

8 Spain

Women in Parliament: The Effectiveness of Quotas

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Introduction

In 2007, Spain ranks eighth among countries in the world as regards the presence of women in the lower chamber of parliament (the Congress of Deputies), with 36 percent female deputies (Inter-Parliamentary Union; www.ipu.org; April 2007). How has Spain reached such a vanguard status regarding the feminization of parliament and passed many other countries economically more developed and with a longer democratic past, such as France, Great Britain, or the United States? The approval and implementation of women's quotas in left-wing political parties is the main causal factor that explains the feminization of the current Spanish parliament. Quotas were adopted owing to the tireless and skillful pressure of party feminists. In the last two or three decades, other factors have created an environment favorable to the increase in the presence of women in the Spanish parliament. One of them was the proportional representation system to elect members of the Congress of Deputies. Other facilitating factors include cultural and socioeconomic variables—since the Spanish society and polity became increasingly secular and conceptions of gender roles more egalitarian, female participation in the labor market increased without interruption and half of the population with university degrees is female.

Previous research on women in the Spanish parliament has usually asked why the proportion of women in the legislative is lower than the proportion of women in the general population (but see Uriarte and Ruiz 1999: 208, among others).¹ I neither deny the underrepresentation of women in parliament nor the interest in studying the causes of such underrepresentation.

However, given the vanguard status of current Spain on female parliamentary presence, in this chapter I focus on the reasons that explain this advancement.

I organize the remainder of this chapter into four sections. First, I describe the voting system used to elect members of the Congress of Deputies. Second, I analyze the evolution of the proportion of women in the lower chamber of parliament since the first democratic elections held in Spain in 1977. Third, I explain how the electoral system has been a facilitating factor for the increase in the presence of women in the Congress of Deputies. Fourth, I analyze other cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors that have affected the proportion of women in the Spanish parliament. The main data for this chapter are secondary sources and four interviews with feminist activists and leaders of the social democratic Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE).

The Voting System

From the mid-1930s to 1975 Spain was governed by a right-wing nondemocratic regime headed by General Francisco Franco. The current Spanish political system was formed during the transition to democracy. It culminated with the public adoption of a democratic constitution in 1978. Parliament is composed of two chambers: the Congress of Deputies and the Senate. Elections are held through universal, free, and secret suffrage. Both women and men aged eighteen or over have voting rights. Members of the Congress of Deputies are elected by proportional representation under the d'Hondt system with closed and blocked lists. The fifty provinces and the two North African territories of Ceuta and Melilla serve as the constituencies. The district magnitude ranges from one in Ceuta and Melilla to thirty-four in Madrid and thirty-one in Barcelona, and almost two-thirds of districts have between four and nine seats. The number of members of parliaments (MPs) in the Congress of Deputies is 350. There is a threshold of 3 percent applicable in each of the fifty-two districts instead of the whole country. It is widely accepted that the Spanish electoral system favors big parties and parties with geographically concentrated support (Magone 2004: 80–81).

Generally speaking, three countrywide parties usually attract the majority of the vote: the social democratic PSOE, the conservative People's Party (Partido Popular, PP), and the United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU).² The IU is an electoral coalition to the left of the PSOE. It was formed in 1986 and includes among others the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista de España, PCE). The PSOE formed government between 1982 and 1996 and since 2004. During the whole democratic period, when not in government, the PSOE was the main opposition party. The PP, which formed

government between 1996 and 2004, was the main opposition party during PSOE rule. The PCE-IU has been the third electoral force in most elections.

Three regional parties play an important role in forming parliamentary majorities: the Catalan Convergence and Union (*Convergència i Unió*), the Basque Nationalist Party (*Partido Nacionalista Vasco*), and the Canary Coalition (*Coalición Canaria*). During the 1993–1996 and 1996–2000 parliamentary terms, these three regionalist parties supported in parliament minority governments formed by the PSOE and the PP, respectively. In democratic Spain, a process of devolution of powers from the central state to the regions has created a quasi-federal state. The three regional parties have governed their regions for long periods of time.

