

## Gender Quotas: A Path to Women's Empowerment?

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**Gender equality is an idea that is enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals. In order to achieve gender equality, a significant amount of women's empowerment must occur. Since women's empowerment is a way out of poverty, many countries have been undertaking tasks to assist women's ascent in society. One institution that has been established is gender quotas, which allocates seats for women in legislatures. This paper will explore how a country's context can influence the effectiveness of gender quotas in bringing women into legislatures. From there, I will look at how female politicians affect society at large. By studying regions of the world, I measure societal effects through political engagement at the local level and public opinion of women. Overall, gender quotas do seem to increase public opinion of women, but do not increase local level political engagement. Further research should be done on what policies women in legislatures support.**

In 2000, world leaders of the United Nations attended the Millennium Summit where they agreed upon a set of goals now known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals seek to reduce extreme poverty by 2015 by “promoting gender equality, health, education and environmental sustainability” (Ban Ki Moon, 2008, 2). Along similar lines of the MDGs, Amartya Sen (1999) discusses freedom in his book *Development as Freedom*. Sen outlines five different freedoms that he believes to be essential to human life: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. To Sen, poverty exists because people are deprived of these liberties. Developing countries should look to enhance these freedoms and the capabilities of its citizens to lead freer lives.

One lesson to draw from both the MDGs and Sen is their reliance on empowerment. By allowing freedoms and providing opportunities to grow, people have a chance to escape extreme poverty. This is especially true and applicable for women in developing countries who have consistently been denied many of the freedoms and opportunities Sen and the MDGs outline. For this paper, I will discuss the empowerment of women because this is a crucial issue in the fight against poverty. Esther Duflo (2011) writes “women's empowerment and economic development are closely related: in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development” (p. 1). With women empowerment, there follows a change in decision-making, which can have direct impacts on the ground

(Duflo, 2011). This directly affects development and helps a country grow (Duflo, 2011).

The empowerment of women aligns with the third goal of the MDGs - to promote gender equality and empower women. Three indicators are used to monitor the progress on this MDG: education, employment, and political participation. Each “is considered essential to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment” (Kabeer, 2005, p. 13). This paper will specifically address the issues of political participation of women and what effect this aspect of the MDGs has had on the world. However, the MDGs, supposed to be met by 2015, look like they will go unmet. Nonetheless, what has the world done thus far to promote increased political participation of women?

### QUOTAS

One solution proposed to help women empowerment is a gender quota. Gender quotas are a minimum amount of representation set up for women in a country's legislature. This can be done by having a percentage of candidates on the voting ballot be women or by simply reserving a percentage of seats in parliament for them (Dahlerup, 2009). Women's quotas are being implemented as a way to increase the female voice in the political world. Many argue that quotas are a substantial way to increase women's freedoms and participation in the community, thus furthering economic development. However, based on research, the effectiveness of women's quotas is highly subjective to the institutions and context in which they are being implemented. Because of this, women's quotas are not a quick-fix solution. To truly make women's

quotas useful and helpful, much thought and care should be put into their implementation.

This paper will begin discussing how a country's institutions influence gender quotas and can affect the amount of female political representation in governing bodies. Once more women are in political power the next step is to look at what other societal effects this can have. My next section will address this and will look deeper into the varying effectiveness of quotas in major world regions. A section on further research opportunities will close.

### WOMEN'S QUOTAS AND INSTITUTIONS

Quotas take two main forms. One way is to reserve seats or set a percentage of seats in parliament for women. This is typically constitutionally or legally mandated (Dahlerup, 2009). Another form is to have a percentage of candidates on the voting ballot be women. Reserving a proportion of women for candidate lists could be either constitutionally/legally mandated or voluntarily undertaken by political parties (Dahlerup, 2009). Each form has a different level of effectiveness in bringing women into government that is dependent on other institutional factors present in society. With quotas being a complex institution in itself, it is no surprise that other institutions can affect its capacity and effectiveness. While cultural and socioeconomic forces also affect how gender quotas work, this section will focus specifically on other institutions and their interactions with gender quotas and female representation.

