

# Quotas for Women in Politics

Gender and Candidate  
Selection Reform Worldwide



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MONA LENA KROOK

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*Gender and Candidate Selection  
Reform Worldwide*

Mona Lena Krook

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QUOTAS FOR WOMEN  
IN POLITICS

*For my parents*

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# QUOTAS FOR WOMEN IN POLITICS



## Introduction to Gender Quotas

Recent years have witnessed a surge of interest in patterns of political representation. On the one hand, political transformations around the world have stimulated reflection on questions of institutional and constitutional design. In Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa, reformers have sought to devise new political arrangements in light of democratic transition, economic crisis, and post-conflict reconstruction. In Western Europe, pressures for devolution have culminated in the creation of new regional bodies which, along with increased European integration, have forced governments to recognize emerging systems of multilevel governance. On the other hand, new scholarship has challenged the dominant conventions of liberal democracy by rethinking the means and ends of the representative process. Rather than viewing politics as a neutral arena in which all citizens play an equal role, these studies argue that liberal political arrangements create systematic distortions in public policies, as well as the potential for equal political engagement. Alternatives they propose include civic republicanism, deliberative democracy, and multiculturalism, all of which promote a notion of equality in a context of difference.

These developments, both empirical and theoretical, have led to various innovations in political participation. The most common reforms, from a global perspective, have been provisions for the increased representation of women. Most of these provisions take the form of quota policies aimed at increasing the selection and election of female candidates to political office. The origins of many of these policies can be traced back to the United Nations' (UN) Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995. The resulting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, signed unanimously by all 189 member states, called on governments to take measures to ensure women's equal access and full participation in power structures and decision-making, as well as to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership (United Nations 1995). Although some quotas appeared before this date, the importance of this event can be seen in patterns of quota adoption around the world.

Between 1930 and 1980, only ten countries established quota provisions, followed by twelve states in the 1980s. Over the course of the 1990s, however, quotas appeared in more than fifty countries, which have been joined by nearly forty more since the year 2000. As a result, quotas now exist in more than one hundred countries around the world, but more than three-quarters of these measures have been passed within the last fifteen years.

In line with these developments, research on gender quotas has become one of the fastest growing subfields of research on women and politics. Most of this work focuses on single countries, or, at most, the diffusion of quotas within a single world region. It thus tends to offer explanations of this phenomenon in relation to dynamics at work within a small number of cases. When juxtaposed, however, these findings often contradict or talk past one another (Krook 2007). This indicates that efforts to generalize based on the experiences of individual countries may be limited in their ability to explain all instances of quota reform. Further, the rapid diffusion of quota provisions implies that these debates may be linked, in the sense that debates in one case may shape how quotas reach the agenda and are formulated in other countries around the world. Alternatively, multiple cases may be swayed by similar international and transnational influences, explaining patterns in the timing and nature of quota proposals. Together, these possibilities suggest that a broader comparative lens may be more appropriate for analyzing gender quotas, both individually and as a group.

Seeking to expand the scope of investigation, this book takes a global perspective to explore the various dynamics at work across the wider universe of quota campaigns and debates. The goal is to use this lens to develop a common framework for understanding the origins and impact of gender quotas, both to produce more cumulative research and to design more effective quota strategies and measures. Comparative work is crucial because an initial glance at quota measures around the world reveals no clear patterns with regard to the source or outcomes of quota policies. Countries with quotas are found in all major regions and have a broad range of institutional, social, economic, and cultural characteristics. Various coalitions of actors may thus pursue quota reforms for any number of different reasons. At the same time, the mere advent of gender quotas has not resulted in uniform increases in the percentage of women in parliament worldwide. Rather, some countries have seen dramatic increases following the adoption of new quota regulations, while others have

witnessed more modest changes or even setbacks in the number of women elected to national assemblies. These variations suggest that specific quota provisions, while ostensibly similar, may in fact entail distinct processes of political reform.

The book aims to untangle these dynamics in a theory-building exercise organized around two sets of questions. First, why are quotas adopted? Which actors are involved in quota campaigns, and why do they support or oppose quota measures? Second, what impact do quotas have on existing patterns of representation? Are these provisions sufficient for bringing more women into politics? Or, do their effects depend on other features of the broader political context? The framework developed via this approach identifies a range of actors, strategies, and contexts relevant to quota reform, and as such, offers a template for engaging in single and comparative case studies of quota policies. The utility of these elements is then illustrated through paired comparisons of the origins and impact of quotas in Pakistan and India, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK), and Argentina and France.

The analysis has several broad implications for the study of politics and efforts to improve women's status around the globe. In particular, the spread of quotas to all world regions signals a major shift in approach from previous patterns of political incorporation, which did not recognize—and, indeed, often explicitly rejected—“women” as a category deserving political representation. Future research on elections and legislatures will thus need to take gender quotas into account, both empirically and theoretically, when investigating political campaigns, candidate selection, and legislative behavior. By the same token the large-scale adoption of gender quotas by national parliaments, as well as individual political parties, raises important challenges for democratic theory and practice, which have often tended to ignore the role of women and gender, despite the fact that women form more than half the population worldwide. More specifically, the diffusion and effects of quotas reveal that women's presence in political assemblies does not simply reflect their broader social and economic status. Rather, measures to increase women's representation may appear even in the absence of previously assumed social and economic prerequisites. In contrast, the adoption and implementation of quotas highlights the recruitment practices of political elites, indicating that political actors and dynamics, not vague forces of development, are the central factor producing and mitigating inequalities in representation.



## Gender Quota Policies

The growing literature on gender quotas presents a variety of typologies for classifying different kinds of quota measures. Most scholars recognize three basic types: reserved seats, party quotas, and legislative quotas (Krook 2005; Norris 2004). However, some exclude reserved seats on the grounds that these provisions do not influence candidate nomination processes, but rather make specific guarantees as to who may accede to political office (Dahlerup 2006a). Others divide party quotas into two further types: aspirant quotas, which affect preselection processes by establishing that only women may be considered as nominees, and candidate quotas, which require that parties select a particular proportion of women among their final lists of candidates (Matland 2006). Still others draw distinctions between various kinds of legislative quotas, separating out those quotas instituted through changes to the electoral law from those secured through constitutional reforms (Dahlerup 2007). Despite these various typologies, this book retains a focus on reserved seats, party quotas, and legislative quotas based on the fact that these policies share similar concerns to increase the numbers of women elected to political office, despite their attention to distinct aspects of the selection process. Further, patterns in the timing of their adoption, as well as where particular kinds of quotas appear, suggest that choices to pursue one type of measure over another may stem from country-, region-, and situation-specific “repertoires” of female representation, rather than objective evaluations as to where best to intervene in candidate selection processes.

### *Reserved Seats*

Reserved seats appear primarily in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (Krook 2004). These measures first emerged in the 1930s, and, indeed, were the main type of quota adopted through the 1970s. Since 2000, however, a new wave of these provisions have been passed in a number of countries that otherwise have had very low levels of female representation. These policies are often established through reforms to the constitution—and occasionally the electoral law—that create separate electoral rolls for women, designate separate districts for female candidates, or distribute seats for women based on each party’s proportion of the popular vote. Reserved seats differ from party and legislative quotas in that they mandate a minimum number of