

More Is Needed than Quota Laws to Increase the Number of Women Legislators

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Dr. Leslie Schwindt-Bayer

Although women's representation in national legislatures around the globe has nearly doubled in the last 30 years, the average percentage of women legislators is only 18 percent worldwide. While many countries have adopted quota laws, which require a certain percentage of a political party's candidates to be female, success has varied among countries. A University of Missouri professor finds that quota laws need placement mandates and enforcement mechanisms to be effective.

"Gender quota laws can increase women's representation, but the quotas' effectiveness depends on their designs," said Leslie Schwindt-Bayer,

assistant professor of political science in the MU College of Arts and Science. "Women's representation will not increase unless political parties are required to place women in electable positions on the ballot and unless the law requires parties to abide by the quota.

In the study, Schwindt-Bayer compared quota laws in 26 countries. She examined the size of the quota (the percentage of a political party's candidates that must be female), placement mandates (that parties must place women in electable positions on the ballots) and enforcement mechanisms. The countries' quota laws varied from 5 percent in Armenia to 50 percent in France. The enforcement mechanisms also varied in each country with some countries specifying no means of quota enforcement while others have hefty consequences for parties that do not meet the quota.

"Setting the quota size to 30 percent but omitting placement mandates and enforcement mechanisms will lead to fewer legislative seats won by women," Schwindt-Bayer said. "The key to substantially increasing the election of women is likely to be the combination of placement mandates, enforcement mechanisms and placing more women on the ballot. The quota laws in Argentina and Costa Rica are good examples of this."

Gender quota laws are not the only means to increase the election of women. Cultural, socioeconomic and institutional differences also can influence women's representation, Schwindt-Bayer said.

"Gender quota laws are 'fast track' mechanisms for increasing women's representation and meant to be temporary," Schwindt-Bayer said. "Quota laws help provide the influx of women to legislatures. In the meantime, other changes must occur, such as increasing the number of women who are qualified to run for office and promoting a women-friendly political context."

The study, "Making Quotas Work: The Effect of Gender Quota Laws on the Election of Women," was published in the February issue of *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

Provided by University of Missouri

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