Women in the Legislature: Historical Trends

As shown in table 8.1, the proportion of women in the Congress of Deputies after the first four democratic elections (1977, 1979, 1982, and 1986) was merely around 6 percent. Suddenly, after the 1989 election, this proportion more than doubled (15 percent). This increase was mainly the result of the adoption in 1988 by the PSOE of a women's quota for party positions and electoral lists. The proportion of female deputies increased continuously in the next four elections (1993, 1996, 2000, and 2004) to reach 36 percent.

These general data mask important differences among parties. In general, and with exceptions, left-wing parties have promoted women's presence in the low chamber of parliament more than conservative parties. As table 8.1 shows, in the first four democratic elections (1977, 1979, 1982, and 1986), only 9 percent or less of PSOE deputies were women. As a result of intense pressure from PSOE feminists, the thirty-first PSOE federal congress in

Table 8.1. Percentage of women in the Congress of Deputies, total and by party, Spain (1977–2004)

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>PSOE</i> | <i>PP</i> | <i>PCE-IU</i> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1977 | 6 | 9 | 6 | 15 |
| 1979 | 6 | 5 | 11 | 9 |
| 1982 | 6 | 9 | 2 | 0 |
| 1986 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 0 |
| 1989 | 15 | 19 | 10 | 12 |
| 1993 | 16 | 18 | 15 | 22 |
| 1996 | 22 | 28 | 14 | 33 |
| 2000 | 28 | 37 | 25 | 25 |
| 2004 | 36 | 46 | 28 | 40 |

Sources: For the 1977–1993 data: Instituto de la Mujer (1994: 79–80); for the 1996–2004 data: Instituto de la Mujer (2006).

January 22–24, 1988, discussed and passed the 25 percent women's quota for party positions and electoral lists. Thereafter, the proportion of female PSOE deputies rose to 19 percent in 1989. It remained almost unchanged in 1993 (18 percent) and increased again in 1996 (28 percent). The mobilization of PSOE feminists within the party to increase the presence of women in high politics did not stop with the adoption of the 1988 quota but continued in the 1990s. As a result of sustained PSOE feminist pressure, delegates at the thirty-fourth PSOE federal congress (June 20–22, 1997) debated and approved the increase of the internal and electoral women's party quota to 40 percent. Subsequently, the proportion of women who became PSOE deputies increased from 28 percent in 1996 to 37 percent in 2000 and to 46 percent in 2004.

As can also be seen in table 8.1, the proportion of women among PCE-IU deputies followed a more discontinuous pattern than that of PSOE deputies. In the first two elections, the proportion of PCE-IU female deputies was 15 percent in 1977 and 9 percent in 1979. After two elections without female deputies (1982 and 1986), the proportion of PCE-IU female deputies increased from 12 percent in 1989 to 22 percent in 1993 and to 33 percent in 1996. Then, it decreased to 25 percent in 2000 and increased to 40 percent in 2004.

Finally, the proportion of women among PP deputies was 11 percent or below in the first five parliamentary terms (1977, 1979, 1982, 1986, and 1989). Afterward, this proportion increased to reach 28 percent in 2004.

The Impact of the Voting System on the Proportion of Women in the Legislature

In general, proportional representation systems are more conducive to women's presence in the legislative than majority systems (Norris 2000; Norris and Inglehart 2005: 249–250; Reynolds 1999: 558–559; Rule 1987: 481, 1994b: 16). This rule seems to be confirmed by the case of current Spain, where more than a third of members of the lower chamber are women (36 percent in 2004). In comparison, the presence of women in the Senate, which is elected by a majority system, has always been lower than that in the Congress of Deputies. The proportional representation system in Spain has some characteristics that are supposed to be particularly favorable to the presence of women in parliament: close lists and a two-to-three party system (outside Catalonia and the Basque country) (Threlfall 2005a: 150).