Democracy as an institution has a huge influence on the workings of gender quotas. Logically, authoritarian regimes will do very little for women's rights. Such regimes do not want to empower anyone. However, the transition to democracy can greatly affect women's political representation. A study done by Fallow, Swiss, and Viterna (2012) focuses on this transition and "based on pooled time series analysis from 1975 to 2009, demonstrate that it is not democracy... but rather the democratization process that matters for women's legislative representation" (p. 380). Specifically, they find that right after democratic openings, the amount of female representation drops, then slowly increases with each subsequent election. They posit that this is connected to the increasing freedoms democracy brings over time. This certainly corresponds to a study done by Paxton, Hughes, and Painter II (2010). These researchers were looking to see how electoral systems, quotas, and political and civil liberties affect female representation. In accordance with Fallow,

Swiss, and Viterna (2012), Paxton, Hughes, and Painter II (2010) discovered that:

Democracy, although it does not influence the level of women's political representation in the earliest period, does influence the growth of women's political representation over time. Specifically, initial levels of overall democracy, political rights and civil liberties matter for the slope of the trajectory of women's representation. (p. 46).

The democratization process, which brings more civil liberties and political freedoms over time, increases the amount of women in political positions. Essentially, "it is increased freedoms, which fuel women's activism, that steepen the trajectory of women's legislative representation" (Paxton, Hughes, & Painter II, 2010, p. 47). Combined with women's quotas, which Paxton, Hughes, and Painter II (2010) also found increases female political engagement, civil liberties can have a significant impact on women's empowerment. As Sen (1999) states, "greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world" (p. 18).

### SYSTEMIC, NORMATIVE, AND PRACTICAL INSTITUTIONS

The institution of democracy, which encompasses many elements including civil and political liberties as discussed above, can be broken down into further institutional subsets. An essay done by Mona Krook (2003) differentiates between three types: systemic, normative, and practical institutions.

"Systemic institutions are formal features of a political system, like electoral rules, ballot structures, district sizes, and number of political parties" (Krook, 2003, p. 13). One main element of systemic institutions is ballot structure. A closed list means that when citizens vote, they vote for the party and not individual members laid out on a party list. When a party wins in a closed list system, the top candidates on that list get placed into the legislature depending on the amount of votes the party won. A zipper list means that the placement of candidates on the ballot goes man, woman, man, woman, etc. Combined, a closed, zipper list typically will be the most effective in bringing women into legislatures (Fleschenberg, 2007). When one votes with this ballot structure, it assures that women from winning parties will be placed in legislatures. Certainly, ballot lists have a big influence over whether or not women are elected into political office. For instance, if all women candidates are placed at the bottom on the bal-

lot list, as opposed to an alphabetical listing, they are less likely to be elected.

Another main element of systemic institutions that specifically influences gender quotas is whether or not a country has a proportional representation (PR) system or a first-past-the-post (FPTP) majoritarian system. Many believe that a PR system is the best system to increase female representation (Fleschenberg, 2007; Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; Krook & Zetterberg, 2014). However, there is a caveat to this. Jennifer Rosen (2012) conducted a study analyzing 168 countries across the world with data from 1992 to 2010. She found that the proposal for developing countries to switch to a PR system to gain more female representation would not be that effective. Instead, Rosen (2012) asserts that while “the transition to a PR electoral system considerably helps women in the average developed country, [it] does less to aid women in less developed countries in the absence of other demands for representation” (p. 318). While a PR system does aid in getting women into legislatures, issues like corruption, conflicts, cultural ideologies, and the social costs of nominating women as candidates act as obstacles towards increasing female representation (Rosen, 2012). This is where normative institutions influence political representation.

