



Gender quotas and women's political representation in national legislatures of the world

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Abstract

Women are under-represented in politics. Women constitute half of the population of every country but the average percentage of women in national parliament at present is only 21.3 percent, still far from being to their population. This figure reveals that politics is still predominantly a men's domain, with men making up more than 75 percent of parliamentarians. For getting better women's representation in political institutions, as from the last couple of decades 90 percent of countries had either established formal national machineries or policy agencies for the advancement of women or less formal governance systems to address gender inequality. Consequently, the most common reforms, 'Gender Quotas' now have been adopted by various countries to counter this inequality in public offices. It is the one type of legislation which has been used as a tool by many countries to raise the women's representation in political institutions. Subsequently, gender quotas has implemented in different countries of the world. Nowadays, it has become a common global trend.

Keywords: politics, population, women, gender quotas

Introduction

Women are not adequately represented in existing democracies. They constitute half of the population of the world but the worldwide average percentage of women's representation in national parliament is merely 21.3 percent^[1]. This figure notifies that politics is still predominantly a men's domain, with men making up more than 75 percent of parliamentarians. It is certainly clear that there is no necessary correlation between length of experience of democracy and numbers of women in political offices. On these grounds Anne Marie Goetz argues that "established democracies are facing not simply a 'deficit', but that they are built upon deeply gendered conditions for political participation"^[2]. So there is need for more women in political office, it is useful to reflect upon different understandings of representation.

It has also been observed that "a balanced representation of women and men at all levels of decision making guarantees better government. Because of history of women as a group, they have their own and unique perspective. Women have different values, ideas and behave differently. It is also believed that increased participation of women in decision making will create a new culture and will shed new light on how power should be exercised. Women as political leaders have attained higher degree of contacts with people in comparison to their male counterparts, and are less individualistic than men"^[3].

It is a well known fact that for healthy political system and for welfare of the people, it is necessary that they must come forward and contribute in the political affairs. More participants in decision making process will enhance the economic and political capacity of the country. Gender equality among political representative is also important because shortage of women in political institutions may have serious consequences (according to feminist movement as

well as feminist theory) for the political agenda, for the articulations of women interests and for the legitimacy of democratic institutions^[4].

According to Yolanda Sadie^[5] the equal representation of women in political decision-making structure and among political representatives is important for many reasons.

- In the first instance, the involvement of women in such structures is recognised as a fundamental human right and an important principle of fair democratic representation.
- Secondly, the presence of women is a necessary condition in women's interest to be taken into account. A widespread reality is that women and their policy interests have been marginalised as a result of men's monopolisation of political decision making structures and men's voices predominating in these structures.
- The adequate representation of women in these structures is regarded as essential for their interests to be taken into account.
- Furthermore, such a presence is also a powerful tool for challenging societal stereotypes, creating role models and thus serving as an impetus for transformation.
- Lastly, there is a utility argument- that society cannot afford not to utilise half of its available talent.

At the turn of twenty first century, there is a little overt discrimination against women in politics. Women can vote, women can support candidate and women can run for office. But the lacks of visible women in political life of nation after nation suggest that veiled discrimination against women remains^[6]. In no country do women make up 50 percent of the legislature, except Rwanda, it became the first parliament in the world with a female majority of 56 percent. Even most of the countries in the world have failed to give due space and representation to women in public offices. Even in societies where women exercise relatively more freedom in day to day

living, they remain politically marginalised. Globally, women are still vastly under-representation in politics.

For getting better female representation in public offices many efforts have been taken by most of the countries in the world. Women now have the right to vote and stand for elections at all levels of the government in most countries of the world. As from the last couple of decades, 90 percent of countries had either established formal national machineries or policy agencies for the advancement of women or less formal governance systems to address gender inequalities. One hundred and eighty five countries have signed the 'Convention for the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW), though many have opted clauses and are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national report, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations ^[7]. Despite these significant gains in institutional politics, gender inequality is continued to persist and even grow.

Nowadays, one of the most common reforms, 'Gender Quota' has been adopted by many countries to redress gender inequality in public life ^[9]. It is a type of legislation which aims to increase the female presence in political office. The origin of the quota policy can be traced back to the United Nations (UN) fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. The resulting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, signed unanimously by all 189 member states, called on governments to take measures to ensure women's equal access and full participation in power structures and decision-making, as well as to increase women's capacity to participate in decisions making and leadership ^[10]. Now quotas have become an important part of the gender politics of development and take a wide range of forms in countries around the world ^[11]. Today around 40 countries have introduced gender quotas in elections to their national parliaments either by means of constitutional amendment or by changing the electoral laws called as legal quotas. In more than 50 countries now major political parties have voluntarily set out quotas provisions in their own manifestoes called as party quotas ^[12]. As a result, quotas now exist in more than one hundred countries around the world. Thus the gender quotas are one of the key innovations of late twentieth century and have become a prominent way to promote women's representation in politics ^[13].

