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Abstract

Electoral gender quotas have become the subject of a growing literature in comparative politics, with the potential to affect how scholars study a wide range of electoral and representative processes. Yet, debates have emerged over how to define and categorize these policies, with implications for the ability to compare cases and draw broader conclusions about their impact in countries around the globe. Reviewing these perspectives, this article draws on work on concept formation to propose a pragmatic approach, focused on matching typologies to research questions. It emphasizes the advantages of this solution for promoting cumulative research and concludes with some thoughts for future research on gender quotas and comparative politics.

Keywords

gender quotas, electoral studies, concept formation, comparative analysis, women in politics, gender and politics

Countries around the world have witnessed dramatic increases in the proportion of women elected to national parliaments over the past two decades. These changes are due in large part to the introduction of electoral gender quotas, establishing minimum thresholds for the nomination of female candidates. Although the first quotas were adopted in the 1930s, these policies became increasingly popular in the 1990s and 2000s in all major regions of

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the world (Dahlerup, 2006; Krook, 2009). The recent and global nature of these developments has sparked scholarly and popular interest, leading work on quotas to become the fastest growing area of research on women and politics (Krook, 2006b), as well as a key focus of the gender-related programming of international organizations (Krook & True, 2012; Towns, 2010). The emergence of gender quotas has also more recently caught the attention of nongender scholars writing on topics like candidate selection and electoral performance (Bhavnani, 2009; Fréchette, Maniquet, & Morelli, 2008), dynamics of internal party democracy (Rahat, Hazan, & Katz, 2008), and patterns of mass political engagement (Karp & Banducci, 2008).

Quotas are thus the subject of a rich and expanding literature, with the potential to affect how social scientists study a host of questions related to elections and political representation. Yet, even as students of quotas begin to talk about the emergence of a “second generation” of research, focused on the effects of quotas beyond numbers (Franceschet, Krook, & Piscopo, 2012), there continues to be some ambiguity over measures to include under the rubric of “electoral gender quotas” and distinct schemes for classifying different types of quota policies. In the early stages of this literature, questions of labels were less important given the tendency to analyze developments in single countries, believing that quotas were an innovation largely unique to a given case (Carton, 2001; Freedman, 2004; Jenkins, 1999; Jones, 1996). However, as work has become more comparative—and scholars have attempted to situate their findings in a global frame—there have been disagreements over how to name, classify, and ultimately count quota policies. At this juncture, therefore, it is important to take stock of these debates to inspire reflection on different conceptual choices and their impact on how quotas are operationalized—and, in turn, what generalizable conclusions, if any, may be drawn from particular studies.

These questions are important for mapping discussions that have not often been addressed explicitly by quota researchers, but are implicit in the use of varied language and typologies to describe gender quotas. They also matter for the study of comparative politics, given that quotas have been adopted in diverse contexts around the globe, affecting the course and outcomes of elections with potential implications for a wide range of political phenomena. As the literature to date has shown, analyzing quotas may shed new light on a wide range of topics of enduring interest to comparativists, whether the topic is electoral reform (Celis, Krook, & Meier, 2011), voting behavior (Cutts, Childs, & Fieldhouse, 2008), party strategy (Murray, Krook, & Opello, 2012), candidate quality (Murray, 2010), legislative behavior (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; Zetterberg, 2008), public opinion (Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2009), or political engagement (Zetterberg,

2009a). Clarifying these discussions has implications as well for activists, outlining options and dividing lines related to quota design. However, the main focus here is on how to think more explicitly about concepts in research to better theorize how the findings of one study might “speak” to those of another, enabling more systematic comparative work and promoting greater dialogue with other literatures in comparative politics.

The article begins with an overview of debates over how to label and categorize quotas, using these to illustrate challenges in ascertaining the effects of quotas on the numbers of women elected. To explore a means for settling some of these controversies, the section, “Concept Formation: Criteria and Implications,” draws on work on concept formation to highlight the stakes of taking using different definitions. Recognizing that a single schema may not be appropriate for all questions, the article advocates a more pragmatic approach, elaborating on Adcock and Collier’s (2001) distinction between “background” and “systematized” concepts. This perspective is implemented in the section, “A Pragmatic Approach: Multiple Systematized Concepts,” which considers multiple ways that quotas might be defined for a variety of purposes—emphasizing, however, that these decisions have implications for how far conclusions might be able to be generalized. It argues that greater awareness to concept formation is crucial for better theorizing what quotas “do” in the course of facilitating—or not—women’s access to political office. The article then concludes with thoughts on how closer attention to concept formation in research on gender quotas can address their proximate effects on the election of women, as well as their wider impact on a host of other electoral and representative processes.

Quota Policies: Debates and Definitions

Many articles and books on electoral gender quotas begin with assertions as to the number of quota policies in force around the world today, with the number ranging from fewer than 30 (Baldez, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009) to approximately 50 (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010), more than 80 (Tripp & Kang, 2008), and more than 100 (Bush, 2011; Krook, 2009). A related approach is to list the top 10 countries in the world in terms of women’s parliamentary representation and report which results are due to quotas, with differences in which countries are deemed to have them (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; UN Women, 2011). A closer look reveals that there are two sources of confusion: differences in how quotas are “named” by scholars and activists and variations in the schemas used to categorize them in comparative research. These divergences play a critical role in assessing—among other things—how effective these measures are in increasing women’s numbers in parliament.