Normative institutions are the justifications for quotas and female representation in government.

Normative institutions are formal and informal principles that define the moral bases and goals of political recruitment... they include the definitions of political equality and political representation enshrined formally in constitutions, legal codes, electoral laws, and party statutes, as well as more informally in party platforms, political ideologies, and voter opinions and values. (Krook, 2003, p. 20).

Much of the rhetoric behind quotas makes up the normative institution. For instance, women's groups and female activism help make up and change these normative institutions towards support for female representation. This is important because if there is no acceptance or moral basis for female representation, then it will never happen. In order to change this, women's activism for political rights should be intensified. Irene Tinker (2004) discusses how women leaders of civil society can increase the number of female representatives by changing the normative institution. Tinker (2004) also points out that while these women are fighting for more representation and leading the charge

on this issue, they are developing their own political qualifications. Then, when elections occur, these women are thus more likely to get elected and will be more effective in the legislature than others (Tinker, 2004). However, to change normative institutions that are against female representation, women's organizations are essential. As Tinker (2004) states, “for any pressure to exist - whether to achieve quotas, to find and support candidates, to influence policy in the legislature, or to turn out the vote - women's organizations are necessary” (p. 542). Laurie Brand (1998) demonstrates this in her book *Women, the State, and Political Liberalization*. By studying Morocco, Jordan, and Tunisia, Brand (1998) shows that women's voices have grown in importance in these countries because women's organizations exploited political openings in order to gain traction on women's rights. Women's organizations, at least in these three countries, have been instrumental in pushing forward female rights and female representation (Brand, 1998).

“Practical institutions comprise formal and informal political party practices guiding candidate recruitment” (Krook, 2003, p. 16), like age, financial resources, formal qualification, legislative experience, etc. Here, the political party acts as a gatekeeper to the political world. If a woman cannot be endorsed and backed by a party, her chances of being elected are slim (Fleschenberg, 2007). Sometimes these institutions turn into patronage-based systems, which can severely erode women's chances of winning support from a party (Fleschenberg, 2007), especially if they do not have a high income or good connections.

Systemic, normative, and practical institutions are all clearly intertwined. Each affects one another, and each affects the effectiveness of gender quotas. When debating about implementing a quota, lawmakers must take the time to evaluate each of these institutions, how they affect each other, and how they could influence the effectiveness of gender quotas. When making the rules for gender quotas, each of these institutions must also be kept in mind in order to alleviate any adverse effects they would have on a gender quota's success.

### WOMEN'S QUOTAS AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Despite variations in the effectiveness of quotas to bring female representation to national legislatures, many studies have found that quotas do in fact increase the number of female representatives in national legislatures (Tripp & Kang, 2007; Paxton, Hughes, & Painter II, 2009; Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; Tinker, 2004). This

no longer needs to be proven. However, many are still unsure about the effects of these quotas in local settings. Therefore, throughout this rest of this paper, I will look for two additional measurements of gender quota effectiveness. One is an increase in female political engagement at the local level, not just the national level. The second is an increase in positive public opinion of women within the community. While a positive outcome of gender quotas is increased female representation, these two other indicators point to broader societal effects of gender quotas. As seen through Sen and the MDGs, an increase in political engagement at the local level could help people out of poverty. In addition, having women well thought of, or that they can hold leadership positions, is a positive step for women. Combined with increased representation at the national level, increased political engagement at the local level and an increase in public opinion of women's capabilities would enhance women's empowerment across a country. As discussed above, women's empowerment, especially at all levels of society, is extremely important for a country's development.