Quota in politics actually means setting up a percentage or a number of seats for the representation of a specific group. Here women, most often in the form of a minimum percentage, for instance 20, 30 or 40 percent are aimed at. Quotas are used as a measure to increase the representation of historically excluded or underrepresented groups. Gender quotas may be to require minimum representation of women or a state may fix a maximum / minimum representation for both sexes, for instance no more than 60 and no less than 40 percent for each sex ^[14]. Thus quotas for women are a form of affirmative action aimed at increasing women's representation in elected legislative bodies. Affirmative action measures are described as aiming at equality of results rather than equality of opportunity ^[15]. However electoral gender quotas are no doubt an affirmative action measure that if properly implemented, has the potential to increase women's

representation rapidly conceptualised as the fast track to gender balance in politics ^[16].

The growing literature on gender quotas presents a variety of typologies for classifying different kinds of quotas measures. Most scholars recognise three basic types: reserved seats, party quotas and legislative quotas. Reserved seats appear primarily in Africa, Asia and Middle East ^[17]. Reserved seat differ from party and legislative quotas, mandate representation of minimum number of female legislators rather than simply a percentage of women among political contenders. In doing so, they revise aspects of the electoral system in ways that guarantee the election of women. It means seats are set aside for women in parliament ^[18].

Party quotas are the most prevalent type of gender quotas. Party quotas are measures which are adopted voluntarily by individual parties to ensure that a certain proportion of women among candidates are represented to political office. These policies typically mandate that women constitute between 25 percent and 50 percent of parties electoral seats. Initially, they were found in Western Europe only where they were adopted mainly in between 1970s and 1980s, but now they are present in all regions of the world ^[19]. Legislative quotas also tend to be found in developing countries, especially in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and south Eastern Europe. Legislative quotas are the newest kind of quota policy, appearing first in the 1990s, at that time issues of women's representation became the agenda of many international organisations and transitional non-governmental organisations (NGOs) enacted through reforms to electoral laws and sometimes even by the constitutions. Legislative quotas are similar to party quotas. In that they address party selection process, but difference is that they are passed by national parliaments to ensure that all parties nominate a certain proportion of female candidates. As such, they are mandatory provisions that apply to all political groups, rather than only those that choose to adopt quotas ^[20]. Gender quotas thus take number of different forms in countries around the world. Even if quota provisions are often very controversial, the use of the quota tool to make historical leaps or jump starts in women's representation is becoming a global trend ^[21]. During just one and-a-half decade, countries as different as Argentina, Uganda, South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France and Costa-Rica through the use of gender quotas, (as illustrated in table.1) attempted to rapidly change women's historical under representation in political institutions ^[22]. In South Africa, women made a noteworthy political advance through the introduction of quotas ^[23].

The five Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden are well known for their extraordinary high representation of women in politics. In International literature on women in politics, one can find the argument, that women's representation reached a historical and worldwide high in the Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden due to quotas. In the Latin American, discussion on quotas for the women has reached the Nordic example in its advocacy for the introduction of legal quota regulations. Nordic quota provision may be seen as 'quotas for gender balance', not minimum requirements. So that electoral gender quotas in these countries could be labelled high echelon quotas ^[24]. Rwanda has the highest female representation in the world today. Rwanda recently overtook Sweden's place as

number one with 56 percent of women, the Nordic countries have altered the top of the world rank order of the countries according to the representation of women in national parliament. In Rwanda elections after the 2003 reform, women occupied forty-nine percent of the parliamentary seats, and in 2008 Rwanda became the first parliament in the world with the female majority of 56 percent (see table.1). Sweden is on second position with female percentage of 45 percent. But today a significant change has taken place i.e. the South Africa with the percentage of 44.5 percent jumped at the third position for women in national parliament and now challenging the Scandinavian countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, which for so long were alone at the top of the world ranking ^[25]. Argentina, Costa Rica, Belgium, Mozambique, and Spain are among the new countries to have passed the 35 percent threshold, all through the use of electoral gender quotas ^[26]. For example in 1990 before quotas were adopted, women constituted only 6 percent in Argentine Chamber of Deputies and by 2008 after quotas adoption this proportion has grown to 40 percent in Argentina ^[27]. At this time Argentina has the 37.4 percent of women in national parliament.

Since 1990, however, the pace of quotas adoption has increased dramatically. National level quotas spread throughout Latin America after 1990, and after 1995 many African countries followed suit with reserved seats and party level quotas ^[28]. In some other countries, scores of political

parties voluntarily adopted gender quotas to attract female candidates or voters.

Latin America is the leading continent when it comes to the introduction of gender quotas in politics. Eleven out of 19 Latin American states have approved the quota system in legal or constitutional act aiming at promoting greater gender equality in political parliamentary representation. All countries adopted gender quotas in between 1996 and 2000, with exception of Argentina, which acted earlier in 1991 ^[29].

