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## Electoral quotas for women: an international overview

Dr Joy McCann

Politics and Public Administration

### Executive summary


- Less than one in five parliamentarians across the world are women. Legal or voluntary electoral gender quotas are used in more than half of the world's countries as the most effective mechanism for increasing women's political representation.
- Electoral quotas have gained international support and have proven to be effective in 'fast-tracking' women's political representation to produce equality of results, not just equality of opportunity.
- Their introduction has been controversial in some countries, particularly in liberal democracies where critics oppose them on the basis that they discriminate against men and undermine the selection of candidates or parliamentarians on the basis of merit.
- Gender quota systems differ in type and application. The main systems in use are reserved seats, legal candidate quotas, and voluntary political party quotas.
- The success of gender quotas is influenced by various factors including the nature of the political system, the type of electoral or voting system, the type of quota system adopted, cultural attitudes towards the role of women in society, and the nature of the parliamentary environment itself.
- In 2012 the Australian Government committed \$320 million to support a 10-year initiative to 'empower women and to promote gender equality in the Pacific' region, which has the world's lowest proportion of women parliamentarians.<sup>1</sup>

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1. AusAID, ['New partnership to empower Pacific women'](#), 1 October 2013, accessed 15 July 2013.

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## Introduction

Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.<sup>2</sup>

Women have become increasingly active and influential in political life in many countries, yet they remain significantly under-represented in political decision-making and leadership roles at all levels. As at 1 October 2013, women occupy around one-fifth of all seats in national legislatures worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1990s, gender quotas have been recognised and endorsed by many countries as the most effective mechanism for increasing women's political representation. In 1995 a report issued by the United Nations Development Programme concluded that 30 per cent was the 'critical minority' required for 'women as a group to exert a meaningful influence in legislative assemblies'. This was to be achieved through a range of mechanisms including quotas for women's participation in governance.<sup>4</sup>

According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, half of the world's countries currently have some form of electoral gender quota system.<sup>5</sup> More recently, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has noted that quota systems have had a positive impact in addressing the gender imbalance in national parliaments:

Women continued to fare better when either legislated or voluntary quotas were used. In 2012, electoral quotas were used in 22 countries holding elections. With legislated quotas, women took 24 per cent of seats and with voluntary quotas they gained 22 per cent. Where no quotas were used, women took 12 per cent of seats.<sup>6</sup>

However the relevance and value of gender quotas remains contentious, particularly in liberal democracies such as Australia where public debate continues about how to address the under-representation of women in parliament and politics.

This paper provides an overview of recent global trends in women's political representation. It describes the different types of gender quotas that have been adopted, and summarises the various arguments for and against their use, as well as key issues and observations about the impact of quotas drawing on recent international research. The paper concludes with an examination of the current status of electoral gender quotas in Australia, and presents a comparative survey of quota systems in Commonwealth countries including Australia (Appendix 3).

## What are quotas?

Quotas are a form of affirmative action or equal opportunity measure designed to address the slow pace of change in the participation of women and minority groups in areas of society where they are historically under-represented, including employment, education and in political institutions. Quotas generally involve setting a certain number or percentage of places to be occupied by the under-represented groups.

Over the past two decades, quotas have been increasingly used in countries across the world as a tool for advancing the political participation of women.

The quota system places the burden of recruitment not on the individual woman, but on those who control the recruitment process. The core idea behind this system is to recruit women into political positions and to ensure that women are not only a token few in political life.<sup>7</sup>

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2. [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995, accessed 20 June 2013.

3. Average from survey of 188 countries conducted by Inter-Parliamentary Union. See IPU, [Women in national parliaments](#), as at 1 October 2013, accessed 11 November 2013.

4. [UN Division for the Advancement of Women](#), Expert Group Meeting, 24–27 October 2005, accessed 4 September 2013.

5. D Dahlerup, '[About quotas](#)', International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and Stockholm University, 2009, accessed 4 September 2013.

6. Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in Parliament in 2012: the year in perspective](#), 2013, accessed 12 July 2013.

7. D Dahlerup, 'Using quotas to increase women's political representation', International IDEA, 2002, accessed 4 September 2013; ML Krook and DZ O'Brien, '[The politics of group representation: quotas for women and minorities worldwide](#)', *Comparative Politics* 42(3), 2008, pp. 253–72, accessed 4 September 2013.

Electoral gender quotas have attracted a significant amount of international research, and are the subject of ongoing debate regarding both their validity and effectiveness. Opponents of quotas view them as unnecessary, discriminatory and a distortion of the democratic process. Some critics see quotas as serving to undermine the legitimacy of women who occupy quotas, or as placing a ceiling on women's political participation.<sup>8</sup> Advocates point out that such intervention is necessary because institutional and cultural gender biases continue to exist, imposing very real barriers to women in the electoral process.<sup>9</sup> Some advocates have promoted the idea of 'parity' or gender balance to emphasise power-sharing between men and women, or adopting different terminology to overcome the negative connotations implied by the term 'quota'. A summary of the more common arguments for and against electoral gender quotas is presented in Appendix 2.

### **Why quotas?**

Parliaments are by nature intended to represent their societies. 'Modern parliaments are those in which citizens recognize themselves and find answers to their questions and aspirations.'<sup>10</sup> However, women's representation in parliaments is increasing very slowly and, in almost every parliament worldwide, is still far lower than women's broader representation in their society. As academic Pippa Norris notes, 'most parliaments worldwide fail to reflect the proportion of women in the electorate ... despite trends in the home, family, school, and work-force' and a growing recognition of the need for the inclusion and empowerment of women in elected office.<sup>11</sup> Electoral gender quotas are widely considered to be a necessary and effective tool for 'fast-tracking' women's representation in parliaments. Some of the key themes underpinning the debate over gender quotas are outlined below.

### **International norms**

The concept of gender equality is internationally recognised as a fundamental element of transparent and accountable governance, sustainable development and social cohesion. This principle has been embedded in a series of international conventions and declarations, beginning with [The Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. The [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) adopted by the UN in 1995 included a specific objective relating to 'Women in power and decision-making'. At a special session of the General Assembly in 2000 known as [Beijing + 5](#), governments reaffirmed their commitment to the goals of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Also in 2000 the United Nations Security Council passed resolution on *Women, Peace and Security* and, during the debate, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated that 'peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men ... maintaining and promoting peace and security requires equal participation in decision-making'.<sup>12</sup> Goal 3 of the UN Millennium Development Goals: [Promote gender equality and empower women](#) adopted in 2010 noted that 'women are slowly rising to political power, but mainly when boosted by quotas and other special measures'. According to the IPU Secretary-General, '[a]lthough quotas remain contentious in some parts of the world, they remain key to progress on a fundamental component of democracy —gender parity in political representation. There can be no claim to democracy without delivering on this.'<sup>13</sup>

### **Equality and representation**

A socially inclusive society is regarded as a fundamental principle of democratic governance enabling women to 'have a voice' in making decisions that affect their lives. This relates to an increasingly popular argument that women are entitled to equal citizenship and that 'political participation is a human right'.<sup>14</sup>

8. See for example C Rodrigues, '[UNDP-USP panel discussion considers quotas to promote women in Pacific parliaments](#)', Pacific Parliaments Network, 8 May 2011, accessed 6 August 2013.

9. Also see Fiji Women's Rights Movement, '[Balancing the power: promoting women's political participation in Fiji through temporary special measures](#)', November 2012, pp. 13–5, accessed 15 July 2013.

10. AB Johnsson, 'Foreword', in S Palmeri, '[Gender-sensitive parliaments: a global review of good practice](#)', Inter-Parliamentary Union, Reports and document no. 65, 2011, p. v, accessed 20 August 2013.

11. P Norris, 'The impact of electoral reform on women's representation', *Acta Politica*, 41(2), July 2006, pp. 197–213.

12. S Whittington, 'UN goals for gender mainstreaming', Paper presented at the 'Women and post-war reconstruction: strategies for implementation of democracy building policies' conference, Florida International University, Miami, March 2004, cited in J Ballington and D Dahlerup, 'Gender quotas in post-conflict states', in D Dahlerup, ed, *Women, quotas and politics*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2006, p. 252. The Women's Environment and Development Organization's launch in 2000 inspired global campaigns that resulted in the introduction of quotas for National Assembly elections for the United Nations and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

13. Inter-Parliamentary Union, '[Increased women's political participation still dependent on quotas, 2012 elections show](#)', Press release, 5 March 2013, accessed 5 August 2013.

