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How Do Electoral Gender Quotas Affect Policy?

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Abstract

Electoral gender quotas now exist in a majority of national legislatures worldwide. In general, quotas are followed by greater legislative attention to the interests and priorities of women as a group. Across cases, effects have been most pronounced on issues related to women's rights, public health, and poverty alleviation. Quotas can influence policy in two general ways: First, quotas may send cues to all officeholders, prompting broad changes in legislator behavior among both men and women. Second, quotas typically bring more women into legislatures, causing a shift in aggregate legislator preferences and increasing women's ability to collectively influence legislative decisions. Yet, the positive effects of quotas are not universal, and some research reveals instances in which quotas have led to limited policy changes or even to more gender-inegalitarian outcomes. I suggest several variables that may moderate the relationship between quota adoption and policy change, including underexplored dimensions of quota design.

INTRODUCTION

The adoption and implementation of quotas for women in politics have been among the widest-reaching electoral reforms in recent decades, deeply affecting the core of representative democracy. Whereas quota policies were relatively rare before the 1990s, today more than 130 countries have modified constitutions, electoral laws, or party rules to require that women be included as candidates or legislators (Hughes et al. 2019, p. 219). Electoral gender quotas exist in every region of the world and are found in a remarkably diverse set of countries. Sweden, the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, and Rwanda, for example, all have highly effective gender quotas that ensure near equal representation of men and women in their parliaments.

Without a doubt, the rapid, recent, and global expansion of quota policies has contributed to the remarkable diversification of national legislatures worldwide. Finland became the first country to elect women to its national legislature in 1907 (Paxton et al. 2020, p. 79). Yet, by the end of the twentieth century, women had attained only 13% of national legislative seats worldwide. The current century has brought with it a new trend: Women's representation has nearly doubled, moving from 13% to 25%, over the last two decades alone. This rapid change is due in large part to quota policies, which have allowed countries to "fast track" women's legislative representation almost instantaneously (Tripp & Kang 2008). Indeed, many quota-adopting countries have made remarkable leaps in very short periods of time, doubling or even tripling women's legislative representation in the first post-quota election. **Table 1** shows the 10 countries with the highest percentages of women parliamentarians in the years 2000 and 2020, respectively. Over the past 20 years, the historical frontrunners in women's rights—Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway—have been overtaken by a new set of countries in which parity parliaments or even women-majority parliaments are increasingly common.

Given the rapid pace of quota adoption worldwide, studies related to the causes and consequences of quotas have become one of the fastest-growing literatures in gender and politics research (Hughes 2017b, p. 332). In this review article, I focus on one highly active stream within this research agenda: how electoral gender quotas have affected the policy agendas of the legislative bodies in which they are adopted. First, I briefly review the most common types of quota policies and discuss variation in the extent to which quotas achieve their intended aim of increasing women's presence in political decision making. The next section details research on gendered

Table 1 Ten highest ranked countries for women's parliamentary representation in the single or lower house in 2000 and 2020^a

2000		2020	
Country	% Women	Country	% Women
Sweden	42.7	Rwanda	61.3
Denmark	37.4	Cuba	53.2
Finland	37	Bolivia	53.1
Norway	36.4	UAE	50
Netherlands	36	Mexico	48.2
Iceland	34.9	Nicaragua	47.3
Germany	30.9	Sweden	47
South Africa	30.0	Grenada	46.7
New Zealand	29.2	South Africa	46.6
Bosnia	28.6	Andorra	46.4

^aData from IPU Parline (<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=10&year=2020>).

policy areas, those in which we might expect quotas to have an impact. In the following and largest section, I examine what the literature tells us about how quotas affect policy. This section includes work that examines how the adoption and implementation of quotas affect legislative environments in ways that may influence both men and women officeholders; how quota-elected women form strategic cross-party collaborations; and how quotas affect women's appointments to intra-parliamentary governing bodies, such as party leadership positions and ministerial posts. In this section, I also review instances in which quotas have been followed by either limited policy change or more inequalitarian practices. Given this variation in the effectiveness of quotas, the next section discusses variables that might moderate the relationship between quota adoption and policy change. These include the role of democracy, democratic transition, specific quota design features (including how many new women they usher in), and parliamentary culture. I conclude by offering some thoughts about future areas of study within this already vibrant field.

WHAT ARE ELECTORAL GENDER QUOTAS?

Following Hughes et al. (2019, p. 220), this review defines electoral gender quotas as policies that specify a threshold—typically a percentage—of women that must be (s)electd or nominated to a political decision-making body. Quotas stipulated by national law usually require that women make up a certain percentage of legislative candidates or fill a certain number of legislative seats. Quotas that pertain to candidates usually specify a certain percentage of women that must hold places on party lists, and thus are typically applied in proportional representation (PR) electoral systems. Almost all Latin American countries have adopted candidate quotas, and this quota type is also popular in Western Europe. Quotas that pertain to legislators rather than candidates usually set aside seats in elected bodies (through various mechanisms) and are typically applied in majoritarian electoral systems. These quotas are most popular in countries throughout East Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Political parties can also voluntarily amend their party constitutions to require that women make up a certain percentage of candidates. This type of quota is most common in PR systems (the Scandinavian countries being the archetypal example) but are found occasionally in majoritarian systems as well. For example, since 1993, the British Labour Party has required that candidates from “all-women shortlists” contest in half of the vacant seats that the party is likely to win (Nugent & Krook 2016, p. 116).

