



## Getting the Balance Right In National Parliaments

### What Works For Women

Across the globe, women have won the right to vote and to stand for elections. Yet, women constitute only 15.2 percent of all national parliaments and only 15 countries worldwide have achieved “critical mass”—30 percent women in national governments (Inter-Parliamentary Union, August 2003).

Countries on this “honor-roll” are *Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Mozambique, The Netherlands, Norway, Rwanda, South Africa* and *Sweden*.

#### **Do numbers make a difference?**

When women are represented in a critical mass in policy-making bodies their perspectives and experiences are more likely to be taken into account, their concerns given higher priority, and action becomes possible.

In Denmark, Finland and Sweden, the state provides women with opportunities to combine work and family obligations in keeping with their well established right to economic independence.

In South Africa, where women occupy 30 percent of seats in the National Assembly, women parliamentarians lead efforts to secure budgets based on gender analysis of government expenditures. Gender Budgets like this help to ensure that adequate funds are allocated for women’s empowerment and development.

The political environment of every country is unique with particular characteristics shaped by cultural norms, educational levels, economic development, parliamentary system, and other such factors. In general, however, these factors do not enable women’s full and active representation and participation.

An examination of those countries where women have gained at least one-third of seats in parliament, with the exception of Cuba, reveals three common features for overcoming structural barriers and achieving critical mass:

- **Quotas for Women**
- **Proportional Representation**
- **Campaign Subsidies**



# Women in National Parliaments: Countries With Critical Mass [January 2004]

Country	Electoral System	Affirmative Action	Campaign Finance	Percent Women
<b>Rwanda</b>	Proportional Representation in the Lower House; Winner-take-all in the Upper House	Legal Quotas, Zipper-Style: Constitution guarantees 24 seats reserved for women in the National Assembly; 30% of seats in the Senate	N/A	<b>48.8</b>
<b>Sweden</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style: Political Parties guarantee 40% women candidates. Zipper-style introduced in 1994	Political Parties receive state subsidy or other form of assistance	<b>45.3</b>
<b>Norway</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Party Quotas + Zipper Style adopted by political parties in 1993	Political Parties receive state subsidy or other form of assistance	<b>38.2</b>
<b>Finland</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style guarantees 40% of each sex represented in the membership of decision-making bodies	Political Parties receive state subsidy or other form of assistance	<b>37.5</b>
<b>Denmark</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style: Political parties guaranteed 40% women candidates in the 1980s. Quotas abandoned in 1996	Political Parties receive state subsidy or other form of assistance	<b>36.9</b>
<b>The Netherlands</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style: 50% established by the Labor Party, one of the two major parties represented in parliament, since 1987	Political Parties receive state subsidy or other form of assistance	<b>36.7</b>
<b>Cuba</b>	Direct voting with absolute majority system*	N/A	N/A	<b>36.0</b>
<b>Spain</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	tktktk	tktktk	<b>36.0</b>
<b>Costa Rica</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Legal Quotas: Constitution has guaranteed 40% quota for women since 1996	N/A	<b>35.1</b>
<b>Mozambique</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style: 30% women in party lists	N/A	<b>34.8</b>
<b>Belgium</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Legal Quotas, Zipper-Style: 2002 Legislation states that in the first election to which the law applies, all three top positions on party lists cannot be held by members of the same sex. Applies to top two positions in subsequent elections.	Campaign Finance limitations on political parties	<b>34.7</b>
<b>Austria</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style: Green Party, 50% quota since 1993; Austrian People's Party, 33.3% since 1995; Social Democratic Party, 40% since 1985	Campaign Finance limitations on political parties	<b>33.9</b>
<b>Argentina</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Legal Quotas, Zipper-Style: Political Parties have reserved 30% of positions in party lists for women since 1993	N/A	<b>33.7</b>
<b>Germany</b>	Mixed Member Proportional Representation System	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style: 40-50% quotas adopted by political parties since 1986	N/A	<b>32.8</b>
<b>South Africa</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style: 30% women on party lists since 1994	Political Parties receive state subsidy or other form of assistance	<b>32.8</b>
<b>Guyana</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	tktktk	tktktk	<b>30.8</b>
<b>Iceland</b>	Proportional Representation, List System	Party Quotas, Zipper-Style: 40% women in party lists	Political Parties receive state subsidy or other form of assistance	<b>30.2</b>
<b>Belarus</b>	Majority polling system	tktktktk	tktktktk	<b>29.4</b>
<b>Seychelle</b>	Mixed system of majority vote and proportional representation.	tktktk	tktktk	<b>29.4</b>

\* According to law, up to 50% of Deputies must be delegates chosen in each municipality. Other candidates are proposed by nominating assemblies comprising representatives of workers, youth, women, students and farmers and members of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. The final list of candidates is drawn up by the National Candidature Commission.

