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The Use of Quotas to Increase the Political Representation of Women

1 Introduction

This Briefing Paper has been prepared in the context of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee review of the representation of women in the Northern Ireland Assembly¹.

The paper supplements a previous Research Paper, *Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly*². A brief overview of the rationale behind the use of quotas is given, a survey of types of quota, a summary where they are in use and some discussion on their effectiveness is undertaken.

¹ Agreed by the Committee at the meeting of 8 April 2014, with initial evidence on 6 May 2014:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Committee-Minutes-of-Evidence/Session-2013-2014/May-2014/Women-in-the-Northern-Ireland-Assembly-Research-and-Information-Service-Briefing/>.

² Research and Information Service Research Paper 9/14, *Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly*, 3 September 2013: http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/potter0914.pdf.

2 Background to the use of Quotas for Women's Political Representation

The use of quotas has been one response to the under-representation of women in political life, particularly in terms of the numbers of women in legislatures. Part of the reasoning behind the use of quotas is that they enable the number of women to reach a 'critical mass' which can effect cultural change and promote the interests of women in a legislature³. Whilst opinions differ as to what would constitute a 'critical mass', a figure of around 30-40% female representation is often cited⁴.

Small numbers of women in an organisation, including political institutions, can lead to a number of effects in relation to more numerous males⁵:

- High visibility – fewer women attract greater attention and place additional pressures on how they perform
- Polarisation – the differences between male and female members are exaggerated
- Assimilation – women are seen more in terms of stereotypes rather than individuals.

The use of quotas has been subject to significant debate and, in broad terms, the following have been presented as arguments for and against their use⁶.

- For:
 - Women are half the population
 - Women's experiences should be represented
 - Sometimes women's and men's experience differ
 - Women as role models for other women
 - Larger numbers counter the 'token' effect
 - There should be a gender balance for democratic reasons
- Against:
 - Politics is a male business
 - Tension between 'freedom' and 'equality', which suggests that equal representation by such means is 'forced emancipation'

³ Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook (2008), 'Critical mass Theory and Women's Political Representation' in *Political Studies* 56, 725-736.

⁴ For example, Dorota Gierycz (2001), 'Women, Peace and the United Nations: Beyond Beijing' in Inger Skjelsbach and Dan Smith (eds.), *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, London: Sage, p.25, who suggests 30-35% to make a difference.

⁵ Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977), 'Some Effects of proportions on group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women' in *American Political Science Review*, 82(5), 965-990.

⁶ Drude Dahlerup (2006), *Women, Quotas and Politics*, London: Routledge, pp.297-300.

- Quotas are illiberal and undermine freedom of choice
- Tokenism
- Quotas are unconstitutional in that they undermine the democratic process

Once decided upon, there are different kinds of quota. They can be legal or voluntary and could operate at different levels:

- Aspirant quotas – these are rare and difficult to apply, but they are aimed at creating a sufficient pool of eligible women with an interest in politics to be considered as candidates.
- Candidate quotas – these are the most common, intended to increase the numbers of women that the electorate may choose from, and can be voluntary or legal, with varying levels of sanction for non-compliance (no sanctions, funding penalty, rejection of a party list, etc.).
- Reserved seats – women are guaranteed a certain number of seats in a legislature regardless of the outcome of an election.

Even where quotas are supported, and they remain controversial, quotas are suggested to be only one provision among many, as numbers of women do not guarantee women's interests will be represented, being descriptive rather than substantive representation, and they fail address underlying conditions that exclude women⁷.

The next section looks at where quotas are in use and discusses their effectiveness.

⁷ Susan Williams (2009), *Constituting Equality: Gender Equality and Comparative Constitutional Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.53, 55.

3 The Use and Effectiveness of Quotas in National Legislatures

The list at Appendix 1 shows national legislatures in rank order according to female representation, with details of what, if any, quotas they employ.

