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Why Gender Balance Matters for Equity and Peace in the Indo-Pacific

BY
MARYRUTH BELSEY PRIEBE





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Executive Summary

Maryruth Belsey Priebe

Who shows up at events and conferences matters. Public and closed-door events are where successes and failures are analyzed; where conceptions about security, what it means, and how we can achieve it bump up against one another; and where problems are solved in novel ways. The greater the diversity of perspectives, the more powerful the outcomes. But within the security sector, predominantly all-male panels—or “manels”—suggest a lack of gender diversity, resulting in the exclusion of women, people of non-binary identities, or both. Manels represent a more serious lack of gender inclusion at leadership levels, making it difficult for women to gain recognition through promotion to senior decision-making positions. The following is a discussion of Pacific Forum's work to study more than nine years of programming with a goal of understanding historical trends in order to implement and measure policies to increase the number of women attending and speaking at Pacific Forum events. The analysis identified room for improvement, and marks a jumping-off point for Pacific Forum's work on mainstreaming gender within institutional programming.

Who shows up at events and conferences matters. Public and closed-door events, whether in-person or virtual, are opportunities for individuals to share their perspectives and experiences. These events are places where successes and failures are analyzed, where conceptions about security, what it means, and how we can achieve it bump up against one another, and where problems are solved in novel ways. The greater the diversity of perspectives, the more powerful the outcomes.¹ But when perspectives are limited due to the exclusion of certain groups of people, the ability to engage multiple audiences is also limited.

Within the security sector, predominantly all-male panels—or “manels”—suggest a lack of gender diversity, resulting in the exclusion of women, people of non-binary identities, or both. Manels represent a more serious lack of gender inclusion at leadership levels, making it difficult for women to gain recognition through promotion to senior decision-making positions. The underrepresentation of women in particular within the international security space is a known problem and something tackled by the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, underpinned by United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) and nine subsequent resolutions.

Manels render women and their diverse perspectives invisible.² They lend weight to the false assumption that women lack the expertise to speak to particular topics, which has negative consequences for women as well as the security sector as a whole. By discouraging the promotion of women to higher-ranked roles within militaries and other international security spaces, manels feed into a vicious cycle that perpetuates

imbalanced speaker panels and vice versa. Research within the medical field, for instance, has shown that speaking engagements at academic conferences offer recognition, are markers of promotion, and establish individuals as experts. Therefore, speaking opportunities are critical for career progression and advancement.³ Conversely, research has shown that when women are denied recognition for their work, they are more likely to exit their fields before reaching senior-level positions.⁴

Publicly foregrounding the talent of women can aid in boosting gender parity. Two important methods for doing so are to encourage organizations to commit to abolishing manels; and to actively invite women or non-binary people to moderate, chair, and/or speak at conference and event panels (though as the Wilson Center’s Center Inclusive Programming Policy of February 2022 states, “it will be insufficient for women to be invited to serve as moderators alone; rather, women should be invited to share their substantive expertise whenever possible”).⁵

Increasing the number of women in security structures is also an effective method for gaining a “thin margin of excellence” over grand strategic competitors who have not harnessed the potential

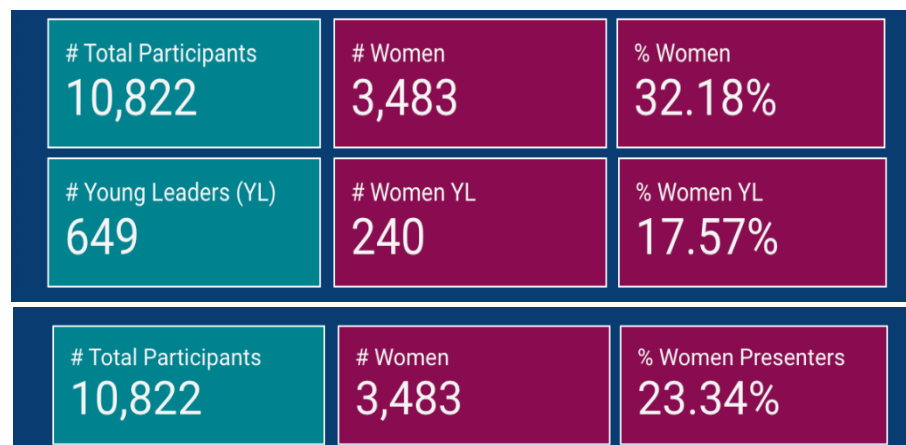


Figure 1: Gender balance of Pacific Forum events from 2013 to 2021. Note: YL = Young Leaders.

capabilities of women among their populations.⁶ Yet

¹ “The Other Diversity Dividend,” *Harvard Business Review*, July 1, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2018/07/the-other-diversity-dividend>.