Moving towards the twenty first century, governments and political parties in many additional countries adopted gender quotas, including Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Sudan, Morocco, Uganda, Spain, Belgium, Tunisia, Serbia, Mexico, to name a few. As a result, quotas now exist in more than one hundred countries around the world, and many more are still debating the issue. Now gender quotas have become a growing-global phenomenon. All over the world gender quotas are being adopted in order to rapidly increase women's political representation. The Arab world is also part of this new trend and today eleven Arab countries have adopted electoral gender quotas. Electoral gender quotas are defined here as an equality policy measure, the aim of which is to rapidly change under-representation of women in the political institutions ^[30]. Gender quotas are therefore new but important political factors for understanding women's representation in politics.

Table 1: Women's Representation in the National Legislatures of Selected Countries of the World

Name of the Countries	Year of Quotas Adoption	Types of Quotas	% of Quotas or Seats	% of Women's Representation in National Parliament (Year 2011)
Rwanda	2003	LQ + RS	30	56.3
Sweden	1987	Party Quota	50	45.0
South Africa	1994	Party Quota	30	44.5
Iceland	1996	Party Quota	40	42.9
Finland	-	No Quota	-	42.5
Norway	1975	Party Quota	40	39.6
Denmark	1988-90	Party Quota	40	39.1
Netherlands	1987	PQ + LQ	50	39.9
Costa Rica	1996	LQ + PQ	40	38.6
Argentina	1991	Legislative Quota	30	37.4
Belgium	2002	Legislative Quota	50	39.3
Spain	2007	Legislative Quota	40	36.0
Uganda	2001	Reserved Seats	18.4	34.9
Nepal	1990	Legislative Quota	5	33.2
Germany	1986	Party Quota	50	32.8
Switzerland	2003	Party Quota	40	28.5
Afghanistan	2004	Reserved Seats	27	27.7
Austria	1986	Party Quota	50	27.9
Tunisia	2004	Party Quota	25	26.3
Sudan	2005	Reserved Seats	13	25.1
Mexico	2002	Legislative Quota	30	26.2
Iraq	2004	Legislative Quota	25	25.2
Canada	1992	Party Quota	50	24.7
Australia	2002	Party Quota	40	24.7
Poland	1997	Party Quota	30	23.9
United Kingdom	1993	Party Quota	50	22.0
Philippines	1986	RS + LQ	10	22.1
Pakistan	2002	Reserved Seats	18	22.2
China	2007	Legislative Quota	22	21.3
Italy	1989	Party Quota	40	21.3

Serbia	2004	Legislative Quota	30	21.6
Israel	1997	Party Quota	25	19.2
Indonesia	2003	Legislative Quotas	30	18.0
Bangladesh	2004	Reserved Seats	13	18.6
France	1999/2000	Legislative Quota	50	18.9
USA	-	-	-	16.8
Bosnia Herzegovina	2001	P Q + L Q	30	16.7
Ireland	1991	Party Quota	40	15.3
Morocco	2002	Party Quota	20	16.7
Thailand	Unknown	Party Quota	30	15.1
Turkey				14.2
Russian Federation	-	-	-	14.0
Colombia	1999	Legislative Quota	30	12.7
Japan				11.3
India	1993	At local level LQ At National Level PQ	30 15	10.8

Source: Krook (2009) ^[10] pp.227-237; Drude Dahlerup (2006), World statistics pocket book 2011, series Vol. No. 36, United Nation publications year 2012, online available on <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/>

Key Quotas types: - Party Quotas (PQ) Legislative Quotas (LQ), Reserve seats (RS)

Asia is an interesting region in terms of its experimentation with quotas, providing some of the earliest example in the world. Pakistan implemented 5 percent quota for women under its first constitution, as far back as 1956. Today legislative quotas are implemented in Pakistan Indonesia and China ^[31].

South Asia presents us with a paradox. It has more powerful women politicians than any other set of countries in the world. Women have been prime minister, leaders of major parties, heads of state and regional governments. Chandrika Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka, Sonia Gandhi in India, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan and Khalida Zia in Bangladesh are the most glaring examples. Yet overall women's political participation is miserable. The membership of women in the parliaments of these countries has been very low during last few decades. The predominance of women political leaders at the highest level seems to have no implications for even at the slightly lower level; village politics is in the hands of men while women confined to domestic duties ^[32].

The countries of south Asia to raise women representation in legislatures have also chosen gender quotas measure. Upon independence in 1971, Bangladesh, in its first constitution of the country reserved 15 of 315 seats in its parliament for women, who were chosen by 300 parliamentarians elected to the general seats ^[33]. This provision lapsed with the times. It was reintroduced in 2004 with 13 percent of seats reserved for women in parliament ^[34]. Afghanistan also adopted 27 percent gender quotas on 4 January 2004, as part of a new constitution, for both the upper and lower houses of the parliament respectively ^[35]. Therefore, it has perhaps been possible only due to share of quotas that in current time Afghanistan parliament has 27.7 percent female representation (see table.1).

Last but not the least; Quotas are a diverse set of measures that can reach the political agenda for both feminist and non-feminist reasons, leading to diverse effects on the election and empowerment of women. More systematic research is clearly needed in order to determine their impact on women as a group. Nonetheless, evidence from around the world indicates that there is a need for gender quotas.

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