Figure 1 shows the countries that currently have reserved seat quotas, candidate quotas, or voluntary political party quotas that have been adopted by a major party or parties. This country-level coding comes from the Quota Adoption and Reform Over Time (QAROT) dataset compiled by Hughes et al. (2017a) and is supplemented with data on party quotas compiled by Clayton & Zetterberg (2018) as well as International IDEA's quota database (2020).

Electoral gender quotas can be adopted at any level of government. Although there are notable exceptions, the bulk of research on the policy impact of quotas has examined national-level quota policies given the generally greater availability of data on national parliaments. Much less is known about subnational quotas. International IDEA (2020) reports that they exist in 73 countries, but aside from a few well-researched cases (India's subnational quota, most notably), there is often little consistent reporting about whether and how these quotas function in practice.

WHEN DO QUOTAS INCREASE WOMEN'S DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION?

Quota policies have had varying levels of effectiveness in reaching their goal of increasing women's numeric representation (Paxton & Hughes 2015, Schwindt-Bayer 2009, Tripp & Kang 2008).

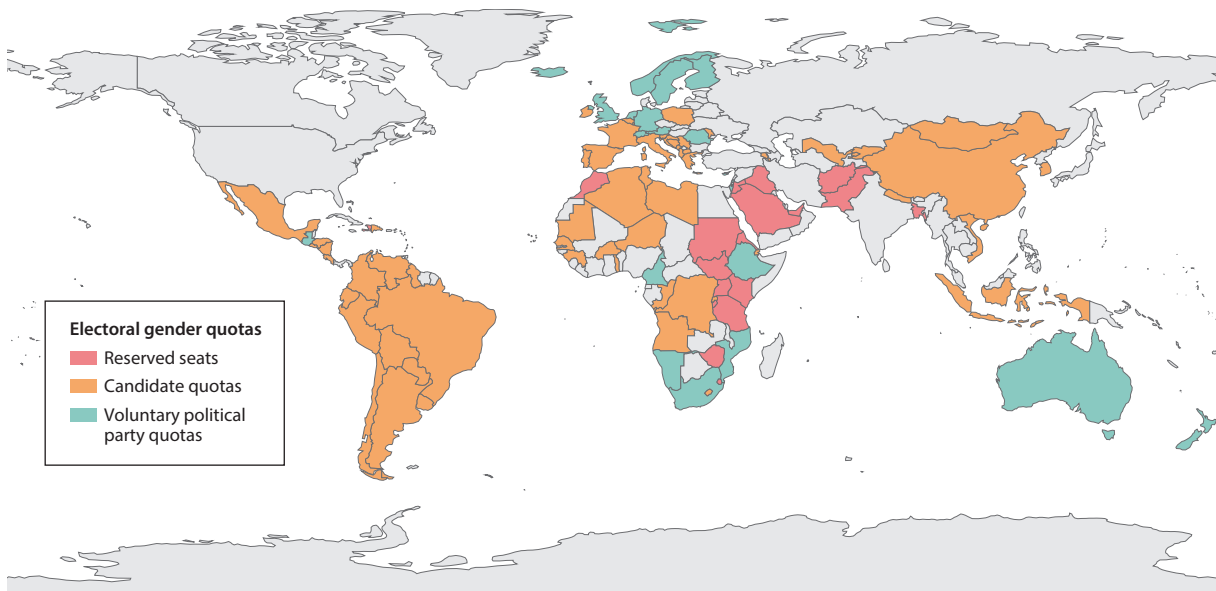


Figure 1

Map of countries that have adopted electoral gender quotas. Countries are coded as having a voluntary party quota if the total number of adopting parties amounts to at least 30% of the legislature. Two countries—Rwanda and Mauritania—have both reserved seat and candidate quotas, coded here as having the latter. Data are from Hughes et al. (2017a), Clayton & Zetterberg (2018), and International IDEA (2020).

Analyzing countries during the peak period of quota adoptions from 1995 to 2012, Clayton & Zetterberg (2018, p. 922) find that, on average, women’s representation moved from 11% of parliamentary seats in the year prior to the quota’s implementation to 21% the following year. That is, on average, quotas nearly doubled women’s parliamentary representation in the first election cycle. Yet, this average obscures significant variation across cases. For instance, when Angola adopted a candidate list quota in 2008, women’s representation increased from 9% to 37% in one election cycle. Similarly, quotas implemented in Kyrgyzstan, Algeria, Senegal, Namibia, Afghanistan, Rwanda, and Burundi have all increased women’s parliamentary representation by over 20 percentage points in the first electoral cycle in which they were implemented. In other countries, quotas hardly made a difference when first implemented. Infamously, when France first implemented a parity gender quota in 2002, women’s representation moved only from 10.9% to 12.2%.