Semantic Issues

A range of debates over semantics have emerged as scholars have sought to give a name to the various policies that might be put under the heading of quotas for women in parliament.¹ Although early work described these measures as “candidate gender quotas” (Caul, 2001; Krook, 2007), there appears to be a growing consensus around the term *electoral gender quotas* (cf. Dahlerup, 2007; Gray, 2003; Zetterberg, 2009b). The preferred shorthand, in any case, is the term *gender quotas*. However, the “gender” and “quota” components have been the subject of some dispute among researchers. These controversies are worth reviewing, per the “naming guideline” mentioned by Goertz and Mazur (2008) as crucial to concept formation: considering the accepted name of the concept and how and why it differs from others in its semantic field.

In terms of gender, some have pointed out that policies focused on women as women are more appropriately labeled “sex quotas,” in light of the well-established distinction in feminist theory between “sex,” the biological differences between women and men, and gender, the social meanings given to these differences through norms of femininity and masculinity (Krook, 2006a). While this point is taken seriously by some scholars (Towns, 2010; Tremblay, 2008), most of the literature opts for gender rather than sex, one might speculate, for at least one of two reasons. The first is that gender is sometimes used to refer to relations between women and men. Quite a number of these policies are written in a gender-neutral fashion, speaking of “the under-represented sex” rather than “women” per se—implying that these policies would apply equally to men at some future date, should women’s representation ever exceed the level of men (Krook, 2009; see Holli, Luhtakallio, & Raevaara, 2006; Lovenduski, 2005b). The second reason is simply a more pragmatic one, referring to the term that has become the recognized expression as a way to retain a connection to the larger literature on these provisions (Krook, 2006a).

The word “quota” has been subject to greater discussion at a number of different levels. One worry, which intersects with observations about the effects of various kinds of quota policies, is whether quotas should be interpreted as mandating a minimum or maximum level of female representation. This has emerged as a concern in contexts where scholars have found that quotas seem to serve as a ceiling on women’s access (Nanivadekar, 2006; Reynolds, 2006). Problematic in a different sense are the many negative connotations connected to the word “quota” that have been employed to argue against these measures (Bacchi, 2006; Dahlerup, 2007; Krook, Lovenduski, & Squires, 2009), and to de-legitimize the women elected via this mechanism (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; Murray, 2010).

In response, advocates have resorted to a number of tactics to make these policies appear more attractive. The most prominent example perhaps is the French campaign, which developed the concept of “parity” as a way of overcoming legal barriers to quotas. Whereas the latter implied special rights for minorities, supporters claimed, parity entailed the equitable sharing of power between women and men (Gaspard, 1994; Scott, 2005). Some scholars emphasize this strategic framing and argue that, for all intents and purposes, parity is the same as a 50% quota (Krook, 2009). However, others maintain—in some instances, quite strongly—that quotas and parity are qualitatively distinct due to their distinct philosophical justifications (Mateo Diaz, 2005).²

A second strand, overlapping significantly with the parity case, relates to efforts by activists in various countries to devise alternative names for quota proposals tapping into already widely accepted political, cultural, and social norms. Examples include the call for “equality guarantees” in the United Kingdom (Lovenduski, 2005a), the principle of “every other one for the ladies” in Sweden (Freidenvall, 2005), and the “zebra” principle in southern Africa (Norris, 2004). A third tactic is to use the language of “targets” and “recommendations”—what Krook et al. (2009) label “soft quotas”—when more binding forms of positive action are rejected at either the party or national level. While some of these declarations reflect empty rhetoric, others influence candidate recruitment to an equal or greater degree than “hard quotas” (Freidenvall, 2006; Luciak, 2005). Altogether, this diversity of names not only presents barriers to cross-national data collection, but also raises questions about what kinds of policies should be rightfully included in a tally of electoral gender quotas.

Categorization Schemes

More extensive than these debates have been discussions over how to classify quota policies in light of the many forms that these measures take around the globe. This conversation has been far less explicit, however, with scholars proposing different schemes without referencing competing typologies (but see Krook, 2009). One approach has been to focus on the location of the quota mandate, distinguishing between constitutional, legal, and party quotas (Dahlerup, 2006; Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). A related framework highlights the regulating body, contrasting statutory/compulsory quotas with those that are voluntary, placing constitutional and legal quotas in the first category and those adopted by political parties in the second (Norris, 2004; Tripp & Kang, 2008). A third conceptualization organizes quotas with reference to the stage of the electoral process they affect, drawing distinctions

between aspirant quotas targeting pre-selection, setting out who may be considered as nominees; candidate quotas addressing selection, regulating who may be included as candidates; and reserved seats shaping outcomes, guaranteeing who will be elected (Matland, 2006). A fourth perspective theorizes quotas in terms of how they attempt to reform dynamics of candidate selection. Reserved seats operate at the level of the electoral system, party quotas are directed at the practices of political parties, and legislative quotas seek to transform norms of equality and representation (Krook, 2009).