² Rosa Balfour et al., “Absent Influencers?: Women in European Think Tanks” (German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2020), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25032>.

³ Melina R. Kibbe and Muneera R. Kapadia, “Underrepresentation of Women at Academic Medical Conferences—‘Manels’ Must Stop,” *JAMA Network Open* 3, no. 9 (September 28, 2020): e2018676, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.18676>.

⁴ Jennifer L. Martin, “Ten Simple Rules to Achieve Conference Speaker Gender Balance,” *PLOS Computational Biology* 10, no. 11 (November 20, 2014): e1003903, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003903>.

⁵ “Gender Inclusion Programming,” *Wilson Center* (blog), February 3, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/gender-inclusion-programming-wilson-center>.

⁶ Dr Joan Johnson-Freese, Dr Jacqui True, “PacNet #23 –How Women, Peace and Security Gives the US and Australia an Edge in the Indo-Pacific,” *Pacific Forum PacNet*, May 15, 2021, <https://pacforum.org/publication/pacnet-23-how-women-peace-and-security-gives-the-us-and-australia-an-edge-in-the-indo-pacific>.

women still make up only a small percentage of most militaries globally. Women comprise 40% of the world’s workforce,⁷ but only 10.9% of NATO member-nation active-duty military personnel (2016), and only 17% of active duty US service members (2018).⁸ A US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report noted that American women

2008.¹⁰ Policies have been established to attempt to increase the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women in the military and security sectors—including NATO’s Policy on implementing UNSCR 1325 (2007) and WPS National Action Plans established by the US and many NATO member nations—but with mixed results.¹¹

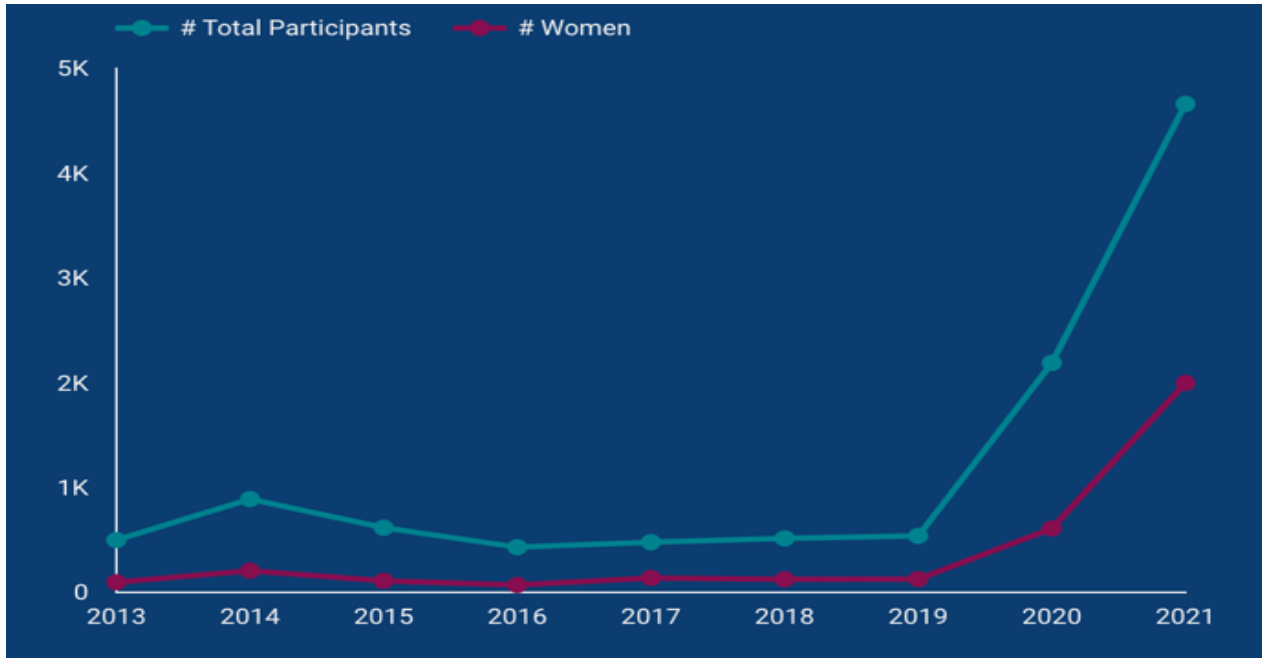


Figure 2: Pacific Forum event totals (participants and presenters combined) between 2013 and 2021.