14. C Bacchi, 'Arguing for and against quotas: theoretical issues', in Dahlerup, *Women, quotas and politics*, op.cit., p. 40.

Promoting increased women’s political leadership and gender equality is a development issue, a human rights issue and also a moral obligation. More inclusive parliaments also have the capacity to strengthen civic engagement and democratic participation among its citizens .... A political system where half the population does not fully participate limits the opportunity for men and women to influence and benefit from political and economic decisions.<sup>15</sup>

Implicit in this view is that legislatures should be inclusive, reflecting the diversity of the society they serve and harnessing the resources and skills of the whole community. International research suggests that women legislators tend to bring different perspectives on political issues, and under-representation of women in parliaments is therefore likely to have ‘important consequences for the public policy agenda. ... as well as for the legitimacy of democratic bodies’.<sup>16</sup> One of the benefits of gender equality in decision-making was graphically demonstrated in a recent analysis by Thomson Reuters which showed that companies with women board members had out-performed those without women on their boards.<sup>17</sup>

### Fast-tracking gender equality

Data collected by the IPU since 1997 demonstrates that, whilst there is a generally upward trend, progress in increasing the number of women in national parliaments has been slow. In January 1997 the world average for women in parliament was 11.7 per cent. By July 2013, some 15 years later, it has risen to 20.9 per cent but is still far short of the ‘critical minority’ of 30 per cent deemed necessary for women to influence decision-making.<sup>18</sup> At the current rate, the UN Millennium Development Goal of gender equality is likely to take another half a century to achieve. Table 1 shows the regional averages for women in national parliaments based on the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s survey of 188 countries.

**Table 1: Regional averages of women in national parliaments (as at 1 October 2013)**

Region	Single House or Lower House %	Upper House or Senate %	Both Houses combined %
Nordic countries	42.0	---	---
Americas	24.8	25.0	24.9
Europe—Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) member countries including Nordic countries	24.5	22.6	24.1
Europe—OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	22.8	22.6	22.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	21.1	18.8	21.7
Asia	19.1	13.8	18.5
Arab States	17.8	7.6	15.9
Pacific (including Australia)	13.1	39.8	15.9

Source: IPU [Women in national parliaments](#)<sup>19</sup>

The greatest increases in women’s parliamentary representation have occurred in those countries where quotas, whether legislated or voluntary, are in use. Nine of the 10 countries with the greatest increase in women MPs (in lower houses) had adopted an electoral quota, while seven of the nine lower houses where the number of women MPs decreased had no quota system. Of the 48 countries where elections were held, women won 24 per cent of parliamentary seats in countries with legislated quotas and 12 per cent of seats where no quotas were used.<sup>20</sup>

15. G Fraser-Moleketi, ‘Foreword’, in P Norris, [Gender equality in elected office in Asia Pacific: six actions to expand women’s empowerment](#), United Nations Development Programme, Asia-Pacific Regional Centre, Bangkok, September 2012, p. 2, accessed 7 July 2013.

16. Norris, ‘The impact of electoral reform on women’s representation’, op.cit.

17. See for example Thomson Reuters Corporation, ‘[Average stock price of gender diverse corporate boards outperform those with no women](#)’, Press release, 10 July 2013, accessed 8 August 2013; European Commission’s Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy, [The quota-instrument: different approaches across Europe](#), Working paper, June 2011, p. 5, accessed 21 October 2013.

18. [UN Division for the Advancement of Women](#), Expert Group Meeting, op.cit.

19. Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in national parliaments](#), World and regional averages as at 1 October 2013, accessed 11 November 2013.

20. Ibid.

Article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recognises that temporary special measures such as quotas are needed to ‘kick-start’ women’s political representation, particularly in countries where women have traditionally been under-represented in the national legislatures. The convention notes that such measures are intended to be temporary, ending ‘when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved’.<sup>21</sup> In practice, this means that women receive initial support to enter political life until they have gained sufficient skills and recognition to engage on an equal footing with men.

### **Equality of opportunity or equality of results**

Advocates of gender quotas point to the fact that women in most countries represent 50 per cent of the population and should be, therefore, equally represented in decision-making and leadership roles. They cite the slow progress in achieving this target, and argue that such intervention is necessary to overcome discriminatory laws and practices. Critics question whether using gender quotas to ‘fast-track’ women’s parliamentary representation is fair, and whether other strategies could be more effective and less divisive. Quota expert Drude Dahlerup distinguishes between the ‘fast-track’ approach using legal quotas to directly increase the number of women in parliament, and the ‘incremental track’ that involves a range of strategies such as training and mentoring programs for women candidates, as well as the need for broader social and cultural changes that address gender inequality.

In liberal democracies those opposed to gender quotas argue that they undermine the principle of merit. The merit principle is an important theoretical concept inherent in equal opportunity laws and designed to avoid discrimination. It underpins public service employment practices in liberal democracies such as the United States and Australia, and means that decisions relating to employment should be ‘based solely on relative ability, knowledge and skills after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity’.<sup>22</sup> At the heart of this debate is whether parliaments should aim for equality of *opportunity* or equality of *results*.<sup>23</sup> Dahlerup describes how gender quotas seek to expand the classic liberal notion of equal opportunity, in which formal barriers to equality are removed, to include ‘equality of result’ which takes into account other factors hindering women candidates:

The argument is that real equal opportunity does not exist just because formal barriers are removed. Direct discrimination and a complex pattern of hidden barriers prevent women from being selected as candidates and getting their share of political influence. Quotas and other forms of positive measures are thus a means towards equality of result.<sup>24</sup>

### **Types of electoral gender quotas**

Electoral gender quotas range from **legal** quotas introduced by means of constitutional amendment or changing the electoral laws to **voluntary party** quotas introduced by major political parties voluntarily setting a quota within their own party rules.<sup>25</sup> International IDEA has identified the most common types of political quotas used to address the under-representation of women in parliament as follows:<sup>26</sup>

#### **Reserved seats**

- These are legal quotas mandated in a country’s constitution that set aside a certain number or percentage of parliamentary seats that other groups are ineligible to contest.

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21. United Nations, [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#), adopted 18 December 1979, accessed 6 August 2013.

22. [US Merit Systems Protection Board](#) website, accessed 20 August 2013.

23. ML Krook, J Lovenduski and J Squires, ‘Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand: gender quotas in the context of citizenship models’, in Dahlerup, *Women, quotas and politics*, op.cit., p. 197.

24. D Dahlerup, ‘About quotas’, [quotaProject: Global database of quotas for women](#), accessed 18 July 2013.

25. Quotas are also used to boost the presence of other under-represented groups in parliament based on ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, class, disability or educational status. New Zealand for example has a long-established practice of reserved seats for Maori.

26. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), quotaProject, [Global database of quotas for women](#), accessed 11 July 2013.

- Reserved seats may involve appointment or election, and may be implemented according to a prescribed process or formula. Samoa is a recent example of a country that has passed legislation establishing a gender quota system by introducing reserved seats for women.<sup>27</sup>

### Legislative candidate quotas

- Legislative quotas require political parties to nominate or preselect a certain proportion of women as candidates for election, although they do not guarantee women's representation in the parliament.
- Legislative quotas ensure that political parties are committed to finding suitable women candidates, and may include incentives to support them or legal sanctions for non-compliance. The United Nations for example provided special funds to Timor Leste during the country's transition to democracy, to support training of women candidates and granted extra time on radio and television for parties with a minimum of 30 per cent women on their candidate lists.<sup>28</sup> More recently, the Republic of Ireland has passed legislation requiring the country's political parties to nominate a minimum of 30 per cent of candidates from both sexes, or lose half of their political campaign funding.<sup>29</sup>

### Voluntary party quotas

- Voluntary quotas are those adopted voluntarily by political parties and have no legal status. Individual parties may adopt a quota requiring that women comprise a certain proportion of candidates nominated or preselected to represent the party in an election. Voluntary party measures may range from recommendations (or 'soft' quotas) to mandatory rules and requirements such as alternating male and female names on the party list (also known as the zipper system). Parties may also embrace organisational quotas to boost women's representation in internal party decision-making positions.
- Legal candidate quotas and voluntary political party quotas are the most common types of quota systems in use amongst the current top 50 IPU-ranked countries with women in national parliaments, and eight of the top 50 countries combine both legislated and voluntary quotas (see Appendix 1).