Of the countries with 30% or more women, the most used system is a legislated candidate quota, where a party list is rejected if the quota is not fulfilled (15 examples). In another 12 examples, voluntary party quotas are used and four countries have reserved seats for women in the lower or single house (Rwanda additionally has reserved seats in its upper house, alongside a legislated candidate quota in the lower house). However, seven of the countries with 30% or more female representation have no quotas at all.

The vast majority have List-Proportional Representation (List-PR) systems, which makes the introduction of quotas relatively straightforward. Yet two have Multi-Member Proportional (MMP) and three have a First Past the Post System (FPTP). One (Senegal) has a mixed parallel system. While List-PR systems may appear to be the most common vehicle for higher female representation, this is clearly not exclusively the case.

The circumstances of the introduction of quotas are significant, as they are often introduced when new constitutions are being written⁸. This may particularly be the case in a post-conflict situation, where a proportional system with community or other identity representation arrangements is being introduced (such as in Kosovo).

In some cases, the introduction of quotas has made a significant difference, with historical leaps in women's representation. However, there have also been cases where increases have not been as much as the quota or where women's representation has stopped at the quota and increased no further⁹. This suggests the context and the existence of other methods in tandem with (or indeed without) quotas are necessary for an increase in women's representation.

The higher representation of women in Scandinavian countries has often been held up as an example. However, higher levels of representation in the 1970s preceded the introduction of quotas in the 1980s, and even then they have always been voluntary, and it has been noted that it took sixty years for Scandinavian countries to reach 20% female representation and seventy for 30%, suggesting a 'fast track' may have been more appropriate¹⁰.

Quotas have been discontinued by parties in Denmark. There has been no specific suggestion that the use of quotas has run its course, but there are certainly larger numbers of women involved in Danish politics than in the past, as is the case across

⁸ Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidenvall (2009), 'Gender Quotas in Politics – A Constitutional Challenge' in Susan Williams (ed.), *Constituting Equality: Gender Equality and Comparative Constitutional Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.29.

⁹ Drude Dahlerup (2006), *Women, Quotas and Politics*, London: Routledge, p.293.

¹⁰ Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidenvall (2005), 'Quotas as a 'Fast Track' to Equal Representation for Women: Why Scandinavia is no Longer the Model' in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(1), p.27.

Scandinavia. Rather than this being attributed directly to quotas, the increase has been explained in the following terms¹¹:

Contrary to common perceptions, no constitutional clause or law demands a high representation of women in Scandinavia. For the most part the increase can be attributed to sustained pressure by women's groups within parties as well as the women's movement in general. Women mobilised and organised to ensure that the political parties increased their number of women candidates, that is to say, women candidates who had a fair chance of winning. The real take-off of the increase in women's representation in the Nordic countries happened in the 1970s before any party-installed candidate quotas.

On the other hand, evidence from Spain suggests that significant increases in women's representation there occurred¹²:

Because in the last two decades feminists within left-wing parties succeeded in making their parties adopt and partly implement quotas.

But this increase was also attributed to the proportional electoral system and to the *increasingly secular and egalitarian society, polity and economy.*

In some contexts however, the use of quotas has been instrumental in the representation of women in politics. The collapse of the Yugoslavian state and the ensuing construction of post-Yugoslav institutions in the 1990s led to a significant reduction of women in the new independent national legislatures, due to the demise of Yugoslav-era quotas and a return to 'traditional' roles for women¹³. The introduction of a 30% reserved seats for women in the Kosovo Assembly, with all its criticisms, has been regarded as placing women in the legislature who would not otherwise have been there¹⁴.

It is worth noting that there are examples in the appendix where the proportion of women in the legislature is lower than the legislated quota. This can be due to one or a combination of factors such as candidates not being in winnable seats, voter preference for males, parties opting to accept sanctions rather than field the required proportion of female candidates or electoral laws being ignored.