These differing typologies reflect efforts to understand what quotas “are” and “do” in relation to existing political processes. Beyond these broad strokes, there are several ongoing tensions that have been raised but not fully resolved in the literature, albeit—again—largely implicitly as scholars have sought to come to grips with quotas as a policy innovation. One issue, for example, is whether reserved seats are qualitatively distinct from other types of quotas, emerging from distinct views on the nature of various ascriptive identities (Htun, 2004), or simply from the fact that they are output- rather than input-oriented and thus operate differently from quotas focused exclusively on candidate selection (Dahlerup, 2006). Arguing against such a separation, a global survey of quotas for women and minorities suggests that chosen policy types are not linked to actor analyses of where best to intervene in the electoral process, but rather, to historical and transnational “repertoires” of group representation shaping the models influential in policy adoption (Krook & O’Brien, 2010). Regional effects are particularly striking for gender quotas, where neighboring countries tend to opt for similar policies (see also Krook, 2006b).

A second issue stems from the diversity witnessed not just *across* also *within* categories. For instance, reserved seats—nearly synonymous with constitutional quotas—range from relatively small, like the 5% policy introduced in Jordan in 2003, to quite sizable, like the 33% provision established in Rwanda that same year. Party quotas—often taken to be the same as voluntary quotas, despite the fact that many of these measures are written into party statutes and thus cease to be fully voluntary—vary in a different, but nonetheless significant way. Some are adopted by minor parties with few or no members of parliament, notably Green parties, while others are employed in large and even governing parties, like the Labour parties in Norway and the United Kingdom. Finally, legal or legislative quotas—also sometimes referred to as “quota laws”—usually require a similar percentage, around 30%, but diverge greatly in terms of the constraints placed on parties when nominating their candidates (Jones, 2009; Krook, 2009; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009). These variations raise doubts about the internal coherence of these respective categories, but it is not yet fully clear how important these

technicalities are in terms of distinguishing among policies—or moreover, what is gained from different approaches to classification.

Gauging Impact

Although some scholars have been involved in exploring the global and regional diffusion of gender quotas (Bush, 2011; Caul, 2001; Krook, 2006b; Towns, 2010), the main outcome of interest in the literature to date has been whether quotas contribute to an increase in women elected, given the frequent mismatch—positive and negative—with the proportion mandated by the quota (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; Jones, 2004, 2009; Krook, 2009; Murray, 2004; Schmidt & Saunders, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009; Tripp & Kang, 2008). Although rarely acknowledged, different approaches to defining “quotas” are central to the conclusions reached in both areas of research.

Models of quota adoption may be skewed, for example, if scholars code countries with quotas as not having these policies. However, these coding decisions are perhaps even more crucial to work on quota impact, given that findings on this topic are often referenced by practitioners when evaluating quotas as a strategy (see Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013; UN Women, 2011). A contributing factor stems from difficulties in data collection. While there is an international website dedicated to providing information on quotas around the world,³ new measures are continually being proposed at the same time that existing policies are updated—and in some cases, even retracted or overturned. Examples include the 20% quota instituted in Saudi Arabia in 2013; the 2008 constitutional reform enacting a 50% quota in Ecuador, up from the 20% measure instituted in 1997; and reserved seats in Egypt that were adopted in 2009, but overturned in 2011. At the same time, data on party quotas is frequently difficult to confirm, with some scholars arguing openly that available information on these measures should not be used for scholarly analysis.⁴

With this caveat in mind, it is worth considering the implications of applying different definitions—and including or excluding certain types of policies—in studies of the numerical impact of gender quotas. By and large, the predominant approach in statistical work has been to limit the analysis to the effects of quota laws, combining data on the presence of these policies with potentially relevant details like the existence of placement mandates and enforcement mechanisms (Jones, 2009; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009). Only occasionally have scholars drawn on data on reserved seats and party quotas to test the impact of quotas overall as well as the effects of individual quota types (Paxton & Hughes, 2007; Tripp & Kang, 2008). The central problem

with counting only legal or legislative quotas—mandated by national parliaments via the electoral law and thus applying to all parties—is that this strategy, while seemingly reasonable, results in an under- or over-estimation of quota impact.

Qualitative and single-case quantitative analyses on quota implementation are more common (see Krook, 2009). At first glance, questions of classification appear less important for these studies, given that the focus is to generate an explanation specific to that particular country. Yet, issues of comparison gain salience as efforts are made to situate the findings of one study in relation to those of another, whether by the same author or by other researchers or activists. More specifically, without a larger framework, it is difficult to know exactly how ordinary or exceptional the outcomes are—precisely because it is not clear what the quota policy in question is a “case of” (cf. Ragin & Becker, 1992). The result is that scholars may judge quotas to be a failure in Bosnia (Pupavac, 2005) and a success in Morocco (Sater, 2007), although women’s representation increased by 10 points in both countries in the wake of quota provisions. The Spanish case presents a related challenge: The number of women in parliament dropped by one following the introduction of a quota law, but remained at a relatively high level, 36%, due to the use of party quotas in prior elections (Verge, 2012). Consequently, issues of “measurement validity” are important in quantitative and qualitative work (Adcock & Collier, 2001), requiring researchers to be aware of—and connect up with—broader developments in the literature.

