

# Designing for Equality

*Best-fit, medium-fit and non-favourable combinations  
of electoral systems and gender quotas*





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of electoral systems and gender quotas*

by  
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## 1 Introduction and background

In January 2007, according to the statistics of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,<sup>1</sup> the world average proportion of women members of national-level legislatures stood at a mere 17.2 per cent. This was in spite of the fact that countries around the world have recognized the under-representation of women in politics and started to adopt measures to help women enter politics and the national legislatures. In 1995 the Beijing Process was initiated, striving for 30 per cent women's representation in national legislatures, 30 per cent being seen as a 'critical mass' needed for women to be able to make a meaningful contribution in an otherwise male domain. Despite slight improvements during recent years, only 19 countries in the world had achieved the goal of 30+ per cent women's representation in national parliaments by January 2007.<sup>2</sup>

In comparison to their male counterparts, women face numerous obstacles when entering politics. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) revised edition of *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (2005) offers insights into those challenges, as well as providing means of overcoming them. The use of quotas for women is a way of ensuring 'fast-track' access to national parliaments.

Besides political, socio-economic and psychological reasons that create obstacles for women entering politics, one important variable influencing the likelihood of women being elected to the (national) legislature is the electoral system used in a country. International IDEA offers detailed insights into the particular kinds of electoral systems in *Electoral System Design: the New International IDEA Handbook* (2005).

This publication brings together the insights provided in the two above-mentioned International IDEA Handbooks. It provides an overview of the 'fit' of the various electoral systems with different kinds of quota and thereby assesses how increased women's representation can be achieved under different combinations of electoral systems and quotas. It aims to serve as a reference tool for all those who work to increase women's representation in politics.

## 2 What are electoral systems?

In this section, the different electoral systems are described to provide an overview of the broad range of possible settings. The electoral system chosen in a country will directly impact on women's political participation.

### 2.1 Definition of electoral systems

There are many definitions of electoral systems: everything from the smallest administrative details to the largest political contexts is at times referred to as a country's electoral system. Here, in order to highlight the effects on representation, the electoral system is defined as:

*The way in which votes are translated into seats*

The three main elements of electoral systems are:

- the district magnitude—determining how many representatives are elected in one electoral district;
- the formula—determining how the winner of a seat is chosen; and
- the ballot structure—determining whether the voter votes for a candidate or a party and whether the voter makes a single choice or expresses a series of preferences.

Electoral systems can be classified into families based on the processes by which they translate votes into seats. International IDEA has identified three main families—plurality/majority, mixed and proportional systems—and a fourth family with electoral systems which do not fit easily into the three main families. Within these four families, 12 individual systems can be identified.

### 2.2 Types of electoral systems

#### *List Proportional Representation (List PR)*

Proportional representation (PR) requires the use of electoral districts with more than one member. Under a List PR system, each party or grouping presents a list of candidates for a multi-member electoral district, the voters vote for a party and the parties receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the vote. In some (closed list) systems, the winning candidates are taken from the lists in the order of their position on them. If the lists are 'open' or 'free', voters can influence the order of the candidates by marking individual preferences.

#### *First Past The Post (FPTP)*

First Past The Post is the simplest form of plurality/majority electoral system. The winning candidate is the one who gains more votes than any other candidate, even if this is not an absolute majority (over 50 per cent) of valid votes. The system uses single-member districts and the voters vote for candidates rather than political parties.

#### *Two-Round System (TRS)*

The Two-Round System is a plurality/majority system in which a second election is held if no candidate or party achieves a given level of votes, most commonly an absolute majority (over 50 per cent) in the first election round. A Two-Round System may take a plurality/majority form—more than two candidates contest the second round and the one who wins the highest number of votes in the second round is elected, regardless of whether they have won an absolute majority—or a majority run-off form—only the top two candidates in the first round contest the second round.

#### *Parallel Systems*

A Parallel System is a mixed system in which the choices expressed by the voters are used to elect representatives through two different systems—one List PR system and (usually) one plurality/majority system—but where no account is taken of the seats allocated under the plurality/majority system in calculating the results in the List PR system.

#### *Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)*

Mixed Member Proportional is a mixed system in which the choices expressed by the voters are used to elect representatives through two different systems—one (most often) a plurality/majority system, usually in single-member districts, and the other a List PR system. The PR seats are awarded to compensate for any disproportionality in the results from the plurality/majority system.

#### *Block Vote (BV)*

Block Vote is a plurality/majority system used in multi-member districts. Electors have as many votes as there are candidates to be elected. The candidates with the highest vote totals win the seats. Usually, voters vote for candidates rather than parties. In most systems, they may use as many or as few of their votes as they wish.

#### *Limited Vote (LV)*

Limited Vote is a candidate-centred electoral system used in multi-member districts in which electors have more than one vote, but fewer votes than there are candidates to be elected. The candidates with the highest vote totals win the seats.

#### *Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV)*

Under the Single Non-Transferable Vote system, voters cast a single vote in a multi-member district. The candidates with the highest vote totals are declared elected. Voters vote for candidates rather than political parties.

#### *Party Block Vote (PBV)*

This is a plurality/majority system using multi-member districts in which voters cast a single party-centred vote for a party of choice and do not choose between the candidates. The party with the most votes wins every seat in the electoral district.

#### *Alternative Vote (AV)*

The Alternative Vote is a preferential plurality/majority system used in single-member districts. Voters use numbers to mark their preferences on the ballot paper. A candidate who receives an absolute majority (over 50 per cent) of valid first-preference votes is declared elected. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority of first preferences, the least successful candidates are eliminated and their votes reallocated according to their second preferences until one candidate has an absolute majority. Voters vote for candidates rather than political parties.

#### *Single Transferable Vote (STV)*

The Single Transferable Vote is a preferential system in which the voter ranks the candidates in a multi-member district and the candidates that surpass a specified electoral quota<sup>3</sup> of first-preference votes are immediately elected. In successive counts, votes are then redistributed (based on second and lower preferences) from the least successful candidates, who are eliminated, and votes surplus to the electoral quota are redistributed from successful candidates until sufficient candidates are declared elected. Voters normally vote for candidates rather than political parties, although a party-list option is possible.