¹¹ Drude Dahlerup (2005), 'Increasing Women's Political Representation : New Trends in Gender Quotas' in Julie Ballington and Azza Karam (eds.), *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, Stockholm: IDEA, p.147.

¹² Celia Valiente (2012), 'Women in Parliament: The Effectiveness of Quotas' in Manon Tremblay (ed.), *Women and Legislative Representation: Electoral Systems, Political Parties and Sex Quotas*, Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, pp.138-9.

¹³ Slavenka Drakulić, (1993), 'Women and the New Democracy in the Former Yugoslavia' in Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (eds.), *Gender, Politics and Post Communism*, London: Routledge, p.124.

¹⁴ Interview with women's NGO, Prishtina, 16 April 2014.

Appendix 1: Quotas in National Legislatures¹⁵

Rank	Country	Lower House		Upper House	
		% Women	Quotas	% Women	Quotas
1	Rwanda	63.8%	Legislated candidate 30%	38.5%	Reserved seats 30%
2	Andorra	50%	None	-	-
3	Cuba	48.9%	None	-	-
4	Sweden	45%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 50%, zipping or alternate	-	-
5	South Africa	44.8%	Ruling ANC has 50% voluntary candidate quota	34%	Ruling ANC has 50% voluntary quota
6	Seychelles	43.8%	None	-	-
7	Senegal	43.3%	Legislated alternate male and female candidates	-	-
8	Finland	42.5%	None	-	-
9	Nicaragua	42.4%	Legislated 50% candidates	-	-
10	Ecuador	41.6%	Legislated alternate	-	-

¹⁵ This table is compiled from data on the Women in Parliaments database of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>) and the Quota Project database (<http://www.quotaproject.org/>), both accessed 21 May 2014.

			candidates		
11	Belgium	41.3%	Legislated candidate: no sex exceeded by more than one	39.4%	Legislated no sex exceeded by more than one
12	Iceland	39.7%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 40%	-	-
-	Spain	39.7%	Legislated 40% candidates	33.5%	Legislated 40% candidates
13	Norway	39.6%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 40-50%	-	-
14	Mozambique	39.2%	Ruling FRELIMO has 40% voluntary candidate quota	-	-
15	Denmark	39.1%	Voluntary party candidate quotas have been discontinued	-	-
16	Netherlands	38.7%	Some parties have candidate quotas	36%	Some parties have candidate quotas
17	Timor Leste	38.5%	Legislated 1 in 3 candidates to be female	-	-
18	Mexico	37.4%	Legislated 40% candidates	34.4%	Legislated 40%

					candidates
19	Angola	36.8%	Legislated 30% quota	-	-
20	Argentina	36.6%	Legislated 30% candidates	38.9%	Legislated 30% candidates
21	Germany	36.5%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 40-50%	27.5%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 40-50%
22	Tanzania	36%	Reserved seats 30%	-	-
23	Uganda	35%	Reserved seats – special ballot in each district for women only	-	-
24	Macedonia	34.1%	Legislated 1 in 3 candidates	-	-
25	New Zealand	33.9%	None	-	-
26	Costa Rica	33.3%	Legislated alternate candidates	-	-
-	Grenada	33.3%	None	15.4%	None
-	Slovenia	33.3%	Legislated 35% candidates	7.5%	None
27	Austria	32.2%	Voluntary party quotas 33.3-50%	29%	Voluntary party quotas 33.3-50%
28	Serbia	32%	Legislated candidate	-	-

			quota 30%		
29	Algeria	31.6%	Legislated variable candidate quotas 20-50%	6.9%	None
30	Zimbabwe	31.5%	Reserved seats: additional 60 women-only election	47.5%	Legislated 60 of 80 seats alternate
31	Italy	31.4%	Voluntary party candidate quotas (1 party 50%)	29%	Voluntary party candidate quotas (1 party 50%)
32	Guyana	31.3%	Legislated one third candidates	-	-
-	Portugal	31.3%	Legislated 33% candidates	-	-
33	Cameroon	31.1%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 25-30%	20%	
34	Switzerland	31%	Voluntary party candidate quotas – 1 party 40%	19.6%	Voluntary party candidate quotas – 1 party 40%
35	Burundi	30.5%	Reserved seats 30%	46.3%	Reserved seats 30%
36	Nepal	29.9%	Legislated one third candidates	-	-

