

BRIEFING PAPER

January 2022

DIVERSITY QUOTAS

BACKGROUND

The findings of the [Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform](#) supported a move to the Single Transferable Vote with the integration of gender quotas into the system. The commitment to introduce gender quotas has now been included in the [Co-operation Agreement](#) between Plaid Cymru and Welsh Labour.

While the Expert Panel and the [Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform](#) have looked in detail into gender quotas and how they could be used in the Senedd, work on quotas for protected characteristics other than gender has been very limited.

The [Senedd Reform Committee Next Steps report](#) recommended that the next Committee on Senedd reform undertake an inquiry into diversity quotas:

“Recommendation 21. *The relevant Sixth Senedd committee should undertake further work on diversity quotas in respect of characteristics other than gender to inform decisions on whether such quotas would be appropriate mechanisms to encourage the election of a more diverse Senedd. This work should be informed by expert advice on the design and operation of diversity quotas, and by working closely in partnership with underrepresented groups, including BAME communities in Wales and people with disabilities.”*

International data shows that women who experience intersecting forms of discrimination are especially under-represented. For instance, [women under 40 make up only 6.1% of the world’s MPs](#). In countries without any quota legislation, the odds of being elected for women from racial, ethnic or religious minorities are 1 in 14 compared to men from a majority (non-minority) background, 1 in 3 compared to women from a majority (non-minority) background, and 1 in 2 compared to men from minority backgrounds (relative to their share in the overall population).¹

DIVERSITY IN THE SENEDD

Since the 2021 elections there are:

- **43% women**
- **3 MSs (5%) from a Black, Asian or ethnic minority background, including the first woman of colour to be elected to the Senedd**
- **3 MSs (5%) who openly identify as LBGTQ+**

No information is collected or published on the number of MSs who are disabled.

The average age of MSs before the 2021 election was 55 years, compared to 42.5 years across the Welsh population. Age data for members of the Sixth Senedd was not available at the time of writing this briefing.

OVERVIEW OF DIVERSITY QUOTAS

- Diversity quotas are quotas in respect of characteristics other than gender. They are present in over 30 countries worldwide.²
- Quotas are applied on the basis of a wide range of characteristics, most commonly for ethnic, linguistic, racial or national minorities, but they are also used for age, disability, caste, expatriation, profession and domicile.³
- For example, quotas have been used for Maori in New Zealand, for scheduled castes in India, for indigenous people in Colombia and Venezuela, for expatriates in France, and for Flemish, French and German speakers in Belgium.

TYPES OF DIVERSITY QUOTAS

Quotas for racial, ethnic, national or religious minorities ('minority quotas')

The two main types of quotas for racial, ethnic, national or religious minorities are regional quotas and reserved seats.⁴ This is a notable difference to gender quotas, which usually take the form of legislative quotas.⁵

- Regional quotas aim to increase the representation of a minority group through the way in which parliamentary seats are distributed to different regions in the country. Regions in which the minority makes up a higher proportion of the population get additional seats over regions with a lower minority concentration – instead of allocating seats strictly proportionally on the basis of the region's share of the population.
- Reserved seats policies ensure the representation of a minority by guaranteeing a certain number of parliamentary seats for candidates representing the minority group. This

system requires a means to legally identify and recognise members of the relevant minority. In many countries, minority representatives are elected in the same way as other candidates, however in some countries only members of the relevant minority can vote for their candidates.

Minority quotas typically have one of two goals:⁷

- Protection of the interests of the relevant minority through guaranteeing a minimum representation for groups which make up a relatively small share of the population. This often goes hand in hand with aiming to compensate for past oppression of the minority.
- Power-sharing by distributing seats among different groups to ensure democratic stability in divided societies.

While gender quotas generally try to make parliaments more reflective of men's and women's equal share in the population, quotas for racial, ethnic, national or religious minorities usually aim to overrepresent the minority in question.⁶

² Reynolds, A. (2005). Reserved Seats in National Legislatures: A Research Note. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*: 301–10.

³ Krook, M.L. & O'Brien, D.Z. (2010). The politics of group representation: quotas for women and minorities worldwide. *Comparative Politics* 42(3), 253-272.

⁴ Institute for International Law and Human Rights (2009). *Comparative Review of Minority Representation in Electoral Legislation*.

⁵ Krook, M.L. & O'Brien, D.Z. (2010). The politics of group representation: quotas for women and minorities worldwide. *Comparative Politics* 42(3), 253-272.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Krook, M.L. & Zetterberg, P. (2014). Electoral quotas and political representation: comparative perspectives. *International Political Science Review* 35(1), 3-11.

An alternative to quotas used to strengthen minority representation in the US is district demarcation. District boundaries are drawn to create ‘majority-minority districts’, where racial or ethnic minorities comprise a majority of the district’s population. Proponents argue that this practice strengthens minority votes, while opponents claim that it can be used to minimize a minority’s influence over neighbouring districts.⁸

YOUTH QUOTAS

Compared to gender and minority quotas, **youth quotas** are relatively new and are mainly introduced by countries that already have gender quotas.

They are applied at age thresholds between 30 and 45 years.