But the proportional representation system is not the main cause of the current high presence of women in the Spanish lower chamber of parliament. For one thing, Spain had a proportional representation system since the first democratic election, but the presence of women in the Congress of Deputies until the late 1980s was extremely modest: around 6 percent

(Threlfall 2005a: 147, 2005b: 5–6). Some characteristics of the Spanish proportional system are not supposed to be particularly favorable to the presence of women in parliament, such as the small district magnitude (five) (Leyenaar 2004: 25; Rule 1987: 484; but see Valiente, Ramiro, and Morales 2005). Therefore, a factor other than the electoral system is needed to explain the feminization of the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament.

The Impact of Other Variables on the Proportion of Women in the Legislature

Cultural Variables

Cultural variables, such as religion or conceptions of gender roles, have evolved in Spain from 1975 in a sense conducive to a higher presence of women in parliament. In comparison with the period of transition to democracy, Spain is today a more secular society and polity. Conceptions of gender roles are considerably more egalitarian.

As for religion, Catholicism has been identified by part of the literature as a variable detrimental to the presence of women in parliament. Simply speaking, Catholicism has historically defended a traditional view of the role of women in society that excludes them from the realm of politics (Leyenaar 2004: 26; Rule 1987: 481–484). However, more than a decade ago, Rule (1994b: 21) already argued that “the growing proportions of women MPs in such strongly Roman Catholic countries as Spain and Italy illustrate the diminishing negative influence of the church on women’s election to parliament” (see also Reynolds 1999).

Spain is a culturally homogenous Catholic country. After the expulsion of Jews in 1492 and of Muslims in 1502, no significant religious community other than the Catholic community has been openly active in Spain in the last four centuries. During Francoism, Catholicism was the official religion of the country, and some Catholic doctrines were reflected in state laws. For instance, divorce was prohibited and abortion was criminalized.

Despite the strong influence of the Catholic church in politics in the past, Spain belongs now to the group of Western countries with secularized politics. The Catholic church runs an important part of the education system and receives state money but does not control the agenda of government.³ Most gender-equality policies are in line with the policies of other European Union (EU) member states (Valiente 2001). In 1975, the majority of Spaniards were practicing Catholics (almost 60 percent), but three decades later these Catholics were a minority (slightly below 30 percent) (Requena 2005: 377).

In respect of conceptions of gender roles, these influence the presence of women in the legislative (Mateo Diaz 2005: 224). More concretely, Norris

and Inglehart (2005) note that egalitarian public attitudes toward women's political leadership favor access of women to parliament. However, these very same authors also propose that "[t]he empowerment of women remains a complex process, and (. . .) favorable attitudes toward women's leadership, by themselves, are not sufficient to produce automatic breakthroughs" (Norris and Inglehart 2005: 261).

Comparatively speaking, the Spanish society was considerably nonegalitarian in 1975 and is markedly egalitarian in current times. In the late 1970s, the view that women (especially married women) belong to the home and not to the public realm was prevalent. For example, in 1975, slightly over two-thirds of adult Spaniards (68 percent) thought that a woman's education should be geared toward raising a family instead of toward professional training. Only less than a third of the adult population (29 percent) believed that a woman should work outside of the home even if it is not essential for supporting her family. Slightly above two-thirds (69 percent) of adult Spaniards thought that unless she receives permission from her husband, a woman should not participate in activities outside of her home, including joining associations and attending meetings or lectures (De Pablo Masa 1976: 372, 377).

Two or three decades later, the situation could not be more different. Using 1995–2001 public opinion data from the World Values Surveys, Norris and Inglehart (2005: 253–254) include Spain and other postindustrial societies such as the Nordic nations, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States in the group of countries with the most positive attitudes toward women's political leadership in the world. In current Spain, the question to be asked in opinion polls is not whether women's place is in the "House" (of parliament), but how big is the majority of Spaniards who support mandatory women's quotas for all political parties (58 percent of adult men and 75 percent of adult women; March 2006 data; Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas 2006).

