Nomination vs. election: do they influence women's access to institutional decision-making bodies?

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The lack of women in leadership positions across higher education (HE) as a result of the well-known phenomenon of vertical segregation has been problematized in the literature. Vertical segregation is defined as the tendency to find women's concentrated in clerical and low-level management. This study analyses if and how the way decision-making bodies are constituted, influence the gender balance of their members. Recently, within the New Public Management context, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been subjected to external pressures to create a new organisational environment, aiming at substituting the collegial model of governance with a managerial one. A trend to replace the election by the nomination as the dominant process to occupy decision-making positions has been observed.

Methodologically, quantitative and qualitative approaches were triangulated through several stages. Data about the gender constitution of the decision-making bodies of all 14 Portuguese public universities and the processes of accessing these bodies–elections vs. nomination–were scrutinised through consultation of universities' websites (cf. Table 1) and content analysis of legal documents describing the mission of the decision-making bodies. This was then cross-compared with an in-depth analysis of the university selected as a case study with content analysis of 12 interviews with institutional key-actors of the case-study institution. It is argued that the nomination process tends to be more advantageous to women than the election. However, although it is possible to conclude that the gender balance decreases with the increasing importance of the decision-making body, it is not accurate to say that there is a direct relationship between the way actors are chosen to these bodies and their gender balance. Institutional culture, gender awareness and even the lack of both self and institutional empowerment are also relevant to understand the low number of women in these positions.

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Table 1. Female participation in Portuguese universities' governance structures (segregating data according to both the election and the nomination procedures).

University	Rector %	Rectoral team %	Board of Trustees %	General council			Management board %	Total %
				Election %	Co-option %	Total %		
ISCTE–University Institute of Lisbon[1]	100	50	40	48	40	42	0	42
Universidade Aberta[2]	100	20	–	56	40	52	40	47
University of the Azores	0	78	–	n.a	n.a	29	33	44
University of Algarve[a]	0	60	–	52	20	43	40	43
University of Aveiro[a]	0	33	20	29	40	32	20	29
University of Beira Interior	0	40	–	29	13	24	40	28
University of Coimbra	0	30	–	n.a	n.a	21	0	
University of Évora[a]	100	44	–	38	14	36	75	44
University of Lisbon	0	13	–	60	30	51	n.a	43
University of Madeira[a]	0	43	–	50	0	38	0	38
University of Minho[a]	0	33	40	45	33	42	n.a	39
Nova University of Lisbon	0	40	40	53	50	52	0	43
University of Porto	0	36	40	24	33	26	25	28
University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro[a]	0	25	–	39	29	36	0	29

Source: Own construction based on the information collected on the website of each university
[a]Includes polytechnic schools; n.a. information not available; [1]University institute; [2] Distance learning university