

Timid steps forward for women in Nobel man's world

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The Nobel prizes remain very much a man's world, especially in science, but with three female laureates already named this year, women are slowly making their mark.

Since the first Nobel prizes were given out in 1901, 57 [women](#) have been rewarded, representing only 6.1 percent of the 931 laureates (excluding institutions) overall, according to an AFP database.

However the number of women laureates has been steadily increasing over the decades, with 11.1 percent in the 2010s and 9.2 percent in the 2000s, against 5.4 percent in the 1900s and 2.6 percent in the 1910s.

There were, however, none in the 1950s.

The latest additions to the Nobel club are France's Emmanuelle Charpentier and the United States' Jennifer Doudna, who were awarded the [chemistry prize](#) on Wednesday, a day after American Andrea Ghez shared the [physics](#) prize.

The record of five female laureates is within reach this year, as the awards for literature, peace and economics have yet to be announced.

Succeeding in science

The three women have pulled off quite a feat in getting their prizes in two of the most male-dominated disciplines.

Women make up only 1.9 percent of physics laureates, or four out of 216, while they won seven out of 186 chemistry prizes.

The medicine and economics prizes are also heavily male dominated, with respectively 5.4 percent (12 out of 222) and 2.4 percent (two out of 84) women laureates.

The Nobel peace prize (15.9 percent, or 17 out of 107), not taking into account those awarded to institutions, and literature (12.9 percent, 15 out of 116) are slightly more women friendly.

This year is only the second time after 2009 that three women have won scientific prizes.

Even though Ghez was awarded her physics prize with two men, Charpentier and Doudna have won an all-woman chemistry prize.

It is only the third time that this has happened in this discipline, after French-Polish scientist Marie Curie and Britain's Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin won it alone in 1911 and 1964 respectively.

As a Frenchwoman, Charpentier follows in the footsteps of Curie and her daughter Irene Joliot-Curie, who won the [prize](#) in 1935 in a tandem with her husband Frederic Joliot.

Marie Curie was the first woman laureate in 1903 in physics, and is to date the only one to have won two Nobels (1903 in physics and 1911 in chemistry).

Like the prizes themselves, the Nobel committees awarding them are also man dominated, with women holding less than a quarter of the places.

There are, for example, only two women among the seven members of the committee which selects the literature laureate, one out of seven for physics and four out of 18 for medicine.

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