

# **Strategies to Enhance Women's Political Representation in Different Electoral Systems.**

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## **1. Introduction**

In 2005, women only occupy 16 percent of the parliamentary seats in the world, while men have 84 percent, implying that politics is still a heavily male-dominated arena ([www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)). Today, however, we see the emergence of new discourses of women's under-representation followed by many old as well as new strategies to change this under-representation.

In this paper I will discuss various strategies for enhancing women's representation in formal political institutions, and I will bring some of the results of my present research project on the new global trend to introduce electoral gender quotas. I will argue, firstly, that any choice of strategy must begin with a diagnosis of what are the causes of women's under-representation. Secondly, I will show the importance of various electoral systems for women's representation and for the choice of strategy.

It is a well-known fact that electoral systems based on proportional representation benefit women's political representation. On the average, the level of women's representation in parliaments is higher in systems that use PR than in plurality-majority systems<sup>1</sup> (Matland & Studlar 1996; Norris 2004). I will discuss why this is the case. Further, I will discuss the difficulties of constructing a quota system that will work in a plurality-majority system. Because of such difficulties, the gap between the majority system and the PR system in terms of women's representation might increase even more with the new trend to use electoral gender quotas at candidate nominations.

## **2. The connection between problem-diagnosis and choice of strategies**

Any choice of strategy to enhance women's political representation must start with an analysis of why women are under-represented and men over-represented. In actual politics we often, although not always, find an intimate connection between the strategies chosen to enhance women's political representation, and the perceptions of the problem. In the

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<sup>1</sup> The 'plurality-majority system' is here preferred to the more common 'majority system', because within the family of the plurality-majority system, only the Two Round System and the Alternative Vote system actually try to ensure an absolute majority for the winning candidate, while in the First-Past-The Post system as in UK, India and the US the winner only needs a plurality of votes to win the constituency.

following discussion, I am dealing with the strategic choices of those who want to increase women's representation, and I will leave aside those many circles that do not consider women's under-representation a problem at all. However, today one will notice a growing concern all over the world about the actual exclusion of women from political decision-making.

The argument made here is that strategies are chosen on the basis of a general perception of what the problem is. This may also be expressed as a question of how the problem of women's under representation is perceived – *the diagnosis of the problem*.

If the problem is understood a questions first and foremost of *women's lack of resources*, then the strategy to enhance women's political representation will typically be: educating women, among other methods by capacity building for potential female candidates.

If on the other hand the main problem is understood to be *discrimination of women*, claiming that direct and indirect mechanisms of exclusion are at work in the political system, then the strategy must be to change the way that the political institutions themselves function and work. The nomination process is one such institution that needs to be scrutinized. The Beijing Platform for Action from 1995 represents a change of discourse towards this second understanding.

The Beijing Platform has been very influential, and women's movements all over the world have attempted to give the controversial demand for gender quotas legitimacy by referring to the Platform for Action.<sup>1</sup> A discourse is here defined as interlinked constructions of meanings, which includes perceptions of possible actions (but not actual actions). Firstly, the Beijing Platform talks about 'discriminatory attitudes and practices' and 'unequal power relations' that lead to the under-representation of women in arenas of political decision-making. This may be labelled *a discourse of exclusion*. Whereas previously the focus was on women's lack of resources or lack of will to participate in politics, attention is now directed towards those institutional and cultural mechanisms of exclusion that prevent women from obtaining an equal share of political positions in most political institutions in the world. Importantly, in this new discourse, the responsibility for promoting change is shifted from the individual woman to those institutions that are, consequently, expected to take action to identify and correct the causes of women's under-representation.

Secondly, the demand for a certain minimum level of representation for women is being challenged by a new discourse of equal representation, often expressed by the term *gender balance*. WeDo's 50-50 campaign is a good example of this new discourse. Thus, the goal is no longer described as 'more women in politics' but as 'equal participation' and 'equitable distribution of power and decision-making at all levels' Somewhat contradictorily, however, the Beijing Platform also speaks of securing a 'critical mass', the latter often associated with figures of 20 or 30 per cent women (Dahlerup 1988, 1998; FWCW 1995: Art. 181-95).