Socioeconomic Variables

Socioeconomic variables—such as the proportion of women with university degrees or the presence of women in the labor market—in the last two or three decades have evolved in a sense favorable to the feminization of the parliamentary elite. As regards university enrollment, the higher the number of women with university degrees, the higher the number of female potential candidates to the legislative (Rule 1987: 484; Uriarte and Ruiz 1999: 214–15; Valiente, Ramiro, and Morales 2005: 197). In the twenty-first century, women are 50 percent or over of those Spaniards aged sixteen or over with a university degree (Instituto de la Mujer 2006).

In respect of the presence of women in the labor market, a high proportion of women in paid employment is conducive to a high proportion of women in politics. Employed women may become more interested in politics through participation in the labor market. Paid employment raises the economic autonomy of women and thus their economic resources to run for office (Mateo Díaz 2005: 80–82, 224; Rule 1987: 481).

In the early 1970s, the majority of women of working age did not work for wages. Most Spanish women left the labor market (if ever present there) when they got married or had their first child (De Pablo Masa 1976: 368). This situation has changed significantly in the last three decades. The Spanish female employment rate has constantly increased, and it is now 51 percent.⁴ However, it is, together with that of Hungary and Slovakia, the fifth lowest in the EU after that of Malta (34 percent), Italy (45 percent), Greece (46 percent), and Poland (47 percent), and it is five points below the EU average (56 percent) (Jouhette and Romans 2006: 5; 2005 data). Since the percentage of women in the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament (36 percent) is the fifth highest in the EU after that of Sweden (47 percent), Finland (42 percent), and Denmark and the Netherlands (37 percent), factors other than the position of women in the labor market are needed to explain the comparatively high presence of women in the Congress of Deputies.

Political Variables

There is agreement in the literature about the key factor that explains the comparatively high presence of women in the Spanish parliament: the approval and successful implementation of women's quotas in left-wing political parties and especially so in the social democratic PSOE (Astelarra 2005: 272–273; Sánchez Ferriz 2000: 207, 220; Threlfall 2005a: 125, 148–149, 2005b: 8–9; Uriarte and Ruiz 1999: 211).

Feminists were active within the PSOE at least since the beginning of the transition to democracy and sought organizational status within the party. In 1976, a women's caucus, "Woman and Socialism" (*Mujer y Socialismo*), was formed. It was no more than a study group. In 1981, one of its members was elected to the PSOE Federal Executive Commission and others followed her in successive years. In December 1984, the women's caucus was raised by the party to the status of a Secretariat of Women's Participation at the federal executive level (Astelarra 2005: 133–134; Verge 2005: 4–5).

In the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, feminists within the PSOE continuously denounced the low presence of women in top political decision-making positions and asked for quotas to remedy this problem. The adoption of the 1988 quota was by no means easy. Most PSOE leaders were much more concerned with class inequalities than with other types of

inequalities, for instance, those caused by gender. For many of these leaders, feminist demands were particularistic and bourgeois deviations from the main objective of a socialist party: the improvement of the status of the working class (Valiente 2005: 178–179).

The full account of how in 1988 PSOE feminists achieved their goal of a 25 percent women's quota has not yet been written, since hardly any in-depth research has been conducted on this matter. Various factors facilitated the adoption of the 1988 PSOE quota: international influences, the support to quotas by the majority of PSOE members and the population in general, and the personal connections of PSOE feminists with PSOE male leaders. The Socialist International had recommended that member parties adopt quotas to increase women's presence in political decision-making positions (Threlfall 2005a: 128, 2005b: 9; Verge 2005: 5). According to an opinion poll conducted among PSOE members in 1986, around two-thirds of them (67 percent) were in favor of quotas (Sánchez Hernández 2003: 186). Similar degrees of support were found in opinion polls administered to the adult population of Spaniards (Instituto IDES 1988: 62–63). Some PSOE feminists were not merely unknown rank-and-file members or PSOE activists but the friends, relatives, and even wives of the main PSOE leaders (Threlfall 2005a: 158). For this very personal reason, PSOE feminists were close to the centers of party power and have continuously used these personal connections to advance feminist causes including the quota.⁵

