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Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide by Mona Lena Krook

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Book Review

Krook, Mona Lena. (2009). *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide*. New York: Oxford University Press, 304 pp., \$24.95, ISBN 978-0199740277.

Although more than 100 countries have adopted some form of national gender quota, such adoptions have not resulted in a universal increase in women's representation. Mona Lena Krook's *Quotas for Women in Politics* successfully parses out why this is the case, identifying gender quota adoption and implementation as a global phenomenon in which the interactions of diverse political actors, motivations, and institutions produce mixed results for women seeking political office. While Krook acknowledges the tensions gender quotas present feminist scholars and activists, she is committed to developing a clearer understanding of the patterns and complexities of gender quotas that can allow scholars, policymakers, and feminists "to design more effective quota strategies and measures."

This book is an essential read for more than just quota scholars, as the theoretical and methodological frameworks Krook develops will appeal to anyone interested in approaches that acknowledge complex, diffuse, and diverse policy processes. This book is innovative on several accounts: (1) for the comprehensive review and organization of the often contradictory gender quota research based upon their main causal explanations; (2) for the utilization of a global lens to construct an alternative framework for classifying explanations of quota adoption and implementation; and (3) for the application of qualitative methods that acknowledge causal heterogeneity and equifinality.

The introduction describes Krook's typology for gender quotas, including reserved seats, political party quotas, and legislative quotas, which also structures her case studies offered in later chapters. She also presents her methodological approach, which is an emerging qualitative comparative methodology that assumes there are multiple paths to the same outcome. In addition, this approach ascertains that certain outcomes are affected by conditions (variables) that may be contingent on the presence or absence of other conditions, so paths to adoption and implementation are causally complex such that no single variable has ultimate explanatory power. While this approach is fairly new, her use of it here is appropriate and enables Krook to develop three comparative case studies that build upon general

quota patterns derived from larger samples without sacrificing nuances of individual cases.

Chapter 2 identifies, primarily from case studies, four general explanations for quota adoption. From these explanations, she parses out the three most important political actors—civil society, state actors, and international actors—and the seven motivations for quota adoption among these actors. She then presents common coalitions among these varying actors and motivations, which highlights that while some feminists promote quotas in the name of justice and equality, political elites may pursue quotas for nonfeminist, strategic reasons.

Chapter 3 offers some of the most insightful and interesting theoretical contributions of the book. Rather than presenting quotas as an independent variable for explaining women's representation, Krook stresses the importance of situating quotas within a country's candidate-selection process and the degree to which quotas "reinforce or disrupt these interactions." She offers an alternative framework for understanding how quotas affect representation by identifying three categories of gendered institutions, which she labels "systemic, practical and normative." Each type of institution is related to different features of candidate selection: systemic institutions are related to the formal features of political systems such as electoral systems; practical institutions are the formal and informal practices of political elites; and normative institutions are the formal and informal behaviors that "justify the means and ends of political life."

Krook's main thesis is that when these gendered institutions are altered in a cumulative and cohesive way, a state will experience a "harmonizing sequence," which she theorizes will result in quotas having a positive, substantive impact. Conversely, if quotas result in shaping only one institution that perhaps clashes with other institutions, the sequence is "disjointed" and less likely to result in increased levels of representation.

She presents three sets of comparative case studies that support her thesis, including Pakistan and India, Sweden and the United Kingdom, and Argentina and France. She finds evidence that variation in quota effectiveness, even among different types of quotas, is generated from the ways in which quotas interact and alter these gendered institutions. For example, in Argentina, while there was a proportional representation system (systemic institution), the practical and normative institutions "did not treat 'sex' as a central criteria or category for candidate selection." In other words, sex was not considered a legitimate category for selecting and promoting candidates. But when feminist groups and party members referenced international documents legitimating quotas (normative institution), they were able to pass a legislative quota, which is the practical institution that facilitates candidates in getting into office.

Krook acknowledges that most research examines only systemic institutions, so her inclusion of institutions that identify informal practices and

ideas as significant factors for quota effectiveness is important. But the differences among her three categories of gendered institutions, and her naming of these concepts, could perhaps use greater clarification. *Systemic*, as a term in political science, has several meanings, and as her categorization seems to refer more to the structural features of political systems; maybe *structural* would better capture this category. In addition, as *practical* and *normative* institutions include both formal and informal categories, they seem highly interrelated and at points indistinguishable. In the Argentina example, sex as a category is both a practical and normative institution. Future scholars may revisit this relationship to assess the distinction between formal and informal practices and norms.

While Krook considers her analysis a “theory-building exercise,” the book is clearly more than this, as her commitment to making sense of a plethora of research and competing explanations will allow for future accumulation of research and assessment of gender quotas. Those interested in her general findings may find her case studies too detailed, but those interested in how to choose case studies and generate comparisons will find her comprehensive study quite useful.

Krook is a trailblazer of this emerging comparative methodology which challenges the prevailing notion that qualitative research should emulate quantitative logic of comparison, in which cases are selected because they are similar in outcome and “control variables” and differ on only one main variable. Her clear and thoughtful organization of the literature results in part from her choice in methodology, which requires a deep knowledge of cases and a commitment to the fact that variables that explain interesting findings are often not “independent,” nor do they consistently account for variance across all cases.

Mona Lena Krook is among the first scholars to offer a framework of study for scholars trying to make sense of the recent phenomenon of gender quotas. She is successful in part because she elucidates general patterns and findings while also demonstrating an awareness that no one explanation can fully explain quota emergence or effectiveness. Her use of a qualitative comparative methodology permits her to develop a system of analysis in which most quota scholars will be able to place their own work while still maintaining commitments to distinct routes and anomalies among individual cases. Her insistence on understanding quotas as a global phenomenon is imperative, as it means those who study gender-based policies can look beyond overly simplistic levels of analysis to assess the complex ways in which politics impact those seeking change.

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