



Women's Quota: Parliamentary Elections 2017



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What is the quota system and what does it seek to achieve?

The quota or shares, in general, is a measure under which a number of seats or functions in a group, body or institution is allocated to a specific category such as ethnic or regional minorities, or where a formula for the distribution of representative seats among various groups is adopted. The quota system is generally adopted as a positive measure to correct an imbalance in representation and equality between various community groups.

The women's quota in elections is one of the temporary special measures designed to promote gender equality and increase women's political participation and representation in elected bodies. It is a set of temporary general policies and legal and regulatory procedures adopted by the State to remove the structural barriers to women's participation in political life on an equal basis with their male counterparts.

The women's quota guarantees a minimum of seats for women representation in the elected body. The formula on the basis of which the quota is applied may vary according to the electoral system.



2

Why is a women's quota required? Why do we still need it in our times?



In the last twenty years, the world has witnessed an increase in the representation of women who now constitute %23 of the elected national bodies in the world, compared to %14 in 2000 and %11.3 in 1995. Hence the importance of the quota system and other temporary measures which application is a key factor in increasing the percentage of women's participation in elected bodies. However, the global average of %23 is not enough yet to form the critical mass that women need to make a real difference in representation and actual participation in decision-making- that is %30 of the representative bodies.

Similarly, the percentage of women's representation in government is still modest to this day and is often limited to stereotype portfolios such as women's and children's affairs. So, in spite of the remarkable progress, the representation of women is still considered very minimal and the goal of empowering women and promoting their participation in political life is still on the list of the international community and the United Nations' objectives for the third millennium (the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals).

The philosophical background for the adoption of quotas for women goes back first to the fact that women constitute more than half of the society. It is therefore fair for women to account for half of elected bodies. Second, the role of women in elected bodies and decision-making platforms is not limited to the representation of women's issues but includes all aspects of political action.

The quota system, when applied, reduces the consequences of women's deprivation, marginalization and exclusion which lasted for long periods due to social, cultural and educational norms and values. It also dispels the male-dominating mentality in the enactment of laws and regulations, and corrects the distribution of roles for both women and men. It gives eligible women an immediate opportunity to prove themselves and their capacities to the community. Moreover, the quota system imposes a fait accompli: the need for the presence of women in politics as ordinary citizens enjoying constitutional rights.

3

Should women's participation in political life be imposed by the quota system or achieved through the economic, social, cultural and political empowerment of women?

The quota system is necessary in order to accelerate women's participation in political life effectively. It has contributed to the increasing rates of women's participation in elected national bodies around the world, even in developed countries.

The quota system alone is not enough to achieve the effective participation of women in decision-making or an absolute equality in political representation between the sexes, especially in the long term. Progress will remain slow until the society's perception of women and the women's perception of themselves change. Hence the need to take quota-like measures to empower women socially, as stipulated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration.



The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women

Article 3:

"States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men."

Article 1) 4):

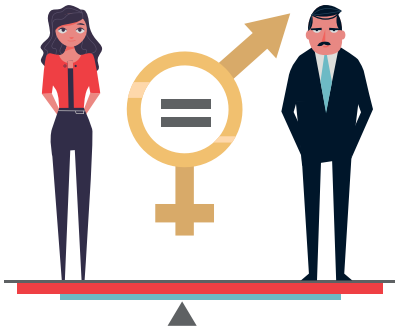
Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.

4

Doesn't the public interest require choosing the best and fittest for the community irrespective of sex, race, or other characteristics?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has confirmed that such measures do not discriminate but aim to achieve equality.

Experience and studies have shown that women's participation in decision-making, especially at the level of local councils leads to investing more public funds and sources in human development projects such as those concerned with health, food and employment.



The quota and the principle of equality

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Isn't the quota inconsistent with the principles of democracy, meritocracy and equal opportunity?

Wouldn't it be better for women to win the elections in an open battle and based on their political agenda, rather than by being imposed on the voter and given an advantage over men?