#### *Borda Count (BC)*

Borda Count is a candidate-centred preferential system used in either single- or multi-member districts. Voters use numbers to mark their preferences on the ballot paper and each preference marked is then assigned a value, using equal steps. These are summed and the candidate(s) with the highest total(s) is/are declared elected.

### 3 What are quotas?

Quotas for women are a form of affirmative action to help them overcome the obstacles that prevent them from entering politics in the same way as their male colleagues. This section gives an overview of quota types and describes the ways in which they are applied. Several types of quota and methods of application are possible. To serve the purpose of achieving increased women's political participation, a sound understanding of how quotas work is needed.

#### 3.1 Legal versus voluntary quotas

There are different types of quotas, the main distinction being between voluntary party quotas on the one hand and constitutional and legislative quotas on the other.

*Constitutional quotas* are enshrined in the country's constitution, while *legislative quotas* are enshrined in the election law, political party law or other comparable law of a country. By definition, both forms are based on legal provisions, obliging all political entities participating in elections to apply them equally. Non-compliance with legislative or constitutional quotas can result in penalties for those political entities which did not apply them. Examples of sanctions issued by the legal authorities of a country can range from disqualifying candidates, to the imposition of fines, up to disqualification of the entire party.

*Voluntary party quotas* are adopted voluntarily by political parties. They are set by the parties themselves to guarantee the nomination of a certain number or proportion of women. As the name reveals, voluntary party quotas are not legally binding and there are therefore no sanctions to enforce them.

#### 3.2 Application of quotas

Quotas can be applied during the nomination process of candidates or can be results-based.

##### *Quotas applied in the nomination process*

When applied during the *nomination* process, the aim of quotas is to make it easier for women to be placed strategically on a party's lists of candidates (or to be nominated in an electoral district) in such a way as to give them equal—or close to equal—opportunities to be elected to the legislative body.

Regulations can range from being loose, with little regulation set for women to be nominated in a favourable manner (e.g. 20 per cent of proposed candidates have to be women, but there are no obligations as to where to place them, so that—in the electoral systems that use lists—they can be placed at the end of the list where the likelihood to their actually being elected is minimal), to strict rules which prescribe a specific ranking of women vis-à-vis men. In the latter cases *rank-order rules* are applied which include the 'zipper system' or 'zebra system', where every other candidate on the list must be a woman. Another possibility is to set a certain percentage *ceiling*—for example, in the first half of the candidate list, the minimum number of either sex (men or women) is one-third of the total number of candidates.

In the nomination process, quotas can be applied voluntarily by the parties, as well as being officially regulated by law through for example the election law or the constitution.

#### *Results-based quotas*

Results-based quotas ensure that either a certain percentage (e.g. 20 per cent) or a certain number (e.g. 20 out of 100) of the seats in a legislature are reserved for women.<sup>4</sup>

One form of results-based quotas is *a separate 'women-only' list or electoral district, or a 'women-only' electoral tier*, electing women to a predetermined number of seats. This form requires, as the name suggests, that only women are fielded as candidates in the district or tier in question.

Another form of results-based quota is the 'best loser' system, which means that among the women candidates, those who received the most votes, up to the number set by the quota, are elected even though male candidates may have won more votes.

Any form of results-based quota will have to be enshrined in the constitution, the election law, the political party law or another comparable law to ensure that it is applied and to ensure that the determined percentage or the seats reserved for women in the legislature are legally secured and cannot be challenged by any of the contestant parties. In the case of the 'best loser system', it is also vital to have it entrenched in the law in order for parties to be allowed to change the successful candidates after the election has been held (giving the seat to a female candidate instead of a male one).

In addition to these mechanisms—which are applied to the electoral process—women can also be directly appointed to the legislature (for example by the country's executive). Because this is outside the electoral process, it will not be taken into consideration in the analysis of the relationship of electoral systems and gender quotas.

## 4 Electoral system variables which impact on the representation of women

Even if quotas are not applied, the various electoral systems will in themselves work differently when it comes to the representation of women (for details, see the first row of the Table which accompanies this publication) and will also affect the possibility of introducing quotas and the very effectiveness of quotas once introduced.

Research has indicated that List PR systems do better when it comes to the representation of women.<sup>5</sup> However, in order to see the mechanisms at work and to get a greater understanding of what the important features are, it is important to break down the systems into their parts and look at the three main elements introduced in section 2. above.

### 4.1 District magnitude

The size or magnitude of the electoral district has a direct impact on the likelihood of women being nominated and elected. If parties can nominate more than one person they will be more likely to nominate a balanced slate than if they are only able to nominate one person per district. If only one candidate is to be nominated, it will often be the male incumbent, and challenging him with a woman candidate can create tensions within the party. Also, if faced with the decision between a man and a woman, parties will often choose the man, as he is seen as the most broadly accepted candidate. This will be less of a problem when the district magnitude is higher and several individuals can be nominated and elected from one party, thus increasing the likelihood of parties nominating women to attractive positions without jeopardizing a 'male' slot.

#### *Party magnitude*

Related to the district magnitude is the party magnitude, which means the number of candidates elected from one party in one electoral district. Since the first slots on the candidate lists or in the party hierarchy are often men (party leaders and others), the bigger the party magnitude, the better the chances for women, as parties will then fill their second and subsequent seats with candidates other than their absolute top candidates. The party magnitude will be larger if the districts are large and if the number of parties which win elections is relatively low. Party magnitude is thus linked to the design process but can only be calculated from the actual election results. The number of elected parties can be limited, for example, by a legal threshold of support needed to gain representation in the legislature (e.g. 5 per cent of the vote). This excludes the smallest parties from the legislature. With small party magnitudes, even if women are nominated, this will have little or limited impact unless they are among the absolute top candidates.

### 4.2 The formula

In many countries, in order for parties to be attractive to a wide spectrum of voters, it is important for them to offer a variety of candidate profiles (e.g. based on gender, ethnicity, geographical region, age). They are more

likely to do so in a system where the threat of losing seats to a competing party is bigger. This threat is bigger if a formula is used that:

(a) leads to many parties in the legislature, as parties are then likely to be closer to each other and voters can change parties more easily. This is likely to yield attempts by parties to appear ‘fair’ and gender balanced in order not to lose votes to any of the parties whose policies are close to their own. It should be noted, however, that a *very high* number of parties in the legislature can work against the representation of women as party magnitude goes down (see *Party magnitude*); and/or

(b) leads to few ‘wasted’ votes. If for example a plurality is needed to gain a seat, no bonus is given for parties which have more votes than the mere plurality (i.e. surplus votes are ‘wasted’) and no representation is given to a party which has less votes than the winner (i.e. all votes for that party are ‘wasted’), parties will be likely to give priority to their ‘core group’ of voters—with little incentive to try to appeal to voters outside that group. In systems where all votes count towards gaining the next seat, parties will be more eager to appeal to all kinds of voters in a district.