Thirdly, affirmative action is suggested as a possible means of attaining the goal of women's equal participation in political decision-making, although the controversial word 'quotas' is not used. For governmental and public administration positions, it is recommended that the world's governments use 'specific targets and implementing measures ... if necessary through positive action' (FWCW 1995: Art. 190.a). Concerning elections, it is stated that governments should commit themselves to 'Take measures, including, where appropriate, in electoral systems that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and at the same levels as men' (FWCW 1995: Art. 190.b). Political parties should 'Consider examining party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women' (FWCW 1995: Art. 191.a).<sup>2</sup>

Even if the language is cautious, the Beijing Platform represents on the whole a new discourse, focusing on the mechanisms of exclusion through institutional practices, setting gender balance as the goal and demanding that governments and political parties commit themselves to affirmative action.

The general argument made in this paper is, that if women are under-represented because of open or indirect mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination, then educating women is the wrong strategy, and will tend not to have much effect. If the problem is not women's lack of resources, but lack of acknowledgement of those recourses and experiences that women

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<sup>2</sup> Some of these new formulations may in fact be found in the CEDAW convention from 1979. The convention recommends the states to adopt 'temporary special measures' (UN 1979: Art. 4). Also, the Interparliamentary Union, IPU, and other international and regional organizations formulated early on new claims for women's representation. However, it is the Beijing Platform that is most often referred to in the quota debate.

actually bring with them into political life, then there is not need to wait for women to be more educated or experienced.

### **3. The ‘fast track’ versus the ‘incremental track’ to gender balance in politics.**

One may identify two current tracks to gender balance in politics (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005). Constructed as an analytical distinction between discourses, the two tracks include different assumptions about historical development, different problem identifications with regard to the causes of women’s under-representation as well as differences in choice of strategy.

The primary problem, according to *the incremental track discourse*, is that women do not have the same political resources as men. While prejudice against women is recognized, it is assumed that this will eventually disappear as society develops. There is thus an inherent notion of gradualism, often embedded in an optimistic, linear view of progress.

In contrast, *the fast track discourse* rejects the idea of gradual improvement in women’s representation. It is even assumed that an increase in resources might not automatically lead to equal representation. And backlash may even occur. Exclusion and discrimination are regarded as the core of the problem identification and understanding, the solution to which could very well be affirmative action. Based on the new diagnosis of the problem associated with the fast track discourse, according to which gender balance will not come about ‘by itself’, there is a growing impatience among contemporary feminists, who are not willing to wait 70 to 80 years in order to achieve their goals. The responsibility for dealing with the under-representation of women rests with the political institutions. It follows from this understanding of women’s under-representation, that measures like electoral gender quotas for the recruitment and election of female candidates are necessary.

Electoral gender quotas represent ‘*the fast track*’ to equal representation of women and men in politics in contrast to ‘*the incremental track*’. Behind the fast track model is growing impatience with the slow pace of change of the position of women. The notion of the fast track versus the incremental track can be viewed as involving firstly two discourses, secondly different types of actual equality policies, and thirdly an account of the actual speed of historical development in women’s representation (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2003, 2005).

The Beijing Platform clearly represents the fast track discourse. This distinction between the two tracks may be relevant for many other policy areas but has been developed with respect to gender and political institutions.

In 1990 the United Nation's Economic and Social Council endorsed a target of 30 per cent women in decision-making positions in the world by 1995 (United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 1995). This target was far from being met. In 1995, only ten per cent of the world's parliamentarians were women, today only 16 percent.

The Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, have for a long time displayed the highest share of female politicians, consistently exceeding the 20 per cent threshold since the 1970s and 1980s. The rest of Europe, the Americas, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are all close to the world average, while the figure for the Pacific is only 10.9 per cent and in Arab countries 6.8 per cent. However, there are also great variations within regions, and today countries like Costa Rica, South Africa, Rwanda and Mozambique have overtaken industrialized nations like the United States and the United Kingdom, which in the House of Representatives and the House of Commons only have 15 and 19 per cent women, respectively. Today, we witness a challenge to the Nordic countries, which, together with the Netherlands, used to be very much alone at the top of the world ranking.