#### GLOBALLY

By comparing countries across the world in different regions, researchers can get a more macro-view about gender quotas and its effect on development. Karp and Banducci (2008) undertake this task by comparing 35 countries around the world with substantive female representation in politics. In their analysis, Karp and Banducci (2008) attempt to ascertain if female representation at the national level affects female political engagement at the local level. While they did find that there is a gender gap regarding political engagement, they did not find any evidence to support "that sex differences in political engagement can be reduced or even reversed when more women gain political representation" (p. 114). On a more positive note, though, they did find that increased female political representation does lead to an increase in positive feelings in both males and females about democracy. While this study does not test changes in opinions about women and does not show an increase in local political engagement, the fact that people view the quality of democracy as higher in countries with female representatives is encouraging, especially for developing governments looking to gain civilian trust. Nonetheless, while certain results point to one conclusion in macro-settings, they are not always present in the microsystem.

#### EUROPE

Scandinavia is the region of the world with some of the highest percentages of women political leaders. Many look to Scandinavia as a model for how to increase female representation. For example, Latin America justified its implementation of quotas because of the Scandinavia example (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). However, Scandinavia is one of the few regions of the world where female political participation was high before the implementation of gender quotas (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). In addition, gender quotas "have always been voluntary in Scandinavia, never a legal requirement, and only used by some political parties" (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005, p. 27). Female representation has increased since voluntary quotas began to be practiced, but this was also due to activism by women in Scandinavia (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). Because Scandinavia is a region with very different demographics and history than most regions that are considering implementing quotas today, it is not a robust comparison. However, it is a region that should be cited for its successful efforts toward in gender equality.

Italy provides another case study for quotas in Europe. From 1993 until 1995, Italy enforced a gender quota in municipality elections. A study done by Paola, Scoppa, and Lombardo (2009) takes advantage of Italy's quotas to test whether gender quotas affect stereotypes of women. Since this was such a short amount of time though, not all municipalities voted under the gender quota, which provides the researchers a control group to effectively test their hypothesis. Paola, Scoppa, and Lombardo (2009) find that "even after gender quotas were abolished, the municipalities effected by the reform continued to return a significantly higher female political representation than municipalities in the control group" (p. 252), which they claim supports their statement that quotas have eliminated a negative stereotype. This is because the increase in female leadership even after the quota repeal occurs with "a higher propensity of parties to present female candidates and [of] a higher propensity of voters to support them" (p. 252) and not because of an incumbency advantage. This shows that communities viewed their female leaders positively, and because of this view, continued to elect women after the abolishment of quotas (Paola, Scoppa, & Lombardo, 2009).

#### MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is the region with the lowest amount of female representation (Tripp & Kang, 2008). In addition, not much



research has been done on this region because of its low female representation. Critics argue that the low representation is because Islam is strongly against female political leaders (Tripp & Kang, 2008). However, a study done by Tripp & Kang (2008) shows that Islam drops out of the picture when quotas are introduced and has little influence over the amount of female participation. Therefore, some other compounding factor must be holding women back from entering the political world. Further research must be done on this issue. Clearly, the MENA region has a lot of work to do to continue to add women to its governing bodies. A case study of Morocco points to some of these issues.

“The arrival of 35 women in Morocco’s parliament in 2002 brings with it a strong wind of change; optimism about and the credibility of political will have increased. However, the disappointing results of the 12 September, 2003 local elections and later polls have shown that the fight for reform in family status and new cultural systems built on equality instead of a culture of submission must continue.” (Errebah, 2004, p. 60).

With the recognition of these issues, many in Morocco have been calling for reforms to the quota laws. Women rights movements are especially zealous in their calls for legal reform, but also for social change. In fact, this is typical across most of MENA.

Further research should focus on MENA and whether quotas are being implemented effectively and what outcomes they are having on society at large. Krook, O’Brien, and Swip (2010) second this view. After their analysis of institutional effects on gender quotas in Iraq and Afghanistan, they state “the question of the broader impact of these measures remains” (p. 75).

### SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

With the introduction of gender quotas in many sub-Saharan African countries, sub-Saharan Africa has increased the amount of women politicians substantially since the 1960s (Barnes and Burchard, 2013). In fact, Rwanda in its 2008 election became “the first country in the world to have more women than men in its lower chamber” with 56% (Barnes and Burchard, 2013, p. 773). As a region, sub-Saharan Africa provides ample data to test the effectiveness of women’s quotas. One study performed by Barnes and Burchard (2013) tries to do just that. By analyzing 20 sub-Saharan African countries, they

test the hypothesis that increased political involvement at the elite level would encourage involvement at the local level. They measure political engagement as discussing politics, participating in demonstration and protests, expressing an interest in politics, and contacting political representatives. They report two important findings. One is that women in this country dataset are significantly less likely to participate in politics than men are, which shows a gender gap in political engagement. However, “women are more likely to engage in politics as the percentage of women in the national legislature increases” (Barnes and Burchard, 2013, p. 780). These findings also still exist when controlling for country-level variation and individual socio-economic variables.

However, a study done by Amanda Clayton seems to find evidence to the contrary. When looking at Lesotho, Clayton (2014) finds that “women living in districts reserved for only female community councilors are less politically engaged... than women living in unreserved districts” (p. 3). She speculates that this “stems from female citizens’ suspicion of affirmative action... rather than an overall rejection of female representation” (p. 3). The differences of these two studies can be attributed to how each study was conducted and how political engagement was measured. In addition, the former was a cross-regional study, whereas the latter focused on one specific location. Interestingly, both of these sub-Saharan Africa studies look at Lesotho in their analysis, with the first study looking at high-level politics and the second study looking at community politics. As has been discussed, this difference in institutions can greatly affect the effectiveness of gender quotas.

### LATIN AMERICA

Latin America is another region where gender quotas are popular. When Argentina became the first country to pass gender quotas in 1991 (Zetterberg, 2009), many others in the region followed. With gender quotas being implemented more than a decade ago in a majority of Latin American countries, this region provides a great opportunity to look at more long-term effects of gender quotas on political participation. Par Zetterberg (2009) analyzes 17 countries in Latin America to see if quotas have increased political participation of women at the local level. Looking at political trust, political knowledge, political interest, party/campaign activities, political contacts, and protests, Zetterberg (2009) finds that quotas do not seem to have an effect on any of these variables except protests. Zetterberg (2009) does however state, “as a con-

sequence of methodological limitations with the analysis, the impact of quota legislation might be underestimated” (p. 723). Nonetheless, these findings go directly against what advocates wish to happen with quotas.

## ASIA

While many believe that the current institutions in some countries hinder them in growth and development, authors Banerjee and Duflo (2011) of *Poor Economics* make the point that small changes on the ground can make a big difference. They point to India, where they looked at the case of female policy makers. In West Bengal, India, some local communal governments have reserved seats for women in their governing bodies, while some do not. This provided Banerjee and Duflo an opportunity for experimental and control groups. In order to measure attitudes about female leaders, they asked villagers to listen to a speech made by a local leader, sometimes a male voice, sometimes female. Banerjee and Duflo (2011) write:

In villages that had never had reserved seats for women, and therefore had no experience of a woman leader, men who heard the “male” speech gave higher approval ratings than those who heard the “female” speech. On the other hand, in villages that had been reserved for women before, men tended to like the “female” speech better. (p. 261).

They point out that these men who liked the ‘female’ speech better also recognized that women were able to implement good policies and could be good leaders (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011). This shows an increase of public opinion of women’s capabilities. While it is just at the local level, this is encouraging for larger-level politics.

In contrast, a case study of Sri Lanka reveals how the public opinion of women candidates can go down. As mentioned before, institutions have a large influence over how effective quotas are bringing women into governing bodies. Sri Lanka, with a reserved seat system, has run into this exact problem. Because of the way Sri Lanka allocates seats to women candidates, “those women parliamentarians are largely perceived to be ‘tokens’ deficient of constituency-based legitimacy and political authority exercising a weak political mandate which seems to bind them even more to party power-holders and party policies” (Fleschenberg, 2007, p. 12). This view pervades society and makes it harder for these women to get re-elected (Fleschenberg, 2007). Men and women who are

elected without the reserved seat policy view these women elected under this type as ‘second-class’ (Fleschenberg, 2007). This further lowers public opinion of women who are elected under the reserved seat gender quota in Sri Lanka.