The approval in 1997 of the 40 percent women's quota was again no easy task.⁶ Around three-quarters of the 1997 congress delegates were men, and 70 percent of congress delegates held political decision-making positions (Méndez and Santamaría 2001: 49, 60). If the women's quota were not only approved but finally implemented, some of these men would risk losing their very jobs as politicians. The reasons that in 1997 help to explain the success of PSOE feminists' skillful mobilization in favor of the 40 percent women's quota include international factors, the need to partly renew the leadership of the party after the 1996 electoral defeat, and the victory in the 1997 PSOE congress of the internal PSOE branch formed by the so-called renovators (*renovadores*). The Socialist International maintained its recommendation to party members to make relevant efforts to increase women's presence in politics. The Declaration of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in September 1995 described access to political office as crucial for women's well-being and encouraged states to make the necessary provisions for the fulfillment of the aim. In addition, one of the main objectives of the Fourth EU Action Program on Equal Opportunities (1996–2000) was the equal participation of women and men in decision making in all fields (Jenson and Valiente 2003: 87–88; Threlfall 2005a: 151; Verge 2005: 5).

In 1997, the still preponderantly male PSOE leadership approved the 40 percent women's quota in part because the quota was seen as a device for party renewal. After fourteen years in office, the PSOE lost the 1996 general election in the midst of a wave of political scandals and episodes of corruption. A renewal of the leadership could be perceived by the electorate in positive terms, because the new faces (women and youth) would not be associated with the old guard. Before the 1997 party congress, PSOE feminists convinced general secretary Felipe González to support the 40 percent quota. Although González resigned as general secretary at the congress, his successor, Joaquín Almunia, was in general supportive of feminist causes and particularly of the new quota (interview with Milagros Candela Castillo; Threlfall 2005a: 129, 152–153, 2005b: 10, 14–15; Verge 2005: 8).

Although one could find PSOE feminists in all internal branches of the party, the majority of them belonged to the branch formed by the renovators. Another main internal PSOE branch was that formed by the so-called followers of [Vice President Alfonso] Guerra (*guerristas*). Both renovators and guerristas shared an attitude of indifference and even hostility to feminism. But in general, the renovators have been known to be less opposed to feminist demands. Both Almunia and the majority of congress delegates were renovators, and this was crucial because the conflict between the renovators and the guerristas was very intense at the time of the congress (Almunia 2001: 428; Verge 2005: 8; interview with Patrocinio De las Heras⁷).

Women's quotas were adopted in many Western countries (including Spain) in the 1980s by left-wing parties (Norris 2000: 350). What is especial about Spain is that in general, PSOE quotas have been implemented (however imperfectly at times). Thus, quotas have produced a substantial increase in the presence of women in parliament (Threlfall 2005a, 2005b; Verge 2005: 5, 8–9). More research is needed to fully understand why this partially successful implementation has taken place, given the fact that in numerous countries quotas have been adopted but not implemented (Matland 2006: 278; Reynolds 1999: 561). PSOE feminists mobilized endlessly within the party at the national and subnational level to make sure that quotas were not only approved but also implemented. PSOE feminists organized training sessions for female members, activists, and leaders. These feminists tried to convince female members and activists that they were ready for public office and need to demand their inclusion in electoral lists (Astelarra 2005: 162–163; Verge 2005: 8; interview with Carmen Martínez Ten). In some elections, PSOE feminists were members of the party commissions that approved electoral lists. They convinced the remaining members of the committee to reject lists elaborated by subnational party structures that did not comply with the quota requirement.⁸ In their efforts to make sure that the quota was implemented, PSOE feminists found powerful male allies.