### 4.3 The ballot structure

The ballot structure defines how voters are allowed to express their choice. Electoral systems can be either candidate-centred (e.g. FPTP systems) or party-centred (e.g. closed List PR systems). It is easier to apply quotas in electoral systems that are party-centred, as the candidates elected from each party will then be determined by the parties at the time of nomination rather than by the voters on election day. However, in countries where the attitude of the electorate is more favourable towards women candidates, and with an electorate which is more in favour of women than the parties are, candidate-centred systems (including open List PR systems) can facilitate the election of women with or without the use of quotas.

## 5 Combinations of electoral systems and quotas: the results

The Table that accompanies this publication offers an overview of the various electoral systems and combinations with specific quotas, by illustrating which outcomes can be expected when a certain quota is applied under a certain electoral system. The likely relative successes of the respective combinations are illustrated by a colour code.

- *Green*: the combination of electoral system and a quota is possible and favourable for the representation of women.
- *Yellow*: the combination of electoral system and a quota can be possible and favourable for the representation of women if the electoral system/quota combination fulfils specific criteria.
- *Red*: the combination of electoral system and a quota is either not possible or not favourable to increased representation for women.

This overview focuses on the mechanisms of the interaction between electoral systems and quotas rather than empirical facts about how these combinations work in practice. It is therefore not possible to deduce any statistics to illustrate successful use or other quantitative data from this grid.

The Table illustrates a variety of possible combinations of specific electoral systems with quotas that will produce an increased number of women in politics. The most favourable combinations are shown in green. Several such combinations can be identified. These combinations and the conditions under which they will favour the election of women can be summarized as follows.<sup>6</sup>

### 5.1 Best-fit combinations

*Systems with a second tier + reserved seats—a tier for women candidates only*

All systems can turn an existing tier into a women-only tier or alternatively add a tier for women candidates only. This is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for. Example of this combination: Pakistan.

*List PR with **small** districts + nominations—percentage regulations **with** placement mandate/rank-order rules (e.g. zipper quotas)*

This combination is guaranteed to work when lists are closed. If lists are open, the order can change, thus undermining the predetermined ranking. It is likely to be slightly less effective in List PR systems with small districts than in List PR systems with large districts as party magnitude is likely to be smaller and more men (who are usually top ranked) are likely to be elected even under zipper quotas. This can be dealt with within parties by alternating also the number-one position on lists, placing women first on some lists and men first on others. Examples of this combination: Dominican Republic and Ecuador.

*List PR with **large** districts + nominations—percentage regulations **without** placement mandate/rank-order rules*

This combination increases significantly the likelihood of women being elected, especially with large party magnitudes, as even women who are

placed quite low on the lists are elected. Example of this combination: Macedonia.

*List PR with **large** districts + nominations—percentage regulations **with** placement mandate/rank-order rules (e.g. zipper quotas)*

This combination is guaranteed to work when lists are closed. If lists are open, the order can change, thus undermining the predetermined ranking. It is likely to be slightly less effective in List PR systems with small districts than in List PR systems with large districts as party magnitude is likely to be smaller and more men (who are usually top ranked) are likely to be elected even under zipper quotas. Examples of this combination: Argentina, Belgium, Costa Rica and Iraq (2005 elections).

*Block Vote (+LV and SNTV) + reserved seats—best loser system*

This is possible<sup>7</sup> and it will work unless there are not enough women candidates. It gives parties incentives to field women candidates in order not to lose any seats to competing parties. Example of this combination: Jordan.

*Party Block Vote + nominations—percentage regulations **without** placement mandate/rank-order rules*

This combination is guaranteed to work since the whole list is elected if it receives the highest number of votes. Independent candidates who could reduce the effect of the quota are not likely to stand to any great extent as their chances of winning are minimal. Examples of this combination: Cameroon (voluntary party quotas adopted by the two largest parties) and Djibouti.

*Party Block Vote + nominations—percentage regulations **with** placement mandate/rank-order rules (e.g. zipper quotas)*

This combination is guaranteed to work just as well as without placement mandate/rank-order rules as the whole list is elected if it receives the highest number of votes.

*Single Transferable Vote + reserved seats —best loser system*

This combination is possible by the same logic as Block Vote, LV and SNTV. When all but the reserved seats have been filled in each district, if no woman has been elected, the highest-polling women are elected.

*Mixed Member Proportional + reserved seats—a tier for women candidates only*

This combination is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.

*Borda Count + reserved seats—best loser system*

This combination is possible by the same logic as BV, LV, SNTV and STV, but only in multi-member districts.

## 5.2 Medium-fit combinations that can work favourably but will need special attention

Beside those ‘best-fit’ combinations, a number of other combinations can work to a certain degree when specific variables are borne in mind.

Some of those are described below. Those cases need more detailed attention by the institutional designer who aims to achieve a higher number of women in the legislature if the goal of increasing women's political participation is not to be jeopardized, as a quota arrangement can be neutralized by a technicality of the electoral system.

One such example is the use of *List PR with large districts without applying any quotas*. List PR systems give incentives for women to be nominated and thereby increase the likelihood of women being elected through a variety of different ways. Women can be nominated together with men so that incumbent men are not challenged specifically. Most votes go towards giving the party another seat, which means that it is important for the party to campaign outside its own group of defined voters. Parties are many and close to each other in policy terms and thus those that are not perceived as being 'fair' to women risk losing voters. The larger the districts and party magnitudes, the higher the likelihood of women being elected. However, the mere use of List PR systems without any quota provision does not guarantee a high representation of women.