Studies informed by different methods thus share a concern to gauge how quotas shape women’s election. Focusing on one category to the exclusion of another, however, does not adequately capture how quotas as a group contribute to female representation. Indeed, as some scholars have shown (Meier, 2004), party and legislative quotas may work together to enhance opportunities for women. At the same time, considering states with party quotas to have “no quotas” distorts the effects exerted by national-level quotas, presumably downward, given that party-level initiatives can be extremely effective in promoting women (Kittilson, 2006; Krook, 2009; Lovenduski & Norris, 1993). A related issue is that reserved seats guarantee outcomes but some allocate only a small proportion of seats to women, while some party quotas are adopted by parties with few prospects of gaining many seats in parliament. One way of resolving this problem has been to add the qualification that quotas only “count” when they decree a certain level of representation or are adopted by a major political party (Krook, 2010; Yoon, 2004). Another is to devise a common coding scheme that integrates legal and party measures, but weighs the latter in relation to the party’s overall share of seats (Schmidt, 2009).

The issue of labels is even more complex, emerging in quantitative and qualitative work. In particular, actors on the ground may dispute the existence of a quota, as in the case of the parity and soft quota reforms discussed above. Some scholars have treated such policies as if they were quota policies, whether constitutional/legal (Murray, 2004) or party-based (Freidenvall, 2006; McKay, 2004). Soft quotas pose further challenges in that they tend to be introduced when hard quotas are blocked and—as an already porous category—pose even greater difficulties than party quotas in terms of collecting comparable data across cases. While “soft” policies may be easier to dismiss as meriting the quota label, they similarly aim in a concrete way to increase the selection of female candidates, in some instances with a substantial impact on the numbers elected (Krook et al., 2009; cf. Freidenvall, 2006). Excluding or including them may, as a result, influence the conclusions of a comparative study of quotas.

A different type of ambiguity is witnessed where quotas appear in one government document but not another, raising questions about the existence of a quota. In Liberia, the 2005 National Elections Commission Guidelines mandated that each party ensure 30% women among their candidates for public elective office, but this requirement never appeared in the electoral law (Bacon, 2009). Similarly, the 2010 Kenyan constitution prohibits either sex from holding more than two thirds of elective and appointive offices. This provision was subject to extensive debate over translating this article into legislation leading up to the 2013 elections, culminating in a Supreme Court decision in 2012 that a formal quota was not feasible and gender equality would need to be achieved gradually over time.⁵

Two final considerations concern cases where quotas have been proposed, but not passed, and those where the policies in place have later been overturned. In both instances, describing the country as having “no quota” obscures a historical legacy that may be important to explaining patterns of female representation. In East Timor, for example, quotas were strongly endorsed by local actors but ultimately not instituted in 2003 due to international pressure (Krook, 2006b; a 25% law was introduced in 2006). When a relatively large proportion of women were elected, some argued that quotas were not needed to facilitate women’s presence—when these debates likely contributed to a politicization of the question of women’s representation, changing selection behavior. Similarly, a “twinning” policy was applied in single-member districts by the Scottish Labour Party in elections to the Scottish Parliament in 1999. This quota had a lasting impact through incumbency effects, although the policy was not applied in subsequent elections (Kenny & Mackay, in press). While there is no clear way to resolve these various issues, signaling them can help strengthen research through greater

attention to coding and labeling decisions—and, at the very least, modify how scholars interpret and present their findings.

Concept Formation: Criteria and Implications

Moving the field forward in a more unified way—especially as quotas begin to be addressed in other literatures—requires working through some of these differences in approach, with the ultimate goal of being able to situate studies in relation to one another. Views on concept formation have a long lineage in political science, beginning with Sartori's (1970) classic article. This received wisdom has been revisited in a series of more recent projects (see Schedler, 2011), which collectively emphasize that this topic remains an important issue for political analysis because it affects how concepts are measured, the degree to which cases can be compared, and the extent to which conclusions from one study—whether quantitative or qualitative—can be generalized. In other words, paying closer attention to concepts can help scholars, as a broader research community, understand and analyze the world in a more systematic way through a more explicit dialogue between theory and evidence (Goertz, 2006). Building on various insights in the existing literature, this article makes the case for a pragmatic approach open to multiple definitions that might be directed toward answering different kinds of research questions.⁶

Approaches in Conceptual Analysis

To paraphrase Sartori (1970), to be able to measure a given political phenomenon, it is necessary to establish what “it” is. Concepts must be clearly defined before they can be operationalized. Yet, in transforming ideas into empirical analysis, it is not always obvious whether the most appropriate concept is a dichotomous or graded one—and moreover, whether any “fuzzy” or “gray zones” should be acknowledged to incorporate “borderline” cases (Goertz, 2006). For some topics, the latter may become especially important, as they not only assist in drawing out the core features of a concept, but may also require researchers to rethink the concept altogether if gray zones appear with increased frequency (Goertz & Mazur, 2008). Some analysts are wary, nonetheless, of fixing the meaning of concepts too strongly, as this may imply that a single list of features is intended to characterize every instance of the concept, without respect to time and place (Choi, 2004; Davis, 2005).