servicemembers are 28% more likely to discharge from the military before reaching retirement. The report went on to note that family planning and dependent care (as well as sexual assault) are among the most common reasons for earlier separation than men, emphasizing the need to examine military women’s higher unpaid care work burdens, as well as sexual assault and supportive policies.⁹ The statistics for American women in high-ranking military positions show even lower levels of women’s inclusion, with only six out of 100 reaching four-star status since the first American woman (Gen. Ann Dunwoody of the US Army) achieved this rank in

The Pacific Forum is committed to fostering greater gender diversity and inclusion. Knowing that one cannot change what one does not measure, we embarked on a study of more than nine years of Pacific Forum programming with a goal of increasing the number of women attending and speaking at our events.¹² We examined 285 events, attended by more than 10,000 participants and speakers. You can see the results on our newly released [Gender Tracker Dashboard](#). (The following analysis examines data between 2013 to the end of 2021. The Pacific Forum will continue to record gender data about its events, with this

⁷ “More Than a Few Good Women: Improving Hemispheric Security by Advancing Gender Inclusivity in Military and Police,” *Council on Foreign Relations* (blog), March 22, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/more-few-good-women-improving-hemispheric-security-advancing-gender-inclusivity-military-and>.

⁸ “Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspective”/“Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives” (NATO, 2017), https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_11/20171122_2016_Summary_of_NRs_to_NCGP.pdf; Meghann Myers, “The Military Needs a Real Plan to Recruit and Retain Women, Report Finds,” *Military Times* (blog), May 20, 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/05/20/the-military-needs-a-real-plan-to-recruit-and-retain-women-report-finds/s/> (NATO, 2017), 9, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_11/20171122_2016_Summary_of_NRs_to_NCGP.pdf.

⁹ “Female Active-Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts,” *US Government Accountability Office*, May 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-61>.

¹⁰ “Women Warriors: The Ongoing Story of Integrating and Diversifying the American Armed Forces,” *Brookings*, May 7, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/women-warriors-the-ongoing-story-of-integrating-and-diversifying-the-armed-forces/>.

¹¹ Claire Wählen, “Could NATO Encourage WPS Uptake among Its Members?,” *Canadian Global Affairs Institute* (blog), October 2020, https://www.cgai.ca/could_nato_encourage_wps_uptake_among_its_members.

¹² Data collection was conducted by Maryruth Belsey Priebe, Hannah Cole, Audrey Happ, Jennifer Howe, Hanmin Kim, Lily Schlieman, and Mikhaela Van Hoven. Data analysis and dashboard construction completed by Maryruth Belsey Priebe.

data feeding into and updating the Gender Tracker Dashboard.)

Women Lag Behind Men in Speakerships and Participation

Given the predominance of men of in the international security field, it is not surprising that in both event participation and in percentage of

comprise, on average, one third of those organizations.¹⁴

However, as Figure 2 shows, Pacific Forum’s gender balance has improved since 2019. From 2013 to 2019, women’s total participation (presenters and attendees combined) ranged between 97 and 177 total annually, but in 2020 and 2021, with a record number of Pacific Forum events and participants, women’s

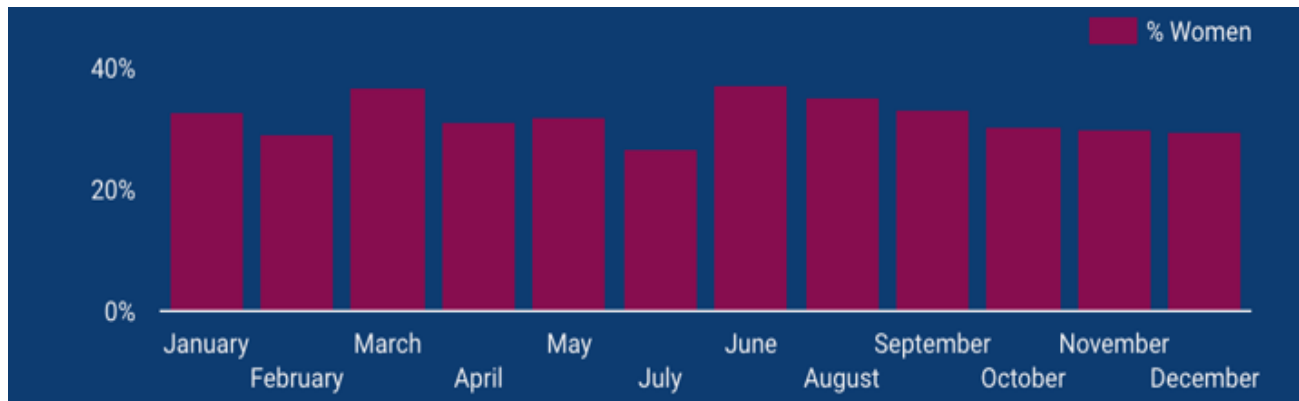


Figure 3: Percentage of women presenters and participants at Pacific Forum events analyzed by month.