Another example would be the use of *any system* (except List PR systems with one nationwide district only) *with reserved seats—certain districts for women candidates only*. This combination does work in theory, but in order to be effective it requires that in certain geographic areas only women are allowed to stand for elections. It may be difficult to determine which electoral district this should apply to, and voters and candidates alike may feel that their choice and/or political liberties are being infringed upon. These districts can be made to rotate from one election to another, so that the same districts are not women-only all the time. This, however, creates an effective term limit for men—even if there is none explicitly in the electoral legislation—as incumbent men are not allowed to stand again in their district when it is turned into a women-only district. Even if male candidates are then allowed to stand in another district, it may be close to impossible for them in practice to be successful when standing in a district to which they have no links.

Other examples of this are the use of a *Parallel or MMP system together with nominations—percentage regulations without placement mandate/ rank-order rules or percentage regulations with rank-order rules* (e.g. *zipper quotas*). These quotas work only for the List PR part of the system (if—as is most often the case—the district element is FPTP). The effectiveness of quotas will be affected by lists being open or closed and by the party magnitude. Again, as a rule, the larger the party magnitude, the more favourable for women candidates. An example is Armenia (though with only 5 per cent reserved seats).

### 5.3 Impossible or non-favourable combinations

This publication identifies 16 combinations of electoral systems with quota types which are either not possible or not likely to be favourable to achieving a higher level of political representation for women. Countries in this category which aim to increase women's political participation can support the election of women either by reviewing the electoral system in use or by reviewing or introducing quotas that will change the status from a 'non-favourable combination' to one of the other categories. This can be controversial since—in addition to raising the

representation of women—it can significantly change the outcome of elections and have other, wider political implications. Potential changes to an electoral system therefore have to be well thought through. The political will for change and a readiness on the part of the legislature and the election authorities must exist. In addition, the change must have the endorsement of the relevant national stakeholders.

#### 5.4 Summary of the Table

No electoral system will translate votes into seats in a neutral way. Regardless of which electoral system is chosen, it will have a number of different political implications—including for the level of representation of women. Used ‘as is’ without quotas, List PR systems with large districts are the systems that tend to provide the most favourable conditions for the election of women, while many of the single-member district systems will provide obstacles for women candidates.

Some of the reasons for the advantages of the List PR system in this sense are (a) that it always uses multi-member districts, and (b) that the party magnitudes resulting from elections under List PR systems are usually large. However, List PR is not the only system likely to provide a good basis for the effective implementation of quotas. Other systems with large districts and party-centred voting, such as PBV, could be just as effective in promoting the election of women.

The electoral systems that make the implementation of quotas more difficult are those that use small electoral districts with candidate-centred voting and decentralized nomination procedures (see sub-section 6.5) and those which result in low party magnitudes, for example, FPTP, TRS and AV. Even proportional systems such as STV can be difficult to combine with certain quotas as they too are candidate-centred.

When applying quotas in the nomination process (either as a set percentage or as a number, or with rank-order rules), as the quotas will not be applicable to independent candidates, the existence of many independent candidates will make these quotas less effective in practice. The existence of only a small number of independent candidates and the application of rank-order rules (such as zipper quotas) will make it likely for as many women as the quota determines to be elected. Many candidate-centred systems, however, do not allow predetermined ranking, as it is the voters who determine the ranking of the candidates on election day.

The best loser system will guarantee that women are elected (if there are enough candidates and if more than one person is elected in each district) but may be controversial, as some candidates with fewer votes may overtake others with more votes. In candidate-centred systems—in theory—the best loser system may even shift seats for women from one party to another, which could also be controversial, as it will affect the composition of the legislature. The use of this quota could be more challenging than other types, as the preference given to a candidate on the basis of gender is more obvious than it is when quotas are used in the nomination process.

All in all—even though the quotas likely to be most effective are the ones which target the results rather than those which target the nomination process—nomination-focused quotas can still be used if results-based ones are too controversial in a particular country. The

choice is then between effective but controversial quotas on the one hand and less effective but also less controversial quotas on the other.

Last but not least, it is interesting to note that there is no 'impossible' electoral system: it is possible to design a quota solution even under systems that are usually thought of as being unfavourable towards women.

## 6 Other variables that impact on the representation of women

Besides the electoral system used, there are a variety of other variables which will affect the effectiveness of a quota in particular and the representation of women in general. The following are some of the major issues to consider.

### 6.1 Enforceability

As described above, quotas are only guaranteed to be an effective tool when they become enforceable and are therefore actually applied by the contesting political entities. To ensure that quotas are applied and followed, they need to be legally binding (legislative or constitutional quotas) and supervision by the electoral management body (EMB) is needed. Furthermore, it is important to follow up non-compliance through sanctions, which need to be significant enough to actually matter to the parties. In some countries and in some situations it is possible to get similar results with voluntary quotas or with legislative quotas without sanctions (as with the Indonesian ‘maybe-quota’ where parties are asked to ‘bear in their hearts’ the desirability of including at least 30 per cent women candidates on their lists), but the effects will be subject to the will of the individual parties and are likely to vary from one election to the next.

### 6.2 Capacity of the electoral management body

A skilled EMB is needed to inform the political parties about the electoral system and the application of both voluntary and legally binding quotas under it. In addition to this, the EMB needs to be willing and able to supervise and administer the quota system, to ensure that sanctions are issued and carried out in cases of non-compliance.

### 6.3 Cultural factors and voter preferences

The voters’ attitudes towards women candidates will impact on the likelihood of their being elected, especially in candidate-centred systems. Furthermore, issues of access to the public media and campaign resources influence women’s success in presenting themselves as candidates.<sup>8</sup>

### 6.4 Aspirants

Women aspirants need to be available, identified and trained by the political parties. It is important to create incentives for women to nominate themselves or be nominated as candidates. Political parties play a vital role when it comes to talent-spotting women and in supporting women aspirants.

### 6.5 Centralized/decentralized nomination procedures

The nomination procedures affect the effectiveness of internal party regulations and legislated quotas. On the one hand, centralized nomination procedures can make it easier and quicker to decide about the composition of the party’s candidates without having to convince all local party offices individually. On the other hand, they can make it harder for women active at the local level who are not known at the central level to be nominated at the national level. This is a particular disadvantage for women where the nomination of candidates is done

centrally by a party leader or a group of people on the basis of personal contacts with party leaders. Women from rural areas are less likely to have good contacts with the party leadership and as a result might not be nominated.

