

## Quotas in Parliamentary Elections

Quotas of various kinds are used in 111 countries to improve the representation of women in legislative bodies. Some countries also use quotas to address other under-representation, most notably of racial groups.

There are three basic types of quota:

- **Constitutional** - in which the requirement for there to be a certain percentage of women in the legislature is part of the constitutional arrangements.
- **Electoral** - in which the electoral laws of the country require quotas to be implemented.
- **Party** - in which some or all of the political parties in the country voluntarily apply some form of positive action or quota requirements. This is the type of quota system currently in use in the UK, and has the drawback of leaving the burden of creating actual improvements on the shoulders of a small number of parties.
- **State Funding** - in which the requirement to field a given level of women candidates is enshrined in the law relating to funding arrangements; there are currently only eight countries in which this applies.

In the analysis which follows, the principal sources are statistics maintained and published by the International Parliamentary Union and the Quota Project website run by the International IDEA and the University of Stockholm at [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org). Information on electoral systems is from the International IDEA's [Table of Electoral Systems Worldwide](#), with some small adjustments for ease of interpretation.

### Use and Effects of Quotas

Internationally, a variety of different approaches has been taken, but a common feature is the use of quota or other systems to ensure the election of women in those countries with (relatively) high levels of women MPs.

Of the 44 countries<sup>1</sup> in which women's representation in the national parliament was at or over 30% on 1 June 2015, 37<sup>2</sup> employ quota systems in one form or another.

In all, 111 out of 189 countries employ one or more of the various forms of quota available (see Appendix). Some use more than one, and several use different types of quota for different kinds of election. The ways in which quotas are set, implemented and enforced varies greatly, with each country setting up whatever system will suit its requirements best. Overall, the number of countries introducing quota systems of one kind or another is slowly increasing, although in some cases new quota systems in one country are balanced by the abolition of quotas in another.

The Nordic countries Sweden (44%), Denmark (38%), Norway (40%) and Iceland (41%), together with Finland on 41.5% are the most obviously successful and comparable group of countries. They have stable political systems and their democratic and party structures are not dissimilar to the UK's.

Of these countries, Sweden, Norway and Iceland all use voluntary party quotas only - in Norway most of the parties have a 40% quota, in Sweden the centre left parties have a 50% quota, whilst the centre right parties used quotas in the 1970s, '80s and '90s, but do not use them now. In Iceland the three centre left parties all use quotas. All three countries have proportional representation (PR) systems.

In Denmark, on the other hand, quotas were used until 1996, when they were abandoned. In 1997 33% of Danish MPs were women, in 2001 the figure had risen to 37.4% and it currently stands at 38%.

The distinguishing feature of all the Nordic countries is that they have been working on women's representation for decades, meaning that even where progress has been slow it has been steady, and that even where quotas have been used and abandoned, there has not been an immediate reverse.

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<sup>1</sup> Rwanda, Bolivia, Cuba, Seychelles, Sweden, Senegal, South Africa, Ecuador, Finland, Iceland, Namibia, Nicaragua, Spain, Mozambique, Norway, Andorra, Belgium, Timor-Leste, Denmark, Mexico, Netherlands, Angola, Slovenia, Germany, Argentina, Tanzania, Guyana, Uganda, Serbia, Costa Rica, Grenada, FYR Macedonia, El Salvador, Algeria, Zimbabwe, New Zealand, Portugal, Tunisia, Cameroon, Italy, Austria, Burundi, Sudan and Switzerland. Source: International Parliamentary Union accessed 3 July 2015

<sup>2</sup> The seven which do not use quotas are: Cuba, the Seychelles, Finland, Andorra, Denmark, Grenada and New Zealand.

Finland has no quota system for parliament or for local councils, but the Act of Equality of 2000 requires all public committees, and all municipal bodies (other than councils) to have a minimum of 40% of both men and women, thus ensuring that there is a 'pipeline' of women coming through the political system. It is worth noting here that Finland's very high standing in the world's ranking is historical - in 1906, 12 years before British women were granted even a limited parliamentary franchise, 16 Finnish women MPs were elected.

In the remaining European countries with 30% or more women MPs:

- the centre left parties in the Netherlands operate quotas; as a result the level of women's representation is subject to fluctuation as the fortunes of the parties fluctuate. In 2010, prior to the rightward shift in the most recent election, 41% of Dutch MPs were female; this figure now stands at 37%.
- Spain (41%) has an electoral law - the Equality Law of 2007 introduced the 'principle of balanced presence', and party lists which do not comply with its requirements are ruled out by the Electoral Commission.
- Belgium (39%) has an electoral law (2002) which requires party lists to be composed of equal numbers of women and men, with places not so filled left vacant
- Both of the main parties in Germany (36.5%) operate quota systems.

