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# The impatient person's guide to achieving diversity in leadership teams

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## Summary

Leadership teams and corporate boards can be made more diverse, balanced and effective – and quickly. But, what's the secret of the countries that secure rapid progress on equality?

- The power of the pledge: A firm pledge on diversity from those in power locks in progress and establishes a Concrete Floor.
- Balance: Successful leadership teams need to balance talent and experience; diversity is part of achieving that balance.
- Merit: Individuals' merit and suitability for a role will be based on their expertise, but also their diverse experiences.
- Multiple appointments: It's easier to recruit a diverse team when multiple appointments are made at once and there is a regular process for team renewal.

## Lessons from cabinet recruitment

### 1. THE POWER OF THE PLEDGE

Find out who has power to make decisions about new leadership appointments. Lobby them to make a public pledge to achieve diversity. Set a measurable target. How about gender parity? Hold them to account for delivering on that promise. As well as a target, commit to a Concrete Floor for the minimum representation of each underrepresented group. This locks in progress.

We found with ministerial appointments that rapid progress is made when a Prime Minister or President makes a public pledge for gender parity or a cabinet that 'looks like the country' ahead of an election. Zapatero did this in Spain, Bachelet in Chile, Trudeau in Canada. Even Cameron promised one-third women. We coined the term Concrete Floor to describe how progress gets locked in and becomes accepted as the new normal.

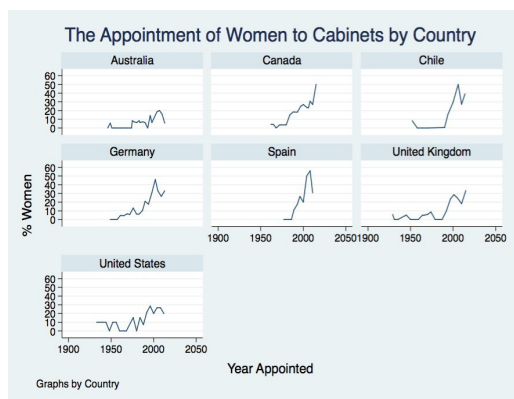
Zapatero in Spain: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/women-lead-the-way-in-the-new-spanish-government-560421.html>

Cameron in the UK: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/mar/02/women.gender>

## 2. INTRODUCE 'BALANCE' AS A QUALIFYING CRITERIA

Create successful leadership teams by balancing a range of talent and experience. Promote diversity as part of that balance. Individuals qualify as much for how they contribute to a balanced team as for their individual credentials. It's like picking the England football team: you need excellent, experienced players, but they can't all be strikers; and picking players from just one Premiership team would warrant a red card.

We found that balance is key when appointing ministers to cabinets. Cabinet as a leadership team needs to 'look like the country.' What exactly needs to be balanced varies by country. The need for more equal gender representation is now a requirement in all cases. In some countries, but not all, region, class or race / ethnicity are also required components of balance. We found that in the countries with a strong tradition of having to balance cabinets on representational grounds – Canada and Germany – adding gender to the checklist met with little controversy. Elsewhere, it has been resisted by insisting appointments should be made on 'merit' not gender.



Canada, Chile, Germany and Spain all show rapid progress in women's representation.

## 3. INTERROGATE WHAT IS MEANT BY 'MERIT'

Stop using the term 'merit' or 'best person for the job' as if they were objective criteria. They are not. Questioning someone's merit is a political strategy to retain the status quo. Instead, think in broad terms about what each person brings to the team. Proactively build diverse networks and cast the net wide in the search for new members of the leadership team. Remember that someone's diversity is part of their qualification for building a balanced team, along with their substantive expertise and experience, of course.

We found that all cabinet ministers need to be able to demonstrate political or policy experience of some kind. But two additional factors seem to make the difference between whether qualified individuals are selected for a spot in cabinet or not: either they can demonstrate to the selector that they can be trusted to respect the rule of collective cabinet responsibility; or they bring to the team an insight derived from their membership of a group underrepresented on the leadership team.

Watch Justin Trudeau talking about merit and the process of producing a diverse cabinet:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3r10gPtTF8>

## 4. MAKE MULTIPLE APPOINTMENTS

Select and appoint leaders or board members in clusters – or change the whole team simultaneously – rather than one individual at a time. Multiple appointments make rapid change more possible. They reduce the chances of the process being perceived of as a high-risk, zero-sum game, in which women are set up as competition to men. Build in a mechanism for regular renewal or turnover of a leadership team or board. This creates the capacity to reassess and check in on diversity goals at regular intervals.

Our research found that cabinets become diverse quickly as they are reappointed from scratch every time there is a change of government, providing an opportunity to get rid of incumbents and rebalance the team. This turnover gives selectors the opportunity to diversify appointments, including multiple women, without it being perceived as high risk. Returning governments and reshuffles allow for more piecemeal adjustments.

## Background to the research

Cabinets, Ministers and Gender is a study of the process of ministerial recruitment across seven democracies, examining why women have been excluded from ministerial office for so long, and what explains increases in women's representation in recent years. The research team is Claire Annesley (University of Sussex), Karen Beckwith (Case Western Reserve University, US) and Susan Franceschet (University of Calgary, Canada). Here's a flavour of our work:

Ending sexism in politics is very simple: put more women in Cabinet:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/02/09/ending-sexism-politics-simple-put-women-cabinet/>

Getting more women into ministerial jobs is not that hard – here's how to do it:

<https://theconversation.com/profiles/claire-annesley-203235/articles>