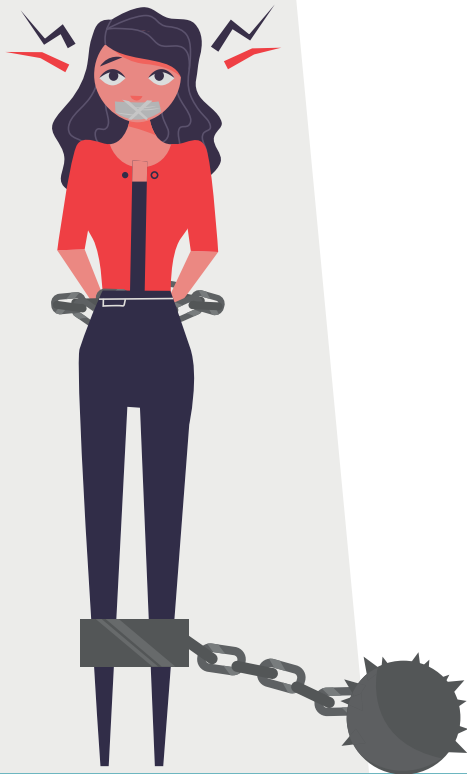
An open electoral battle is not enough because the battle is not equal in the first place, due to social and cultural barriers to women's access to political positions. This reality has made Lebanon rank 180th out of 187 countries on the list of female representation in parliaments in the world.

Therefore, a quota system is needed to achieve equality, yet every State remains responsible for providing an appropriate electoral climate for the voters to cast their vote freely and choose the candidates who propose the most convincing electoral program, irrespective of sex, race or other characteristics.

6

If the CEDAW calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination, why is discrimination by the quota system justifiable?

The quota system is a Positive Discrimination - Affirmative Action that aims to correct imbalances and restore the balance lost in a given society by removing barriers to women's participation in political life. It thus cannot be considered discriminatory. On the contrary, it is a positive measure aimed at achieving gender equality and eliminating discrimination against women. It is a temporary measure designed to give women a temporary chance to participate in political life until a real structural change occurs in society and in people's minds when absolute gender equality is achieved and the quota or any other temporary special measure is no longer needed.



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If the quota system is designed to safeguard the rights of minorities, why do we need to apply a quota for women who are not a minority but make up half of the society?

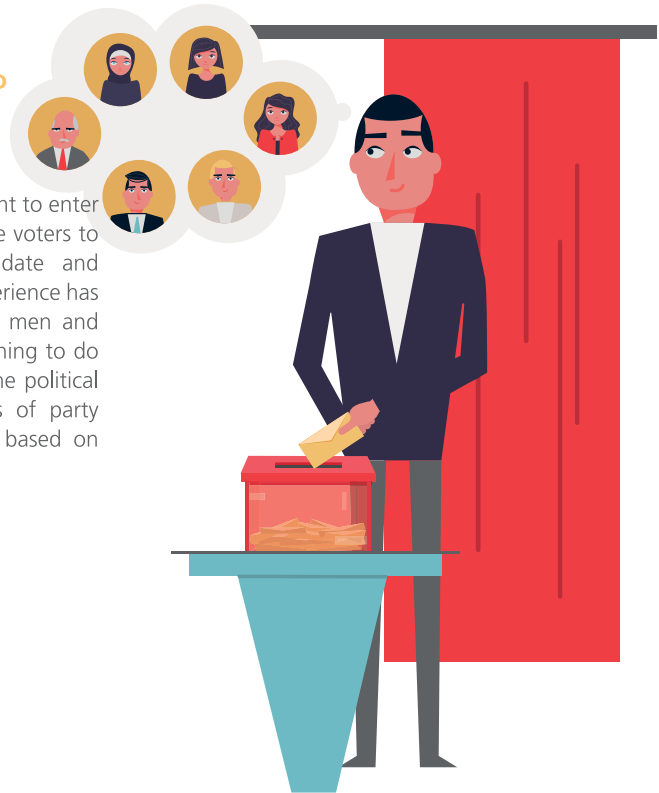
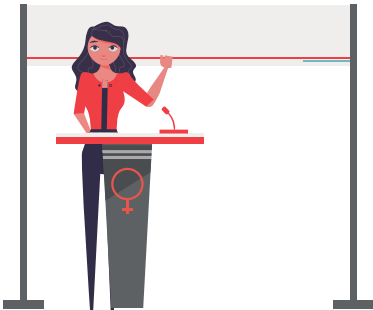
The logical standpoint behind the women's quota is different from that behind the minorities' quota. The former is based on the principle of equality between the sexes, while the second is based on the principle of equality between different social, cultural, regional groups. There is no contradiction between the two. When women are marginalized in the society as a whole, they are even more marginalized within minorities. Rarely do we see a minority group nominate a woman to represent them in elections.