Generally, quotas are most effective when they set placement mandates—requiring women to be placed in winnable positions on party lists—and when they sanction parties for not complying with the quota law (Hughes et al. 2019, Jones 2004). Intuitively, quotas are also strongest when they are set at a high threshold. Whereas reserved seat quotas are typically never greater than a third of parliamentary seats, several countries with either candidate quotas or voluntary political party quotas have parity thresholds, requiring that men and women comprise an equal number of candidates on party lists. Not surprisingly, countries with the highest representation of women in national parliaments often have parity quotas in PR systems (e.g., Bolivia, South Africa, and Norway).

WHAT POLICY AREAS ARE QUOTAS LIKELY TO AFFECT?

Research investigating whether and how quotas affect policy often builds on the expectation that men and women citizens have different social experiences, which lead to divergent political

interests, preferences, and priorities (Mansbridge 1999, Sapiro 1981, Young 2002). At the same time, gender scholars have noted that women's identities are multiple, constituted not only by gender but also by many other identities—such as race and ethnicity, class, partisanship, and religion—leading women even in the same communities to disagree on many policy issues (Celis et al. 2008, Celis & Childs 2012, Crenshaw 1990). This has led to lively debate about what constitutes a women's issue and how to think about the potential impacts of quotas without essentializing women as a uniform social group.

One helpful way to navigate this debate is Beckwith's (2014) distinction between women's interests and women's preferences. Beckwith conceptualizes women's interests through policy areas that protect women's rights as women. For example, policies to combat gender-based violence uphold women's right to be free from abuse. Among women, we might observe multiple and differing preferences on this issue (including antifeminist preferences), yet objectively this policy area protects the interests of women *qua* women. Other work in this vein focuses on a broader range of what may be considered women's issues—that is, policy areas that disproportionately affect women given their traditional role in child-rearing, such as investments in child health (Kittilson 2008, Miller 2008, Swiss et al. 2012).

Rather than examining prespecified interests, other research first attempts to ascertain gendered differences in citizens' policy priorities and then measures the extent to which women's presence in political bodies affects attention to these priorities. Of course, not all women agree on which issues deserve prioritization, but strong gender gaps in prioritization likely reflect the gendered nature of a particular issue. Work in this vein often uncovers gender differences that map in predictable ways onto the divergent social and economic experiences of men and women. For example, women tend to prioritize investments in potable water in contexts in which they are tasked with fetching drinking water for their communities, typical in rural agricultural societies (see, e.g., Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2004 in India and Gottlieb et al. 2018 in sub-Saharan Africa). In these same contexts, men often prioritize infrastructure projects, most notably roads, because they tend to travel farther and more frequently from home than women and because infrastructure projects typically employ men's labor (see, e.g., Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2004 in India and Olken 2010 in Indonesia).

While gender gaps on some issues reflect men's and women's community-specific social and economic roles, other gender differences appear more universal. The most striking examples are the issues of healthcare and poverty alleviation. Studies have found that women—both citizens and politicians—tend to report more concern about healthcare and poverty than men across Latin American, African, South Asian, and Western cases (Bhalotra & Clots-Figueras 2014, Clayton et al. 2019a, Gottlieb et al. 2018, Miller 2008, Schwindt-Bayer 2006, Swers 2002, Swiss et al. 2012, Tremblay 1998, Wängnerud 2000, Westfall & Chantiles 2016). Men, for their part, also tend to consistently prioritize certain issue areas across contexts. Cross-national research finds that men tend to prioritize national defense and military spending more than women (Clayton & Zetterberg 2018, Koch & Fulton 2011). Evidence from citizen surveys in sub-Saharan Africa and legislator surveys from Latin America indicates that men also tend to prioritize issues related to agriculture and employment more than women (Gottlieb et al. 2018, Schwindt-Bayer 2006).

In short, despite a great deal of heterogeneity among women both within and across local contexts, theory-driven and empirical work suggests quotas are most likely to affect legislative attention to issues related to women's rights, public health (particularly children's health), poverty alleviation, and, in agrarian rural contexts, access to potable water. If legislative attention is zero sum, women's increased presence in legislative bodies may turn priorities away from national security, infrastructure, agriculture, and employment initiatives. No work that I am aware of has systematically addressed the legislative effectiveness of quota-elected women in certain issue areas

compared to others. Yet, it stands to reason that women elected through quotas may have more success advocating for issues that are not seen as challenging patriarchal institutions (such as investments in maternal or child health) than those that fundamentally challenge men's authority (such as equalizing inheritance laws). This line of inquiry—that is, the comparative success of quota-elected women in some policy areas versus others—is ripe for future study.

HOW DO QUOTAS AFFECT POLICY?

