

## Designing Better Quotas, Building Stronger Legislatures

### By the National Democratic Institute (NDI)

Quotas – whether mandatory, legislated or voluntary – continue to be one of the most effective means for increasing the number of women both in political parties and elective office. In 2012, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women won 24 percent of seats in countries using legislated quotas, but only 12 percent of seats in countries where no quotas were used. While the National Democratic Institute (NDI) does not have an official stance on quotas, our programs are often involved either directly or tangentially with affirmative action policies, such as providing assistance for the development of legislation or helping stakeholders understand how to comply with quota requirements. To discuss this issue further, NDI recently hosted two briefings on gender quotas and women’s leadership in legislatures to share lessons learned from its programs around the world.

On April 30, NDI held a briefing entitled “Gender Quotas: Lessons Learned from Kenya to Tunisia,” which featured recent case studies from Kenya, Burkina Faso, Tunisia, Kosovo and Libya. The design and implementation of a quota can greatly impact its effectiveness. For example, Kenya, Tunisia, and Libya all recently passed landmark quota laws. Despite best intentions, the political challenges around Kenya’s constitutionally mandated 1/3 quota, designed to be required of the 2013 elections, resulted in the delay of the actual implementation of the quota until 2015. Tunisia and Libya both quickly passed quota legislation following the revolution. Even with a parity law that ensured that 50 percent of the candidates on the list in Tunisia were women, and the adoption of a “zipper list” format that guaranteed that the names of the women candidates appeared in every second place on the list, the number of women ultimately elected to parliament was only 27 percent. This occurred because of the large number of political parties who nominated candidates. As most parties only won one seat and the candidate in the first place was a man, the percentage of women elected was ultimately about half of the number of women on the candidate lists. The lesson from Tunisia informed the creation of the new law in Libya, which resulted in both a horizontal and vertical zipper system. Under this law, half of the political parties covered by the quota legislation had to place a woman at the top of their candidate lists to ensure greater representation in the end.

The example of Burkina Faso’s quota law was also shared, illustrating the steps that were necessary to take a legislated quota from passage to implementation. NDI supported this process with three complementary efforts, from the drafting of the legislation, through a voter registration drive focused on women voters, and through training for women candidates. In Kosovo, the quota law is structured as an affirmative action policy for either gender, depending on their level of representation. If, after the allocation of seats, the number of the minority gender is not at least 30 percent of the total seats, the last elected candidate would be replaced with a minority gender candidate. The number of women elected at the local and national levels is now more than 30 percent. [Watch the briefing](#)

Once women attain political office, NDI provides training and advice to individual parliamentarians, committees and caucuses as part of its legislative strengthening programs. The July 18 briefing, ["Building Stronger Legislatures: NDI Strategies for Supporting Women's](#)

[Leadership.](#)" drew upon recent case studies from Bangladesh, Sierra Leone, Ukraine and global governance programs to share effective strategies for increasing women's leadership in legislatures.

To help legislative leadership better understand the needs of new female legislators, NDI conducted a gender parliamentary assessment in Sierra Leone. The assessment collected information on the capacity of individual female parliamentarians, as well as the institutional and cultural barriers that women faced within the parliament and their party. Building off insights from this assessment, NDI has worked with women members of parliament to provide information about how parliament functions and the necessary skills to navigate their new positions. In Bangladesh, programming helped build capacity of newly elected women as well as relationships between the new members and civil society, which resulted in the first "[Who's Who of Women Leaders in Bangladesh](#)", a directory of 134 women in politics, the judiciary, academia, civil service, business, law enforcement and the media.

To close the briefing, other strategies for supporting women's leadership in parliaments were shared with the participants. These included a review of parliamentary infrastructure and culture, including the work schedule, facilities and communication policies as well as the removal of structural barriers such as committee leadership assignments based on seniority to women's leadership in parliament. Finally, a strategy to increase women's voice in parliament, even with small numbers, is to combine forces across party or legislative body for greater impact. Along with many other countries, NDI supported the creation of a parliamentary women's caucus in Ukraine in order to strengthen the women members' ability to influence policy making within the parliament. [Watch the briefing](#)

Overall, panelists noted key recurring themes throughout the two events. The design of a special affirmative action policy like a quota can greatly help or hinder women's real opportunities to be elected; similar electoral systems can provide valuable information of what worked - or didn't work - and why. Where women do not make up a significant percentage of a political body, working across political lines is important for building a strong quota movement or women's caucus. "Buy-in" from civil society leaders, male colleagues and other stakeholders both inside and outside the political structures is also critical. Finally, finding quick, tangible "wins" for individual women parliamentarians or a newly formed women's caucus can help build support for further efforts on behalf of women and the issues that affect their daily lives.

For more best-practices and strategies to increase women's political participation throughout the election cycle, we encourage you to read NDI & UNDP's publication: "[Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties](#)" in English, Spanish, French, or Arabic. To learn more about NDI's programming supporting women in political parties, elections, and parliaments around the world, please visit <http://ndi.org/womens-political-participation>.