8

Doesn't the quota system lead to having unqualified women in parliament?

The quota system guarantees women's right to enter the electoral race, but it remains up to the voters to judge the qualification of each candidate and evaluate their work and performance. Experience has shown that the entry of highly qualified men and women candidates to parliament has nothing to do with the quota, but rather depends on the political and democratic climate, the seriousness of party work, and the culture of accountability based on political performance.



9

What are the Quota system implementation mechanisms?

There are different types of mechanisms adopted to implement the quota system. They vary depending on the legal framework and the electoral system adopted in the country.

A distinction can be generally made between the optional quota and mandatory quota:

The optional quota is automatically approved by political parties without any legal obligation. It guarantees the nomination of a certain percentage of women on the lists of party candidates.

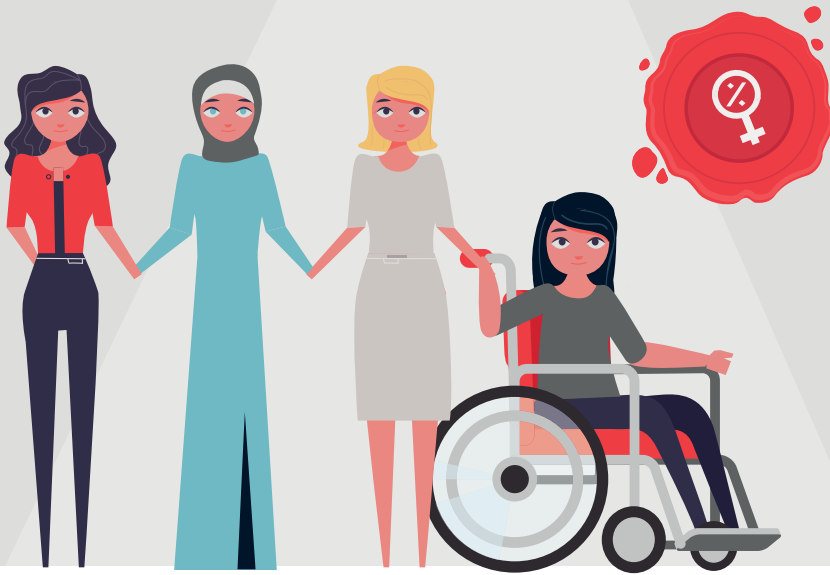
The mandatory quota is provided for in the Constitution and / or the law. It is binding on all parties.

It is also possible, within the mandatory quota, to make a distinction between the candidates' quota and the seats' quota, based on the electoral system adopted:

The candidates' quota is implemented in the proportional representation system. It guarantees the nomination of a certain percentage of women on the lists of party candidates.

This quota system could even impose a specific layout order of the names of male and female candidates on the lists, so as to improve the chances of women.

The seats' quota, or previously reserved seats, is generally implemented in the majoritarian system. It guarantees the election of the legally prescribed percentage of women.



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