## 7 Conclusions and recommendations

This publication has shown the relationship between electoral systems and quotas, illustrating which combinations are likely to be favourable to women and which may not be as effective. However, the logic of the relationship between electoral systems and quotas is applicable to any other group in society for which increased representation is desired, e.g. ethnic minorities. It does not lead to any automatic conclusion as to which electoral system or which quota to choose, since there are many other implications to consider when designing electoral institutions. Hopefully, however, this publication will raise awareness of the variables at play, the choices to be made and the likely implications of these choices for the representation of women.

As always, the country context needs to be taken into account. Whenever designing the ‘rules of the game’, a holistic view should be taken in order to see the ways in which different elements can act to complement each other and avoid gaps or contradictions. Moreover, there are of course other laws and contextual factors that can be taken into account when trying to promote the representation of women in legislatures.

As has been shown, the different combinations of electoral systems and quotas work quite differently. One clear conclusion is therefore that *the electoral system and the quota to be used must be considered together instead of separately.*

It is also important to mention that the institutional designer should not feel restricted to wholesale solutions imported directly from the existing literature and/or the experiences of other countries, as they may not necessarily be the best ones for the country in question. Both electoral systems and quotas can be modified and adapted to suit the specific context in which they are implemented.

When designing electoral institutions, it is highly advisable to include as many stakeholders as possible in the discussion, design and implementation phases in order to reach a broad understanding of the problems at hand and thereby achieve the greatest possible legitimacy for the provisions adopted.

Finally, the use of gender quotas can significantly increase women’s participation in politics, but it is important to keep in mind that quotas can often be treated as a ceiling for the nomination of women candidates. For example, a quota stipulating that 30 per cent of candidates should be women is unlikely to result in a higher percentage being nominated, and thereby in effect sets a ceiling to women’s political representation. In order to increase the representation of women, it is therefore important to work on many different fronts at the same time, of which electoral systems and quotas are only two.

## 8 Notes

- 1 See the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) website, <<http://www.ipu.org>>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 An electoral quota refers to the number of votes that guarantees a party or candidate to win one seat in a particular electoral district in a PR system. There are three variants in common use: the Hare, Droop (or Hagenbach-Bischoff) and Imperiali quotas.
- 4 In some MMP systems, the exact total number of seats in the legislature is not determined until after the election. In some countries, the size of the legislature changes with the size of the population. In these cases, there could be an actual difference between stipulating a percentage and a fixed number of reserved seats when designing the quota.
- 5 See for example the following in *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers. A Revised Edition* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2005): Matland, Richard E., “Enhancing Women’s Political Participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems”, chapter 3, pp. 99–110; Sineau, Mariette, “The French Experience: Institutionalizing Parity”, case study, pp. 127–30; and Meintjes, Sheila, “South Africa: Beyond Numbers”, case study, p. 231.
- 6 The country examples given are based on information available by December 2006.
- 7 It is used in Mauritius and Palestine for under-represented groups, although not for women.
- 8 See Ballington, Julie, “Gender Equality in Political Party Funding”, in *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2003), chapter 9, pp. 157–67.

## 9 Further reading

### International IDEA publications

*Publications can be found online for a free download or to order hard copies.*

(1) <<http://www.idea.int/publications/browse/gender.cfm>>

- *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers. A Revised Edition, 2006*  
English
- *Building Democracy in Egypt: Women's Political Participation, Political Party Life and Democratic Elections*  
English, Arabic
- *Building Democracy in Jordan: Women's Political Participation, Political Party Life and Democratic Elections*  
English, Arabic
- *Building Democracy in Yemen: Women's Political Participation, Political Party Life and Democratic Elections*  
English, Arabic
- *Cuotas de género: democracia y representación*  
Spanish

- *Strengthening Women's Political Participation in Indonesia*  
English, Bahasa
  - *La concepción del poder desde las mujeres*  
Spanish
  - *The Implementation of Quotas: African Experiences*  
English
  - *The Implementation of Quotas: Asian Experiences*  
English
  - *The Implementation of Quotas: European Experiences*  
English
  - *The Implementation of Quotas: Latin American Experiences*  
English, Spanish
  - *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (1998 edition)  
English, French, Russian, Spanish
  - *Mujer, Partidos Políticos y Reforma Electoral*  
Spanish
- (2) <<http://www.idea.int/publications/browse/electoral.cfm>>
- *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook*  
(2005 edition)  
English, Nepali, Spanish
  - *Sistema Electoral*  
Spanish
  - *Electoral System Design* (2002 edition)  
English, Arabic, Burmese, French, Spanish
  - *Sistemas electorales y reforma electoral: una introducción*  
Spanish

*A collection of essays/study papers by other authors is available at*  
<<http://www.quotaproject.org>>  
(by International IDEA and Stockholm University)

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## 10 Glossary

**Alternative Vote (AV):** A candidate-centred, preferential plurality/majority system used in single-member districts in which voters use numbers to mark their preferences on the ballot paper. A candidate who receives an absolute majority (50 per cent plus 1) of valid first-preference votes is declared elected. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority of first preferences, the least successful candidates are eliminated and their votes reallocated until one candidate has an absolute majority of valid votes remaining.

**Ballot structure:** The way in which electoral choices are presented on the ballot paper; in particular, whether the ballot is candidate-centred or party-centred.

**Best loser system:** Provisions under which previously unsuccessful candidates with the most votes in a certain group (e.g. among women) will be elected to the legislature even if they have fewer votes than other candidates do, until the previously set quota is reached. E.g. among the women candidates, those who received the most votes up to the number set by the quota are elected even though male candidates may have won more votes.

**Block Vote (BV):** A plurality/majority system used in multi-member districts. Electors have as many votes as there are candidates to be elected. The candidates with the highest vote totals win the seats. Usually voters vote for candidates rather than parties and in most systems may use as many or as few of their votes as they wish.

**Borda Count (BC):** A candidate-centred preferential system used in either single- or multi-member districts in which voters use numbers to mark their preferences in the ballot paper and each preference marked is then assigned a value, using equal steps. These are summed and the candidate(s) with the highest total(s) is/are declared elected.

**District magnitude:** For an electoral district, the number of representatives to be elected from it.

**Electoral district:** One of the geographic areas into which a country, local authority or supranational institution may be divided for electoral purposes. An electoral district may elect one or more representatives to an elected body.