Most work situates the question “how do quotas affect policy?” within the framework of women's substantive representation. In their influential edited volume on the impacts of gender quotas, Franceschet et al. (2012, p. 12) refer to work linking quotas to women's substantive representation as studies “seeking to establish whether quota introduction increases the number of policies proposed, debated, and passed on behalf of women as a group.” The collective body of quota research shows important variation across cases but largely suggests that the introduction of quota policies is followed by increased legislative attention to women's interests, issues, and priorities (for related reviews see Hughes et al. 2017b, p. 343; Wängnerud 2009; Paxton et al. 2020, ch. 9).

Relevant to the discussion that follows is the distinction quota scholars have made between the process of substantive representation and any policy outcomes that reflect women's interests or priorities. Substantive representation as a process entails whether, when, and how political actors claim to act on behalf of some or many women (Franceschet & Piscopo 2008). Substantive representation as an outcome refers to ultimate policy decisions that reflect women's (or some group of women's) interests or priorities. Substantive representation as both a process and a set of outcomes can occur through multiple actors, sites, goals, and means (Celis et al. 2008)—and quotas have the potential to affect all of these dimensions. Yet, actively engaging in the process of substantive representation (e.g., through bill sponsorship, speaking in plenary debates) is far from ensuring any type of ultimate policy reform.

The following sections review the many ways that quotas may affect certain legislative actions taken on behalf of women as a group as well as whether and how these efforts translate into policy change. More specifically, I expand on arguments I made with Pär Zetterberg, in which we theorized that gender quotas might affect legislative policy decisions in two broad ways (Clayton & Zetterberg 2018). First, quotas may affect policy when they are first adopted or implemented by sending cues to officeholders, prompting changes in legislative behavior across all types of legislators (men and women, quota-elected and non-quota-elected alike). Second, quotas can influence policy by bringing more women into legislatures, which may change aggregate legislator preferences, as well as increase women's ability to collectively influence legislative decisions.

Quotas Provide Information to All Legislators

The very act of quota adoption or implementation may provide legislators new information about changing legislative priorities. During the policy adoption process, quotas may send policy cues to both men and women policy makers about women's interests or priorities (Zetterberg 2009). All legislators who have made decisions about adopting gender quotas have been exposed to quota debates, often with women's organizations, women party activists, and other quota advocates (Valdini 2019). As a consequence, the introduction of quota policies may draw attention to gender equality issues broadly and thus to women's rights and women's legislative priorities (Catalano Weeks 2019). Quotas may also change the legislative arena by normalizing women's presence, generating new political cultures and causing non-quota-elected legislators, particularly men, to pay more attention to women's interests and priorities (Franceschet 2011, Mackay 2008). For

example, examining parliamentarians' speeches in the German Bundestag, Xydias (2014) finds that entering the legislature as a member of a party with a gender quota causes men, but not women, to participate more actively in debates on gendered policy areas.

Although quotas may prompt change in aggregate legislator behavior, it is also true that quotas are often adopted in times of general progressive policy change or democratic transition (Krook 2010, ch. 2; Tripp 2015). From a methodological perspective, this complicates how researchers assess the policy consequences of quotas. During times of transition, parliaments may adopt quotas as part of a bundle of progressive measures meant to remedy previous social grievances. South Africa is an archetypal example. Nelson Mandela's party, the African National Congress (ANC), adopted a voluntary gender quota in 1994 as the country was emerging from apartheid and redesigning democratic institutions to be more inclusive of many previously marginalized groups, including women. Although quota-elected women were influential in making sure women's rights were part of the ANC's post-apartheid agenda, the national environment was also ready for this sort of change (Hassim 2002).

Additionally, when parties adopt quotas voluntarily, they may be doing so within a larger party strategy to appeal to women voters, women's movements in civil society, or transnational women's activist groups (Hughes et al. 2015, Kang & Tripp 2018, Krook 2010). As part of these appeals to women voters or to progressive civil society groups, parties might also espouse new commitments to historically feminized issue areas. Methodologically, under such conditions it is difficult to disentangle the causal impact of quotas from a scenario in which policy reforms in general (for either historic or strategic reasons) only coincide with, and are not caused by, new quota policies. To meet this challenge, many quota scholars have come up with clever research designs (for a recent review of experimental designs assessing quota impacts, see Clayton & Anderson-Nilsson 2021, pp. 507–9).

Quotas Increase Women's Presence in Political Decision Making

Perhaps the most intuitive way for quotas to affect policy is by increasing women's presence in legislative decision making. Feminist political theorists place great importance on women's presence, arguing that women bring into politics a different set of experiences and perspectives than men (Phillips 1995, p. 65). These claims are well supported empirically. Parliamentary surveys across a diverse set of countries find that women legislators do tend to articulate different preferences and priorities than their men counterparts (see Clayton et al. 2019a across sub-Saharan Africa, Schwindt-Bayer 2006 across Latin America, Tremblay 1998 in Canada, and Wängnerud 2000 in Sweden), and these gender differences tend to correspond closely in size and substance with those observed among citizens (Clayton et al. 2019a). Given these gender gaps in opinion, women representatives may choose to act on their preferences through many different channels that may ultimately influence legislative outcomes.

