



Quota Implementation in Mexico

Summary of Presentation

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After the 2000 elections in Mexico, with the advent of a change in power, the issue of women's political representation came to the fore among the demands for consolidating democracy. Those women's movements that have been fighting for more decision-making positions came together with legislative groups to amend the electoral code and to incorporate specifications into the provision on quotas that has been in place since 1996.

In April 2002, the legislative group of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) launched the reform initiative, which won the support of the other parties, underlining the broad consensus around the issue of gender equity. Indeed, it was the only initiative of the 20 introduced on electoral issues that was ultimately approved in the run-up to the 2003 mid-term elections.

The reform of the quota system had three main parts.

- (1) Thirty percent of the principal candidates would have to be of a different gender, both where elected by relative majority and proportional representation (PR).
- (2) In the lists for PR, female candidates would be included among every three of the lists to ensure better opportunities for winning a seat.
- (3) Any political party that failed to meet the quota would be sanctioned by the exclusion of the respective candidacies, that is, of as many [candidates?] as necessary to attain gender proportionality.

The provision recognized just one caveat: that in electing candidates through majority vote, the political parties that opted for a direct method of election—that is, open consultation among their

members or the general population, a sort of primary election—would be exempt from meeting the quota.

The electoral authority needed to regulate how the respective slates of candidates that surpassed the maximum of 70 percent for a single sex would be cancelled. Two provisions were introduced.

(1) In order to determine which candidacies had to be cancelled to meet the requirement, male candidates (for cancellation) would be drawn by lot until 30 percent of the candidates were women.

(2) In the case of the PR lists, the cancellations would begin with the last names and work up from there, in each of the five electoral districts into which the country is divided.

This decision implied that compliance with the law would be required in regard to each of the slates, and not as applied to all candidacies taken as a whole. Moreover, in the case of PR lists, the gender percentage was required for each particular district, that is, in each group of 40 candidates, and for all of the lists taken together (200 candidates).

Enforcement of the quota law revealed that seven of the 11 political parties, including the three largest ones, resorted to some form of direct selection of their majority candidates so as to be relieved of the quota requirement in a particular area. Nonetheless, the proportion of principal women candidates reached 29.6 percent on average, albeit with major differences among the political parties. For while the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) registered 11 percent majority women candidates, the México Posible Party, a recently registered party, which grew out of the women's movements, registered 51 percent women candidates.

The final tally of the candidacies showed that all of the parties far surpassed the threshold of 30 percent principal women candidates, reflecting acceptance of this measure among the rank-and-file in the various parties. One hundred and fifteen women legislators took up seats in the Chamber of Deputies—23% of all of its members, up from 16% in the previous legislature. This is the first time that more than 20 percent of legislators have been women. Nonetheless, although the reform, widely known as the 'double quotas', was effective in terms of increasing the number of women in Congress, it did not suffice, on its own, to attain the desired goal.

There are several reasons for this. Certainly the lack of a balanced gender composition within political party structures is the main obstacle to female candidates being proposed on a regular basis. Accordingly, the nomination of female candidates was not concentrated in those districts in which each political party has the best chance of winning, since they are reserved for their best leaders, among whom there are few women. Of course, behind all of this lurk culturally rooted convictions as to the inadvisability of nominating women, who have various roles to play, yet who lack sufficient training and skills to assume political responsibilities.

Only a detailed study to follow up on each political party in the process of nominating women candidates would make it possible to identify specifically the persisting lag in balanced gender representation.