For instance, circulars and recommendations signed by the PSOE general secretary supporting the recruitment of women to decision-making positions were sent to the different structures of the party (Astelarra 2005: 162).

Other left-wing parties different from the PSOE also had quotas. This is the case with the PCE-IU. In the late 1980s, an internal party debate on women's political presence finished with the 1989 commitment to a women's quota of 30 percent for internal party positions and on party electoral lists. Two other IU discussions culminated in the adoption of new women's quotas of 35 percent and 40 percent in 1990 and 1997, respectively (Ramiro 2000: 225–226).

The conservative PP has always vehemently opposed quotas. As with many other conservative parties, women and men from these parties think that it is wrong to intervene in the recruitment process in order to elect more women. For instance, Amalia Gómez, general secretary of Social Affairs in the first PP government (1996–2000), dismissed such efforts as “the wonderbra quota” (*la cuota del wonderbra*) (*El País* May 18, 1997: 31). Her more restrained colleagues term quotas a form of discrimination (see Isabel Tocino of PP, minister of the environment, in *Mujeres* 1994). Conservative women argue instead that the recruitment process must be “fair” and “neutral,” so that the “best people” (including women) can be elected. Some may accept “soft” measures (such as encouraging women to stand for office) but oppose “hard” ones (such as quotas) (Jenson and Valiente 2003: 86; Verge 2005: 6). However, the increase of the access of women in PP elected positions since the 1990s has been explained by a mimetic effect of the PSOE quotas in a context of intense electoral competition between the PSOE and the PP (Astelarra 2005: 164–166; interview with Martínez Ten; Ruiz Jiménez 2006; Uriarte and Ruiz 1999: 211; Verge 2005: 1).

In the years to come, the access of women to political decision-making positions will be under discussion at the central state level. It is an issue of high priority for feminists within left-wing parties. Organic Act 3/2007 of March 22 on equality between women and men contains, among other measures, a reform of the 1985 General Electoral Act, making a women's quota of 40 percent mandatory for all parties. It is likely that the conservative party would lodge an appeal to the Constitutional Court on the grounds that mandatory quotas are unconstitutional. The PP has already lodged such an appeal regarding similar regional laws (Valiente 2005: 177).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that Spain ranks eight in a world classification of women in parliament with 36 percent female members in the lower chamber because in the last two decades feminists within left-wing parties

succeeded at making their parties adopt and partly implement women's quotas. Spanish women gained presence in high politics in a conducive environment because of the proportional representation electoral system and the increasingly secular and egalitarian society, polity, and economy. It is an open question whether further increases in female parliamentary representation can be obtained with the help of voluntary quotas in left-wing parties or with more radical devices, such as mandatory quotas for all parties that compete in elections.

Notes

1. For a review of the literature on women in the Spanish parliament, see Valiente, Ramiro, and Morales (2005: 193–195).
2. In the past, the PP had other names. Only “PP” is used in this chapter.
3. Approximately a third of pupils of preschool, primary, and secondary education attend private educational centers, the overwhelming majority of which are run by the Catholic church.
4. The female employment rate is the proportion of employed women in each age group (fifteen to sixty-four years in this case).
5. Interview with Carmen Martínez Ten, member of the Federal Executive Commission of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Madrid, May 4, 1999.
6. Interview with Milagros Candela Castillo, president of the Association for Feminist Thought and Action and activist of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Madrid, April 14, 1999.
7. Local councilor in the city of Madrid representing the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, interview, Madrid, April 20, 1999.
8. Interview with Carmen Martínez Ten. Interview with Micaela Navarro Garzón, secretary of women's participation in the Federal Executive Commission of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Madrid, April 13, 1999.