speakerships, women lag behind men at Pacific Forum events, accounting for 35.1% of participants and 23.8% of presenters (see in Figure 1 of the Gender Tracker Dashboard). Comparing these numbers to those reported on the Women In International Security (WIIS) [Gender Scorecard](#) for Washington, DC-based think tanks, Pacific Forum falls somewhat

absolute participation dramatically increased to 610 in 2020 and 1,801 in 2021, and so did the percentage of women, from 22.6% between 2013 and 2019 to 39.6% from April 2020 to Dec 2021. Note that, coinciding with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pacific Forum shifted to virtual execution of its

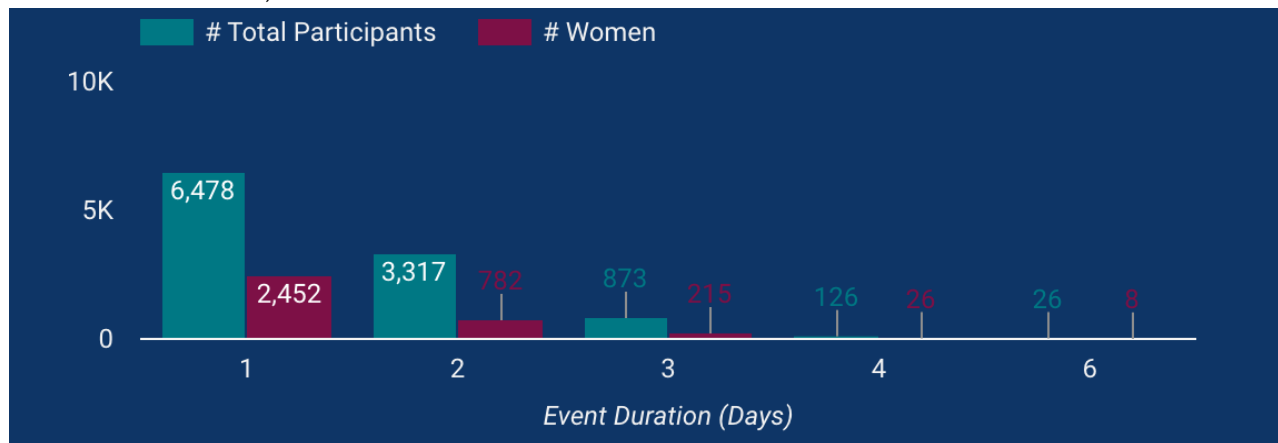


Figure 4: Number of women presenters and participants at Pacific Forum events analyzed by event duration.

behind the average of 27% women experts.¹³ Relatedly, the International Studies Association tracks the involvement of women in political science associations globally and estimates that they

programming in April 2020. Did offering travel-free programming (as opposed to in-person events) make it easier for women with higher unpaid care and domestic burdens to attend?

¹³ Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Soraya Kamali-Nafar, “The WIIS Gender Scorecard: Washington, DC Think Tanks - 2018” (Women in International Security, September 2018), <https://www.wiisglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Gender-Scorecard-Think-Tanks-Washington-DC-Final-1.pdf>.

¹⁴ “Committee on the Status of Women: 2013 Annual Report” (International Studies Association, 2013),

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwilp1eLxLnzAhVtHrkGHbPDDSwQFnoECAIQAAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.isanet.org%2FLinkClick.aspx%3FfileticKet%3D7ky4UcFZ7CY%253D%26tabid%3D1870%26portalid%3D0%26mid%3D8452&usg=AOvVaw0C9LI2hCfiC5wWTpj0vVhX>.

Prior to the pandemic, globally, women generally were responsible for more unpaid care and domestic work (such as that for children and dependent adults) than men.¹⁵ UN Women studies have shown women worldwide take on two and a half times more unpaid household and care work than men—3.13 times more than men in developing countries and 2.14 times more than men in developed countries.¹⁶ The International Labour Organization reports that women in Indo-Pacific countries do four times more unpaid care work than men.¹⁷ For women who started telecommuting, newly available virtual events may have made attendance and speaking at security-related events more feasible than before.

care work burdens may play a role in women’s participation, so we wanted to study the times of year and lengths of events to see if there were any differences in the percentage of women engaged, both as participants and as speakers. The lowest participation rates were found in months that coincide with family vacations and when children are out of school (at least in the United States). For instance, July, a typical summer vacation month, was the lowest for women’s attendance. To encourage an increase in women’s attendance, Pacific Forum could test whether hosting more events in alternate months—such as early Autumn months—is effective in increasing women’s presence in our programming.