### Influencing factors

The success of candidate quotas depends in part on having the 'right' kind of quota law and implementing it under the 'right' conditions. Academics specialising in the study of gender quotas have identified a range of factors that influence their effective implementation. For example, Pippa Norris states that:

Variation in the effectiveness of the quotas can be explained by whether the PR [Proportional Representation] list is open or closed (with the latter most effective), the existence of placement mandates (requiring parties to rank women candidates in high positions on closed party lists), district magnitude (the higher the number of candidates in a district, the more likely quotas are to work), and good faith party compliance.<sup>30</sup>

Dahlerup concludes that passing a quota law to ensure that women achieve 30 per cent of parliamentary seats is not sufficient. Other factors need to be taken into account:

- The more vague the regulations, the higher the risk that the quota regulations will not be properly implemented. Quotas for candidates do not automatically lead to the election of more women.
- Pressure from women's organisations and other groups is necessary for the successful implementation of quotas. It is also crucial to have at least one major parliamentary party that supports them.
- There must be monitoring of and sanctions for non-compliance with the quota requirement.<sup>31</sup>

27. Parliament of Samoa, [Constitution Amendment Act 2013](#), accessed 15 July 2013.

28. S Sunn Bush, 'International politics and the spread of quotas for women in legislatures', *International Organization*, 65(1), January 2011, pp. 103–37.

29. '[Gender quota legislation passes all stages of Oireachtas](#)', *thejournal.ie*, 20 July 2012, accessed 7 August 2013.

30. P Norris, '[Increasing women's representation in government: what strategies would work best for Afghanistan?](#)', Prepared for Centre on International Cooperation, New York University, n.d., pp. 9–10, accessed 20 August 2013.

31. D Dahlerup, 'Increasing women's political representation: new trends in gender quotas', in J Ballington and A Karam, eds, [Women in parliament: beyond numbers](#), IDEA, Stockholm, 2005 (revised edition), Chapter 4, accessed 22 August 2013.



## Electoral system

The type of electoral system can determine who is elected, how a campaign is fought, and the role of political parties.<sup>32</sup> According to the IPU and International IDEA, women are generally three to four times more successful in being elected under proportional representation (PR) electoral systems than majoritarian systems based on single-member electorates. This is because PR systems tend to encourage political parties to seek a diverse range of candidates in order to attract a broader support base, and generally have a large number of candidate positions they can fill. 'The more seats elected from each constituency, the more women are likely to be elected.'<sup>33</sup>

Single-member electorates with the full preferential voting system, on the other hand, reduces the number of parties vying for election and makes it more likely that a single party can choose their local candidates without having to consider the gender balance of the party at a national level.<sup>34</sup> In 2012 more women were elected to parliament in countries with a PR electoral system than those with the first-past-the-post system, or a mixture of the two systems.<sup>35</sup> In Australia, for example, women have had a higher representation in the Senate (upper house) which uses the single transferrable vote (STV), a form of proportional representation, than in the House of Representatives (lower house) which uses the full preferential voting system for single-member electorates.<sup>36</sup> The proportional representation electoral system is also considered to have been the key factor in the adoption of quota systems in Africa, where several countries have now met or exceeded a 30 per cent quota for women parliamentarians.

There are, however, examples where a majoritarian electoral system has produced a successful quota system.<sup>37</sup> In 2005, for example, Tanzania amended its constitution to increase the proportion of reserved seats to 30 per cent, and also required that five out of ten seats be set aside for presidential appointees. As a result, the proportion of women increased after the 2005 national elections to comprise 30.4 per cent of the National Assembly.<sup>38</sup>

## Quota system

Constitutionally or legally mandated quotas introduced to 'kick-start' women's representation have produced rapid results in countries with historically low levels of women's representation. As academic Li-Ju Chen notes, legal gender quotas have been more commonly adopted in developing countries where women have not had equal access to political resources.<sup>39</sup> By their nature, voluntary political party quotas are simpler to introduce than legislated quotas. Nearly half (24) of the top 50 IPU-ranked countries have voluntary party quotas, including Australia. They enable a party to publicly demonstrate its policies on gender equality and may be used strategically, for example, when a party is keen to improve its electability by attracting more women voters.<sup>40</sup> Voluntary party quotas have been applied in different ways. For example, the 'zipper' system, popular in parts of Europe, requires party candidate lists to alternate between one male and one female candidate or that every three candidates must include one woman. The zipper system has been particularly effective in Sweden, where five parties have adopted voluntary party quotas to achieve a gender balance and resulted in a consistently high proportion of women elected to parliament over the past 15 years.<sup>41</sup>

'Soft quotas' are the most common type of quota adopted in liberal democracies such as United States, Australia and New Zealand where political parties tend to embrace the idea that gender parity will occur gradually over

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32. S Larserud and R Taphorn, *Designing for equality: best-fit, medium-fit and non-favourable combinations of electoral systems and gender quotas*, International IDEA, Sweden, 2007, accessed 22 October 2013.

33. Norris, 'Increasing women's representation in government', op.cit., p. 2.

34. Fraenkel, *The impact of electoral systems*, op.cit., p. 78; IPU, 'Increased women's political participation still dependent on quotas', op.cit.; Norris, 'The impact of electoral reform on women's representation', op.cit.

35. IPU, 'Increased women's political participation still dependent on quotas', op.cit.

36. S Bennett and R Lundie, *Australian electoral systems*, Research paper, 5, 2007–8, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2007, accessed 18 July 2013.

37. ML Krook, J Lovenduski and J Squires, 'Gender quotas and models of political citizenship', *British Journal of Political Science*, 39, 26 August 2009, p. 793, accessed 8 August 2013.

38. Fridell, Consolidated response, op.cit.

39. L-J Chen, 'Do gender quotas influence women's representation and policies?', *The European Journal of Comparative Economics*, 7(1), 2010, pp. 13–60.

40. P Van Onselen, *Liberals and power: the road ahead*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2008, p. 200.

41. 'Differential impact of electoral systems on female political representation', op.cit.

time without the need for rules.<sup>42</sup> Political scientists Krook, Lovenduski and Squires describe ‘soft quotas’ as ‘a novel solution to the widespread resistance to quotas in states with liberal citizenship models’. Citing the situation in New Zealand where the number of women candidates increased following ‘women-friendly’ electoral reforms introduced in 1993, they conclude that:

the success of soft quotas has led to widespread complacency among all parties that these trends will continue upward, leading many to claim that women no longer need ‘special treatment’ in order to be elected to top political positions.<sup>43</sup>

Certain types of quota systems tend to be associated with particular regions. Reserved seats, for example, are the most widespread gender quota system used in South Asia and in the Arab region, where this type of quota system has been adopted for other under-represented groups. Reserved seats have also been adopted in a number of Sub-Saharan countries, as well as in some countries of Asia and the Pacific. Legal candidate quotas are the preferred system in Latin America and the Balkans, while voluntary party quotas or targets are generally preferred in liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the Nordic region.<sup>44</sup>

**Table 2: Type of quota system adopted by top 50 IPU-ranked countries for women in national parliament**

Chamber	Reserved seats	Legislated candidate quotas	Voluntary party quotas
Lower or single House	9	21	-
Upper House	4	7	-
-			26

Sources: IPU [Women in national parliaments](#) and IDEA [Quota Project database](#)<sup>45</sup>

### **Parties as ‘gatekeepers’**

Political parties are ‘gatekeepers to political office’ because of their role in the candidate selection process.<sup>46</sup> According to IDEA, they are ‘entrusted with perhaps the most strategic responsibility in a democracy—to prepare and select candidates for election and to support them in positions of leadership and governance’.<sup>47</sup> The degree to which parties support gender equality is generally determined by their culture and rules. For example, parties may regard women candidates as an electoral advantage, demonstrating their commitment to gender equality.

However, even with candidate quotas, research on the implementation of gender quotas in different countries shows that a placement mandate is generally necessary in order to ensure that parties do not place women in unelectable positions on their candidate lists. A 2009 report by the European Commission, for example, noted that women were consistently being placed in lower positions on the list, resulting in a discrepancy between the number of women candidates and the share of women actually elected to the lower houses of parliament in European Union member states. In Mexico, a gender quota law was passed in 2002 requiring women to be placed in winnable positions on party lists, and not on the bottom of lists or identified as ‘alternates’ as had occurred previously.<sup>48</sup>

‘[T]he harshest battles are fought within political parties, for positions of power ... As a future political career in Mexican politics seems to be dependent on ties and loyalty to dominant leaders and groups, gender quotas are mainly a threat to male *party* colleagues .... Without strict and transparent rules on how to select women candidates, quota legislation provides no solution to the fairly undemocratic practices of candidate selection.’<sup>49</sup>

42 Exceptions include the Australian Labor Party and British Labour Party, both of which have adopted formal quota policies.