37	Trinidad and Tobago	28.6%	None	19.4%	None
38	Luxembourg	28.3%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 33-50%	-	-
39	Tunisia	28.1%	Legislated parity for candidates, except where numbers are odd	-	-
40	Ethiopia	27.8%	None	16.3%	None
41	Afghanistan	27.7%	Reserved seats 27%	27.5%	Reserved seats: 50% of seats appointed by the president (a third of total)
42	El Salvador	27.4%	Legislated candidate quotas 30%	-	-
43	Philippines	27.3%	Voluntary candidate quotas (1 party 25%), 1 all-woman party	25%	Voluntary candidate quotas (1 party 25%), 1 all-woman party
44	Lesotho	26.7%	Legislated candidate quota for 40 of 120 seats	27.3%	None
45	Belarus	26.6%	None	35.1%	None
46	South Sudan	26.5%	Reserved seats	10%	Reserved

			25%		seats 25%
47	Turkmenistan	26.4%	None	-	-
48	France	26.2%	Legislated candidate quotas, difference between male and female candidates cannot exceed 2%	22.5%	Legislated candidate quotas: alternate or twinning, depending on district
49	Australia	26%	Voluntary party candidate quotas, 1 party 40%	41.3%	Voluntary candidate quotas, 1 party 40%
50	Honduras	25.8%	Legislated candidate quota 40%	-	-
51	Namibia	25.6%	Voluntary party candidate quota, 1 party alternate ('zebra')	26.9%	Voluntary party candidate quota, 1 party alternate ('zebra')
52	Bolivia	25.4%	Legislated candidate quota 50% (to apply from 2014)	47.2%	Legislated candidate quota 50% (to apply from 2014)
53	Singapore	25.3%	None	-	-
54	Iraq	25.2%	Reserved seats, not less than a quarter	-	-
-	Kazakhstan	25.2%	None, but 1 all-	6.4%	None, but 1

			women party		all-women party
-	Mauretania	25.2%	Legislated candidate quota, 1 in 3-seat districts, alternate in larger districts	14.3%	Legislated candidate quota, 1 in every 4 constituencies
55	Canada	25.1%	Voluntary party candidate targets 25-50%	39.6%	Voluntary party candidate quotas, 25-50% targets
56	Lao people's Democratic Republic	25%	None	-	-
-	Latvia	25%	None	-	-
57	Bulgaria	24.6%	None	-	-
58	Poland	24.3%	Legislated quota 35%	13%	Legislated quota 35%
-	Sudan	24.3%	Reserved seats 25%	17.2%	None
-	Viet Nam	24.3%	None	-	-
59	Lithuania	24.1%	Voluntary party candidate quota, 1 party one third	-	-
60	Equatorial Guinea	24%	None	10.7%	None
61	Croatia	23.8%	Voluntary party candidate quota, 1 party	-	-

			40%		
62	China	23.4%	Reserved seats 22%	-	-
63	Kyrgyzstan	23.3%	Legislated quota 30%	-	-
64	Madagascar	23.1%	None	-	-
65	United Kingdom	22.6%	Voluntary party candidate targets 40-50%	23.4%	
66	Israel	22.5%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 20-40%	-	-
67	Malawi	22.3%	Voluntary party candidate targets 25-33%	-	-
-	Peru	22.3%	Legislated candidate quota 30%	-	-
68	Eritrea	22%	Reserved seats 30%	-	-
-	Uzbekistan	22%	Legislated candidate quota 30%	15%	None
69	Guinea	21.9%	Legislated candidate quota 30% for two thirds of seats	-	-
70	Bosnia and Herzegovina	21.4%	Legislated candidate quota 40%	13.3%	None