Virtual events may have also offered women who left the workforce opportunities to stay abreast of foreign policy issues while caring for their families until they could reengage with their careers. Additionally, the recent #MeToo movement may have encouraged women to be more active and engaged in public forums on security topics. More research is required to ascertain which of these factors, or other potential influences, is best correlated with this post-pandemic increase, and such insights could be valuable for informing how Pacific Forum delivers future events.

“For women who started telecommuting, newly available virtual events may have made attendance and speaking at security-related events more feasible than before.”

Event Month and Duration Impacts Women’s Participation

In Figures 3 and 4 of the Dashboard, we examined how event month and duration impacted women’s attendance and speakership. As mentioned, unpaid

Time of year is not the only factor that apparently impacts women’s participation—number of days per event also mattered. As seen in Figure 4, women participants tended to prefer one-day events. Again, child care and household roles may limit how much time women can spend away from home, making

	Event Type	# Women	% Women (by type)	% Men (by type)
1.	Public event	2,108	43%	57%
2.	Closed-door	730	24%	76%
3.	CSCAP	365	36%	64%
4.	Young Leaders	297	26%	74%
5.	Honolulu International Forum	184	31%	69%

Figure 5: Gender balance based on event type.

¹⁵ Claudia Lahaie, Alison Earle, and Jody Heymann, “An Uneven Burden: Social Disparities in Adult Caregiving Responsibilities, Working Conditions, and Caregiver Outcomes,” *Research on Aging* 35, no. 3 (May 1, 2013): 243–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027512446028>.

¹⁶ U. N. Women, “Women in the Changing World of Work - Facts You Should Know,” accessed Aug. 13, 2021,

<https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/changingworldofwork/en/index.html>.

¹⁷ “Women Do 4 Times More Unpaid Care Work than Men in Asia and the Pacific,” Press release (International Labour Organization, June 27, 2018), http://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_633284/lang-en/index.htm.

shorter one- and two-day events preferred. However, women presenters *slightly* preferred two-day events over events of three or more days. Could this be because travel for a two-day event is more worthwhile than the same effort required for a shorter event that requires travel? Additional research could be conducted to determine whether event length was a factor in women’s decisions to attend events.

Furthermore, post-event surveys of Pacific Forum participants could be used to determine whether unpaid care work plays a role and whether there are other factors that impact preference for certain times of the year. This may be especially useful to teasing out why participants attend one-day events most frequently while speakers agree to participate in both one- and two-day events. It is possible that speakers are generally required to attend all days of an event, while participants can drop in and out more freely. Surveying both experts and participants on why they turned down invitations to attend or speak could be useful in further analyzing these factors.

On the other hand, men’s participation was highest at closed-door events (77% of participants) which are often exclusive to high-ranking government officials, dignitaries, and academics. Men’s participation rates were also significantly higher than women’s in Pacific Forum’s Young Leaders events (75% of participants), which is a competitive cross-cultural program for young scholars and foreign policy professionals to improve their policy analysis skills at an early juncture in their careers, and at events for

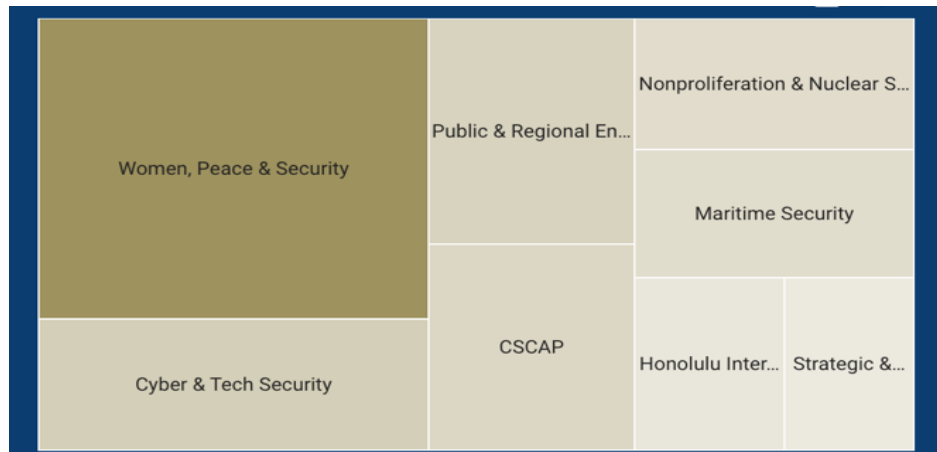


Figure 6A: Women’s attendance (participants and presenters) based on event focus area.