43. Krook et al, Gender quotas and models of political citizenship, op.cit., p. 788.

44. Dahlerup, What are the effects of electoral gender quotas?, op.cit.

45. IPU, [Women in national parliaments](#), as at 1 October 2013, accessed 11 November 2013; IDEA Quota Project, [Global database of quotas for women](#), accessed 11 July 2013.

46. Sawyer, ‘Representation of women’, op.cit., p. 9; RE Matland, ‘Enhancing women’s political participation: legislative recruitment and electoral systems’, in J Ballington and A Karam, eds, [Women in parliament: beyond numbers](#), IDEA, Stockholm, 2005 (revised edition), pp. 93–4.

47. Ballington and Karam, *Women in parliament*, ibid., p. 28.

48. Godwin, *Awaiting the watershed*, op.cit.

49. P Zetterberg, ‘The downside of gender quotas? Institutional constraints on women in Mexican state legislatures’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 61(3), 2008, p. 455.

Some countries impose legal sanctions on parties if they fail to comply with gender-based quota requirements. In Ireland, for example, parties stand to lose 50 per cent of their state funding unless at least 30 per cent of their candidates are women and 30 per cent men, with the quota increasing to 40 per cent after seven years.<sup>50</sup> However, not even regulated sanctions may be effective in enforcing a quota system. France, for example, became the first country in the world to introduce 50 per cent or 'parity' quotas for most elections, but sanctions for non-compliance failed to change party preselection practices at the national level, with the result that women's representation in the French Parliament is still well below parity (see Appendix 1).<sup>51</sup>

### **Cultural and social factors**

Whilst quotas represent a temporary special measure to 'fast-track' women into parliament, it is widely acknowledged that long-term strategies are usually needed to address cultural, social and economic barriers that prevent women from standing for or being elected to parliament. Women tend to be more successful in societies where attitudes towards the roles of men and women are more egalitarian, while traditional roles and attitudes that differentiate the roles of women and men may serve to discourage women from pursuing careers in public life and present barriers to them seeking elected office.<sup>52</sup> Recent scholarship on quotas points to a trend away from gender differences to those that highlight the benefits of gender balance in political and social institutions.<sup>53</sup>

In some countries longer-term changes in community attitudes to women in politics are gradually being achieved through education, initiatives to combat stereotypes, providing opportunities and support for women to become candidates, as well as generational change.<sup>54</sup> International IDEA has produced a handbook for women's political representation that explains the steps involved in getting elected to parliament, noting how party rules and norms, together with the electoral system, access to resources, and the socio-political environment, influence the ability of women candidates to run for office.<sup>55</sup> Other countries have introduced quotas as part of a broader strategy of cultural and institutional reform. The former Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, for example, describes the gradual process of change undertaken in her country:

One cannot deal with the problem of female representation by a quota system alone. Political parties, the educational system, NGOs, trade unions, churches—all must take responsibility within their own organizations to systematically promote women's participation, from the bottom up. This will take time. It will not happen overnight, or in one year or five years; it will take one or two generations to realize significant change. This is what we are working on in Sweden. We did not start with a quota system. First we laid the groundwork to facilitate women's entry into politics. We prepared the women to ensure they were competent to enter the field; and we prepared the system, which made it a little less shameful for men to step aside. Then we used quotas as an instrument in segments and institutions where we needed a breakthrough.<sup>56</sup>

### **The parliamentary environment**

According to IDEA, since political life is dominated by men, parliaments tend to be organised around a set of standardised rules, operating procedures and institutional facilities that may deter women from entering politics or make it difficult for women MPs to function effectively. The IPU has acknowledged that this is a significant issue and has recently adopted an action plan to promote parliamentary reform, including provision of gender-sensitive facilities, working conditions and recruitment into parliamentary leadership:

A gender-sensitive parliament is a parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its composition, structures, operations, methods and work. Gender-sensitive parliaments remove the barriers to women's full participation and offer a positive example or model to society at large. They ensure that their operations and resources are used effectively towards promoting gender equality. A gender-sensitive parliament is

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50. International IDEA quota project, [Ireland](#), accessed 15 August 2013.

51. D Dahlerup and L Freidenvall, 'Quotas as a "fast track" to equal representation for women', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(1), March 2005, pp. 40–1, accessed 22 August 2013.

52. See for example Commonwealth of Australia, [Tonga and Vanuatu: Report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation](#), 22 July to 1 August 2009, p. 20, accessed 6 August 2013; United Nations Development Programme, 'UNDP-USP panel discussion considers whether quotas to promote women in parliament should be a Pacific priority', Pacific Centre, Press release, 9 March 2013, accessed 8 August 2013.

53. Bacchi, 'Arguing for and against quotas', op.cit., p. 46.

54. Fiji Women's Rights Movement, [Balancing the power](#), op.cit.; P Norris, [Gender equality in elected office in Asia Pacific: six actions to expand women's empowerment](#), United Nations Development Program, Thailand, September 2012, pp. 9–10, accessed 21 August 2013.

55. Matland, 'Enhancing women's political participation', op.cit.

56. B Dahl cited in Dahlerup, 'Increasing Women's Political Representation: New Trends in Gender Quotas', op.cit., p. 143.

one in which there are no barriers – substantive, structural or cultural – to women’s full participation and to equality between its men and women members and staff. It is not only a place where women can work, but also one where women want to work and contribute. A gender-sensitive parliament sets a positive example by promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment among society both nationally and internationally.<sup>57</sup>

## Electoral gender quotas in Australia

Gender quotas represent a form of affirmative action, a policy designed to remedy the effects of past discrimination on women. In Australia, affirmative action has been a central part of Australia’s workforce participation and gender equality legislative framework since the first equal opportunity legislation was passed in 1986.<sup>58</sup> More recently the focus has shifted to improving the gender balance in other areas of public life including leadership roles.<sup>59</sup> In 2010 the Australian Government committed to achieving at least 40 per cent representation for men and women on all Australian government boards by 2015.<sup>60</sup>

Historically, women have been poorly represented in the Australian Parliament despite being the first country in the world (in 1902) to grant women both the right to vote and to stand for federal parliament. It was another 41 years before the first two women entered federal parliament (in 1943), but progress remained slow. Action to address the under-representation of women in public decision-making gained momentum internationally in the 1990s, reflected in the Platform for Action adopted by the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.<sup>61</sup> Australia’s world ranking in terms of women in national parliament has fallen from 40<sup>th</sup> to 43<sup>rd</sup> position over the past three years.<sup>62</sup> In 2013, women comprise 30.8 per cent of the [federal parliament](#)<sup>63</sup>, just meeting the minimum level of representation considered by international experts to be the ‘critical minority’ necessary for women to influence decision-making.

In common with other liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom, quotas remain contentious as a mechanism for addressing the continuing under-representation of women in parliament. As the Australian Bureau of Statistics notes:

Although targets and quotas make a difference to the number of women in senior leadership roles, some believe quotas are wrong in principle, are tokenistic and counterproductive to changing the workplace culture .... Other ways suggested for increasing the number of women in senior leadership positions include reviewing diversity policies such as recruitment practices to address barriers, implementation of family friendly policies and flexible work options, and intervention programs to foster the career development of women employees.<sup>64</sup>

Whilst Australian governments have endorsed the concept of gender equality through a range of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws and policies, the matter of women’s parliamentary representation has been left to the political parties. In common with other countries, the argument about electoral gender quotas in Australia is divided along ideological lines, with the Australian Labor Party supporting voluntary party quotas and the Liberal–Nationals Coalition parties opposing them.

### **Australian Labor Party**

The Australian Labor Party adopted an Affirmative Action Rule in 1994 that committed the party to achieving preselection of women for 35 per cent of winnable seats at all parliamentary elections by 2002.<sup>65</sup> The policy had its genesis in the 1970s when the ALP, having suffered electoral defeat, recognised the need to attract more

57. Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments](#), 2012, accessed 20 August 2013.

58. The *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986* was amended in 1999 and 2012 (see current legislation: [Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Act 2012](#)).

59. E Broderick, [Gender equality blueprint \(2010\)](#), Australian Human Rights Commission, June 2010, Recommendation 7, accessed 20 August 2013.

60. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, [Gender balance on Australian government boards report 2012-2013](#), 5 August 2013, accessed 20 August 2013.

