



Getting the Balance Right In National Parliaments

What Works For Women

By the end of 2008 20 countries had achieved a critical mass of 30 percent women in national parliaments.¹ This is double the number of countries since the 2000 launch of WEDO's global 50/50 Campaign to boost women's representation in political decision-making positions. The 20 countries represent regions all over the world: Africa, Latin America, Caribbean, Pacific as well as Europe.

While the absolute increase is small, this rise is significant—women's representation in parliaments, now at 18.2 percent, is the highest it has ever been. And when women are represented in critical numbers in parliament, their perspectives and interests are more likely to be taken into account and their concerns given higher priority.

For example, in South Africa, where women occupy more than 30 percent of seats in the National Assembly, women parliamentarians introduced a gender budget process that analyzes government expenditures to ensure that a dequate funds are allocated for women's empowerment and development.

In Rwanda, women parliamentarians have formed a women's caucus that works together across party lines to review existing laws, eliminate discriminatory legislation, examine proposed laws through a gender lens and liaise with the women's movement. A key legislative achievement was the repealing of laws that prohibited women from inheriting land.²

In Costa Rica studies indicate that female deputies have been successful over 80 percent of the time in getting laws that they submitted to the legislative assembly approved. Men only have a 48 percent success rate. Women also play leading roles in the field of public health and in the fight against narcotics and money-laundering.³

What makes these 22 countries—Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Burundi, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Macedonia, Mozambique, Nepal, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Rwanda, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania and Uganda—successful is that they have each instituted changes in their electoral and parliamentary processes, recognizing the importance of equity between women and men in decision-making.

Achieving Critical Mass

The type of electoral system, used in combination with a quota system, is the most reliable predictor that a country will have a higher than average number of women in parliament.⁴ *(continued inside)*



Women in National Parliaments: Countries With Critical Mass⁵

Country	Electoral System	Affirmative Action ⁶	Campaign Finance	Percent Women
Rwanda	Proportional Representation (PR) in the Lower House; Winner-take-all in the Upper House	Legal quotas, zipper-style: Constitution guarantees 24 seats for women in the National Assembly; 30% of seats in Senate. Non-compliance results in party sanctions.	N/A	56.3
Sweden	PR List system	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style: Political Parties guarantee 40-50% women candidates.	Political Parties receive state subsidy, but no information on use of funds. ⁷	47.0
Cuba	Direct voting with absolute majority system ⁸	N/A	N/A.	43.2
Finland	PR, List System	Party quotas, zipper-style: Party guarantees 40% of each sex represented in decision-making bodies.	Political Parties receive state subsidy, but no information on use of funds	41.5
Argentina	PR, List System	Legal quotas, zipper-style (1993): Legislature guarantees 30% women candidates on party lists. Non-compliance results in rejection of party list	Same	40.0
Netherlands	PR, List System	Party quotas, zipper-style (1987): Labor Party (one of the three major parties in parliament) guarantees 50% women candidates on party lists	Same	39.3
Denmark	PR, List System	Party quotas, zipper-style (1980s): Party guarantees 40% women candidates. Quotas abandoned in 1996	Same	38.0
Costa Rica	PR, List System	Legal quotas (1996): Constitution guarantees 40% women candidates. Non-compliance results in rejection of party list.	Same	36.8
Spain	PR, List System	Legal quotas (2007): Legislature guarantees a minimum of 40% and a maximum of 60% of each sex among candidates in all elections.	Same	36.3
Norway	PR, List System	Party quotas, zipper-style (1993): Party guarantees 40% women candidates	Same	36.1
Belgium	PR, List System	Legal quotas, zipper-style: Legislature guarantees an equal share of women and men on party lists, and that the top two positions be of different sexes. Non-compliance results in the party leaving the remainder of the seats vacant.	Campaign Finance limitations on political parties	35.5
Mozambique	PR, List System	Party quotas, zipper-style: Party guarantees 30% of positions in party lists for women..	Political parties receive subsidies, but no information on use of funds.	34.8
Iceland	PR, List System	Party quotas, zipper-style (1986): Party guarantees 40% women candidates on party lists. Political parties meet quotas without legal sanctions.	Same	33.3
New Zealand	Mixed Member PR System	No quotas	No subsidies for political parties. ⁹	33.1
South Africa	PR, List System	Party quotas, zipper-style: Party guarantees 30% of positions in party lists for women. Local political parties must seek to ensure 50% women on their lists. Political parties meet quotas without legal sanctions	Political parties receive subsidies, but no information on use of funds.	33.0
Austria	PR, List System	Party quotas, zipper-style: Green Party has 50% quota (1993); Austrian People's Party has 33.3% (1995); Social Democratic Party has 40% (1985).	Same	32.8
Nepal	Mixed system: First Past the Post System (FPTP) / PR, list system	Legal quotas (1990): Constitution states that at least 5% of the total number of candidates contesting for the lower house election from any political party or organization must be women candidates, and at least 3 seats are reserved for women in the 60 member upper house.	No subsidies for political parties. Campaign finance limitations. ¹⁰	32.8 ¹¹
Macedonia	PR, List System	Legal quotas (2002): A minimum of 30% of each sex should be represented on party candidate lists. Macedonian election code (2005): every third position must be filled "with a candidate of the lesser represented gender." ¹²	Ceiling on total expenditures by a campaign. ¹³	31.7
Germany	Mixed member PR system	Party quotas, zipper-style (1986): Party guarantees 40-50% of positions on party lists for women. Non-compliance by Christian Democrat Party results in repetition of internal elections.	Political parties receive subsidies, but no information on use of funds.	31.6