In the debate in Latin America, in South Africa and in many other countries, the extraordinarily high representation of women in Scandinavian parliaments has been used as an argument in support of the introduction of electoral gender quotas.<sup>3ii</sup> This argument is, however, somewhat misleading, since the real boom for women's representation in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden occurred in the 1970s and in Iceland in the 1980s, all before the introduction of any quotas. Gender quotas were introduced when women already comprised 20 to 30 per cent in these parliaments. Moreover, in the Nordic countries electoral quotas have always been voluntary, never a legal requirement, and are only used by some of the political parties at the centre and at the left (Freidenvall, Skjeie & Dahlerup in Dahlerup, forthcoming). In general, the Nordic countries come close to what we label *the incremental track* towards

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<sup>3</sup> For Argentina, the leading Latin American country concerning quotas: Oral communication from Mariá José Lubertino, president of the Instituto Social y Política de la Mujer. Professor of Human Rights and Guarantees at the Universidad de Buenos Aires.

equal political representation for women and men. It took approximately sixty years from women's enfranchisement for Denmark, Norway and Sweden to cross the 20 per cent threshold and seventy years to reach 30 per cent. *This means that the Nordic countries, in spite of the high level of women's representation, can no longer be considered the model, or at any rate the only model, for increasing women's representation.*

It has been argued that gender quotas only deal with the symptoms of women's under-representation, not its causes. From one perspective this seems correct. Gender quotas do not remove all barriers for women in society, be it prejudice against women or problems in combining work, family life and political obligations. However, seen from another perspective, gender quotas target exactly one of the main problem: the fact that the political parties to a much higher extend select males as their candidates for election than women, be it because of own prejudice or an anticipation of the prejudice of the voters. Gender quotas in a way represent a jumping over the historical barriers. It gives the voters a possibility to choose women candidates, which they may not have had before (within their preferred party). Opponents of gender quotas, however, argue that quotas violate the liberal principle of merit – let the best man (sic) win!

#### **4. Is gender quotas discrimination of voters? Of men?**

In order to answer the question of whether electoral gender quotas are in fact discrimination of men, we must look at how political systems function. The gatekeepers to the political arena are usually the political parties, because of their control the nomination process. The role of voters is often not as decisive as one would think. Who will be elected is frequently decided by the nomination committees of the political parties—they select the candidates and place them in good or bad constituencies in terms of the chances of being elected. Prior to the polls, the political parties usually know which seats are 'safe'. In all systems, it is important to examine who actually exercises control over the nomination process. In countries with a high level of female representation, women's organizations have consistently asked: who controls the nomination process?

The decision as to whether or not to introduce a quota is increasingly influenced by the recommendations of international organizations and by developments in different national

contexts. Electoral gender quotas are being introduced today in nations where women have been almost entirely excluded from politics, as well as in states with a long history of female involvement in the labor market and in political life, such as the countries of Scandinavia. The introduction of effective quota systems represents a shift in approach, from ‘equal opportunity’ to ‘equality of results’. However, since most quotas systems specify the number of women and men to be presented to voters on electoral lists, and not the gender distribution following the election, one might prefer to see electoral gender quotas rather as an example of ‘real equal opportunity’. Women and men have an equal chance to present themselves to the voters and in open lists PR-systems as well in majority systems voters have the choice of voting for a female or male candidate.

Hence some consider quotas to be a form of *discrimination and a violation of the principle of fairness*, while others view them as *compensation for structural barriers that prevent fair competition*. Quotas sometimes considered violating other principles like fairness, competence and individualism. Yet quotas are also seen as an efficient way of attaining ‘real’ equality, that is, ‘equality of results’ (Dahlerup 1998).