**Electoral formula:** The rules for determining a winner/winners in an electoral system.

**Electoral Management Body (EMB):** The organization tasked under the electoral law with responsibility for the conduct of elections. In most countries the EMB consists either of an independent commission appointed for the purpose or of a specified government department.

**Electoral quota:** The number of votes that guarantees that a party or candidate will win one seat in a particular electoral district in a PR system. There are three variants in common use: the Hare, Droop (or Hagenbach-Bischoff) and Imperiali quotas.

**Electoral system:** That part of the electoral law and regulations which determines how parties and candidates are elected to a body as representatives. Its three most significant components are the electoral formula, the ballot structure and the district magnitude.

**First Past The Post (FPTP):** The simplest form of plurality/majority electoral system. The winning candidate is the one who gains more votes than any other candidate, even if this is not an absolute majority of valid votes. The system uses single-member districts and the voters vote for candidates rather than political parties.

**List Proportional Representation (List PR):** Proportional representation requires the use of electoral districts with more than one member. Under a List PR system, each party or grouping presents a list of candidates for a multi-member electoral district, the voters vote for a party, and parties receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the vote. In some (closed list) systems, the winning candidates are taken from the parties' lists in the order of their position on the lists. If lists are 'open' or 'free', voters can influence the candidates' order by marking individual preferences.

**Mixed Member Proportional (MMP):** A mixed system in which the choices expressed by the voters are used to elect representatives through two different systems—most often a plurality/majority system (usually in single-member districts) and a List PR system. The PR seats are awarded to compensate for any disproportionality in the results from the plurality/majority system.

**Parallel System:** A mixed system in which the choices expressed by the voters are used to elect representatives through two different systems—one List PR system and (usually) one plurality/majority system—but where no account is taken of the seats allocated under the plurality/majority system in calculating the results in the List PR system.

**Party Block Vote (PBV):** A plurality/majority system using multi-member districts in which voters cast a single party-centred vote for a party of choice and do not choose between the candidates. The party with the most votes will win every seat in the electoral district.

**Party magnitude:** For an electoral district, the average number of representatives elected by each party and grouping. For a country, the average of the party magnitudes for all electoral districts.

**Proportional representation (PR):** An electoral system family, based on the principle of the conscious translation of the overall share of the vote obtained by a party or grouping into a corresponding share of the seats in an elected body. For example, a party that wins 30 per cent

of the vote will receive approximately 30 per cent of the seats. All PR systems require the use of multi-member districts. There are two main types of PR system, List PR and the Single Transferable Vote (STV).

**Quota:** A number of seats in an elected body or a proportion of candidates nominated by a party or grouping which are required to be filled by representatives of a particular kind (in this publication, women); used to ensure the nomination and election of a minimum number of women.

**Limited Vote (LV):** A candidate-centred electoral system used in multi-member districts in which electors have more than one vote, but fewer votes than there are candidates to be elected. The candidates with the highest vote totals win the seats.

**Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV):** Voters cast a single vote in a multi-member district. The candidates with the highest vote totals are declared elected. Voters vote for candidates rather than political parties.

**Single Transferable Vote (STV):** A preferential system in which the voter ranks the candidates in a multi-member district and the candidates that surpass a specified electoral quota of first-preference votes are immediately elected. In successive counts, votes are redistributed from the least successful candidates, who are eliminated, and votes surplus to the electoral quota are redistributed from successful candidates, until sufficient candidates are declared elected. Voters normally vote for candidates rather than political parties, although a party-list option is possible.

**Two-Round System (TRS):** A plurality/majority system in which a second election is held if no candidate or party achieves a given level of votes, most commonly an absolute majority (50 per cent plus one), in the first election round. A Two-Round System may take a plurality/majority form—more than two candidates contest the second round and the one who then wins the highest number of votes is elected, regardless of whether he has won an absolute majority—or a majority run-off form—only the top two candidates in the first round contest the second round.

**Threshold:** The minimum level of support which a party needs to gain representation in the legislature. A threshold may be formal—a figure laid down in the constitution or the law, usually in the form of a percentage of the valid votes cast—or effective or ‘natural’—a mathematical property of the electoral system in use.

**Tier:** The level at which candidates are elected. It can be local, regional or national. All electoral systems thus have at least one tier, but many have two and sometimes even three.

**Zipper:** Quota requiring every other candidate on a party list to be a man and every other candidate to be a woman. Also known as a zebra system.

Despite some improvements in the number of women elected to national legislatures since the adoption of the Beijing Process in 1995, according to the ranking of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, by January 2007 only 19 countries in the world have achieved the goal of 30+ per cent women's representation in national legislatures.

The electoral system and quotas for women used to elect representatives to the legislature are two important variables that affect women's political representation. *Designing for Equality* provides an overview of the 'fit' of various electoral systems with different kinds of quotas. It assesses how increased women's representation can be achieved under different combinations of electoral systems and quotas, serving as a reference tool for all those who work to increase women's representation in politics.

### **About International IDEA**

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance—International IDEA—is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. Its objective is to strengthen democratic institutions and processes.

International IDEA acts as a catalyst for democracy building by providing knowledge resources, expertise and a platform for debate on democracy issues. It works together with policy makers, donor governments, UN organizations and agencies, regional organizations and others engaged in the field of democracy building.

International IDEA's notable areas of expertise are:

- Constitution-building processes
- Electoral processes
- Political parties
- Democracy and gender
- Democracy assessments

International IDEA works worldwide. It is based in Stockholm, Sweden, and has offices in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