Uganda	Simple majority system	Legal quotas: Constitution guarantees 18% women in parliament.	Same	30.7
Burundi	PR, List system in lower house, Direct voting with super majority in upper house.	Legal quotas (2004): Constitution guarantees 30% women in Parliament. Non-compliance results in electoral management body adding members to the parliament.	Same	30.5
Tanzania	Direct voting with simple majority system	Legal quotas: Constitution guarantees between 20-30% women in parliament.	Only represented political parties receive funds. Lack of resources makes it difficult for women to run.	30.4

(continued from front page)

Electoral Systems

Proportional representation is associated with achieving the greatest numbers of women in parliament. This system is used in almost all the countries where women occupy at least 30 percent of parliamentary seats. The most widely used form of proportional representation is the list system. In its simplest form, each party presents its list of candidates to the electorate and receives seats in proportion to its overall share of the national vote. In some countries a minimum share of the votes may be required for a party to earn representation. In the mixed-member PR system voters elect a certain percentage of the legislature from single-seat, winner-take-all districts while the remaining members are chosen from lists.

Quota Systems

Women's representation increases significantly in countries that apply quota systems in national parliaments enabling women to overcome obstacles that prevent them from entering politics in the same ways as their male colleagues.¹⁴

Party quotas are voluntary measures or targets adopted by political parties to guarantee that a certain percentage of women are selected as election candidates. Political parties in Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Mozambique, Norway, Spain, Sweden and South Africa use this system.

Legal quotas, which derive from the constitution or legislation, make it mandatory for political parties to set aside a certain percentage of parliamentary seats for women. Non-compliance can open parties to penalties such as disqualification from elections or withdrawal of government campaign funding. Legal quotas are in force in Argentina, Belgium, Burundi, Costa Rica, France, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

Most of the countries that have reached a sustained critical mass have adopted quota systems, primarily using a zipper-style system, alternating equal numbers of women and men on party electoral lists. Other countries—Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden—have introduced gender neutral quotas that establish a minimum and maximum percentage of parliamentary seats for both sexes.

Campaign Finance

Almost all countries that achieved critical mass provided campaign funds to their political parties. Unfortunately, this money is not used to encourage increased numbers of women to become candidates or as an incentive to implement gender quotas. This is a missed opportunity.

Traditionally women have been positioned in the private, domestic sphere. Of the 1.3 billion people living in dire poverty worldwide, the majority are women. Across the globe, women's average wage is 75 percent that of men. It is, therefore, not surprising that women in general face obstacles in accessing campaign funds. They often do not have the personal resources or the moneyed networks to allow them to compete effectively in expensive electoral campaigns. Campaign finance subsidies can make it easier for women to mobilize resources.

For example:¹⁵

- Ensure that women candidates at the local and national levels have wider and earlier access to financial resources.
- Provide incentives through public funding—party funding could be reduced if women's quotas are not met.
- Limit nomination and campaign spending to make it easier for women to obtain needed funds.

Take Action

- Press governments, parliaments, and political parties to adopt legally binding quotas in elections at all levels.
- Monitor quota implementation and push for non-compliance to be sanctioned.
- Challenge the status quo by changing voter's attitudes towards women candidates—in Trinidad and Tobago women use the slogan "A women's place is in the House of Parliament" to push for social and political change.
- Identify and train women candidates to enlarge the pool of eligible women.
- Persuade political parties to identify talented women and to provide incentives for women presenting themselves as candidates.

Resources

Websites

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU): www.ipu.org

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA): www.idea.int

Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO): www.wedo.org

Worldwide guide to women in leadership:
www.guide2womenleaders.com

Publications

Designing for Equality, IDEA (2007).

Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers, A revised Edition, IDEA (2005).

Ringing Up the Changes: Gender in Southern Africa Politics, edited by Colleen Lowe Morna, *Gender Links* (2004).

End Notes

¹ www.ipu.org

² Powley, Elizabeth. Rwanda: Women Hold Up Half the Parliament (this case study is published in *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, A revised edition, IDEA (2005)

³ Olsen de Figueres, Karen. The Road to Equality—Women in Costa Rica, (2002) (this is an update of the case study which was originally published in International IDEA's handbook: *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, Stockholm, International IDEA, 1998).

⁴ *Designing for Equality*, IDEA (2007)

⁵ Data from May 2007

⁶ www.quotaproject.org, IDEA, Stockholm University

⁷ PR: proportional representation.

⁸ According to Cuban law, up to 50 percent of Deputies must be delegates chosen in each municipality. Other candidates are proposed by nominating assemblies comprised of workers, youth, women, students, farmers and members of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. The final list of candidates is drawn up by the National Candidature Commission.

⁹ Party financing in post-Soeharto Indonesia: between state subsidies and political corruption, (2007). http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-7028823/Party-financing-in-post-Soeharto.htm

¹¹ Nepal: Current Political and Legal Overview. http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1848_polpart_moneyinpolitics_010105_95_115.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2386.htm>

¹² Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Early Parliamentary Elections, 1 June 2008, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report. http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2008/08/32619_en.pdf

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ www.quotaproject.org, IDEA, Stockholm University

¹⁵ *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns*, IDEA (2003)