If we take the actual exclusion of women as the starting point, that is, if we recognize that many barriers exist that prevent women from entering the realm of politics, then quotas are not seen as discriminating (towards men), but instead, as compensation for all the obstacles that women are up against. When all of these impediments are removed, quotas will no longer be necessary, it is argued. In this respect, quotas are a temporary measure. It may take decades, though, before all social, cultural and political barriers preventing equal female representation are eradicated. Today, the very concept of a linear progressive development toward gender equality is even challenged by actual experiences of backlash and stand still when it comes to women’s representation in formal political institutions.

## **5. Gender quotas – a new trend in the world today.**

Many different strategies are being used in order to enhance women’s political representation. Research into what conditions make which strategies work is only in the beginning. Some strategies have proved successful, while others are merely symbolic. All in all, this is a new and very interesting research field.

In my present research on electoral gender quotas all over the world, I meet a growing impatience with the slow speed of change. In the first world-wide comparative analysis of the introduction of gender quotas in politics, based on research in almost all major regions of the world (Dahlerup, forthcoming), we analyse 1) the quota discourses, 2) the actual quota rules (different quota regimes), 3) the often troublesome implementation of quotas and finally 4) the effects of quotas in both quantitative (numbers) and qualitative terms (empowerment). In co-operation with International IDEA we have constructed the first world-wide web site with information about all countries in the world who are applying electoral gender quotas, see [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)

During just the last one and a half decade, 50 countries in the world have introduced *legal quotas*, e.g. quota rules inscribed in constitution or electoral law. In other 50 countries major political parties have introduced gender quotas for their own list at public elections, e.g. *voluntary party quotas*. This is an amazing new development, which also challenge our previous theories that an increase in women's political representation follows improvement in women's education and women's access to the labour market. Today, we see the world record in women's representation in the Scandinavian countries being challenged by countries such as South Africa, Costa Rica, Mozambique, Argentina, – not to speak of Rwanda, who now has the highest share of women in parliament in the whole world, 48.8 percent. Gender quotas are part of the explanation behind the exceptional historical leaps in women's representation in all the mentioned countries.

Table 1 shows the top of the world rank order in terms of women's representation. Three main features are revealed by this table. Firstly, the Nordic countries, for so long solely on the top of the world rank order in terms of women's representation are now being challenged by several developing countries. Secondly, many of the countries who have more than 30 percent women in parliament do make use of some kind of quotas, be it legal or voluntary party quotas. Thirdly, the table shows that most of the countries with the highest women's representation elect its representatives under the PR system.

**Table 1. The Top of the World Rank Order of Women in Parliament**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Women in National Parliament (%)</b>	<b>Quota Type</b>	<b>Electoral system</b>
Rwanda	48.8 (2003)	Legal quotas (C)	List PR
Sweden	45.3 (2002)	Party quotas	List PR
Norway	37,9 (2005)	Party quotas	List PR
Denmark	36.9 (2005)	No quota	List PR
Netherlands	36.7 (2003)	Party quotas	List PR
Cuba	36.0 (2003)	No quota	Two Rounds
Mozambique	36.0 (2004)	Party quotas	List PR
Spain	36.0 (2004)	Party quotas	List PR
Costa Rica	35.5 (2002)	Legal quotas (L)	List PR
Belgium	35.3 (2003)	Legal quotas (L)	List PR
Argentina	33.5 (2003)	Legal quotas (C)	List PR
Austria	33.3 (2002)	Party quotas	List PR
South Africa	32.8 (2004)	Party quotas	List PR
Germany	31,8 (2005)	Party quotas	MMP
Iceland	30.2 (2003)	Party quotas	List PR

Key Electoral System: *Proportional Representation*: List PR. *Mixed*: MMP=Mixed Member Proportional. Key Quota Type: Legal quotas: Constitutional (C) or Law (L).

Source: International IDEA and Stockholm University (2005); official statistics. Changes after the election not included.

## **6. Why are women doing better under the PR system?**

The choice of electoral system does not correspond to any socio-economic or cultural factors.

The same electoral system may be installed in very different countries, and visa versa.