Decisions regarding the content and boundaries of concepts are necessary, per Sartori (1970), to conduct better comparative research. He advocates

working at a medium level of abstraction, maximizing the ability of conceptual tools to “travel” while avoiding—if possible—“conceptual stretching” resulting in “meaningless togetherness” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1052), occurring when concepts are distorted beyond their original meaning to fit the new cases. These conceptual choices do not simply affect the ability to generalize, as scholars move up and down the “ladder of abstraction” between more specific and more universal conceptualizations. As Collier and Levitsky (1997) point out, they also influence the types of conclusions that are drawn regarding the causes and consequences of a given phenomenon. Stated slightly differently, how concepts are defined affects the causal relations that are explored—as well as the cases that should be included in a particular analysis (Goertz & Mazur, 2008).

Pragmatism and Concept Development

Stable concepts and shared understandings are thus central to any research community. Contrary to the image of concept generation described by Sartori, however, more recent scholars observe that concepts emerge in social science more frequently via a more “wide-ranging and unpredictable process” (Gerring, 2001, p. 60). They argue, indeed, that “ambiguity, confusion, and disputes about categories” (Collier & Mahon, 1993, p. 845) are quite common, as scholars seek to adapt concepts to fit new contexts as a way of achieving broader knowledge. In light of this contestation, the issue that arises in concept development is how to enable studies to “talk” to one another, when authors use diverse meanings but shared understandings would foster more cumulative research (Collier & Levitsky, 1997). For Gerring, this requires forging “cosmopolitan definitions” (2001, p. 55) that can apply broadly across cases, but are also coherent, identifiable, and parsimonious, among other features.

In light of these ongoing debates, Collier and Adcock (1999) recommend a more “pragmatic approach,” suggesting that there might be good theoretical and analytical reasons for adopting different definitions. They argue that, instead of searching for a single “correct” or “best” meaning, how scholars understand and operationalize a given concept should depend in part on what they seek to do with it. In other words, the goals of a project should shape the generation and application of concepts. One way to link these definitions, these authors suggest, is through distinguishing among background and systematized concepts (Adcock & Collier, 2001). Background concepts refer to the constellation of meanings and understandings associated with a given concept, while systematized concepts reflect formulations—usually explicit definitions—used by a given scholar

or group of scholars. Researchers thus have some flexibility in conferring meanings to concepts, but the background concept establishes boundaries on what can be plausibly claimed. Acknowledging the presence of systematized concepts, in turn, warns scholars against claiming that their definition is the definitive one.

This reorientation proposes that a more fruitful approach to questions of concept formation is to acknowledge that scholars often stress different aspects of a background concept when developing systematized concepts. What becomes important, as a result, is to reflect over how distinct versions of the latter connect to the goals of particular studies as they grapple with generating knowledge about a given political phenomenon. Individual systematized concepts may be modified over time via “friendly amendments” (Adcock & Collier, 2001, p. 533) that suggest refinements to initial formulations. This may be done in various ways, including a “family resemblance” approach that relaxes assumptions about clear boundaries and defining attributes (Collier & Mahon, 1993). This strategy can enhance the prospects for comparison, as concepts can be present to varying degrees as opposed to being simply present or absent. Once these conceptual issues are worked out, it then becomes appropriate to consider which indicators or scores to use to operationalize a systematized concept, whether these are interpreted literally or through various strategies of establishing equivalence (Adcock & Collier, 2001). The analysis undertaken below extends these insights to the literature on electoral gender quotas, focusing on the background concept and the various systematized concepts used by quota scholars.

A Pragmatic Approach: Multiple Systematized Concepts

Adopting a more pragmatic approach presents an opportunity to evaluate more explicitly how different definitions relate to one another. One observation that has already been alluded to is the fact that there is substantial overlap among many of the existing concepts in the literature, raising questions about whether it might be appropriate to converge toward a single set of labels as a way to enhance comparisons across cases—or, perhaps, to propose a new and more comprehensive typology that might better capture variations across quota policies. This article suggests, however, that these definitions do not involve minor differences in semantics, but in fact reflect somewhat distinct views on what quotas “are” and “do.” Consequently, they are better theorized as systematized concepts, tapping into various facets of a shared background concept. After mapping these out in relation to one another, the analysis argues in favor of matching definitions with the questions posed in different

projects, with the goal of promoting work that is not only cumulative but also more self-aware in connecting these perspectives.