61. M Sawyer, ‘Women and government in Australia’, in Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book of Australia, 2001*, 25 January 2001.

62. This ranking is based on the percentage of women members of parliament in the lower or single house of parliament in each of the 188 countries surveyed. See Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in national parliaments](#), as at 1 October 2013, accessed 11 November 2013.

63. See J Wilson, [Composition of Australian Parliaments by party and gender](#), as at 1 November 2013, accessed 11 November 2013. Australia is considered to be part of the Asia-Pacific region, and is included here in accordance with its regional categorisation by the IPU (Pacific) and IDEA’s Quota Project (Oceania).

64. [‘Women in leadership’](#), 4102.0 – Australian social trends, Dec 2012, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 11 December 2012, accessed 11 July 2013; C Fine, [‘Status quota: do mandatory gender quotas work?’](#), *The Monthly*, March 2012, accessed 11 September 2013.

65. ‘Our history’, EMILY’s List Australia, accessed 18 July 2013.

women to its ranks. In 1981, the party endorsed a quota requiring that women hold 25 per cent of all internal party positions. In 1996, the ALP established the National Labor Women's Network as the peak women's organisation within the party.<sup>66</sup> In the same year a group of Labor women formed EMILY's List Australia, based on a similar organisation in the United States, to assist progressive Labor women in their electoral campaigning. Between 1994 and 2010 the preselection of women candidates increased from 14.5 per cent to 35.6 per cent. The party has adopted a 40:40:20 quota system since January 2012, as described in its Constitution:

The ALP is committed to men and women in the Party working in equal partnership. It is our objective to have equal numbers of men and women at all levels in the Party organisation, and in public office positions the Party holds. To achieve this the Party adopts a comprehensive affirmative action model of 40:40:20, as set out below, whereby a minimum of 40 per cent of relevant positions shall be held by either gender.<sup>67</sup>

This means that 40 per cent of seats held by Labor will be filled by women, and not less than 40 per cent by men. The remaining 20 per cent may be filled by candidates of either gender. There is pressure within the party to increase the quota to 50 per cent. Members have expressed a range of views about quotas, ranging from concern about tokenism and preserving the concept of merit, to those who point to the results in the number of Labor women in parliament.

### **Coalition parties**

The Coalition parties, comprising the Liberal Party of Australia and the Nationals, do not formally support gender quotas on the basis that they contradict the principle of merit for political candidates. Instead, the parties have adopted strategies to develop women's networks within the party and provide support for women to stand for preselection.<sup>68</sup>

Formed in 1944, the Liberal Party inherited a tradition of women's political activism amongst non-Labor activists, attracting women with political skills to the party and directly canvassing women's votes by offering a women's policy statement in the party's policy platform for the 1946 and 1949 elections.<sup>69</sup> In 1945 the party established a Federal Women's Committee which was incorporated in the party's Constitution in 1946. The Committee has had representation on the Federal Executive since then, and the party's federal Constitution requires the vice-president of the party to be a woman.

Liberal Party historian, Margaret Fitzherbert, notes that a decline in the number of Liberal women contesting seats in the federal parliament over the following decades motivated women members to mount a campaign to support more women candidates in the leadup to the 1996 federal election. Rejecting the quota approach of the ALP, the Liberals set up support structures for women in the party and argued for more women candidates. Their success in the 1996 election was regarded as a vindication of the party's rejection of quotas.<sup>70</sup> In 2010, however, Liberal Senator the Hon Judith Troeth circulated a policy paper proposing that the quota for women in the organisational wing of the party (introduced in 1944) should be applied to the parliamentary party. She stated that women are not 'progressing through party preselection to parliament and beyond', and called for women candidates to be endorsed in a minimum of 40 per cent of its seats for the 2010 federal election.<sup>71</sup> In a related media article, she commented on the 'customary defence against quotas in the "what about merit?" argument':

If it's demeaning for women to have quotas, it's equally demeaning to sit in a Parliamentary party room for 20 years without seeing a progressive increase in the number of women members. As if those handful of women members who are there were the only "women of merit" who put themselves forward for preselection!<sup>72</sup>

66. The Australian Women's Register, [National Labor Women's Network](#), accessed 24 July 2013.

67. Australian Labor Party, [National Platform](#), Constitution and rules, Part B: Rules, 10, p. 239.

68. J McCann and J Wilson, [Representation of women in Australian parliaments](#), Background Note, Parliamentary Library, 7 March 2012, accessed 15 June 2013.

69. M Fitzherbert, '[Liberal women in parliament: what do the numbers tell us and where to from here?](#)', Lectures in the Senate Occasional Lecture Series, and other papers, Papers on Parliament, 59, Canberra, 31 August 2012, accessed 15 July 2013.

70. Ibid.

71. Senator the Hon J Troeth, '[Modernising the parliamentary Liberal Party by adopting the organisational wing's quota system for preselections](#)', Policy Paper, 23 June 2010, accessed 24 July 2013.

72. J Troeth, '[A quota will level the playing field for Liberal women](#)', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 2013, accessed 24 July 2013.

The Nationals, a party which represents the interests of regional Australians, has its origins in the Australian Country Party formed in 1920.<sup>73</sup> In 1959 the party created a Women's Federal Council (initially called the Women's Conference) within the party's Federal Council to contribute to party policy and decision-making processes. The party 'supports and encourages participation by women in all aspects of the party or standing for parliament'.<sup>74</sup>

### **Minor parties**

Australia's larger minor parties, the Australian Democrats (formed in 1977) and Australian Greens (formed in 1992), have both embraced gender equity as a founding principle. Neither party has adopted a gender quota, although each has achieved a relatively high percentage of women candidates, and both have had women as party leaders. The Australian Greens reached a record high for any party in the 2010 federal election, with women comprising 71.4 per cent or more than two-thirds of their total candidates. They have attributed their higher female representation in parliament to the party's open decision-making and preselection processes, a strong emphasis on grassroots membership, and the party's acceptance of gender equity as a core principle.<sup>75</sup>

### **Conclusions**

- Electoral gender quotas are a type of special measure or affirmative action designed to increase women's political representation. They may be mandated through constitutional or legislative change to create reserved seats or legal candidate quotas, or achieved through voluntary quotas adopted by individual political parties.
- Gender quotas have gained the support of international organisations, including the United Nations, and have proven to be effective in 'fast-tracking' women's political representation. However, they continue to be controversial, particularly in liberal democracies where critics oppose them on the basis that they discriminate against men and undermine the selection of candidates or parliamentarians on the basis of merit.
- Certain factors contribute to the effectiveness of quota systems:
  - a commitment to women's political representation from key decision-makers
  - political parties play a crucial role as gatekeepers in recruiting, nominating and pre-selecting candidates
  - voluntary party quotas require rules concerning the order of candidates on party lists to ensure that women candidates have an equal opportunity to contest 'winnable' seats
  - candidate quotas, whether legal or voluntary, may require additional incentives or sanctions for non-compliance in order to be effective
  - quota systems should be supported by appropriate mentoring and training programs to attract and support women candidates, and
  - gender-sensitive parliaments are necessary to 'remove the barriers to women's full participation and offer a positive example or model to society at large'.<sup>76</sup>
- While gender quotas offer a mechanism for increasing the number of women in parliament, countries also need longer-term strategies that address historical barriers to women's participation and actively promote gender-sensitive parliaments.

73. It was renamed the National Country Party in 1975 and the National Party of Australia in 1982, and is commonly referred to as 'The Nationals'.

74. 'The Nationals' women', The Nationals website, accessed 25 July 2013.

75. McCann and Wilson, *Representation of women in Australian parliaments*, op.cit.; 'Women', The Greens website, accessed 20 August 2013.