Constitutional quotas are not generally found in Europe, and are more likely to be in operation in countries which have recently-written constitutions, or where the severity of the problem is agreed to warrant such a step.

There are currently 27 countries using constitutional quotas (up from 15 in 2009), 67 using electoral law quotas (up from 44 in 2009), and 106 political parties in 52 countries (including the UK) using voluntary party quotas. It should be noted that there is some overlap between these types, with a number of countries featuring in more than one list; for instance, in Rwanda, which at 63.8% has the highest level of female representation, the constitutional quota requirement is brought into practical effect through electoral law.

In many cases, quotas are used in conjunction with proportional representation in one

form or another, and, indeed, without strong political will, majority electoral systems such as first-past-the-post are probably the most difficult systems to make work with quotas. In addition, the most effective sanctions for parties which break compulsory quotas are often financial; in France, Belgium, Spain and (from 2016) Ireland, for instance, the penalty for non-compliance is the loss of some element of state funding, and in Ireland the requirement for quotas was actually included in the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 rather than as part of equality legislation. The disinclination in the UK to introduce state funding of political parties therefore also militates against effective legally binding quotas.

Quotas are not in and of themselves a panacea for all the ills of women's under-representation. As is evident from the Table in the Appendix below, some countries which have quotas either set them very low, or fail to implement them effectively. In Jordan, for instance, only 15 of the 150 seats are reserved for women. Where the quota system is purely voluntary (as in the UK and Germany, for instance) success is dependent upon participation from one or more of the major political parties.

Finally, caution should be exercised before drawing a direct line between the type of electoral system and the ease of implementing quotas. The Table in the Appendix below shows countries in order of the percentage of women MPs, and although it is certainly true that countries with PR systems find quotas easier to implement than those with majority voting arrangements, it is by no means universal, and there may well be other factors at work. The numbers of women coming forward, the level of training and mentoring available, the position of women in wider society and financial issues all also have an effect.

However, that said, it is clear that quota systems, particularly when combined with amenable electoral systems, can and do make a significant difference to the representation of women in national parliaments.

## Quota systems in use as at July 2015.

The list includes only those countries currently using a quota system, and is arranged in descending order of women's representation.

Electoral systems are defined as follows:

- **Majority** - includes first-past-the-post systems (as used in the UK) together with variations
- **Mixed** - these are systems which include elements of both majority and proportional systems
- **Proportional (PR)** - these are systems which, generally speaking, use one of a variety of methods of apportioning seats won in proportion to the number of votes received.
- **Transition** - in a small number of countries systems are in transition between one form (or regime) and another.

In Saudi Arabia the Parliament is appointed by the King.

Country	% women	Electoral System	Voluntary Party Quota Systems	Legislated Candidate Quota	Reserved Seats	Constitutional Quota	Electoral Law	State Political Funding Legislation
Rwanda	63.8	PR		y		y	y	
Bolivia	53.1	Mixed	y	y			y	
Sweden	43.6	PR	y					
Senegal	42.7	Mixed		y			y	
South Africa	41.9	PR	y					
Ecuador	41.6	PR		y		y	y	
Iceland	41.3	PR	y					
Namibia	41.3	PR	y					
Nicaragua	41.3	PR	y	y			y	

Country	% women	Electoral System	Voluntary Party Quota Systems	Legislated Candidate Quota	Reserved Seats	Constitutional Quota	Electoral Law	State Political Funding Legislation
Spain	41.1	PR	y	y			y	
Mozambique	39.6	PR	Y					
Norway	39.6	PR	y					
Belgium	39.3	PR		y			y	
Timor-Leste	38.5	PR		y			y	
Mexico	38.0	Mixed	y	y		y	y	
Netherlands	37.3	PR	y					
Angola	36.8	PR		y			y	y
Slovenia	36.7	PR	y	y			y	
Germany	36.5	Mixed	y					
Argentina	36.2	PR	y	y		y	y	
Tanzania	36.0	Majority	y		y	y	y	
Guyana	35.1	PR		y			y	
Uganda	35.0	Majority			y	y	y	
Serbia	34.0	PR		y		y	y	
Costa Rica	33.3	PR	y	y			y	
FYR Macedonia	33.3	PR		y			y	
El Salvador	32.1	PR	y	y			y	
Algeria	31.6	PR			y		y	y
Zimbabwe	31.5	Majority			y	y		
Portugal	31.3	PR		y			y	
Tunisia	31.3	PR		y		y	y	