71	Greece	21%	Legislated candidate quota one third	-	-
72	Cabo Verde	20.8%	Legislated candidate quota 25%	-	-
-	Dominican Republic	20.8%	Legislated candidate quota 33%	9.4%	None
-	Monaco	20.8%	None	-	-
73	Pakistan	20.7%	Reserved seats 17%	16.3%	Reserved seats: 17 of 104
74	Cambodia	20.3%	None	14.8%	None
75	Albania	20%	Legislated candidate quota 30%	-	-
-	Liechtenstein	20%	None	-	-
76	Saudi Arabia	19.9%	Reserved seats 20%	-	-
77	Czech Republic	19.5%	Voluntary party candidate quota, 1 party 25%	17.3%	None
78	Bangladesh	19.3%	Reserved seats: 50 of 350	-	-
79	Kenya	19.1%	Reserved seats: 47 of 349 seats contested by women only;	26.5%	Reserved seats: 18 of 67 seats contested by women only;

			Legislated candidate quota, no more two thirds of either sex		Legislated candidate quota, no more two thirds of either sex
80	Estonia	19%	None	-	-
81	Burkina Faso	18.9%	Legislated candidate quota 30%	-	-
82	Mauritius	18.8%	None	-	-
-	Republic of Moldova	18.8%	None	-	-
83	Slovakia	18.7%	Voluntary party candidate target, 1 party	-	-
84	Indonesia	18.6%	Legislated candidate quota 30%	-	-
85	San Marino	18.3%	None	-	-
-	United States of America	18.3%	None	20%	None
86	Sao Tome	18.2%	None	-	-
87	Togo	17.6%	Legislated candidate quota equal numbers of women and men	-	-
88	United Arab Emirates	17.5%	None	-	-

89	Morocco	17%	Reserved seats: 60 of 395	2.2%	None
-	Venezuela	17%	A 30% legislated quota was used in 1998, but was declared unconstitutional for subsequent elections	-	-
90	Barbados	16.7%	None	28.6%	None
-	Saint Lucia	16.7%	None	18.2%	None
91	Libya	16.5%	Legislated candidate quota, alternate for 80 of 200 seats	-	-
92	Thailand	16%	Voluntary party candidate quota 1 party 30%	16.7%	Voluntary party candidate quota 1 party 30%
93	Tajikistan	15.9%	None	11.8%	None
94	Chile	15.8%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 20-40%	18.4%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 20-40%
95	Ireland	15.7%	Legislated candidate quota 30%, rising to 40% after 7 years	31.7%	None

-	Republic of Korea	15.7%	Legislated candidate quota: 50% for 56 seats. 30% 243 seats	-	-
96	Azerbaijan	15.6%	None	-	-
-	People's Democratic Republic of Korea	15.6%	None	-	-
97	Gabon	15%	None	16.7%	None
-	Paraguay	15%	Legislated candidate quota: 1 in 5	20%	Legislated candidate quota: 1 in 5
98	Chad	14.9%	None	-	-
-	Mongolia	14.9%	Legislated candidate quota 20%	-	-
99	Montenegro	14.8%	Legislated candidate quota 30%	-	-
100	Turkey	14.4%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 33-40%	-	-
101	Malta	14.3%	Voluntary party candidate quota 1 party 20%	-	-
102	Somalia	13.8%	Reserved seats: 30%	-	-
103	Russian Federation	13.6%	None	8%	None