Background and Systematized Concepts

When considering whether to propose a new versus revised concept, Goertz and Mazur (2008) argue, it is necessary to situate the concept against its intellectual and methodological background—a procedure that Schedler (2011, p. 12) describes in terms of “bringing analytical order into multiple uses of a concept” to “reconstruct its structural properties.” What this involves is determining what the core meaning of a concept is and what elements are more secondary and contingent. Although Sartori (1970) states that concepts “travel” better when dimensions are taken away, new work suggests that the opposite may in fact be true (Goertz & Mazur, 2008; cf. Collier & Levitsky, 1997; Collier & Mahon, 1993). On comparing the various typologies proposed in the literature, what emerges as central to all definitions of electoral gender quotas—peeling away the details specific to individual cases, as well as the normative evaluations of these policies, whether positive or negative—is the fact of attempting to intervene in an explicit manner in the candidate selection process to enhance women’s prospects of being nominated for political office. These efforts may institute a range of requirements regarding the selection of women and be initiated and implemented by actors at different levels of the political order. The shared feature, however, is the concern to increase women’s political representation through a variety of concrete policies addressing the selection process in either a direct or indirect way.

This background concept thus defines “electoral gender quotas” minimally as policies that (a) seek to increase the number of female political candidates and (b) are articulated explicitly in one form or another. Following Sartori’s (1970) advice, this definition covers a wide variety of initiatives pursued on behalf of women’s political representation, enabling it to “travel” across many different political and historical contexts. Yet, describing this as the “background concept” also permits greater nuance when delineating subtypes of this broader category of measures, enabling scholars to layer on a variety of features to “systematized concepts” to highlight one or another policy feature. Recognizing the degree to which each set of proposed definitions is partial vis-à-vis this background concept would thus enable researchers to consider more openly how these systematized concepts compare with one another.

As noted above, the four most common approaches to dividing up electoral quotas is to call attention to the location of the quota mandate, whether in the constitution, the electoral law, or the party rules; the regulating body,

whether states or political parties; the stage of the electoral process that quotas affect, whether pre-selection, selection, or election; and the nature and extent of reform vis-à-vis dynamics of candidate selection, whether targeting the electoral system, party practices, or political norms. These classifications result in some correspondence among quota types, but there are also conflicts that may or may not be relevant, depending on the question at hand. More specifically, the first emphasizes where the policy is recorded, the second where compliance is monitored, the third when the policy is applied, and the fourth intervention into existing selection dynamics. Juxtaposed, it becomes evident that these divergent approaches are not so much competing schemes for classifying quotas, but rather, different ways of thinking about relevant policy features.

Matching Concepts and Research Questions

Reframing existing typologies in this manner serves to emphasize that scholars, to some extent, have been talking past each other when labeling quotas in different ways. At one level, this might be taken as a minor problem that might be resolved by converging on a single framework. The argument put forward here, however, suggests that these varied approaches are appropriate to different kinds of research questions. For that reason, at the outset of their studies, scholars would benefit from explicitly considering how to best categorize quotas in light of the outcome under investigation—whether this entails drawing on an existing scheme or proposing a new one. This is true for quantitative and qualitative work, including instances where only one kind of quota policy is under discussion, as these choices play a role in shaping the potential for a given study to inform the broader quota literature. How this matching might be done is illustrated below, focusing on the five main questions tackled to date in the literature on electoral gender quotas: quota adoption processes, variations in numerical effects, qualities of women elected, policy-making by quota women, and symbolic ramifications of quota policies (see reviews in Dahlerup, 2006; Franceschet et al., 2012; Krook, 2009).

Quota adoption. The introduction of quota policies in diverse contexts around the globe is puzzling for a variety of reasons: Affirmative action per se is often controversial, yet electoral quotas for women have been approved in a wide range of states and political parties; quotas undermine the reelection of male incumbents, but these same individuals typically vote en masse in favor of their passage; and quotas can reify gender as a political identity, yet feminist activists have organized nationally and transnationally in support of these measures (Krook, 2008; Murray et al., 2012). A key focus in research has

thus been to trace the processes leading to quota adoption in countries around the world (Bush, 2011; Krook, 2006b).

To answer this question, the most appropriate typology may be the one focusing on where the policy is recorded—constitution, electoral law, or party statute—given that this can help illuminate who must be involved, what kinds of arguments need to be made, and what is required procedurally to get the reform passed. A policy that entails amending the constitution, for example, necessitates generating broad popular and partisan support, addressing questions regarding the constitutionality of quotas, and cultivating the approval of the majority of parliamentarians as well as the chief executive. A party-level measure, in contrast, involves working more intensely inside a single party, making not only principled arguments but also emphasizing electoral advantages, and devising a campaign targeted at delegates to the party congress and/or members of the national executive committee.

