
REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IN THE CONTEXT OF MADAGASCAR'S ABORTION BAN

Eugene Andriamasy, Partnerships & Advocacy Manager at MSI Madagascar

Madagascar has one of the strictest abortion laws in the world, with access restricted even in cases of rape, incest, or risk to the health of the woman or pregnant person.

Against that backdrop, MSI Madagascar and our partners at Ipas have worked behind the scenes to develop a Reproductive Justice Network within Parliament, garnering the support of 20 cross-party Parliamentarians who would support expanding access to safe abortion.

Although neither party has made a public commitment to abortion, the election in Madagascar this year could present an opportunity for change, through the ratification of the Maputo Protocol, which would commit Madagascar to offering abortion in cases of rape or risk to health. But with the looming risk that Trump's potential re-election could further embolden anti-choice groups in Madagascar, a strong Reproductive Justice Network in Parliament will be more important than ever.



THE LONG SHADOW OF AMERICA'S GLOBAL GAG RULE

Amanda Seller, President of MSI United States

40 years ago, the first Global Gag Rule, also known as the Mexico City Policy, was introduced by Ronald Reagan, blocking US Government funding for international organisations that deliver, provide information on, advocate for, or even refer people to abortion care. The policy has been reinstated by every Republican President since and was significantly expanded by President Trump in 2017 and in 2019.

MSI has never and will never sign the Global Gag Rule and in 2017, this reduced our donor income by \$120 million over the course of Trump's presidency. As a result, we estimate that 8 million women lost access to our sexual and reproductive health services, resulting in 6 million unintended pregnancies, 1.8 million unsafe abortions and 20,000 maternal deaths.

As the name infers, the Global Gag Rule has a silencing effect, with partners concerned that their US funding could be taken away if they even meet with MSI or other abortion providers. If Trump is re-elected in the United States, he is expected to reinstate the Global Gag Rule and expand it further. Trump will also likely influence more countries to sign the Geneva Consensus Declaration, which commits states to restricting abortion access. Following the reversal of Roe V. Wade in 2022, revoking the constitutional right to abortion in America, Trump now has his sights set on rolling back reproductive rights globally.

Protecting choice in a pivotal year

In a critical year for change, we need to raise awareness of the implications of this year's elections on reproductive choice and encourage citizens to vote for candidates that will push forward sexual and reproductive health and rights domestically and internationally.

Reproductive choice supports political participation. When women and girls have sexual and reproductive health and rights, it supports them to have autonomy, to engage in politics, and to lead in driving change. But to do so, we need the right laws and policies in place to grant everyone the autonomy to make decisions about their futures. After all, the attempted roll-back on our reproductive rights is not just an attack on our bodies, but on the human rights and democratic freedoms that we all take for granted.

With choice firmly on the ballot this year, those of us who believe in the right to choose – civil society, providers, governments, and donors – must step forward to hold the line on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

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