

Motion: This house would make it compulsory for 50% of MPs to be female

(This type of motion is often known as a 'quotas' motion, and is a common topic. It could be about employment or educational background or, as here, political representation, and the quotas might apply to race, educational background, class, sexuality, or, as here, gender.)

CHAIR

Welcome everyone to this debate. To remind you of the rules; each speaker will have five minutes to speak, with the first and last minute protected. I will signal the beginning and end of protected time by banging once on the table like this. (Bang.) At the end of the five minutes, I will signal that time is up by banging twice on the table like this (Two bangs.) Speakers will then have fifteen seconds to finish their speeches; if they are still speaking after fifteen seconds, I will bang on the table continuously like this (continuous bangs) and the speaker must sit down immediately. As this is BP, there will be no speeches from the floor. At the end of the debate, the judge will give her feedback and the result.¹

The motion before the house is: 'This house would make it compulsory for 50% of MPs to be female.' I'd like now to ask the Prime Minister to open the debate.

PRIME MINISTER

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Britain is a representative democracy. MPs are elected by the British people, to represent the British people. And yet, MPs don't look like the British people.²

Why not?³

Because, as you may have noticed, 50% of the British people are female; one in every two.⁴ And yet, following the 2019 General Election, only 34%⁵ - barely more than one in three - of MPs are female. So, our representative democracy is not doing its job; to represent.⁶

This has to change. Only when the composition of Parliament fairly represents the composition of the nation will we be fairly governed.⁷

We therefore propose that it should be compulsory for 50% of MPs to be female. We will achieve this goal in the following way. The current 650 constituencies⁸ will be reduced to 325, with each new, larger constituency electing two MPs, one

1 It's usually a good idea to run quickly through the rules if you are Chair, just to remind everyone, and make sure everyone knows what they have to do.

2 Notice how the Prime Minister is using epistrophe (repeated endings) (see Chapter 11). By focusing attention through repetition on the phrase 'the British people', she appeals to her audience by directly addressing them and including them; as this debate takes place in Britain, she can assume almost all the audience will be part of 'the British people'. Mark Antony uses a similar technique with his opening phrase 'Friends, Romans, countrymen' in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

3 Now she's using hypophora (asking herself a question and answering it) (see Chapter 11). This is a good way to present her main argument to the audience in a clear, systematic way.

4 Most people know that 50% means one in two, but expressing the statistic in a different way further emphasises its significance when compared with the upcoming statistic about the percentage of women MPs.

5 This is obviously a crucial fact to know in this debate. Given that BP is short prep with no access to the internet, the Prime Minister must have known it already. Having some of these sorts of facts and figures at your fingertips will give you a great advantage.

6 The Prime Minister has started by saying what's wrong with 'Now' (see Chapter 5).

7 Here she introduces the 'Then' (see Chapter 5).

8 Another useful fact the Prime Minister has made sure she knows.

from a male list, one from a female list. This will retain the connection between MPs and their constituents and allow each party to put up both male and female candidates in every constituency, while ensuring completely equal access to Parliament for both men and women.⁹

(CHAIR gives the one minute knock)¹⁰

I will be explaining how this measure will ensure that women will be more likely to enter politics; how it will change the culture of politics; and how it will ensure that women's interests are considered when laws are made.¹¹ The Deputy Prime Minister¹² will show how this measure will change the way women are perceived in wider society; how it will inspire young women to achieve as highly, or more highly, than men; and how it will ultimately lead to a more civilised society.¹³

To my first point. Women are currently discouraged from entering politics because they are outnumbered in Parliament.

OPPOSITION WHIP¹⁴

On a point of information.

PRIME MINISTER

Yes please.¹⁵

OPPOSITION WHIP

The percentage of MPs who are female has steadily increased over recent years; there is no reason to suppose it should not continue to do so.¹⁶

PRIME MINISTER

That is the case, and it is very welcome.¹⁷ I can see that my opponent clearly shares our desire for women to achieve equal representation¹⁸ in Parliament; but only our measure will guarantee this.¹⁹

To return to my first point. Imagine an idealistic young woman who wants to change the world

9 This is 'the mechanism' (see Chapter 3, The Basic Skills), essential in a debate proposing a change to the status quo. It shows how the proposition will get from 'Now' to 'Then'. It is specific and practical, and also makes sure to anticipate possible objections, by conceding the importance of MPs representing their constituencies and of parties being allowed to select both male and female candidates. However, it is not beyond criticism, as we shall see.

10 Signposting of key points all done in the first minute; now time to move on to the substance.

11 Excellent signposting; three points (the right number), clearly and concisely stated, all showing what 'Then' would look like. Not much yet on why 'Then' will be better than 'Now'.

12 It feels a bit pompous at first to use these terms when you're used to calling your debating partner just 'Ben', but it helps you to get into the role.

13 The second half of the signposting shows that the two of them are working as a team, dividing up the points clearly between them. The fact that the Prime Minister focuses on politics, and the Deputy Prime Minister on wider society, makes the division even clearer and easier to understand.

14 Remember in BP anyone from any position on the other side of the table can make a POI.

15 A good time for the Prime Minister to take a point of information (POI), with her first point introduced.

16 The Opposition Whip is using line of attack #13 from Chapter 6, 'The problem will go away without the solution you propose'. It has some impact as it is based on a measurable fact (again, see how useful general knowledge about politics is for debaters), and it does diminish the severity of the problem in 'Then'; if the number of female MPs were dropping, the proposition would have a much more powerful case. The POI is also admirably concise and focused. It would be even better, though, if it was addressed to what the Prime Minister is saying at that moment.

17 Always agree with your opponent as much as you can without conceding your case; it is a very good way of disarming them.

18 'equal representation' is an astute choice of language, very helpful for the proposition in a 'quotas' debate. It makes it sound as if your measure is fair for the whole population, rather than just meeting the needs of one part of it. Compare the way in which the terms 'gay marriage' or 'same-sex marriage' imply something that meets only the needs of the gay community, while 'equal marriage' is more inclusive, implying that the measure treats everyone, straight and gay alike, the same.

Choice of language influences how people think about issues; to give another example, supporters of legal abortion describe themselves as 'pro-choice', not 'pro-abortion' (not everyone likes abortion, but everyone likes choice, as it gives them control over their lives), while opponents of abortion describe themselves as 'pro-life' (not everyone is opposed to abortion, but who could be opposed to life?). One of the ways in which the opening speaker in a debate can take control of it is by choosing the language in which the debate is conducted to benefit their side.

19 This is brilliant. The Prime Minister has caught the Opposition Whip out conceding her central point that equal representation is necessary, and shown that a/ they both want the same thing b/ her measure is more certain to achieve it. All while appearing friendly and nice by agreeing with him!