76. Palmeri, *Gender-sensitive parliaments*, op.cit.

## Appendix 1: Women in national parliaments—top 50 IPU-ranked countries and gender quota system/s (as at 1 October 2013)

Key: R = Reserved seats  
 LC = Legislated candidate quotas  
 V = Voluntary party quotas

Rank	Country	Lower/Single House	Upper House	Quota type		
		Women %	Women %	Lower/single House	Upper House	Voluntary party quotas
1	Rwanda	63.8	38.5	R	R	-
2	Andorra	50.0	-	-	-	-
3	Cuba*	48.9	-	-	-	-
4	Sweden	44.7	-	-	-	V
5	Seychelles	43.8	-	-	-	-
6	Senegal	42.7	-	LC	-	-
7	Finland	42.5	-	-	-	-
8	South Africa	42.3	32.1	-	-	V
9	Nicaragua	40.2	-	-	-	V
10	Iceland	39.7	-	-	-	V
11	Norway	39.6	-	-	-	V
12	Mozambique	39.2	-	-	-	V
13	Denmark	39.1	-	-	-	-
14	Netherlands	38.7	36.0	-	-	V
14	Ecuador	38.7	-	LC	-	-
15	Costa Rica	38.6	-	LC	-	V
16	Timor-Leste	38.5	-	LC	-	-
17	Belgium	38.0	40.8	LC	LC	-
18	Argentina	37.4	38.9	LC	LC	V
19	Mexico	36.8	32.8	LC	LC	V
20	Germany	36.3	27.5	-	-	V
21	Spain	36.0	34.2	LC	LC	V
21	United Republic of Tanzania	36.0	-	R	-	-
22	Uganda	35.0	-	R	-	-
23	The F.Y.R. of Macedonia	34.1	-	LC	-	-
23	Angola	34.1	-	LC	-	-
24	Grenada	33.3	15.4	-	-	-
25	Serbia	33.2	-	LC	-	-
25	Nepal	33.2	-	LC	-	-
26	Slovenia	32.2	7.5	LC	-	V
26	New Zealand	32.2	-	-	-	-
27	Algeria	31.6	7.0	LC	-	V
28	Zimbabwe	31.5	47.5	R	LC	V
29	Italy	31.4	29.0	-	-	V
30	Guyana	31.3	-	LC	-	-
31	Cameroon	31.1	20.0	-	-	V
32	Burundi	30.5	46.3	R	R	-
33	Switzerland	29.0	19.6	-	-	V
34	Portugal	28.7	-	LC	-	-
35	Trinidad and Tobago	28.6	22.6	-	-	-
36	Ethiopia	27.8	16.3	-	-	V
37	Afghanistan	27.7	27.5	R	R	-
38	Philippines	27.1	25.0	-	-	V
39	France	26.9	22.2	LC	LC	V

40	Tunisia	26.7	-	LC	-	-
40	Lesotho	26.7	27.3	LC	-	-
41	Belarus	26.6	35.1	R	-	-
42	South Sudan	26.5	10.0	R	R	-
43	Australia	26.2	42.9	-	-	V
43	El Salvador	26.2	-	-	-	V
44	Bolivia	25.4	47.2	LC	LC	V
45	Iraq	25.2	-	LC	-	-
46	Lao People's Democratic Republic	25.0	-	-	-	-
47	Canada	24.7	37.9	-	-	V
48	Sudan	24.6	17.9	R	-	-
48	Bulgaria	24.6	-	-	-	-
49	Viet Nam	24.4	-	-	-	-
49	Namibia	24.4	26.9	-	-	V
50	Kazakhstan	24.3	4.3	-	-	-

Note: Countries are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in the lower or single House.

\*Cuba has no official quota system but uses other measures to increase gender equality<sup>77</sup>

Sources: IPU [Women in national parliaments](#); IDEA [Quota Project database](#)<sup>78</sup>

77. IA Luciak, '[Party and state in Cuba: gender equality in political decision making](#)', article prepared for American Political Science Association, n.d., accessed 22 October 2013.

78. IPU, [Women in national parliaments](#), as at 1 October 2013, accessed 11 November 2013; IDEA *Quota Project*, [Global database of quotas for women](#), accessed 1 September 2013. See also CA Shaffo, '[Gender and Ethiopian politics: the case of Birtukan Midekesa](#)', Thesis submitted to Central European University in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies, Budapest, Hungary, 2010, p. 33, accessed 22 October 2013; '[Belarus](#)', Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Knowledge Resource, 12–30 January 2004, accessed 22 October 2013.



## **Appendix 2: Arguments for and against electoral quotas for women's representation**

<b>Against</b>	<b>For</b>
Quotas are against the merit principle because they give preference to women over men.	Electoral quotas have proven to be the most effective way to achieve a better gender balance.
Quotas are undemocratic because voters should be able to decide who is elected.	Quotas give voters a chance to elect both women and men.
Quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their expertise, and women elected to fill quotas may not be seen as being equally competent.	Women have the right as citizens to equal representation.
More qualified candidates may be excluded to enable a quota to be filled.	Women's life experiences are as valid as men's life experiences in politics and parliaments.
Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within the party organization.	Women who are as well qualified as men are sometimes undervalued in a male-dominated political system or culture.
Quotas violate the principles of liberal democracy.	Quotas for women do not discriminate but rather compensate for barriers that prevent women from achieving equal representation in parliament.
Quotas may result in a less competent legislature.	Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimising the stress experienced by the 'token' woman.
Quotas give the erroneous idea that only women can represent women, while men can represent both men and women; this would work against women in gaining representation based on the political ideas they represent rather than on their gender.	Quotas can contribute to a process of democratisation by making the nomination process more transparent.
Quotas can act as an upper ceiling to women's participation rather than a lower floor.	If women perform well, voters are likely to be more willing to elect women candidates in future elections, even in the absence of quotas.
Women may be uneasy with being selected just because they are women, and may be stigmatised as 'quota women'.	'Critical mass' or increased representation will accelerate the likelihood that other women will stand and gain election by providing role models.
Legislated quotas (especially reserved seats) make women compete against women rather than campaign together to achieve greater influence.	Quotas 'fast-track' women's equal representation.
	More women in parliament benefits society by drawing on wider range of talents and resources and strengthening democratic participation.

Source: IDEA, [Electoral quotas for women](#)

### **Appendix 3: Gender quotas in Commonwealth parliaments**

- The 54 member states of the Commonwealth, including Australia, are committed to the principles enshrined in the [Commonwealth Charter](#), including ‘gender equality and women’s empowerment’. Seven of the 54 [Commonwealth member states](#) are ranked in the top 50 IPU-ranked countries for women in national parliament (see Appendix 1). However, there are many countries amongst them that face both gender inequality and development issues.
- Quota systems exist in different forms and at different levels of governance in the Commonwealth, as shown in the table below.
- Twenty-one of the 54 member states currently have adopted some form of quota system at the national, sub-national, or political party level, while several others have been debating the adoption of special measures.
- Reserved seats have been introduced in 10 of the 21 countries at either the national or sub-national legislatures, or both.
- Legislated candidate quotas have been introduced in four countries, although only in one at the national level.
- Voluntary party quotas have been introduced in 11 countries including Australia.
- Eleven of the 21 Commonwealth countries with quota systems in place are in Africa, three in Asia and Europe respectively, two in the Pacific (including Samoa which adopted a reserved seat system in June 2013 and is yet to hold a national election), and two in the Americas.
- The following tables summarise gender quota systems used in Commonwealth countries and the percentage of women in their national parliaments.

**Table 3: Gender quota systems in Commonwealth countries (by region)**

Key: R = Reserved seats

LC = Legislated candidate quotas

V = Voluntary party quotas

Region	Country	National		Sub-national	Voluntary party quota
		Lower/single House	Upper House		
Africa	Botswana	-	-	-	V
	Cameroon	-	-	-	V
	Kenya	R	R	R	V
	Lesotho	LC	-	R	-
	Mozambique	-	-	-	V
	Namibia	-	-	LC	V
	Rwanda	R	R	R	-
	Sierra Leone	-	-	R	-
	South Africa	-	-	LC	V
	Tanzania	R	-	R	-
Uganda	R	-	R	-	
Americas	Canada	-	-	-	V
	Guyana	LC	-	-	-
Asia	Bangladesh	R	-	R	-
	India	-	-	R	-
	Pakistan	R	R	R	-
Europe	Cyprus	-	-	-	V
	Malta	-	-	-	V
	United Kingdom	-	-	-	V
Pacific	Australia	-	-	-	V
	Samoa	R	-	-	-

Sources: [Commonwealth website](#) and IDEA [Quota Project database](#)<sup>79</sup>

79. The Commonwealth, [Member States](#), accessed 17 October 2013; IDEA Quota Project, [Global database of quotas for women](#), accessed 30 September 2013.