Country	% women	Electoral System	Voluntary Party Quota Systems	Legislated Candidate Quota	Reserved Seats	Constitutional Quota	Electoral Law	State Political Funding Legislation
Cameroon	31.1	Majority	y					
Italy	31.0	PR	y					
Austria	30.6	PR	y					
Burundi	30.5	PR			y	y	y	
Sudan	30.5	Mixed			y		y	
Switzerland	30.5	PR	y					
Nepal	29.5	Mixed		y		y	y	
United Kingdom	29.4	Majority	y					
Luxembourg	28.3	PR	y					
Ethiopia	27.8	Majority	y					
Afghanistan	27.7	PR			y	y	y	
Philippines	27.2	Mixed	y					
Australia	26.7	Majority	y					
Iraq	26.5	PR			y	y	y	
South Sudan	26.5	Transition			y	y	y	
France	26.2	Majority	y	y		y	y	
Croatia	25.8	PR	y	y		y	y	
Honduras	25.8	PR		y			y	y
Canada	25.3	Majority	y					
Mauritania	25.2	Majority		y			y	y
Lesotho	25.0	Mixed		y			y	
Israel	24.2	PR	y					

Country	% women	Electoral System	Voluntary Party Quota Systems	Legislated Candidate Quota	Reserved Seats	Constitutional Quota	Electoral Law	State Political Funding Legislation
Poland	24.1	PR		y			y	
Equatorial Guinea	24.0	PR	y					
China	23.6	Majority			y		y	
Lithuania	23.4	Mixed	y					
Kyrgyzstan	23.3	PR		y			y	
Greece	23.0	PR	y	y		y	y	
Peru	22.3	PR		y			y	
Eritrea	22.0	Transitional			y		y	
Guinea	21.9	Mixed		y			y	y
Bosnia Herzegovina	21.4	PR		y			y	
Cape Verde	20.8	PR		y			y	
Dominican Republic	20.8	PR		y		y	y	
Albania	20.7	PR		y			y	
Pakistan	20.7	Mixed			y	y		
Bangladesh	20.0	Majority			y	y		
Czech Republic	20.0	PR	y					
Colombia	19.9	PR		y			y	y
Saudi Arabia	19.9	Appointed			y	y		
Kenya	19.7	Majority	y		y	y		
Panama	19.3	PR		y			y	
Slovakia	18.7	PR	y					
Togo	17.6	PR		y			y	



Country	% women	Electoral System	Voluntary Party Quota Systems	Legislated Candidate Quota	Reserved Seats	Constitutional Quota	Electoral Law	State Political Funding Legislation
Montenegro	17.3	PR		y			y	
Indonesia	17.1	PR		y			y	
Morocco	17.0	PR	y		y		y	
Malawi	16.7	Majority	y					
Ireland	16.3	PR		y			y	y
South Korea	16.3	Mixed		y			y	
Uruguay	16.2	PR		y			y	
Libya	16.0	Mixed		y			y	
Chile	15.8	PR	y					
Paraguay	15.0	PR	y	y			y	
Mongolia	14.9	Mixed		y			y	
Turkey	14.4	PR	y					
Somalia	13.8	Transition			y	y		
Romania	13.7	Mixed	y					
Burkina Fazo	13.3	PR		y			y	y
Guatemala	13.3	PR	y					
Niger	13.3	PR	y		y		y	
Palestine	13.0	PR		y			y	
Malta	12.9	PR	y					
Djibouti	12.7	Mixed			y		y	
Cyprus	12.5	PR	y					
Jordan	12.0	Mixed			y		y	

Country	% women	Electoral System	Voluntary Party Quota Systems	Legislated Candidate Quota	Reserved Seats	Constitutional Quota	Electoral Law	State Political Funding Legislation
Armenia	10.7	PR		y			y	
Hungary	10.1	Mixed	y					
Brazil	9.9	PR		y			y	
Botswana	9.5	Majority	y					
Cote d'Ivoire	9.2	Majority	y					
Congo (DRC)	8.9	Mixed	y	y			y	
Mali	8.8	Majority	y					
Republic of Congo	7.4	Majority		y		y	y	
Swaziland	6.2	Majority			y	y		
Samoa	6.1	Majority			y	y		
Thailand	6.1	Transition	y					
Haiti	4.2	Mixed			y	y		
Solomon Islands	2.0	Majority		y			y	
Egypt	2.0	Mixed		y			y	

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