Figure 6B: Men’s attendance (participants and presenters) based on event focus area.

Event Types and Topics (May) Influence Women’s Participation

When we examined Pacific Forum events in terms of the type and topic of the events, the lack of gender balance in the security field became much more obvious. Looking first at Figure 5 on the Dashboard, we see that the greatest participation by women (42% of participants) was at public events, which are open to anyone who wishes to attend.

Honolulu International Forum members (65% of participants), a Pacific Forum membership program that offers small, closed-door roundtable sessions with prominent experts, analysts, and diplomats focused on major political, economic, and security issues in the Indo-Pacific. When the gender mix is significantly unbalanced for these types of exclusive events, it suggests that the events themselves both reflect the lack of women in security leadership and reinforce the problem by perpetuating higher representation by men in such spaces.

In addition to event types, our data suggests there is a trend among women to attend events focused on non-hard security topics. As can be seen in Figure 6A,

events may be an important lever to pull in countering the manel problem. Yet women comprise a minority of people in foreign policy,¹⁸ and

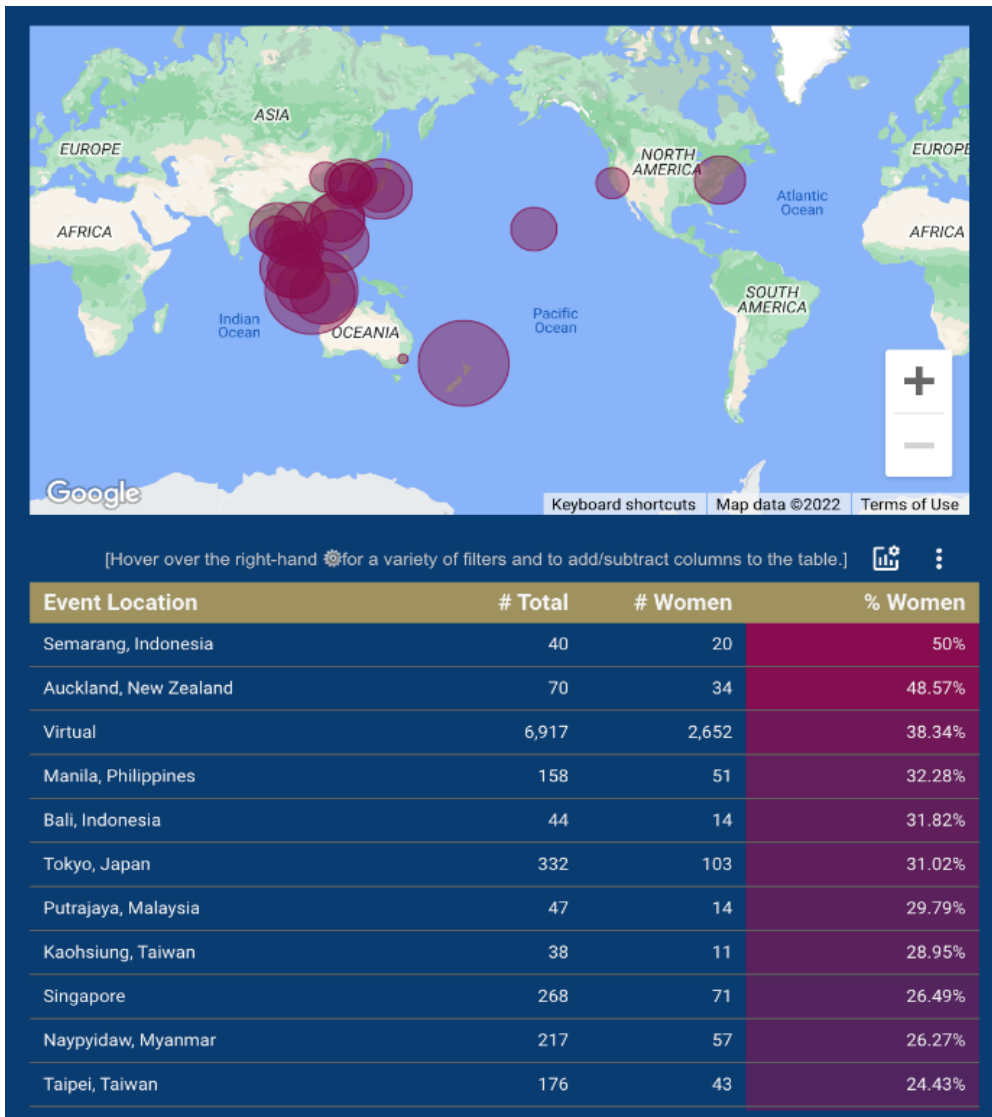


Figure 7: Percentage of women based on event location.

women participants and presenters tend to frequent events focused on topics such as WPS, cyber and technology, Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), and public and regional engagement.