**Table 4: Percentage of women in Commonwealth parliaments with gender quotas (by region)**

Key: sub-nat. = sub-national level (regional or local government)

Region	Country	Women in national parliament		Quota type/s			IPU ranking
		Lower/single House %	Upper House %	Reserved	Legislated candidate	Voluntary party	
Africa	Botswana	7.9	-	-	-	√	125
	Cameroon	13.9	20	-	-	√	31
	Kenya	18.6	26.5	√	-	√	77
	Lesotho	26.7	27.3	√ sub-nat.	√		40
	Mozambique	39.2	-	-	-	√	12
	Namibia	24.4	26.9	-	√ sub-nat.	√	49
	Rwanda	56.3	38.5	√	-	-	1
	Sierra Leone	12.4	-	√ sub-nat.	-	-	104
	South Africa	42.3	32.1	-	√ sub-nat.	√	8
	Tanzania	36	-	√	-	-	21
Uganda	35	-	√	-	-	22	
Americas	Canada	24.7	37.9	-	-	√	47
	Guyana	31.3	-	-	√	-	30
Asia	Bangladesh	19.7	-	√	-	-	72
	India	11	10.6	√ sub-nat.	-	-	110
	Pakistan	20.7	16.3	√	-	-	67
Europe	Cyprus	10.7	-	-	-	√	112
	Malta	14.3	-	-	-	√	94
	United Kingdom	22.5	22.6	-	-	√	58
Pacific	Australia	24.7	38.2	-	-	√	43
	Samoa	4.1	-	√	-	-	136

Sources: [Commonwealth website](#); IPU [Women in national parliaments](#); and IDEA [Quota Project database](#)<sup>80</sup>

## Africa

According to the IPU's regional averages, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have an average of 21.7 per cent women in their national legislatures (both Houses combined).<sup>81</sup> Countries in this region have made substantial progress in achieving a 'critical mass of women leaders' in political and public affairs since the 1990s, and the region leads the world in introducing gender quotas.<sup>82</sup> Recent analysis by the Electoral Knowledge Network identifies several factors that have contributed to this region's strong uptake of gender quotas including the 'liberation ideology' of political parties, the increasingly powerful women's movement as a result of their involvement in the liberation struggles, and the opportunity for electoral reform during the reconstruction of countries following conflict or revolution.<sup>83</sup>

80. The Commonwealth, [Member States](#), accessed 30 September 2013; IPU, [Women in national parliaments](#), as at 1 October 2013, accessed 11 November 2013; IDEA *Quota Project*, [Global database of quotas for women](#), accessed 30 September 2013.

81. IPU, [Women in national parliaments](#), as at 1 October 2013, accessed 11 November 2013.

82. Fridell, Consolidated response, op.cit.

83. 'Gender quotas in Africa', [ACE: The Electoral Knowledge Network](#), 30 July 2012, accessed 30 September 2013.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Quota status</i>
Rwanda	Rwanda tops the IPU's ranking of 188 countries worldwide with 63.8 per cent of women in the lower house of its national parliament (as at 1 October 2013). South Africa is considering amendments to its <i>Electoral Act</i> to require that all political parties have at least 50 per cent representation by women in the lead-up to the 2014 elections. <sup>84</sup>
Namibia	Namibia has legislated candidate quotas (at the sub-national level) and voluntary party quotas. The constitution empowers parliament to enact legislation to address past discriminatory laws or practices and encourage women to 'play a full, equal and effective role in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation' (Article 23(3)). Whilst party quotas have been effective in increasing the proportion of women in the National Assembly from 6.9 per cent in 1989 to 24 per cent following the most recent national election, voluntary party quotas have resulted in women being placed too low on party lists to achieve parity. <sup>85</sup>
Kenya	Kenya has both reserved seats and voluntary party quotas. The 2009 Political Parties Act (Article 30, 4) created a Support Fund for Political Parties only available to parties in which women comprise at least a third of the total membership. New constitutional provisions for gender equality in the electoral system were first implemented in the March 2013 general elections. <sup>86</sup>

## **Americas**

In the countries of North and South America, women represent an average of 24.9 per cent of the national parliaments (both Houses combined).<sup>87</sup>

<i>Country</i>	<i>Quota status</i>
Canada	Canada is the only Commonwealth country in this region to have some form of quota system. Canada's total representation of women is 31.1 per cent. Canada and Australia are similar in having voluntary party quotas. <sup>88</sup>

## **Asia**

According to the IPU's regional averages, countries in Asia have an average of 18.5 per cent of women in their national legislatures (both Houses combined).<sup>89</sup> Three Commonwealth countries (**Bangladesh, India and Pakistan**) all have some form of quota system at the local government level. The quotas were introduced in the 1990s for directly elected reserved seats. The percentage of reserved seats for women was subsequently increased to 33 per cent in India and Pakistan and to 25 per cent in Bangladesh. These quotas have gone some way to addressing the 'historical inequality' of women, enabling them to participate in the public sphere at the local level although this has not necessarily translated into an increase in women's status or to representation in national parliament. According to one study, the quotas have had a positive impact on 'familial and institutional relations even though this impact is rather fragile and will need further nurturing in order to be consolidated'.<sup>90</sup>

<i>Country</i>	<i>Quota status</i>
India	The Indian Parliament already had reserved seats for certain groups including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes when it passed a constitutional amendment

84. J Selfe, '[South Africa: DA will fight against 50-50 gender quotas](#)', Democratic Alliance press release, *All Africa*, 2 September 2012, accessed 30 September 2013.

85. Namibia: women's representation quotas, [Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa](#), December 2009, accessed 31 January 2013.

86. IDEA, quotaProject, [Country overview: Republic of Kenya](#), accessed 15 July 2013.

87. IPU, [Women in national parliaments](#), op.cit.

88. IPU, [Women in national parliaments](#), as at 1 October 2013, accessed 11 November 2013; M Godwin, '[Awaiting the watershed: women in Canada's parliament](#)', *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, 33(2), 2010, accessed 30 September 2013.

89. IPU, [Women in national parliaments](#), op.cit.

90. SM Rai et al, p. 229.

to reserve one third of seats by direct elections in local municipal bodies and rural panchayats (village councils) in 1993 as part of an anti-poverty measure. As a result, the number of women councillors has increased accordingly, and research suggests that there have been 'profound consequences' such as new policy priorities, changing perceptions of women's abilities, and raised aspirations and educational achievement for girls. In 2010, the upper house of India's Parliament agreed to a constitutional amendment that would reserve a third of lower house and state assembly seats for women, but the lower house did not pass the amendment which required a two-thirds majority to become law. Critics have argued that quotas will encourage 'undeserving' females to get into parliament, or that such quotas will widen existing social divisions in the country.<sup>91</sup>

#### Bangladesh

A quota system was first introduced by the 1972 Constitution (originally providing for 15 reserved seats for women, out of 315 seats, for a period of 10 years). In 1978 a presidential proclamation enlarged the number of reserved seats to 30 and extended the period of reservation to 15 years from the date of promulgation of the constitution of the Republic in December 1972. The constitutional provision lapsed in 1987 and was re-incorporated in the constitution by an amendment in 1990 to be effective for 10 years from the first meeting of the legislature next elected. This provision lapsed in 2001. The Bangladeshi Parliament passed a constitutional amendment in 2004 to reintroduce quotas for women. The number of seats in parliament was raised from 300 to 345, of which the additional 45 seats (13 per cent) were reserved for women. On 30 June 2011 the number of reserved seats was increased from 45 to 50, bringing the total number of seats to 350. The reserved seats are divided among the political parties based on the proportion of seats they won in the election.<sup>92</sup>

#### Pakistan

60 seats of the total 342 seats in the national assembly (18 per cent) are reserved for women. These seats are allocated to four provinces in the following manner: Punjab – 35 seats reserved for women; Sindh province – 14 seats; North West Frontier Province (NWFP) – eight seats; Baluchistan – three seats. Following the elections, these seats are allocated to the political parties proportionally, in line with the number of votes they have received. Parties nominate and ultimately elect the women to the special seats. Seventeen out of the 100 seats in the Senate are reserved for women. Members of the Senate are indirectly elected by member of the provincial councils and by members of the lower house.<sup>93</sup>

### Europe

The European Union established gender equality as one of its founding values. Women currently hold an average of 35 per cent of seats in the European Parliament. The numbers are lower in individual European national parliaments where women comprise an average of 23.5 per cent of sitting parliamentarians, although the gender balance varies widely across the region.<sup>94</sup> Nordic countries, which have unicameral parliaments, have the highest overall regional representation of women in the world at 42 per cent, while Hungary and the Ukraine have the lowest numbers of women in parliament with less than 10 per cent. In Denmark, Sweden and Norway, political parties introduced voluntary gender quotas in the 1970s, and consistently achieve higher numbers of women in parliament than other members of the European Union.<sup>95</sup> Sweden, for example, is currently ranked fourth in the IPU's survey of women in national parliaments with 44.7 per cent of parliamentary seats held by women. The quota system has been abandoned in Denmark because it is considered to have achieved its

91. S Dutta, 'UN report backs India push for quotas', *The Wall Street Journal*, 1 October 2012, accessed 1 October 2013.