First, quota-elected representatives may influence policy decisions during chamber-wide legislative procedures, such as during plenary speeches and roll call votes. Across both quota and non-quota cases, a large body of work has examined gender differences in the content of legislative speech. This research collectively demonstrates that women legislators participate more actively and more emotively in debates on women's rights and other gendered issue areas (most notably on public health) than do men (Catalano 2009, Clayton et al. 2017, Dietrich et al. 2019, Osborn & Mendez 2010, Pearson & Dancey 2011, Piscopo 2011, Tremblay 1998). For instance, Clayton et al. (2017) find that in the Ugandan parliament, women elected to seats reserved for women and women elected to open seats are equally likely to discuss issues related to gender equality in plenary debates, and that both groups of women do so at a significantly higher rate

than men parliamentarians. Given the consistency of this finding, it stands to reason that women's increased presence in political bodies should cause an aggregate preference shift in the legislature in ways that could affect collective decision making to better reflect women's interests and priorities.

Additionally, in contexts in which legislators' preferences are not yet crystallized, women's experiential knowledge may improve the quality of deliberation and sway men politicians toward a policy choice that better reflects the preferences of women as a group (Dietrich et al. 2019, Mansbridge 1999). That is to say, quotas may change aggregate legislative preferences by bringing into politics more women who have distinct preferences, and this influx of women newcomers may change men's legislative preferences as well.

The other plenary-wide activity that has received considerable scholarly attention is bill sponsorship. Research on a variety of cases suggests that women, both quota-elected and not, tend to sponsor significantly more bills and motions related to the rights and welfare of women as a group than do men. For instance, in a foundational study, Franceschet & Piscopo (2008) use data on bill cosponsorship patterns from the Argentine Congress and find that the number of women's rights bills increased substantially following the implementation of a gender quota in both the upper and lower parliamentary houses. This trend is likely due to the actions of women parliamentarians, as this group is much more likely than their men counterparts to sponsor legislation on issues related to women's rights, such as bills on reproductive rights and violence against women. Similarly, Schwindt-Bayer (2006) analyzes cosponsorship patterns in the Argentine and Costa Rican parliaments (both quota adopters) and in the Colombian parliament (a nonadopter at the time). Across parliaments, she finds that women parliamentarians are significantly more likely to sponsor legislation related to women's rights, as well as issues related to children and the family, than their men counterparts, suggesting that the presence of women has similar effects across quota and non-quota settings. Similar patterns have also been documented in the United States (Bratton & Haynie 1999, Gerrity et al. 2007, Swers 2013), Britain (Childs & Withey 2004), and Honduras (Taylor-Robinson & Heath 2003).

Second, quota-elected legislators may also affect government decisions through their entrance into party leadership. Research from Sweden finds that quotas increase the likelihood that women will attain leadership positions within their parties (O'Brien & Rickne 2016). In addition, cross-nationally, women are more likely to receive high-prestige cabinet posts as the percentage of women in the legislature increases (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson 2005, 2016; Krook & O'Brien 2012). Similarly, cross-national research from Latin America demonstrates that as women's numbers increase (often through quotas), women are more likely to join prominent sectoral or budget-setting committees. In short, quotas appear to increase the likelihood that women will become party leaders and attain prominent positions in ministries and committees. Through these fora, quota-elected women have the ability to create or amend legislation in ways that better reflect the rights and priorities of women as a group (see Heath et al. 2005, Kerevel & Atkeson 2013).

Some countries have also adopted quotas specifically for political leadership positions. For example, in 1993, India amended its constitution to require that one-third of all village council leadership positions be reserved for women, and that these reservations rotate at random in each electoral cycle. In a foundational study, Chattopadhyay & Duflo (2004) find that women's leadership on village councils increases investment in access to potable water, a public good prioritized by women in rural India. Councils reserved for women leaders also appear to increase the likelihood that women citizens will be acknowledged and receive a policy-relevant response from council leaders during village meetings (Parthasarathy et al. 2019). Quotas also appear to strengthen policy enforcement. For instance, Iyer et al. (2012) find councils reserved for women

leaders experience a significant rise in documented crimes against women. They present evidence that this effect is driven by women's greater willingness to report these crimes in reserved villages, based on the correct belief that they will be more likely to be investigated under women's leadership.

Third and finally, quota-elected legislators may also affect government decisions through informal negotiations and bargaining with other legislators or members of the executive branch. For instance, women can influence policy making through collaborations with other legislators or through intra-parliamentary institutions such as women's caucuses. A growing literature suggests that women are more likely to cosponsor legislation with other women than with men (Barnes 2012, 2016; Swers 2002), and quotas may increase the likelihood of cross-party alliances between women. Indeed, rates of collaboration between women tend to increase as women's numbers grow, particularly when party discipline is weak (Barnes 2016). Additionally, women legislators often collaborate through women's legislative caucuses, which also provide women politicians an important forum for engagement with feminist civil society (Sawer & Turner 2016). Cross-nationally, feminized parliamentary bodies, such as women's caucuses, are more likely to emerge in countries with electoral gender quotas (Adams et al. 2019), and they can serve as a powerful tool for legislative reform on women's rights issues (see Adams & Wylie 2020 across sub-Saharan Africa and Johnson & Josefsson 2016 in Uganda and Uruguay). For instance, in Uganda, the interparty women's caucus led a confrontational and ultimately successful effort to increase funding for maternal health, refusing to legislate on other issues until the government dedicated more of the country's budget to maternal and neonatal health (Clayton 2021).