Research on women in politics has tried to isolate the effects of the electoral system per se for the level of women's political representation, and the result is unambiguous. Women are more likely to be elected under proportional representation than under plurality-majority electoral systems. In 2000 the difference amounted to 15.4 versus 8.5 percent women in parliaments. In mixed systems women have on the average 11.3 percent. However, the average hides that in some PR countries women do worse than in some plurality-majority systems. Pippa Norris concludes that "although there is a strong and consistent association, by itself the basic type of electoral system is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to guarantee women's

representation” (Norris 2004:187-88). However, focusing at structural variations, Pippa Norris are able to show that the differences between the outcome in PR-systems versus plurality-majority systems are much more distinct in ‘post-industrial’ societies, whereas the differences between these two electoral systems in terms of women’s representation are much smaller in industrial societies and minimal in poorer agrarian societies (Norris 2004:188).

The best test cases that can isolate the effects of the electoral systems per se are those countries that operate a mixed electoral system, combining the PR system with constituency lists based on plurality-majority. Electoral statistics show that in such countries women’s representation tends to be higher among that part of the parliament elected under PR, than among those elected in single-member districts. This has proved to be the case in Germany and New Zealand, while the new Scottish parliament turned out to be an exception to this rule, because of the Scottish “Twinning system”(Lundgren 2005).

What are the factors behind the different outcome between the two electoral systems, at any rate in highly industrialised or post-industrial societies? The most important factor seems to be the nominating party organisations’ *anticipation of voter reactions*. When nominating, the party organisation try to make a vote maximizing strategy, but also takes into consideration *incumbency* as well as power relations between *fractions* and geographical units within the party.

In plurality-majority systems, the local party organisation only has one candidate, and in anticipating the reaction of the voters of their constituency, the party prefers a safe candidate. In PR systems in contrast, each party list has many names and consequently, the local party organisation will try to attract as many voters as possible by composing a list with many different candidate profiles in order to attract different types of voters: young candidates as well as older, candidates representing different geographical parts of the constituency, different occupations – and women as well as men. However, during history we have seen important changes in which category of people are considered an advantage for the party.

However, the electoral systems cannot explain the *increase* in women’s political representation over time in countries like the Nordic countries, where the increase in women’s representation first took off in the 1970s, because all five Nordic countries have used the PR systems all through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Diane Sainsbury has pointed out (1993). In my

opinion, it is relevant to reformulate the thesis of the benefit for women of the PR system into this reformulated thesis: *The PR system is more open to change than the plurality-majority system, because it can include new types of candidate, such as women or immigrants, without replacing the old and well-known political profiles.*

## **7. Introducing the majority-system in Scandinavia!**

In order to throw light on the complicated mechanisms behind the outcome of various electoral systems, let's hypothetically imagine a situation, where the plurality-majority system was introduced into the five Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, countries who for more than 100 years have been based on PR systems and who have a very high women's representation, between 30 and 45 percent.

This scenario is not totally hypothetical, since major political forces in Sweden today are seriously discussing changing the PR system into single member constituencies in order to avoid minority government - which these people seem to despise for various reasons. Even a former Social Democratic prime minister is among the proponents of changing the electoral system of Sweden.

Since women in general do better under PR systems than majority systems, will women's high representation in the Nordic countries drop, if suddenly a plurality-majority electoral system was introduced? I will suggest that this would not be the case. The reasons behind this are important parts of the explanations of the very high representation women in these small and affluent countries:

Even if single-member constituencies were introduced in the Nordic countries, the women's organisations and various feminist groups would be very well aware of what to demand. From a good knowledge of the new electoral system, supported by experts from gender research at the universities, women within the political parties would come up with a very precise demand, namely *that a woman candidate be placed in half of what was expected to be the new safe seats*. Women's groups would not wait until after the election to complain over a bad result, and they would have sufficient political power within the party – supported by a critical press – to succeed in having 30-40 percent women elected even under a single

member district system! This hypothetical experiment points to the importance of the strength of the women's movement within and outside the political parties as well as in the public discourse.