## Achieving Critical Mass

### Quotas for Women

All countries achieved critical mass after implementing party or legal quotas.

**Party Quotas** are voluntary measures or targets adopted by political parties to guarantee that a certain percentage of women are selected as election candidates. Political parties in Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Mozambique, Norway, Sweden and South Africa use this system.

**Legal Quotas**, which have constitutional or legislative clout, make it mandatory for political parties to set aside a certain percentage of parliamentary seats for women. Noncompliance can open parties to sanctions such as disqualification from elections or withdrawal of government campaign funding. Legal quotas are in force in Argentina, Belgium, Costa Rica, France and Rwanda. Most of the countries that have reached critical mass use a **'zipper'-style system**, alternating equal numbers of women and men on party electoral lists.

In most of the countries quotas are specific to women, but in some—Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden—**gender neutral quotas** have been introduced that establish a minimum and maximum percentage of parliamentary seats for both sexes.

### Proportional Representation

Proportional Representation is the most important predictor of high numbers of women in parliament; this system is used in all those countries where women occupy at least 30 percent of parliamentary seats. The most widely used form of Proportional Representation is the **List System**. In its simplest form each party presents its list of candidates to the electorate and receives seats in proportion to its overall share of the national vote. In some countries a minimum share of the votes may be required for a party to earn representation. In the **Mixed-Member System** voters elect a certain percentage of the legislature from single-seat, "winner-take-all" districts while the remaining members are chosen from lists.

### Campaign Subsidies

Of the 1.3 billion people living in dire poverty worldwide, 70 percent are women. Worldwide woman's average wage is 75 percent that of men's. It is not surprising, therefore, that women in general face obstacles in accessing campaign funds. Women candidates at the local and national levels need wider access to financial resources. The playing field is best leveled with campaign finance reform that makes it easier for women to mobilize resources. In most of the countries with a critical mass of women in parliament, political parties receive some form of government subsidy.

## WEDO Publications

*Keeping you in touch with the issues*

### Primers on Women in Government

<http://www.wedo.org/publicat/publicat>



**Get the Balance Right!**  
**Get Involved in the 50/50 Campaign!** <http://www.wedo.org/balance.htm>

## Strategies for Change

### Build Alliances

- Network with women inside and outside the corridors of power: caucus across party lines; collaborate with women's organizations on policy.
- Delegate senior women Members to mentor juniors. Push policy for more women representatives; encourage more women to run.
- Target male colleagues for consciousness-raising. Network and build relationships broadly—with the media, non-governmental organizations, labor unions, environmentalists and the private sector.

### Learn the Rules

- Participate in training and orientation exercises on internal parliamentary rules and procedure. Organize training in public speaking, debating and building effective communication skills.

### Use the Rules

- Seek to establish equal opportunity positions and women's ministries; expand existing structures to include women's concerns; change parliamentary work schedules to better suit women's realities.
- Establish public inquiries on women's issues and use findings to place issues on government agendas and within legislative programs.
- Speak for, co-sponsor and sponsor bills.

### Change the System

- Insist on candidate selection rules for entire party, especially for leadership positions.
- Introduce quota systems or proportional representation in committees and other bodies.
- Establish national machinery to monitor implementation and include regular debates on progress to ensure accountability.
- Encourage financial incentives for programs and projects that facilitate women's decision-making.

## Resources

### Organizations/Issues

**Inter-Parliamentary Union** (Women in National Parliaments): [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

**Center for Voting and Democracy** (Electoral Systems): [www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org),

**International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance** (Quotas:) [www.idea.int/quota/index.cfm](http://www.idea.int/quota/index.cfm)

**Women's Environment & Development Organization** (Women in Governance) [www.wedo.org](http://www.wedo.org)

**Women's Leadership Conference of the Americas (2001)**: [www.iadialo.org](http://www.iadialo.org)

**The International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES)** (Campaign Finance): [www.ifes.org](http://www.ifes.org)

### Publications

*Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (1997 & 2002).

*Electoral Systems, Contextual Factors and Women's Opportunity for Election to Parliament in Twenty-Three Democracies*, by Wilma Rule, *The Western Political Quarterly* (1987).

*No Short Cuts to Power, African Women in Politics and Politics Making*, By Anne Marie Goetz and Shireen Hassim, Zed Books (2003).

*The Politics of Increased Women's Representation: the Swedish Case*, by Diane Sainsbury, in *Gender and Party Politics* edited by Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris, Sage (1993).