

This House Would Establish Gender Quotas for Legislative Assemblies

RESEARCH

This Research booklet is not complete. It is only an overview of information and good debaters will use this booklet as a basis for their thinking and move on to other ideas and research. As well, the best foundation for any research into a topic begins with some basic reading on the ideas. Follow this with an interview with someone who is knowledgeable, can suggest ideas and can direct you to other ideas and research. Although you cannot quote this person unless he/she is published in print or on video, a human being can always explain issues better than an article.



Debate regarding representation, and more appropriately equal representation, in the political sphere has been continuously debated for decades. The proximate questions in regards to this resolution are whether or not barriers to entry exist for female leaders, whether gender quotas serve to remove this barrier, and whether the greater good is served by employing gender quotas. These are the burdens that a proposition team debating this topic should extinguish in this debate.

The first step in crafting an approach to tackling this issue is determining what theatre of debate and what model for gender quotas a proposition is proposing.

JUNIOR HIGH DEBATERS

This debate should be approached within the Canadian Theatre of action. That is to say, it should be debated within Canadian Legislative Assemblies. It is not necessary to propose and defend gender quotas internationally for the purposes of Junior High. However, using international statistics to further propositions (or oppositions) arguments should be encouraged. In your research you will soon discover that there is a world of evidence of gender quotas being employed around the globe, and when properly applied, this evidence can drive some key arguments in this debate.

SENIOR HIGH DEBATERS

This debate should be approached within a Global Theatre of action. That being said, which nations it can be applied to is a sliding scale. It is certainly necessary for Senior High proposition teams to propose their model for all Western Liberal Democracies where it can be applied, but can be extended further to democracies in developing democracies if proposition feels there are strong arguments to do so. This extends propositions burden of proof however, and so should only be done under careful consideration.

Model

The second question you need to ask in molding the debate after where, is “what”. This will create your Model. Gender quotas can be employed in 2 different ways: Candidate Quotas, and Reserved Seats.

Candidate Quotas refer to a system when a minimum number of candidates fielded in an election should be female. This can refer to the nomination stage (for example, in Canada the NDP party enforces a policy where each riding must have at least one female nominee before selecting a candidate to represent them), or can refer to a minimum number of candidates who run in a federal election (for example, demanding that a party run a female candidate in half of all of their contending ridings).

Reserved Seats refers to a predetermined allotment of female seats in the legislative body. This can be done in number of ways. A rotating system is used in West Bengal, wherein districts cycle through being “reserved” (for only female candidates), and being “open” (for any available candidate). This can also be done by imploring a multi-member district which has a predetermined spot for a minimum number of female candidates (say, consolidating five districts/ridings into one multi-member district which must elect at least one female candidate, and allowing parties to field multiple candidates in that district).

Between these options, Reserved Seats on a rotating cycle would be most compatible with any plurality voting system, and so can be applied to over 40 Western Liberal Democracies without the need to argue for an entirely new system of government.

It should be noted that you could also propose a multi-member district model, but then have the added burden of proving that it too should be implemented, without distracting from your goal of proposing gender quotas. Please note that suggesting a model which calls for an additional change like this increases your burden as the proposition, and that any arguments you could use to support the model do not necessarily support your case.

For example; multi-member districts generally result in a more accurate representation of the political spectrum of a district. While this is a good argument to support a multi-member district, judges should not see this a positive argument for your case, but only an argument to defend your model. However, arguing that a multi-member district is necessary to allow for continuity of leadership while giving all areas of the country an equal chance of electing any gender would be an argument that both supports your model and your case.

As an opposition; your arguments should be driven towards attacking the issue at hand rather than the model. This is because the proposition can propose a number of nuanced models which may make your constructive argument less applicable. For example, one could argue that a rotating cycle can result in a lack of continuity. If each election alternates between a man and woman, in order for someone to hold more than one consecutive term they would have to move districts each time their seat was up for election. This argument, while valid if the proposition proposes a rotating cycle, would not make sense if they propose a multi-member district.