As of 2018, 24 countries had some form of youth quota. Four countries use reserved seats, four countries use legislative quotas and parties in 16 countries are using voluntary party quotas.⁹

To date, youth quotas have not had a statistically significant **impact on young people’s representation**. This does not mean that quotas for young people are ineffective, as they have been proven to be effective for women. Rather, the lack of impact could be due to the small sample size, the fact that these quotas are relatively new and also the low threshold of quotas used. Reserved seat policies and legislative quotas for young people generally fall behind recommended targets (see box on the right). If more countries used youth quotas at a higher level, young people’s representation is expected to increase.¹⁰

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING QUOTAS

Research on gender quotas shows that they are the “single most effective tool for ‘fast tracking’ women’s representation in elected bodies for government.”¹¹ Gender quotas are used world-wide by over 100 countries and are backed internationally by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the EU and the Council of Europe.

Diversity quotas have not been studied as widely as gender quotas but we can see some clear trends in their use and effectiveness.

**THE INTERNATIONAL
PARLIAMENTARY UNION
(IPU) FORUM OF YOUNG
PARLIAMENTARIANS
RECOMMENDS THE
FOLLOWING TARGETS BY 2035:**

- **15% of parliamentarians under 30 years**
- **35% of parliamentarians under 40 years**
- **45% of parliamentarians under 45 years**

Based on age groups within the global population.

⁸ https://ballotpedia.org/Majority-minority_districts

⁹ Belschner, J. & Garcia de Paredes, M. (2021). Hierarchies of representation: The redistributive effects of gender and youth quotas. *Representation* 57(1), 1-20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Drude Dahlerup et al. (2013), *Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IDEA], IPU and Stockholm University.

THE INTERSECTIONAL IMPACT OF COMBINED QUOTAS

Comparative studies of gender and minority quotas in different countries suggest that the intersectional impact depends on the nature and combination of the quotas in question.

On their own, gender quotas tend to benefit women from majority backgrounds more than women from minority backgrounds, and minority quotas tend to benefit men from minority backgrounds more than women from minority backgrounds.¹²

While each quota individually has some positive impact on the representation of minority women, this effect is very limited.

This is what makes the case for combined action on gender AND minority quotas so strong.

In countries where both gender and minority quotas are in place, the combined impact depends on the level at which the different quotas operate.^{13 14}

- If quotas for gender and ethnic minorities exist separately and are applied independently from each other, they tend to favour women from majority backgrounds and men from minority backgrounds with little favourable impact on the representation of women from minority backgrounds.
- Only if gender and minority quotas are 'nested' or operate in tandem (such as legislative candidate quotas that apply to the same party lists) do they significantly increase minority women's representation. This is due to the fact that selection procedures look at both gender and minority status at the same time.

These findings have been corroborated for combining gender and youth quotas.¹⁵

However, evidence suggests that even tandem quotas can be used tactically to preserve the representation of dominant groups. Parties may only put forward candidates that have multiple protected characteristics (e.g. only women from minority backgrounds). Since these candidates can fulfil

different quotas simultaneously, their selection can be used strategically to retain a maximum number of seats for men from dominant groups instead of representing the full range of diversity.

Intersectionally embedded quotas are emerging as global best practice to prevent this and to ensure diverse representation across different protected characteristics.¹⁶ Embedded quotas use intersectional demands within group-based quotas. This can be achieved, for instance, through requiring gender parity within quotas for other characteristics, e.g. if there is a 20% quota for disabled people, the intersectional requirement could ask that half of these candidates need to be men and half women.

¹² Hughes, M. (2011). Intersectionality, quotas and minority women's political representation worldwide. *American Political Science Review* 105(3), 604-620.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bird, K. (2016). Intersections of exclusion: The institutional dynamics of combined gender and ethnic quota systems. *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4(2), 284-306.

¹⁵ Belschner, J. & Garcia de Paredes, M. (2021). Hierarchies of representation: The redistributive effects of gender and youth quotas. *Representation* 57(1), 1-20.

¹⁶ Krook, M. L. (10 December 2021). The intersectional impact of quotas. Presentation to the Senedd Cross-Party Group on Women.

CONCLUSION

Following the international success of gender quotas, an increasing number of countries are using quotas for other underrepresented groups such as ethnic minorities, young people or disabled people.

Research on combined quota systems shows that they need to be designed carefully to maximise the benefits across different underrepresented groups or protected characteristics.

Emerging international best practice suggests that combined quotas work best when they:

- **Operate in tandem** – Combined quotas should be designed to lead to selection procedures that look at different characteristics at the same time, such as legislative candidate quotas for women and ethnic minorities that apply to the same party lists.
- **Are intersectionally embedded** – Combined quotas should use intersectional demands within individual group-based quotas, for instance through requiring gender parity within quotas for other protected characteristics.

ABOUT WEN WALES

Our vision is a Wales free from Gender Discrimination. [Join us](#) to help deliver that vision.

For further information please contact WEN Wales: Admin@wenwales.org.uk or Policy & Public Affairs Officer Jessica Laimann, jessica@wenwales.org.uk

www.wenwales.org.uk / [@wenwales](https://twitter.com/wenwales)

This briefing is part of WEN Wales' work on the [Diverse 5050 Campaign](#), a coalition that aims to achieve diverse and equal representation and leadership in the Senedd and throughout the political structure of Wales.

We are calling for:

- **Electoral reform that will deliver an enlarged Senedd;**
- **Legally-binding integrated diversity and gender quotas;**
- **A Senedd elected by the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system.**