In summary, quotas can affect policy making via cues to all legislators or by bringing more women into legislative bodies. Related to the latter, when women enter parliaments, they may affect legislation through plenary-wide debates, votes, and bill sponsorships; through attaining new leadership positions; or through creating new collaborations, often through newly formed intra-parliamentary bodies. Ample research suggests that all of these mechanisms are at play, although some may be more likely than others in certain institutional contexts (a theme I return to below, and one that is ripe for future comparative research).

Null Results and Cases of Backlash

The large majority of work on quota adoption suggests that quotas are followed by the greater substantive representation of women's interests, priorities, and preferences. However, several studies have documented cases in which quotas have resulted in limited policy changes or even more gender-inegalitarian outcomes.

Many scholars have noted instances in which quota-elected women's efforts to push for policy reform have been stymied. For example, through a qualitative case study of the Rwandan Parliament, Devlin & Elgie (2008) find that although quota-elected women parliamentarians often advocate for the rights and welfare of Rwandan women, this effort has had little effect on policy outputs (also see Longman 2006). Similar effects have been documented in Tanzania (Yoon 2011), as well as Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait (Shalaby 2016). Additionally, while not analyzing quotas per se, a cross-national analysis by Htun & Weldon (2012) finds that women's parliamentary representation is not correlated with progressive policies to combat violence against women.

In some cases, intense public resistance to quota-elected women can even lead to more gender-inegalitarian practices. For example, using data from India's policy experiment with randomized reserved village leadership positions, Brulé (2020) examines the effect of women council leaders on the likelihood that daughters will inherit family land. She examines daughters' inheritance in villages in reserved and unreserved councils both before and after substantial national reforms that

equalized women's legal right to inherent familial property. She finds that pre-reform, daughters inherited significantly more land if they lived in villages reserved for women leaders. Post-reform, she finds that reservations actually decreased daughters' inheritance. Using extensive qualitative evidence, she argues that these equalizing reforms caused male heirs to fight their married sisters' claims most intensely in reserved villages out of anticipation that women councilors would be more likely to enforce a daughter's legal right to inherit land. That is to say, the presence of quota-elected leaders led to more inequalitarian outcomes due to intense resistance by men affected by the equalizing reforms.

On average, quota-elected women appear to influence policy in ways that substantively benefit women constituents, either by distributing resources in ways that reflect women's priorities or by enacting or enforcing policies that grant women greater rights. Yet, these findings are not universal, and some work uncovers null results or even instances of backlash against women officeholders in ways that exacerbate patriarchal policies and practices. That there is such variation in the observed policy effects of gender quotas suggests the potential for moderating variables.

QUOTAS AND POLICY: MODERATING VARIABLES

The body of research cited above suggests that quotas affect policy reform to various degrees across cases. In this section, I discuss potential variables that might moderate the relationship between quota adoption and policy change. However, research in this area has been far from systematic, in part because of the difficulty in comparing quota experiences across cases.

Democracy and Democratic Transition

Perhaps one of the most obvious potential moderating variables connecting quotas to policy reform is the degree of democracy in the adopting country. Quotas are equally popular in democratic, hybrid, and authoritarian regimes (Hughes et al. 2015), yet expectations for their effectiveness should vary across cases (Baldez 2006, p. 108). It seems unreasonable to expect quota-elected women to have a distinct policy impact in authoritarian regimes like Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates, in which no legislator—man or woman—has authority independent of the executive branch. The same might be said for failed or weak states with gender quotas, such as Somalia or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, there is emerging evidence that the adoption of electoral gender quotas provides legitimacy to authoritarian or hybrid regimes, enabling them to engage in human rights abuses or consolidate authoritarian control (Bush & Zetterberg 2020, Donno & Kreft 2019, Valdini 2019). Longman (2006) describes this sort of occurrence in Rwanda, in which a women-majority parliament presents an appealing veneer to the international community as the president solidifies authoritarian rule (cf. Bauer & Burnet 2013).

In contrast, quotas might be the most effective during periods of democratic transition or times of policy innovation. Gender scholars have documented the many ways that women parliamentarians have been able to use their positions to advocate for women's rights reforms as countries transition from colonial or otherwise authoritarian regimes to democratic governance (Bauer 2012, Walsh 2012). In African states with a recent history of conflict, women have found inroads into new governance institutions and have been able to use their positions to lobby for women's rights reforms (Tripp 2015). Similarly, discussing early policy successes in post-apartheid South Africa, Hassim (2002, p. 694) notes that women activists in civil society and new quota-elected representatives joined together to insert "gender equality concerns into the heart of democratic debates" (also see Walsh 2006). By a similar logic, women's presence may also be most effective during periods of policy innovation in democratic regimes. Bratton & Ray (2002) find that women were most effective in pushing for increased childcare coverage in Norwegian municipalities when the policy

was first introduced. In summary, quota-elected women may be most effective when institutions and policy agendas are in early stages and there is more room for innovation.