When we filter for only men (Figure 6B), the top topics are strategic & nuclear policy, maritime security, CSCAP, and nonproliferation and nuclear security.

Inviting the few women who have reached high leadership positions to speak at security-related

according to a SHEcurity report, in 2020 only 25 of 103 countries analyzed (24.3%) had a woman foreign minister and 19 of 103 had a woman defense minister (18.6%).¹⁹ Fewer women in senior foreign policy roles and in leadership at security agencies means the women speakership pool on these topics will be smaller. As data discussed a little later in this analysis shows, it's important to increase the number of women speaking at events, because doing so tends to increase women's participation as well.

Importantly, because it is rare for women to reach senior ranks, their schedules are often oversubscribed, which could limit their ability to engage when invited and further contribute to skewed gender workload imbalances. Sensitivity to this factor is therefore important. Women should be given generous speakership honoraria that provides fair compensation and equal to that given to men. Additionally, organizations could consider rotating through a strong list of speakers to avoid frequent repeat invitations of the same handful of women. The Pacific Forum hopes to minimize the impact of overburdening women expert's schedules by increasing the size of the talent pool from which to draw. We have published a

¹⁸ Elena Lazarou and Ionel Zamfir, "Women in Foreign Affairs and International Security" (European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2021), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689356/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)689356_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689356/EPRS_BRI(2021)689356_EN.pdf).

¹⁹ Hannah Neumann, Barbara Mittelhammer, and Sofia Shevchuk, "The #SHEcurity Index Report" (SHEcurity, 2021), https://shecurity.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report_Security_2021_RGB-Final.pdf.

[directory of women experts in Indo-Pacific security](#) to aid in this effort.

In-Person Event Location Doesn't Play a Role

One might expect event location to have an impact on the likelihood of reaching gender parity in both speaker panels and participant rosters, in part due to local gender dynamics, but Pacific Forum statistics would suggest otherwise (Figure 7). For instance, only one 2017 Pacific Forum event location reached equal numbers of both men and women participants and speakers: Semarang, Indonesia. An earlier event

in Auckland, New Zealand came very close to parity in participants, and had equal numbers of men and women presenters.

Other events in places such as Manila, Bali, and Tokyo achieved between 32.3%, 31.8%, and 31.0% women participants and presenters, while events in Phnom Penh, San Francisco, and Beijing had the poorest showings in terms of women at 10.5%, 11.3%, and 11.6%, respectively. Even Hawaii has only an average of 19.7% women. It would seem that there is no correlation between Gender Inequality Index rank and percentage of women, either (2020 data: Philippines ranks 107, Indonesia 107, Japan 19, Cambodia 144, USA 17, and China 85).²⁰

Women May Attend More When Women Speak

Perhaps one of the most interesting data points in this analysis is that the gender mix of participants changes depending on the gender of the speaker or presenter. For each event, we calculated the percentage of women and men on the speaker panels and in the audience. We then ran a correlation analysis (again, on the event-level) to test whether the gender mix of the participant pool (percentage of women or men) changed depending on the gender mix of the speaker panel (percentage of women and men speakers). The results (see Figure 8) show that women participants attended in higher numbers when the percentage of women speakers was higher, and conversely that the percentage of men participants was low when the percentage of women speakers was higher (the strength of these relationships is moderate: 0.63 for women