Numerical effects. Despite their common goals to increase the numbers of women elected, quotas have had divergent effects on the numbers of women elected, with increases, stagnation, and even decreases occurring after quotas are introduced (Krook, 2009). Several typologies may serve to untangle the causal factors at work, albeit in somewhat distinct ways, by theorizing features relevant to quota effectiveness. Focusing on where compliance is monitored, a common approach is to distinguish between “statutory,” “compulsory,” or “mandatory” quotas, on the one hand, and “voluntary” quotas, on the other—language that emphasizes state versus party levels of enforcement.

This distinction, however, is limited for causal analysis, as it obscures rather than clarifies the nature of different policies. As various studies have observed, a quota may be mandated by legislation—and thus apply to all parties—but have few or any sanctions, effectively allowing parties to voluntarily comply (Miguel, 2008; Murray, 2004; Siregar, 2006). The reverse can also occur: Parties may adopt a quota voluntarily, but once the policy is written into the party rules, it technically becomes a statutory requirement. While party leaders retain the power to apply the quota, many of these measures are strictly implemented, even as conflicts arise in selection contests and party members might advocate overlooking the quota requirement (Cutts et al., 2008; Freidenvall, 2006; Meier, 2004). The validity of the “compulsory” versus “voluntary” distinction is thus undermined when these terms are employed in a stricter sense, placing some cases in different categories.

If the aim is to explore the impact of state versus party levels of regulation, this article argues, two other typologies offer a more promising way forward. Both seek to connect quota reforms to the political recruitment process, albeit in slightly different ways, to theorize how quotas do—and do

not—alter dynamics of candidate selection in ways that affect the numbers of women elected. One approach divides quotas into types according to the stage of their application to aspirants, candidates, or elected officials (Matland, 2006; cf. Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). The power of this framework is that it can help visualize how “distant” the intervention is to the outcome—and presumably how effective it is—with aspirant quotas enhancing the supply of women considered, candidate quotas creating a demand for female aspirants, and reserved seats placing more women into elected positions. A challenge, however, is that some policies in fact fall into multiple categories—in which case, it is not clear how to gauge the effect of different groups of provisions. The British Labour Party, for example, uses a policy of all-women shortlists, establishing that only women be included in the final list of candidates in a given electoral district; it is thus an aspirant and a candidate quota.

A second approach is to link quota types to three bundles of factors shaping candidate selection processes: electoral systems (reserved seats), political party practices (party quotas), and norms of equality and representation (legislative quotas; Krook, 2009). Distinct from the previous typology, it suggests that different categories of quotas focus primarily on reforming one of these dimensions, whether fully or partially, and that outcomes depend on how the reform interacts with stability and change in the other two dimensions. This typology thus attempts to offer a more holistic view of what quotas do in the context of a wider set of dynamics in motion around candidate selection processes (cf. Kenny, 2013). While presenting a way to unravel causal complexity, the disadvantage of this approach is that broad recommendations cannot be made regarding which quotas are “best” for all cases.

Qualities of women elected. Quota campaigns revolve around a variety of claims about what quotas might do if enacted. One line of division regards the types of women who might be chosen via quotas: Advocates suggest women from more diverse backgrounds will be elected, while opponents express concerns about elite and “unqualified” women benefiting from quota provisions. The few studies that have examined this question thus far have rarely placed quota types per se at the center of the analysis, testing hypotheses using within-case comparisons—before and after quota adoption and reserved versus general seats—and drawing general conclusions on that basis (Franceschet et al., 2012; Murray, 2010).

Recent theoretical work suggests, however, that the impact of quotas “beyond numbers” may be influenced in important ways by who is involved in selecting candidates—whether these are party elites, party members, or citizens at large. Theorizing women’s legislative autonomy, Zetterberg

(2009b) argues that quota women may be more or less autonomous from political parties, depending on to whom they feel they owe their election. While not explicitly connected to quota types, the argument implies that there may be an important connection between modes of selection/election and the profiles of quota women (cf. Hinojosa, 2012). Women selected through party mechanisms—via party or legislative quotas—may more closely resemble other party candidates, given their selection by party elites and/or party members. Reserved seats, in contrast, take two forms: direct election by voters and indirect nomination by parliamentarians and/or party elites (Krook, 2009). It is possible that these three different modes of selection do have an impact on elected women's backgrounds, indicating room for the development of new typologies more appropriate to the research question being posed.

Policy-making by quota women. A second set of claims put forward relates to how these measures might shape the legislative behavior of quota women, above and beyond the effects of sex and gender. Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) propose that the application of quotas may place particular pressures on women elected this way: a “label effect,” whereby women seek to overcome stigmas associated with quotas by deliberately distancing themselves from women's issues, and a “mandate effect,” whereby women feel a special obligation to represent women due their election via gender quotas. This work, again, does not make a distinction between quota types. Yet, as Zetterberg (2009b) points out, quotas are not implemented in the same way across cases: Women may have greater or lesser degrees of legislative autonomy stemming from how they are selected, likely influencing how individual women negotiate the balance between label and mandate effects. At the same time, and distinct from a study of backgrounds, it is important to draw a further line between cases where quotas are implemented by a single party versus imposed on all parties. This might affect the broader legislative environment in which quota women act, in terms of the proportion of women elected and in relation to broader debates concerning the legitimacy of quotas and the salience of partisan divides.