Quota Design and Implementation

Another set of moderating variables relates to how quotas are designed and implemented. Quotas may be more likely to lead to significant policy reforms if they are promoted from below (through sustained grassroots activism from women's movements in civil society) rather than from above (due to pressure from international or regional actors). For example, Clayton (2015) finds evidence of extreme public resistance to a subnational quota policy in Lesotho that was implemented with little consultation from women's groups in civil society. The quota law was ultimately challenged in the country's supreme court, with the plaintiff arguing, "The government needs to come and explain to the people why it is important for women to participate. There was no consultation. We were just told it has to be done" (Clayton 2015, p. 357). Quota-elected women entering into such environments may have a more difficult time influencing policy reform.

Quota type may also be an important moderating variable, but theoretical expectations point in opposing directions. On the one hand, women entering political office through candidate quotas or voluntary party quotas may be entering more women-friendly environments than women in reserved seat systems. Quotas that apply to candidates are typically adopted in PR systems, meaning that quota-elected legislators are not distinguishable from other legislators, as all candidates are elected through the same party-wide lists. In these systems, women do not enter office through a separate electoral arena, and this may grant women in these quota regimes more influence and less stigma than "quota women" elected to reserved seats (also see Htun 2004 on differences between reservations and candidate quotas).

Yet, on the other hand, there are also reasons to expect that women elected through candidate quotas may have less influence than women in reserved seats. Proportional systems give party gatekeepers a great deal of control (often absolute control) over candidate selection. This may cause party leaders to choose women whom they think will toe the party line on issues of policy. As Hassim (2003, p. 88) observes, in closed-list PR systems like South Africa, "party leaders will choose women candidates who are token representatives, least likely to upset the political applecart, rather than those candidates with strong links to women's organisations." Moreover, proportional systems also tend to have higher levels of legislator party discipline than majoritarian systems, and party loyalty seems to inhibit some women representatives from taking a stronger position on women's rights (Cowley & Childs 2003, Goetz & Hassim 2003, Walsh 2012). This trend may be particularly pronounced in cases in which women are elected through quotas if party leaders use quota policies to make women feel particularly beholden to the party line (Murias & Wang 2012). For instance, drawing on the South African case, scholars have noted that the increasingly centralized nature of the ruling party and high levels of party discipline have limited the ability of women legislators to collaborate on women's rights legislation over time (Britton 2005, Hassim 2003, Walsh 2012). In contrast, women in reserved seat systems are directly elected by constituencies and thus may have more legislative autonomy to act outside the wishes of party leaders than women elected through party lists (Clayton 2021). In summary, whether women elected through different types of quotas have more or less influence on policy remains an open question and is an underdeveloped line of inquiry in the study of comparative political institutions.

Another potential moderating variable is the extent to which quotas are designed to usher in large cohorts of women newcomers and thus dramatically disrupt previous patterns of male overrepresentation. While some quota policies result in large changes in women's numeric representation, others see only very modest changes. The literature suggests multiple differing expectations

about this feature of quota design as a moderating variable. On the one hand, even when the number of quota-elected women is small, this new group of legislators may have an oversized effect on collective legislative behavior. Women entering through new quota policies may instill in their women colleagues an increased mandate to act on behalf of women (Franceschet & Piscopo 2008, Hinojosa et al. 2018, Wang 2013). Moreover, even small numbers of quota-elected women may serve as critical actors and work through formal channels or engage in informal discussions and negotiations to affect policy decisions (Childs & Krook 2009). Furthermore, a small cohort of women in parliament may appear less threatening to men politicians than a larger cohort. For instance, Htun et al. (2013) find that women's increased presence in the Argentine Congress made approval of gender-related legislation less likely over time, especially when a woman sponsored the bill. They argue that women are more likely to be marginalized as their presence grows (cf. Kerevel & Atkeson 2013).

On the other hand, some work finds support for the long-standing and oft-debated idea that women must pass a certain threshold or critical mass (typically conceptualized as at least 30%) before they are able to collectively influence policy (Childs & Krook 2009, Dahlerup 1988, Kanter 2008). In New Zealand, Grey (2002) finds that women politicians verbally represent themselves as women more often after surpassing 15% of the legislature. Globally, Clayton & Zetterberg (2018) find that quotas have the biggest impact in increasing spending on public health when they usher in large cohorts of newly elected women. Future theoretical and empirical work might examine how the rich institutional variation among quotas moderates their potential legislative consequences. Researchers might also more systematically examine how the impact of quotas varies with characteristics of society, such as the strength and autonomy of women's movements in civil society (see, e.g., Goetz & Hassim 2003) or the society's general level of gender egalitarianism.