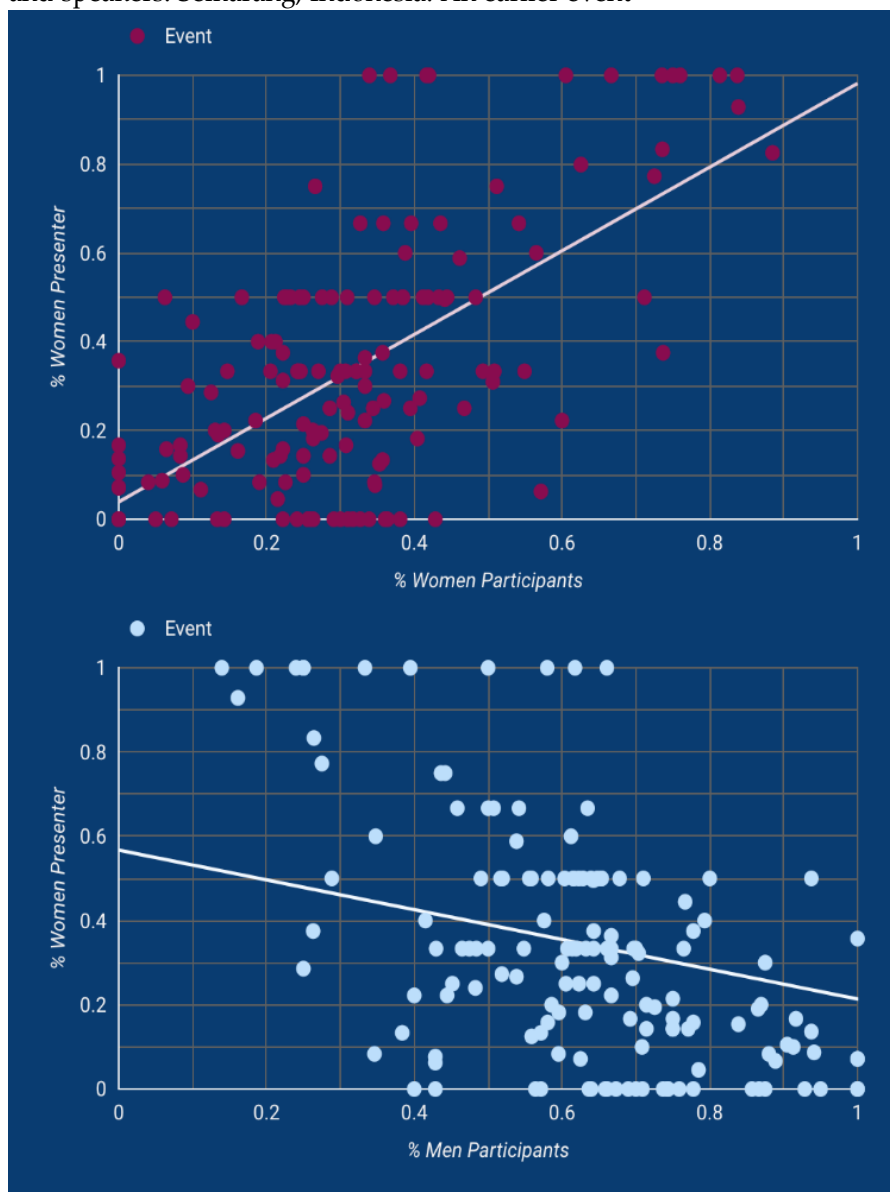


Figure 8: Correlation between the percentage of women presenters and the percentage of women or men participants, 2013 to 2021.

²⁰ “Gender Inequality Index (GII) | Human Development Reports” (United Nations Development Programme, 2020), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>.

participants: women speakers and -0.54 for men participants: women speakers). This data provides preliminary insight on the positive relationship between women's speakership and participation. Continued statistical analysis and modeling on future Pacific Forum events would be useful to track this potential trend over a longer period of time, especially if virtual events remain common.

More Work to Be Done

The preceding analysis is only the jumping-off point for Pacific Forum's work on mainstreaming gender within our programming. The research will continue as we look to understand and further respond to these trends. For instance, through post-event surveys, we could ask questions that clarify why participants attend our events, their organizational affiliation, and whether speaker gender, travel time, or travel expenses are important factors in determining if women (and men) choose to attend. Additionally, we can analyze the gender balance of our mailing list, and track not just executed speaker panels, but speaker invitation lists to determine how often women and men are invited to present versus how often they accept such invitations. All of these factors (and others not yet explored) may play a role in women's participation in Pacific Forum events, and other security-related programming offered throughout the Indo-Pacific region. As an organization, the Pacific Forum will work toward achieving gender balance through several initiatives, including gender policies, and by developing a directory of women experts in the Indo-Pacific to encourage more women security experts to speak at our events. All such information will hopefully contribute to a greater gender balance at events, with knock-on effects for Indo-Pacific security as a whole.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maryruth Belsey Priebe is the Director for Women, Peace & Security (WPS) Programs and a Senior Fellow at Pacific Forum International, is the author of numerous articles on gender and sustainability, and holds a Harvard International Relations graduate degree (2023) for which her thesis, "Gender All the Way Down: Proposing a Feminist Framework for Analyzing Gendered Climate Security Risks" was nominated for the Deans Price for Outstanding ALM Thesis. Using social science, feminist foreign policy perspectives/analyses/theories, and data analysis, her research focuses on the nexus of gender, climate change, and peace and security in the Asia-Pacific. Maryruth's circular food economy policy work has been selected for inclusion in the OpenIDEO Food Systems Game Changers Lab, and she has held several research and fellowship positions focused on women's leadership. She is also a Teaching Fellow at Harvard Extension School, a member of the Research Network on Women, Peace & Security in Canada, and is a volunteer for multiple gender-climate causes. Maryruth tweets @greenwriting.



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