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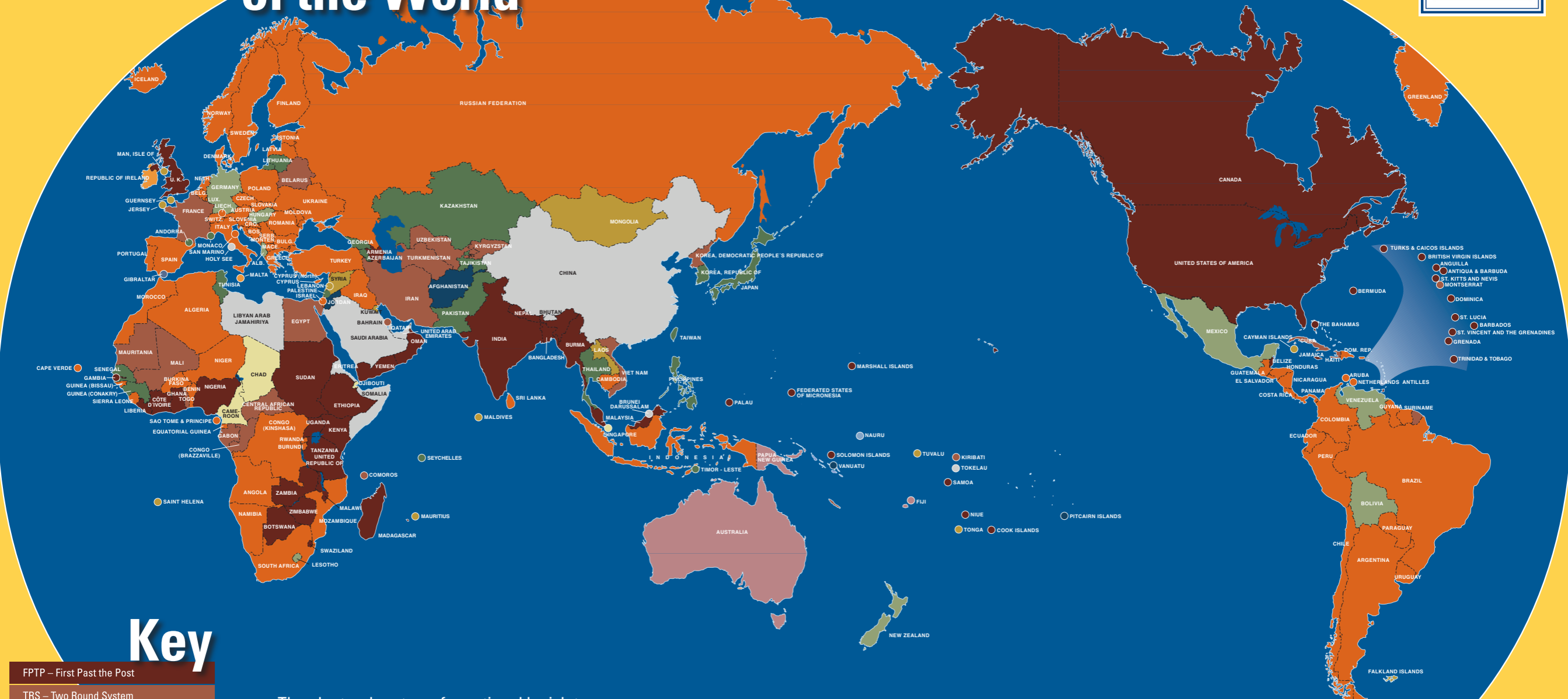


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# The Electoral Systems of the World



## Key

- FPTP – First Past the Post
- TRS – Two Round System
- AV – Alternative Vote
- BV – Block Vote
- PB V – Party Block Vote
- Parallel – Parallel
- MMP – Mixed Member Proportional
- List PR – List Proportional Representation
- STV – Single Transferable Vote
- SNTV – Single Non-Transferable Vote
- LV – Limited Vote
- Modified BC – Modified Borda Count
- No provisions for direct elections

The electoral systems for national legislatures – unicameral or lower houses – of independent countries and related territories. Territories are included where they have no direct representation in a legislature of the country with which they are associated.

This map does not imply any judgement on the part of International IDEA on the legal status of any territory or the endorsement of such boundaries, nor does the placement or size of any country or territory reflect the political view of International IDEA.

# Designing for Equality

GREEN = Best-fit combinations  
 YELLOW = Medium-fit combinations (could work favourably but will need special attention)  
 RED = Non-favourable combinations