Parliamentary Culture

A final potential moderating variable relates to political institutions themselves as gendered workplaces and the role of parliamentary culture in either facilitating or hindering progressive policy change following quota adoption. The ability of quota-elected women to affect policy depends on their ability to successfully work within their legislative institutions, and differences in parliamentary culture may play a large role in their success. For example, in some instances, quotas may incite a backlash among men legislators who, in reaction to the influx of new women, try to preserve power, close down spaces for women's substantive representation, and marginalize women newcomers (Beckwith 2007, Htun et al. 2013, Towns 2003). Indeed, all women elected to parliaments with new quota laws have entered into men-dominated institutions, often with deeply masculinized norms and cultures (Bjarnegård & Kenny 2016, Norris & Lovenduski 1995, Tamale 2000, Valdini 2019). These highly gendered workplaces may cause women to participate less in parliamentary debates (Bäck et al. 2014) and to be less recognized for their contributions when they do participate (Clayton et al. 2014). How to conceptualize and *a priori* measure masculinized parliamentary cultures for a comparative analysis of quota effectiveness is an open line of inquiry.

The role of parliamentary culture as a potential moderating variable highlights the distinction quota scholars have made between substantive representation as a process versus substantive representation as an outcome. Quota-elected women must be both willing and able to successfully change policies in ways that better represent women as a group (see Goetz & Hassim 2003). The bulk of research on quotas and substantive representation suggests more support for the willingness (women's desire to represent women as a group) than for the ability (women's actual influence on policy on gendered issues). That is, most research suggests that quota-elected women are active in the process of substantive representation, while policy outcomes often prove harder to achieve.

This may be because women, more than men, are marginalized in legislative institutions in ways that stymie their initiatives. Methodologically, it seems almost impossible to know the counterfactual: What would quota-elected women's impact be if they entered parliaments on the same playing field as men? While collectively the body of evidence suggests that quota-elected women have been able to use their newfound positions to achieve policy reform on issues that promote the rights and welfare of women as group, this impact may have been greater still if women were working in institutions in which they had equal footing with men.

CONCLUSION

Gender quotas have transformed legislatures worldwide and, in many instances, have transformed policy making in their wake. While quotas are often followed by new policies that better represent women as a group, feminist theorists are quick to point out that no matter what women do in legislative bodies, their inclusion is also a matter of representative justice (Dahlerup 2007). As half of the population, women have a democratic right to be included in political decision making (Phillips 1995). That women also appear to make a difference in policy outcomes only adds to arguments grounded in democratic justice. Importantly, though not the topic of this review, quotas appear to make a difference in many ways beyond their substantial policy effects. Cross-nationally, quotas tend to increase the percentage of minority women in politics (Hughes 2011), as well as diversify the class and professional backgrounds of both women and men officeholders (Barnes & Holman 2020). Evidence from Sweden also suggests that quotas improve overall legislator quality (Besley et al. 2017). Women's inclusion in political decision making may also reduce citizens' bias against women over time (Beaman et al. 2009), improve the career aspirations and educational attainment of young women and girls (Beaman et al. 2012), and improve citizens' trust in political institutions (Clayton et al. 2019b). However, the positive consequences of quotas are not guaranteed. Entering into men-dominated parliaments, quota-elected women often face gendered constraints in their legislative work, particularly when they attempt to reform policies that uphold traditional male authority. As such, researchers would do best to avoid any variant of the old "add women and stir" expectation that might predict universally salutary effects following women's rising numbers (see Clayton & Anderson-Nilsson 2021, Mackay 2008).

Through case-based and cross-national research, gender and politics scholars have amassed an incredibly rich range of knowledge about the potential for quotas to affect policy. Pulling together these accounts, future work might systematically theorize and test when quotas will have different effects. While there has been important work in this vein (e.g., Barnes 2016, Goetz & Hassim 2003, Walsh 2012), this is still a relatively under-researched topic in part because of the difficulties associated with measuring the effects of quotas comparatively. Yet, understanding which variables moderate how quotas affect policy could be achieved through well-designed comparative case studies, subnational analyses, or quantitative analyses with well-theorized outcome variables that are comparable across cases. A good meta-analysis of existing quantitative studies might also be in order. Intersectional approaches to understanding the effects of quotas are also still relatively rare (but see, e.g., Celis et al. 2014, Htun 2004, Hughes 2011) and offer an important opportunity to expand this literature.

Finally, a host of additional questions are still underexplored in comparative context: When quotas usher new women into politics, which women's interests are represented? Are there instances in which the inclusion of otherwise privileged women actually cements exclusion along other important dimensions of identity (see Karekurve-Ramachandra & Lee 2020)? Do minority women (conceptualized through numerous other identities such as race and ethnicity, class, and sexuality) represent the interests or priorities specific to women in their minority groups? These

questions deserve more scholarly attention and would benefit from collaborations across the fields of gender and politics, race and ethnic politics, and legislative studies. While quotas as a legislative phenomenon have caused an explosion of scholarly interest in the topic, there is still much work to be done.

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