## 8. Various types of quotas

Electoral gender quotas come in many forms today, and it is important to study how different quota types match or do not match with different electoral systems. The two most common gender quotas types are on one hand *candidate quotas* (legal or voluntary), which set a minimum percentage of women (or other groups) on the parties' lists for public election, and on the other hand *reserved seats*, e.g. quotas implying that a certain number - not of the candidates on the electoral lists, but of those actually elected are from a special grouping, here women. As in the case of Uganda, where 56 seats in parliament are reserved for women, one woman being elected from each of the 56 districts. Reserved seats have been and are in many countries in place concerning religious groups, ethnic groups and clans, but today also many reserved seats for 'women' are introduced. Reserved seats systems are well known in non-democratic systems. It is, however, interesting to note, that today many of the new reserved seat systems for women are based not on appointment, but on competitive elections among women candidates like in Uganda, Morocco and Rwanda and at the local level in among others India, Bangladesh and Pakistan (for details, see Dahlerup forthcoming).

There is however, some confusion about what constitutes different quota regimes. It is important to distinguish between two separate dimensions in the definition of quota systems: The first dimension covers the questions who has mandated the quotas system, while the second dimension indicates what part of the selection and nomination process that the quota targets.

As for the mandating, *legal gender quotas* are mandated either by the constitution (like in Burkina Faso, Nepal, the Philippines and Uganda), or by the electoral law (as in many parts of Latin America, as well as, for example, in Belgium, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Serbia and Sudan). But quotas may also be decided for voluntarily by political parties themselves, *voluntary party quotas*. In some countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Germany, Italy, Norway and Sweden, a number of political parties have some type of quota. In many others, though, only one or two parties have opted to use quotas. However, if the leading party in a

country uses a quota, such as the ANC in South Africa, this may have a significant impact on the overall rate of female representation. Yet most of the world's political parties do not employ any kind of quota at all.

Concerning the second dimension, quotas may target the first stage of the process, the stage of finding *aspirants*, e.g. those willingly to be considered for nomination, either by a primary or by the nominations committee and other parts of the party organization. Gender quotas at this stage are rules that demand a certain number or percentage of women or either sex be represented in the pool of candidates that are up for discussion, such as the controversial 'women's short lists' in Great Britain. The second stage is the actual nomination of *candidates* to be placed on the ballot by the party. This frequently used quota system implies that a rule (legal or voluntary) is installed according to which for instance 20, 30, 40 or even 50 percent of the candidates must be women. This may also be formulated in a gender-neutral way, stating that no sex should have not less than for instance 40 percent and no more than 60.

At the third stage, those elected, we find quotas as reserved seats. Here it is decided that a certain percentage or number of the parliament or local council must be women. Increasingly, gender quotas are being introduced using reserved seat systems.

Figure 1 shows various combinations of the two dimensions, firstly the questions of mandating and secondly the question of where in the nomination process quotas are placed.

**Figure 1. Types of Electoral Quotas**

<b>Mandated by</b>	<b>At What Level?</b>		
	<b>Aspirants</b>	<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Elected</b>
Legal quotas (Constitutional or electoral law)	n/a	Candidate quotas	Reserved seats
Voluntary party quotas	Aspirant quotas (Short lists)	Candidate quotas	Reserved seats <sup>a)</sup>

a. Informal agreements among political parties reserving a certain number of seats for women like in the case of Morocco.

Even if constitutional amendments and new electoral laws providing gender quotas may seem more commanding, it is not at all evident that these methods are more efficient than political

party quotas when it increasing the number of women in parliament. It all depends on the actual rules and the possible *sanctions for non-compliance*, as well as on the general opportunities that exist for quotas within the country. Concerning rules for nomination, the crucial issue is whether there are any rules concerning the *rank order* on the list of the. A requirement of say 40 percent may not result in any women elected, if all women candidates are placed at the bottom of the list. The question is, whether the nominated women are placed in a position with a real chance of election? 'Reserved seats' are found in countries like Rwanda, Jordan, Uganda and at the local level in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and many other counties. Here a specific number of seats are set aside for women as in the Ugandan case, where a number of regional seats are reserved for women. The differences between the various systems should not be exaggerated. In a closed list system, quotas may, in fact, determine which of the candidates will be elected, but the number of seats to be awarded to each party is still for to the electorate to decide.