PROPOSITION CASE

PROPOSITION POINT

COUNTER-POINT

Barriers to entry exist for women seeking leadership. Historically speaking, affluent Caucasian males have held high office and the power that goes with it, and today there's still exist between a population's demographics and representation in government. Of the 13 countries with the highest representation in national parliament, 10 of them have some form of gender quota that is influencing their representation. Natural progress will happen, and equality will come, but far too slowly if not aided by measures such as Quotas. Without them, women are less likely to seek high office (fearing that their candidacy will not be taken as seriously), and often times the electorate does not gauge male and female candidates equally.

Political Priorities for women are a positive influence that is needed at high level of government. There is abundant statistical data which demonstrates that they are more likely to engage in policy related to healthcare, education, and women's rights. In nations which have seen a rise in gender equality these issues have also progressed rather quickly.

Women quotas in the short term allow for the electorate to become more comfortable with women leaders. In West Bengal, which rotates districts between reserved and open, districts which have seen more women rotations are increasingly likely to elect women in open cycles. That is to say that the more the population is exposed to women leaders, the more likely they are to accept them as leaders once a quota isn't forcing the issue. This causes a societal change in a few years which has escaped many countries for decades.

In less progressive nations quotas have given a significant positive turn to the way women are treated. In India, since the implementation of gender quotas, there has been a 44% increase in the reporting of crimes against women (such as domestic abuse and rape) as well as an increase in the number of arrests for these crimes. In countries which have not developed the same sense of equality as Canada, quotas may make the difference in saving lives.

While it is easy to point out that women are less equally represented in legislative bodies, it is a very different claim to say that they are prevented from seeking that representation. They are afforded all of the same opportunities to run as a man, and in a progressive society the equality of that opportunity is more important than an equality of outcomes. In fact, in a democracy, saying that a candidate should be dismissed because they are not a woman for a particular district would be a far greater injustice than tolerating and gradual nature of progress.

There is no reason why these issues have to be pursued by a specific gender. In fact, setting that expectation can be dangerous as it dismisses them as a "women's issue" as opposed to a societal issue. If an electoral body wants to influence policy, there are many avenues available for them. In modern liberal democracies, there is no reason a specific gender needs to be in power for specific changes to take place.

However, this diminishes the real accomplishments of women leaders who have proven themselves without the need for quotas. It gives a finality to the misconception that people need to be convinced that female candidates can hold high office, and sends a message that female candidates can't change minds without artificial means.

While we all wish to promote equality and the justice in countries around the globe, it is difficult to connect quotas as the definitive cause of such crackdowns. Women's rights are advancing every day, and these increases occur in nations without quotas just as well. In the UK over the past 5 years, the conviction rates for rape have risen from 58% to 63%, with report on rape also rising from 79,195 cases to 88,202.

OPPOSITION CASE

OPPOSITION POINT

Quotas send a negative message about women candidates. It sends the message that women are less capable than a man, and need to have their own electoral "league" in order to make it in the big leagues. This is nothing further than the truth, women are strong and perfectly capable of holding high office. In the 2011 federal election in Canada, of 451 women candidates 76 were elected, roughly 17%. Of the 1,587 candidates there were 308 seats, meaning roughly 19% of all candidates one. This is a very small gap, showing that women who step up to the national stage are not significantly less likely to win.

Guaranteeing a seat for a specific demographic means you're taking the decision out of the hands of the voters. Democracy is representation by the people for the people, and artificially toying with their choices is a distortion of those democratic principles. It is also arrogant to assume that a) we know better than the electoral body which forms our democracy, and b) that they would be unwilling to accept a woman as a candidate without us forcing them to.

There is a crowd-out effect which this proposal may have on a democratic election. Gender quotas leave less overall seats being pursued by the general electoral body. If half our seats go to women specifically. If there are half as many traditional seats available, parties are likely to field their strongest (i.e. less marginalized candidates). The other marginalized elements of society, ethnic minorities for example, may have less representation as a result.

