

Consolidated Response

Commentaries and Suggestions to the UN-INSTRAW Analysis Tool for Electoral Systems from a Gender Perspective

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International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics



Introduction

Despite comprising more than 50 percent of the world's population, women continue to lack access to political leadership opportunities and resources at all levels of government. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but a necessary pre-condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Governance structures which do not result in the equal participation of men and women, or their equal enjoyment of benefits from state interventions are by definition neither inclusive nor democratic.

In 2007, recognizing that over the last century women's gains in the political arena have been slow and inadequate, five international organizations came together to make women's political participation their collective priority and devise a strategy that would scale-up each of the organization's efforts to foster gender equality in politics:

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
National Democratic Institute (NDI)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (www.iKNOWPolitics.org) is an online network, jointly supported by the five partner organizations, that aims to increase the participation and effectiveness of women in political life by utilizing a technology-enabled forum to provide access to critical resources and expertise, stimulate dialogue, create knowledge, and share experiences among women in politics.

In just three years, iKNOW Politics has become the leading website on women's political participation. Building on a library of over 5300 resources, iKNOW Politics has captured the combined experience and knowledge of its 92 global experts and 10,000 members from over 150 countries. iKNOW Politics has documented and disseminated the lessons and best practices of women as voters, candidates and elected legislators.

The following is a printed version of one of the most frequently-cited iKNOW Politics knowledge products, based on the combined input from experts and members worldwide. Please visit the iKNOW Politics website to pose a question of your own, contribute to the online discussions, browse the resource library or read additional iKNOW Politics consolidated expert responses, E-discussion summaries, interviews with women leaders, or contact iKNOW Politics at connect@iknowpolitics.org to get in touch with a staff member in your region of the world. iKNOW Politics is available in **English, French, Spanish and Arabic**.

Commentaries and Suggestions to the UN-INSTRAW Analysis Tool for Electoral Systems from a Gender Perspective

This consolidated response is based on the initiative carried out by the team at iKNOW Politics and UN-INSTRAW as well as contributions from the following specialists: José Ángel Aquino Rodríguez, Judge from the Administrative Chamber of the Dominican Republic's Central Electoral Assembly; Néida Archenti, psychologist, political science professor and researcher at the Universidad de Buenos Aires Gino Germani Institute; Gemma Bardají, member of the Women's Political Participation Team at UN-INSTRAW; Line Bareiro, researcher at the Center for Documentation and Studies (CDE), academic director of the Human Rights Coordinator's Paraguay Human Rights Report and member of the Directors Board at the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IHR); Beatriz Llanos, consultant on political communication and women's participation in politics; and Blanca Olivia Peña Molina, independent consultant on gender issues, politics and public policies.

Question

"I am addressing experts in order to request their help through comments, contributions and suggestions on a new analysis tool that will identify the obstacles that electoral systems present to women's participation in politics and the effectiveness of quota laws."

– Gemma Bardají, the Dominican Republic

Introduction

For the development of democracy, there must be an increasingly greater representation and greater participation from the diverse groups that form the political community. If a certain society's representation does not truthfully reflect its diversity, then we must question its democratic system and legitimacy.

Women's access to formal political power and decision making bodies is therefore a democratic demand. Only when women — along with other traditionally excluded groups — have access to power will we be able to overcome the grave democratic deficit that the majority of world democracies reveal.

Thus electoral systems have fundamental relevance since they make up the rules of the democratic game. According to how they are designed, women's political participation will either be promoted or hindered.

Along this line, in efforts to achieve equal opportunities between men and women to access all levels of political power, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute

for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) is working on the design of an Analysis tool for electoral systems from a gender perspective. The objective of this tool is to recognize and identify the advantages and disadvantages in electoral systems and whether or not there is a quota system, in order to advance equality in the area of women's political representation. In this way, the tool seeks to promote strategies and reforms that lead to equality.

In order to enrich this new tool's design through commentaries and suggestions, the team for Women's Participation in Politics from UN-INSTRAW and the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) agreed to hold a discussion on the issue among experts in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We have presented the objectives of this process below, as well as the methodology used, results and conclusions.

Initiative Objectives:

1. Assess the tool's usefulness and goals.
2. Debate the relevance of the factors chosen.
3. Contribute to the analysis of the factors chosen.
4. Debate the tool's reach: national, regional and local use and its relevance to other regions.

Methodology used

A group was formed of five experts with diverse professional and academic experience at the regional level, denominated the "consultant group," which contributed to building a multidisciplinary vision of the study subject.

The exchange with and among the experts took place via e-mail and was moderated by iKNOW Politics.

Each participant was sent a series of documents to be reviewed, which would serve as a base for contributions and suggestions. A question guide divided by issues was also distributed; one issue was covered each day.

The formal exchange of ideas took place between Oct. 6 and Oct. 17 and contributions were

informally received until Oct. 31.

