

Formal Institutions and Women's Electoral Participation in Four European Countries

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Abstract : This research tried to produce evidence that formal institutions, such as electoral and internal party quotas, can advance women's active roles in the public sphere using the cases of four European countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. The quantitative dataset was provided by the University of Chicago and the Inter-University Consortium of Political and Social Research based on a two-year study (2008-2010) of political parties. Belgium engages in constitutionally mandated electoral quotas. Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, on the other hand, have internal party quotas, which are voluntarily adopted by political parties. In analyzing each country's chi-square and Pearson's r correlation, Belgium, having an electoral quota, is the only country that was analyzed for electoral quotas. Germany, Italy and the Netherlands' internal voluntary party quotas were correlated with women's descriptive representations. Using chi-square analysis, this study showed that the presence of electoral quotas is correlated with an increase in the percentage of women in decision-making bodies as well as with an increase in the percentage of women in decision-making bodies. Likewise, using correlational analysis, a higher number of political parties employing internal party voluntary quotas is correlated with an increase in the percentage of women occupying seats in parliament as well as an increase in the percentage of women nominees in electoral lists of political parties. In conclusion, gender quotas, such as electoral quotas or internal party quotas, are an effective policy tool for greater women's representation in political bodies. Political parties and governments should opt to have gender quotas, whether electoral or internal party quotas, to address the underrepresentation of women in parliament, decision-making bodies, and policy-formulation.

Keywords : electoral quota, Europe, formal institutions, institutional feminism, internal party quota, women's electoral participation

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