In some countries quotas pertain to minorities based on regional, ethnic, linguistic or religious cleavages. Almost all political systems utilize some kind of geographical quota to ensure a minimum level of representation for a densely-populated area, such as an island. That type of quota is usually not considered to be as controversial as a gender quota.

Quotas work differently under different electoral systems. Quotas are most easily introduced in PR and other multi-list systems. But even in a PR system, because of the few elected candidates, small parties and parties in small constituencies experience difficulties in implementing quotas without interference from the central party organization.

Quotas may be introduced in democratic political systems, as well as in systems with limited democratic freedoms, or even in non-democratic or authoritarian political systems.

### **9. Quotas and the plurality-majority system - a difficult equation**

How are the plurality-majority systems performing during this new trend to introduce electoral gender quotas? Is this a strategy which can help improving the bad record of these systems in terms of women's parliamentary representation?

Unfortunately not. It is very difficult to find a quota regime that will match a plurality-majority system. The obvious reason is that it is not possible to take for instance 30 percent of one! When the political parties only nominate one candidate, both voluntary party quotas and legal quotas in the form a minimum percentage of the nominated, evidently does not work.

Considering the categories of figure 1, at what level and mandated by who is gender quotas in plurality-majority systems possible? Do we find any example of quota systems at all in majority systems? Please note, that in general gender quotas are not relevant for every category in figure 1: Legal aspirant quotas are not found, and very seldom are also voluntary quotas in reserved seats system, Morocco's "Gentleman's agreement" being a temporary exception. Quota countries are found in all four remaining categories. *However, only few countries operating a plurality-majority system have introduced gender quotas.*

Consequently, gender quotas are much more frequent in PR-systems (Matland in Dahlerup forthcoming).

However, we do find some countries which have tried to solve the unsolvable equation of combining quotas and plurality-majority electoral system. In the following a few such examples are mentioned. It should be noticed that only three of the categories in figure 1 are used by majority systems, since no legal candidate quota systems exist in majority systems, even if it is theoretically possible. One could think of a legal quota system, which demands that a candidate from the under-represented gender be nominated for every free seat, following the withdrawal of the incumbent MP. Such quota measures are not in use in public election, but known as an equality measures in appointments to positions in a sex-segregated labour market, however everywhere heavily contested.

Among the few examples of quotas in plurality-majority systems one can mention India, where quota provisions for local elections reserve certain seats for women and – in combination - for scheduled castes. This system function on a rotation basis, which implies that the elected women usually only serve one period, if they do not choose to stand for one of the 'free' seats in the following election. In Bangladesh, the reserved seats for women cover three constituencies (wards), which deprive the elected women a constituency base of their own (Rai, Bari, Mahtab & Mohanty in Dahlerup, forthcoming).

For the election to the new Scottish parliament quotas were introduced by the labour party. Here the problem of combining single-member districts and quotas were solved by ‘twinning’ two constituencies who taken together should nominate one man and one woman. This system had the result that women’s representation in the Scottish parliament overtook the Westminster parliament by far (Lundgren 2005).

The conclusion is that it is in fact possible to combine the plurality-majority electoral system with some form of gender quotas, but only with some difficulties. If this combination is not developed further in the future, the difference between women’s representation in majority-systems versus PR-systems will increase further, because gender quotas are no doubt an equality measure that will be used more and more – in order to solve the problem of women’s under-representation.

The focus of this paper has been the connection between electoral systems and strategies to enhance women’s political representation, especially through electoral gender quotas. In general, electoral gender quotas may be purely symbolic, especially if the chosen quota system does not match the electoral system of the country, no capacity-building are organized by the women’s movement, and if there are no sanctions for non-compliance and no rules about rank orders. Quotas may also leave the elected women relatively powerless, unless other factors changes simultaneously. However, electoral gender quotas can under the right circumstances be an important, yes in fact one of the most efficient strategies to increase women’s political representation in numerical terms (see Dahlerup, forthcoming).

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