104	Romania	13.5%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 30%	7.4%	Voluntary party candidate quotas, 2 parties 30%
105	Guatemala	13.3%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 30-40%	-	-
-	Niger	13.3%	Reserved seats: 10%	-	-
106	Bahamas	13.2%	None	25%	None
107	Uruguay	13.1%	Legislated candidate quota: 1 of 3 places, or 1 of 2 places	6.5%	Legislated candidate quota: 1 of 3 places, or 1 of 2 places
108	St Vincent and the Grenadines	13%	None	-	-
-	Colombia	13%	Legislated candidate quota 30%	17%	Legislated candidate quota 30%
109	Dominica	12.9%	None	-	-
110	Djibouti	12.7%	Reserved seats: 10%	-	-
-	Jamaica	12.7%	None	28.6%	None
111	Cyprus	12.5%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 30%	-	-
112	Sierra Leone	12.1%	Voluntary party targets 30-50%	-	-
113	Georgia	12%	Legislation for	-	-

			funding incentive for 20% candidates will come into force in 2014		
-	Jordan	12%	Reserved seats: 15 of 150	12%	None
-	Syrian Arab Republic	12%	None	-	-
114	Suriname	11.8%	None	-	-
115	India	11.4%	None	11.9%	None
116	Guinea-Bissau	11%	None	-	-
-	Liberia	11%	Guideline 30%, but no quotas in place	-	-
117	Ghana	10.9%	Quotas used in 1960 and 1965 only	-	-
118	Zambia	10.8%	None	-	-
119	Armenia	10.7%	Legislated candidate quota: 20% in 90 of 131 seats	-	-
120	Democratic Republic of the Congo	10.6%	Legislated candidate quota: 'to take account of equal representation'	5.6%	Legislated candidate quota: 'to take account of equal representation'
121	Antigua and	10.5%	None	29.4%	None

	Barbuda				
122	Malaysia	10.4%	None	28.8%	None
123	Bahrain	10%	None	27.5%	None
124	Ukraine	9.7%	None	-	-
125	Botswana	9.5%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 30%	-	-
-	Mali	9.5%	Voluntary party candidate quota: 1 party 30%	-	-
126	Côte d'Ivoire	9.4%	Voluntary party candidate quota: 1 party 30%	-	-
-	Gambia	9.4%	None	-	-
-	Hungary	9.4%	Voluntary party candidate quotas 30-50%	-	-
127	Kiribati	8.7%	None	-	-
128	Brazil	8.6%	Legislated candidate quota 30%	16%	Legislated candidate quota 30%
129	Bhutan	8.5%	None	8%	None
-	Panama	8.5%	Legislated candidate quota for internal nominations 50%	-	-

130	Benin	8.4%	None	-	-
131	Japan	8.1%	None	16.1%	None
132	Congo	7.4%	None	13.9%	None
133	Nigeria	6.7%	None	6.4%	None
-	St Kitts and Nevis	6.7%	None	-	-
-	Tuvalu	6.7%	None	-	-
134	Swaziland	6.2%	Reserved seats: 4 of 26	33.3%	Reserved seats: 8 of 30
135	Maldives	5.9%	None	-	-
136	Sri Lanka	5.8%	None	-	-
137	Myanmar	5.6%	None	1.8%	None
138	Nauru	5.3%	None	-	-
139	Kuwait	4.6%	None	-	-
140	Haiti	4.2%	Reserved seats: 30% for future elections	0%	Reserved seats: 30% for future elections
141	Samoa	4.1%	Reserved seats: 10%, to apply 2016	-	-
142	Tonga	3.6%	None	-	-
143	Belize	3.1%	None	38.5%	None
-	Iran	3.1%	None	-	-
-	Lebanon	3.1%	None	-	-

144	Comoros	3%	None	-	-
-	Marshall Islands	3%	None	-	-
145	Papua New Guinea	2.7%	None	-	-
146	Solomon Islands	2%	None	-	-
147	Oman	1.2%	None	18.1%	None
148	Yemen	0.3%	None	1.8%	None
149	Micronesia	0%	None	-	-
-	Palau	0%	None	23.1%	None
-	Qatar	0%	None	-	-
-	Vanuatu	0%	None	-	-