Electoral System / Quota Type	List Proportional Representation with small districts (List PR)	List Proportional Representation with large districts (List PR)	First Past The Post (FPTP)	Two-Round Systems (TRS)	Parallel Systems	Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)	Block Vote (BV), Limited Vote (LV) and Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV)	Party Block Vote (PBV)	Alternative Vote (AV)	Single Transferable Vote (STV)	Borda Count (BC)
No quota	List PR systems give incentives for women to be nominated and thereby increase the likelihood of women being elected through a variety of different ways. Women can be nominated together with men so that incumbent men are not challenged specifically; most votes go towards giving the party another seat, which means that it is important for the party to campaign outside its own group of defined voters; parties are many and close to each other in terms of policy, meaning that parties that are not perceived as being "fair" to women risk losing voters and so on. The larger the districts and the larger the party magnitudes, the higher the likelihood of women being elected.	List PR systems give incentives for women to be nominated and thereby increase the likelihood of women being elected through a variety of different ways. Women can be nominated together with men so that incumbent men are not challenged specifically; most votes go towards giving the party another seat, which means that it is important for the party to campaign outside its own group of defined voters; parties are many and close to each other, meaning that parties that are not perceived as being "fair" to women risk losing voters; and so on. The larger the districts and the larger the party magnitudes, the higher the likelihood of women being elected.	Does not come with any specific incentives to elect women. Incumbents are usually men and since only one person can be elected from the party, the party will be likely to go with the most broadly accepted candidate (which is usually a man - especially if he is the incumbent).	Does not come with any specific incentives to elect women. Incumbents are usually men and since only one person can be elected from the party, the party will be likely to go with the most broadly accepted candidate (which is usually a man - especially if he is the incumbent).	The List PR part of the system has incentives to nominate and elect women, but the second element will often have no such incentives - with only medium effects on the election of women as the result.	The List PR part of the system has incentives to nominate and elect women, but the second element will often have no such incentives - with only medium effects on the election of women as the result.	Does not come with any specific incentives to elect women.	A very uncommon system, which has the incentives to work fairly well (as a balanced list could be made without specifically denying the incumbent man the possibility to be nominated). It does not, however, have all the List PR incentives, such as clear incentives to campaign for votes outside the party's core voters, or many parties in parliament with only slight differences between them, making voter volatility a salient issue for the parties.	Does not come with any specific incentives to elect women. Incumbents are usually men and since only one person can be elected from the party, the party will be likely to go with the most broadly accepted candidate (which is usually a man - especially if he is the incumbent).	Does not come with any specific incentives to elect women.	A very uncommon system, which has the incentives to work fairly well, as a balanced list of candidates could be made without specifically denying the incumbent man the possibility to be nominated. It does not, however, have all the List PR incentives, such as clear incentives to campaign for votes outside the party's core voters, or many parties in parliament with only slight differences between them, making voter volatility a salient issue for the parties.
Reserved seats: certain districts for women candidates only	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis. (Example: India on sub-national level)	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.	Possible, but only either in parts of the country only or on a rotating basis.
Reserved seats: a tier for women candidates only	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for. (Example: Pakistan)	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.	Reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for.
Reserved seats: best loser system	Possible, but only with open lists. If lists are closed, there would be no best loser as no candidate-centred votes would be cast. Will work unless there are not enough women candidates on the lists.	Possible, but only with open lists. If lists are closed, there would be no best loser as no candidate-centred votes would be cast. Will work unless there are not enough women candidates on the lists.	Not possible since only one person is elected from each district.	Not possible since TRS almost always use single-member districts.	Possible only for the List PR part of the system (if - as is most often the case - the district element is FPTP) and only if the lists are open.	Possible only for the List PR part of the system (if - as is most often the case - the district element is FPTP) and only if the lists are open.	Possible (used in Mauritius and Palestine for under-represented groups, although not women). Will work unless there are not enough women candidates. Gives parties incentives to field women candidates in order not to lose any seats to competing parties. (Example: Jordan)	Not possible when lists are closed (which is almost always the case). If lists were open, the quota would work in much the same way as under Open List PR systems.	Not possible since only one person is elected from each district.	Possible by the same logic as Block Vote, LV and SNTV. When all but the number of reserved seats have been filled in each district - if no woman has been elected - the highest polling women are elected.	Possible by the same logic as BV, LV, SNTV and STV. But only in multi-member districts (MMDs).
Nomination: percentage regulations without placement mandate/rank-order rules	Increases the likelihood of women being elected, but not as much as in large districts or under rank-order rules. In countries with a population largely unwilling to vote for women, open lists (compared to closed lists) will limit the effect of the quota, while in countries with a population willing to vote for women candidates, open lists can work in favour of the women candidates. (Examples: Peru and Paraguay)	Increases significantly the likelihood of women being elected, especially with large party magnitudes as even women placed quite low on the lists tend to get elected. (Example: Macedonia)	Not possible within districts since only one candidate from each party usually stands in each district. If more than one candidate were to stand because of a quota on the number of nominated candidates, it would be against the party's interest to nominate a strong second candidate as that risks splitting the votes between the two, and the party may instead nominate a weak and unknown woman in order to maximize the support for candidate number one. Possible only between districts (on a national or regional level) e.g. by stipulating that women will be fielded in a certain number of districts. Not to be confused with the 'women only' tier. This runs the risk that parties who are not eager to nominate women will only nominate them in districts where the seat is likely to be won by a competing party anyway. (Example: Nepal, 1999 elections)	Not possible since only one candidate from each party usually stands in each district. If more than one candidate were to run because of a quota on the number of nominated candidates, it would be against the party's interest to nominate a strong second candidate as that risks splitting the votes between the two, and the party may instead nominate a weak and unknown woman in order to maximize the support for candidate number one.	Possible for the List PR part of the system. For the single-member district (SMD) part of the system please see the FPTP cell on this row. The effectiveness will be affected by lists being open or closed and by the party magnitude. (Examples: Armenia, 5% quota in 2003 elections, and Republic of Korea)	Possible for the List PR part of the system. For the SMD part of the system please see the FPTP cell on this row. The effectiveness will be affected by lists being open or closed and by the party magnitude. (Examples: Bolivia, constituent assembly election 2006, and Mexico)	This is possible in theory, but difficult, especially if many independent candidates stand. Block Vote is likely to work better than SNTV and LV as voters have as many votes as there are seats to be filled and those who are loyal to one party will cast all their votes for that party - including the women candidates.	Is guaranteed to work since the whole list is elected if it receives the highest number of votes. Independent candidates (who could lessen the effect of the quota) are not likely to stand to any great extent as their chances of winning are minimal. (Examples: Cameroon, voluntary party quota adopted by the two largest parties, and Djibouti)	Not possible within districts since only one candidate from each party usually stands in each district. Possible only between districts (on a national or regional level) e.g. by stipulating that women will be fielded in a certain number of districts. Not to be confused with the 'women only' tier. This runs the risk that parties who are not eager to nominate women will only nominate them in districts where the seat is likely to be won by a competing party anyway.	This is possible in theory, but difficult, especially if many independent candidates stand. Even without independent candidates, there are no guarantees that any women will be elected.	Is possible and is likely to have a medium effect as voters will mark their preferences.
Nominations: percentage regulations with placement mandate/rank-order rules (top-ranking, zipper quotas)	Guaranteed to work when lists are closed. If lists are open, the order can change, thus undermining the predetermined ranking. Likely to be slightly less effective in List PR systems with small districts than in List PR systems with large districts as party magnitude is likely to be smaller and more men (who are usually top ranked) are likely to be elected even under zipper quotas. (Examples: Dominican Republic and Ecuador)	Guaranteed to work when lists are closed. If lists are open, the order can change, thus undermining the predetermined ranking. Likely to be slightly less effective in List PR systems with small districts than in List PR systems with large districts as party magnitude is likely to be smaller and more men (who are usually top-ranked) are likely to be elected even under zipper quotas. (Examples: Costa Rica, Argentina, Belgium, Portugal and Iraq, 2005 elections)	Not possible since ranking cannot be determined beforehand.	Not possible since ranking cannot be determined beforehand.	Possible for the List PR part of the system. For the SMD part of the system please see the FPTP cell on this row. The effectiveness will be affected by lists being open or closed and by the party magnitude. (Example: Palestine)	Possible for the List PR part of the system. For the SMD part of the system please see the FPTP cell on this row. The effectiveness will be affected by lists being open or closed and by the party magnitude. (Examples: Bolivia, constituent assembly election 2006, and Mexico)	Not possible since ranking cannot be determined beforehand.	Is guaranteed to work just as well as without rank-order rules as the whole list is elected if it receives the highest number of votes.	Not possible since ranking cannot be determined beforehand.	Not possible if it is candidate-centred. Ranking is determined by voters.	Not possible since ranking cannot be determined beforehand.