92. IDEA, quotaProject, [Country overview: Bangladesh](#), accessed 15 July 2013

93. IDEA, quotaProject, [Country overview: Pakistan](#), accessed 15 July 2013.

94. IPU, [Women in national parliaments](#), op.cit.; European Commission's Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy, [The quota-instrument: different approaches across Europe](#), op.cit.

95. 'Differential impact of electoral systems on female political representation', Directorate-General for Research, European Parliament, March 1997, accessed 18 July 2013.

objective.<sup>96</sup> Three Commonwealth countries in Europe have some form of quota system: Cyprus, Malta and the United Kingdom. All three are members of the European Parliament.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Quota status</i>
Cyprus	A National Action Plan for Gender Equality was initiated by the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and adopted in 2007. It provides for a 40 per cent target for participation of women in national political life, and most political parties in Cyprus have introduced voluntary quotas for party decision-making roles while some have adopted them for candidate lists. Nevertheless, the proportion of women elected to the national parliament fell from 14.6 per cent in 2006 to 10.7 per cent in the 2011 election. <sup>97</sup>
United Kingdom	In the United Kingdom the Labour Party has adopted various kinds of ‘soft’ quotas over the years as a way to increase the number of women candidates. Given that the United Kingdom’s electoral system has single-member districts and ‘winner-take-all’ elections, the emphasis has been on identifying potential candidates in each district for party shortlists. Initially, the Labour Party required at least one woman candidate in those districts where a woman had been nominated. In 1990 the party imposed a 40 per cent quota for women in all party positions and set a target for 50 per cent of the party’s parliamentary delegation to be women within ten years or three general elections. The party controversially adopted a formal quota policy in 1993 after these measures failed, requiring all-women shortlists in 50 per cent of all vacant Labour-held seats and 50 per cent of all winnable seats. The policy was overturned following legal claims that it was contrary to the UK’s <i>Sex Discrimination Act</i> , then reinstated after the Act was reformed in 2002. The impact of the policy can be seen in the Labour Party’s electoral results over the next few years, when ‘the number of women in the House of Commons doubled from 9.2 per cent in 1992 to 18.4 per cent in 1997, and the number declined to 17.9 per cent in 2001 because no party quota was in place, then increased to 19.5 per cent in 2005 after new quota polices were adopted’. <sup>98</sup> The United Kingdom’s Conservative Party has also adopted a ‘soft’ quota involving a priority list of equal numbers of men and women candidates for Conservative-held seats.
Malta	In Malta the Labour Party has introduced a voluntary party quota system. The country has recently opposed a proposal by the European Commission to enforce quotas for women on boards of publicly-listed companies. <sup>99</sup>

## **Pacific**

According to the IPU table of regional averages, the Pacific region has the world’s lowest proportion of women parliamentarians with 15.9 per cent (both Houses combined).<sup>100</sup> In the parliaments of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) members, women represent just 4.5% of all MPs.<sup>101</sup> The Beijing + 5 has set a participation target of 50 per cent representation for women in Australian and New Zealand parliaments, and 30 per cent representation for women in the PIF.<sup>102</sup> In 2012 the Australian Government committed \$320 million to support a 10-year initiative to ‘empower women and to promote gender equality in the Pacific’.<sup>103</sup> In March 2013 a panel discussion involving member nations of the United Nations Development Programme concluded that temporary special measures such as quotas should be considered to increase women in Pacific parliaments, but that they also

96. R Hausmann, LD Tyson and S Zahidi, *Measuring the global gender gap report 2011*, World Economic Forum, p. 22, accessed 7 August 2013.

97. European Institute for Gender Equality, ‘[Cyprus](#)’, accessed 14 October 2013.

98. Krook et al, ‘Gender quotas and models of political citizenship’, op.cit., pp. 794–5.

99. ‘[Minister Said lambasted over gender quotas](#)’, *Malta Star*, 11 September 2012, accessed 30 September 2013.

100. IPU, *Women in national parliaments*, op.cit.

101. Pacific Women’s Parliamentary Partnerships, *Submission to the Pacific Plan Review 2013*, 15 May 2013, accessed 23 July 2013.

102. Beijing + 5 was a special session of the General Assembly entitled ‘Women: 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century’ in 2000 at which governments reaffirmed their commitment to the goals of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

103. AusAID, ‘[New partnership to empower Pacific women](#)’, 30 August 2012, accessed 15 July 2013.

require 'long-term strategies to address cultural, social and economic barriers to women's election'.<sup>104</sup> Three Commonwealth countries in the Pacific region have some type of quota system: Australia has voluntary party quotas, Samoa has recently established reserved seats, and the Solomon Islands has announced that reserved seats will be introduced in 2014.<sup>105</sup> The New Zealand Labour Party is considering a proposal for a 45 per cent voluntary party quota for the party's caucus in 2014, and 50 per cent by 2017.<sup>106</sup>

<i>Country</i>	<i>Quota status</i>
Australia	Australia is one of ten Commonwealth countries in which one or more major political party has adopted a voluntary political party quota system. It is the only Commonwealth member in the Pacific to do so. The Australian Labor Party adopted a voluntary political party quota in 1994. Some of the minor parties have embraced embraced gender equity as a founding principle.
Solomon Islands	In the Solomon Islands the governing National Coalition for Reform and Advancement (NCRA) has announced a reserved seats policy in order to 'fast-track' women's political participation in parliament, by setting a quota of 10 reserved seats to be implemented by 2014. The reserved seats will only be contested by women candidates, 'one reserved seat per province with the seat rotating amongst the province's constituencies each election'. The policy announcement follows the launch of the 2011 People's Survey, which indicated that there was strong support for the idea of reserved seats for women in parliament. The Prime Minister, Gordon Darcy Lilo, stated that the policy draws on a 'developmental approach rather than a rights-based approach'. <sup>107</sup>
Samoa	The Samoan Parliament passed the <a href="#">Constitutional Amendment Act 2013</a> in June 2013, introducing reserved seats for 10 per cent of the National Assembly for women members. The rule will apply to the National Assembly elections in 2016. <sup>108</sup> The system is based on a flexible formula whereby if no woman is elected to Parliament at the next elections, five women candidates who get the highest number of votes will occupy the allocated seats in Parliament and the number of seats in Parliament will be increased to 54 seats. If less than five women win seats in general elections candidates who secured the most votes will fill the allocated seats, while if five women candidates win seats in elections, system of reserved seats will not apply and the number of seats in Parliament will be 49. If the seat of an elected woman MP becomes vacant, and a man wins the seat in a subsequent by-election, a woman candidate in that by-election with the most votes becomes an MP to ensure the five seats remain occupied. If no woman candidate runs in that by-election a woman MP is chosen from the results of the last by-election or general election. If two or more women candidates get equal votes the winner will be decided by a lot before the Electoral Commissioner in the presence of the candidates or their authorised representatives and at least two police officers. No two women candidates from the same constituency may become an MP unless no other women candidate exists to make up the prescribed number of women MPs.

Source: Figures compiled by Politics and Public Administration, Parliamentary Library

104. 'UNDP-USP panel discussion considers whether quotas to promote women in parliament should be a Pacific priority', op.cit.

105. 'Reserved seats for women will take a developmental approach', op.cit.

106. V Small, 'Labour proposes "women only" rule', stuff.co.nz website, accessed 22 October 2013. New Zealand has a long-established practice of reserved seats for Maori, but there is no legislated quota system for women.

107. 'Reserved seats for women will take a developmental approach', 5 March 2012, Pacific Women in Politics website, accessed 30 September 2013.

108. Parliament of Samoa, [Constitution Amendment Act 2013](#), accessed 15 July 2013.



## Selected reading

### **International conventions and agreements**

- [The Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979
- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) adopted by the UN in 1995 includes a specific objective relating to 'Women in power and decision-making'
- [Beijing + 5](#), a special session of the General Assembly entitled 'Women: 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century' in 2000 at which governments reaffirmed their commitment to the goals of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing
- Goal 3 of the UN Millennium Development Goals: [Promote gender equality and empower women](#) adopted in 2010, which noted that 'women are slowly rising to political power, but mainly when boosted by quotas and other special measures', and
- Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly's [Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments](#) adopted in October 2012, including a commitment to increasing the number of women in parliament, achieving equality in participation and gender mainstreaming.

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