## CONCLUSION

Gender equality has become a hot topic in today’s world. With the United Nation’s call for gender equality and increased women’s rights, many countries have been trying to raise women’s positions in society. The third MDG addresses this issue, and looks at education, employment, and representation. Increasing women’s representation can especially empower women, something which Amartya Sen also believes is important to help people out of poverty. However, in order to combat societal pressures against female leadership, gender quotas may need to be implemented to assure women’s representation.

Traditionally, most countries, especially Scandinavian countries, looked to gain female representation through an ‘incremental track.’ This track embodies the idea that equal representation of the sexes may take many decades to achieve. In order to gain more women in legislatures, states should look to build women’s skills and commitment to public service (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). However, today, most countries are adopting a ‘fast track’ approach. This approach believes that “historical leaps in women’s representation are necessary and possible” (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005, p. 29) and cannot wait to be incrementally built. Because of this, active measures should be taken by the state to put women in governing positions (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). Dahlerup & Freidenvall (2005) believe that the ‘fast track’ approach is much more applicable to today’s world, but caution that “the fast track, where women are given political positions ‘from above’, so to speak, could turn them into tokens and leave them relatively powerless” (p. 42). With the implementation of quotas, countries need to assure that this does not happen. However, based on a survey of the research on gender quotas, it appears that some spillover effects do occur, whether or not these women are ‘token’ members or actually working against stereotypes to make a difference.

The regional variation of these spillover effects is important to note. Because context has so much influence over gender quotas, research should be done on a country, its institutions, history, and culture before implementing quotas. As discussed above, institutions in a country can have a large effect on the amount of representation a quota

can actually generate. If a quota is implemented without regard to the situation of a country, then chances are that this quota may not actually bring in women to government. Without an increase in female representation, then no supposed spillover effects can occur. Whether these spillover effects are better public opinion of women, increased political participation, or different policies made, none will happen without a quota being effective.

Based on an analysis of the regions, one spillover effect occurs, another does not, and another still needs to be researched. First, gender quotas can influence public opinion positively about women and female leaders. However, if women are viewed as 'token' members of the legislature, public opinion can certainly start to erode in female political leaders. As seen in Sri Lanka, it has reached the point where these women are finding it hard to even get re-elected. Countries must work to not only get women elected to political positions, but also to make sure that they do not become 'token' members. A combined approach of gender quotas with proper institutional backing to alleviate the 'token' view, and education of girls at the ground level is one possible way to do this.

The spillover effect that is less certain is whether national level participation promotes political participation at the local level, with some studies proving yes and others proving no. However, with only one study out of the many reviewed finding evidence for this, it is highly likely that increased female participation at the elite level does not increase female participation at the local level.

Finally, the claim that increased female representation can change the policies being implemented needs some more research to be proven true.

#### FURTHER RESEARCH: WOMEN AND LEGISLATION

There have been very few studies conducted to test the theory that female politicians support and implement policies that are different from the ones men support. Banerjee and Duflo (2011) find some evidence that local female politicians in India are more likely to support proposals for better water access and education, however other studies have not been able to prove that these policies are actually passed. For example, Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) find that in Argentina, "despite women's success in transforming the legislative agenda, they have not succeeded in transforming legislative outcomes" (p. 421). Other studies that look to test this theory typically only look at developed countries, since they are the countries with the most transparent data. While these studies could provide some insight, using them as data about fe-

male politicians is imperfect since developed countries do not match the situations in developing countries. Further research needs to be spent on studying what female politicians in developing countries support and can actually get passed.

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