There is no policy that a woman can support that a man couldn't. Women gained universal suffrage without a vote. Women have gained numerous rights and progressed all of their causes consistently for centuries without artificially being elevated into government. In fact, gaining male supporters who are willing to champion women's rights is key to continuing to evolve feminist policies. The alternative, supporting this motion, is likely to alienate male supporters, and further divide societies on the nature of women's rights.

COUNTER-POINT

While it is true that in the case of Canada voters can be receptive to certain candidates, there were still more than twice as many men as women that ran in the election at all. That is a significant gap. As well, it should be noted that 40 of those 76 successful candidates were from the NDP which employs a voluntary gender quota of nominating at least one female candidate to every riding.

The purpose of this proposal is to help to create a change of outlook on women as leaders. Some people need to see a woman representing them first before they are likely to choose a female as their representative. This has been noted to create a higher likelihood of electing a woman in many countries which have utilized a gender quota.

That assumes that these marginalized candidates cannot be women as well. There is no reason that all of the women candidates need to be of an ethnic majority, and we would anticipate that crossover would happen for all seats. In any case, arguing that marginalized elements of society have a disadvantage in elections and should be more represented is actually arguing for shaping electoral systems around equal representation, which supports this motion more than it opposes it.

While we agree that male support is important, it hasn't done enough. There is still a stark inequality in government, and women's rights are hardly championed. This motion seeks to advance women's rights at a much more accelerated pace.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Women in National Parliaments

<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

This site has up to date statistics regarding women represented in National Parliaments in 189 Countries, including Canada. These statistics are particularly useful when used in comparison with further research regarding countries which currently employ different forms of Gender Quotas.

Women in Canadian House of Commons and Senate

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/compilations/parliament/WomenRepresentation.aspx>

This site has statistical data on women in the House of Commons and Senate dating back to 1867. Most interestingly, it also breaks this data down by political party. Canada currently employs voluntary party quotas for candidates, it may be interesting to compare which parties exercise these voluntary quotas against their electoral results (versus parties which do not).

Female success pertaining to Canadian Elections

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/FederalRidingsHistory/hfr.asp?Language=E&Search=WomenElection>

This page crunched some numbers and found out how many female candidates were successful in running for political office in each federal election. It also breaks it down by party, illustrating how likely different political parties were to embrace female candidates.

Awaiting the Watershed: Women in Canada's Parliament

<http://www.revparl.ca/english/issue.asp?param=198&art=1384>

This fascinating article examines the debate from a strictly Canadian perspective, and analyzes several of the pragmatic issues with employing gender quotas in a First Past the Post system which does not contain multi-member districts. This article is a good first stop when determining a model to support the proposition case, as well as a way to determine potential model weaknesses while on opposition.

Gender Quotas and Female Leadership

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1322671773271/Pande-Gender-Quotas-April-2011.pdf>

This extensive background paper was originally published for the World Bank, and is a must read for anyone who wants to know how gender quotas have been employed throughout the world. Examining the pains and pitfalls of gender quotas along with their victories and triumphs, this paper can give either side of this issue plenty of ammo in the form of case studies, statistical data, and strong arguments.

The Quota Project

<http://www.quotaproject.org/>

This non-profit organization exists solely for the purpose of covering this issue. In 2003 International IDEA and Stockholm University initiated a research project leading to the collation of comparative knowledge and resources on the implementation and impact of quotas. In 2009, this cooperation expanded to include the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This website is the culmination of their efforts, and has extensive data on how quotas are employed throughout the world.

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International Debate and Education Association

<http://idebate.org/debatabase/debates/politics/house-would-put-more-women-parliament>

IDEA, dedicated to the promotion of debate, discusses this topic with their usual usefulness. Be wary that while their arguments hold true anywhere, some of their statistical data may be regarding the United Kingdom. While this data is certainly useful, it could be mistaken for data on our own MPs and Parliament, so be sure to use it properly (as an international example) if used in your debates.