Results of the exchange

Gemma Bardají summarizes the exchange's results in the following way:

The experts that participated in the consultant group agreed on the relevance and importance of designing an analysis tool for electoral systems from a gender perspective.

Identifying the advantages as well as disadvantages of electoral systems for women's access to decision making bodies is a fundamental step in overcoming obstacles and promoting strategies that are favorable for women candidates.

I consider this a very positive effort that UN-INSTRAW is doing to confront the issue of how electoral systems influence women's level of participation in politics. (Llanos, Beatriz. Expert from the consultant group)

I am honored to accompany you all in this evaluation and virtual exchange of comments on the UN-INSTRAW initiative, which is both necessary and opportune. (Peña, Blanca Olivia. Expert from the consultant group)

The experts agreed with the factors chosen for the tool's design and also suggested more:

One of the factors I would include is the political parties' internal democracy, which addresses political parties' internal process of selecting candidates in Latin American countries. In other words, how democratic are these processes? (Peña, Blanca Olivia. Expert from the consultant group)

Another issue to keep in mind is the permanence of the party system, focusing overall on the influence it has on how seats are distributed. Also, the issue of electoral campaigns might be considered due to the decisive impact it has today on political representation, since it is not included in the political financing factor. (Aquino, José Ángel. Expert from the consultant group)

It is also necessary to analyze the degree of fragmentation in the party system, which is a common reality in Latin America that affects women's access. I also think the issue of electoral campaigns is important, but I don't quite understand how this would be categorized in the context of this tool. (Archenti, Nélica. Expert from the consultant group)

UN-INSTRAW proposed a debate on whether the factors of the media and violence and political harassment toward women should be taken into account. All group participants agreed it would be very important to include both factors, but also thought these would be very difficult to measure and monitor since in many cases there are not even data or statistics, overall on the local level.

In order to overcome these difficulties, Nélide Archenti proposed:

I would incorporate this factor through some measurement of the degree of female candidates' presence in the media during the political campaigns. This is an extremely important factor in closed list systems or open systems where electoral competition is personalized. (Archenti, Nélide. Expert from the consultant group)

For her part, Beatriz Llanos, added:

It must be included, although I know this is an issue that is difficult to get data for because I only know two measurements of women's presence in the media. One is Perú elecciones 2006 (Peru elections 2006), measured by International IDEA and Transparencia, of the coverage on congressional candidates in the radio, on television and in the press. I don't know up to what point it would be feasible to find this kind of monitoring/data at the local level. (Llanos, Beatriz. Expert from the consultant group)

Another topic of discussion was the importance of the socio-political context's influence on women's participation in politics:

[...] the cultural factor still influences women's participation in politics...such as the predominant patriarchal model that is reproduced in society through school, the media and other means... (Aquino, José Ángel. Expert from the consultant group)

In reference to this issue, the UN-INSTRAW team proposed two formulas that take each country's context into account. The first formula relates to a group of indicators that considers a country's political context. The second is a document guide with key issues beyond electoral systems, that includes contextual information.

The UN-INSTRAW team believed that the second formula was more appropriate and is currently working on it.

I think it's interesting (and even necessary) to incorporate information that goes beyond

electoral systems (Archenti, Nélica. Expert from the consultant group)

I believe it's justified to have an outline of key issues for Latin American countries that guide the tool's users in general terms. (Peña, Blanca Olivia. Expert from the consultant group)

The group also highlighted the importance of the tool's versatility in order to adjust it to different levels of power — both at the national and local level — though in the beginning, UN-INSTRAW will work exclusively at the municipal level in the Latin American region.

I think that all the factors chosen work at all levels. It's possible there could be a problem in applicability due to the lack of systematic registries of data for some analyses. In sum, all work, but it will be important to identify the limitations in each case. (Archenti, Nélica. Expert from the consultant group)

For Blanca Olivia Peña, the studies on women's participation in politics faces a complex situation due to various factors. For this reason, each level of power has specific issues that must be considered, according to each case.

One of the objectives of this tool is precisely to be flexible so that it can be molded to the specific circumstances of each country and each situation.

Conclusions

For iKNOW Politics, this initiative represented a new form of collaboration with an organization of such solid international prestige as UN-INSTRAW.

The process of exchanging ideas achieved a suitable balance between the practical demands of those who are closest to these issues in practice and contributions from those who have wellstructured reflections on women's participation in politics.

For both institutions, the opportunity to strengthen the tool through a discussion with experts has consolidated ties that will decisively contribute to improving the quality and impact of future proposals.

Thanks to this joint effort, the members of iKNOW Politics as well as an extensive audience of people interested in the topic of electoral systems from a gender perspective, will be able to access the discussion's results through this consolidated response.

Finally, it is important to add that iKNOW Politics and UN-INSTRAW thank the consultant group of experts for their availability and valuable contributions. The Women's Political Participation Team at UN-INSTRAW has accepted these important contributions, which they currently reviewing in order to improve the new tool's design.

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