Symbolic ramifications of quota policies. A third group of assertions concerns the broader meaning of quotas: Supporters contend that quotas will legitimize women as political actors and inspire female citizens to get more politically involved, while opponents propose that quotas will reinforce negative stereotypes about female politicians and thus further discourage women's political participation (Franceschet et al., 2012). As in work on legislator backgrounds and policy-making activities, research on these questions has

largely involved within-case comparisons, with the majority of work being done on countries with reserved seats given the possibility for natural experiments (Beaman et al., 2009; Bhavnani, 2009). Whereas these studies have generally generated positive evidence for the impact of quotas, the few articles tackling these questions in relation to quota laws has been mixed or negative (Meier, 2008; Zetterberg, 2009a).

An issue that has not been considered, however, relates to the symbols inherent within quota policies themselves. As noted above, a number of concrete measures to increase women's political representation deliberately eschew the quota label, even if they operate—for all intents and purposes—like a quota policy. While not usually placed at the center of analysis, these linguistic choices may be vital to consider when assessing the symbolic value of these various interventions. One example is the decision to reject quotas in favor of parity, which advocates—political and academic—argue is qualitatively distinct from the former in that it proposes a whole new model of democracy based on the equal sharing of power among women and men (Gaspard, 1994; Scott, 2005). As such, these 50% policies do not offer a “quick fix” but instead fundamentally reorient and re-gender political institutions. Other cases avoid the language of quotas through “softer” measures like targets and recommendations, a preference which some scholars have linked to party- and national-level resistance to affirmative action over equal opportunities notions of equality (Krook et al., 2009). Such resolutions—while often furthering the goals of gender quota advocates—may have the effect of reinforcing reigning definitions of equality that denigrate quotas as a solution *per se*. These various dynamics, crucial for ascertaining the symbolic role of quotas, are not captured in existing typologies, suggesting that new categorizations based on concepts like parity and soft quotas may be worth incorporating.

This review suggests that there may be multiple systematized concepts suitable to the analysis of quota policies and, in particular, that the research question should drive the choice of typology. At the same time, however, expanding the number of sub-types may affect the generalizability of findings with respect to the universe of cases. This is especially true when seeking to include measures that are not clearly labeled “gender quotas.” If the definition outlined above—policies that seek to increase the number of female political candidates and are articulated explicitly in one form or another—is accepted as the broader background concept, parity laws clearly qualify as a quota measure. Soft quotas, in comparison, occupy a “gray zone” (Goertz, 2006) as cases that are “recognizable members of a general class of phenomena” but “are less than full members” (Schedler, 2011, p. 14)—along the lines of Collier and Levitsky's (1997) “diminished subtypes,” which are

part of but do not fully possess all genuine features of the phenomenon. Including these provisions might be appropriate in studies treating quotas along a continuum of more and less strict measures, or those probing the distinction between voluntary and mandatory policies, but may be less suitable to other research questions.

Conclusion: Concepts and Electoral Analysis

Electoral gender quotas are one of the major recent reforms addressing candidate selection processes globally, but over the past decade, there has been debate, explicit and implicit, over how to best conceptualize—and thus count—quota policies in quantitative and qualitative work. This article argues in favor of retaining multiple classification schemes, but advocates that scholars carefully match typologies according to the dimensions that are relevant to the questions being posed. While this approach may lead to a further proliferation of frameworks, the argument advanced here is that this will serve a broader theory-building purpose, both in the literature on gender quotas and in research on related topics like political recruitment, legislative behavior, public opinion, and political engagement. Moreover, it will—perhaps counterintuitively—enhance the ability of studies to speak to one another, improving the comparability of research findings by specifying the aspect of these policies that is being explored, and thus more clearly delimiting what types of policies are included and excluded in the analysis. As evident in the review above, research on the impact of quotas on women's election has produced mixed findings due to variability in the data, stemming not only from difficulties in data collection, but also from different perspectives—not often explicitly recognized—on which policies should “count” in a tally of quota measures and which types of policies should be compared.

As this literature moves in a variety of new directions, the need for greater awareness to issues of concept formation will only become more pressing, as these decisions affect how causal relations are theorized and analyzed. To date, most studies have focused on the relatively straightforward descriptive effects of gender quotas, aiming to understand the origins of these policies and how they have altered—or not altered—the numbers of women in political office. In contrast, an emerging body of research seeks to address the substantive and symbolic impact of these measures, in terms of what they mean for women and the political system more broadly. A new wave of studies, for example, has begun to explore the effects of quotas on women, asking whether quotas empower women as political actors and confer greater weight to women's issues in public policy (Childs, 2004; Schwartz, 2004; cf. Skjeie,

1991) or, alternatively, undercut women's legitimacy in politics and detract from efforts to represent women (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). Other work analyzes tensions between quotas and democracy (Burnet, 2008; Cornwall & Goetz, 2005; Walsh, 2011), probing among other questions their impact on mass political engagement (Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Zetterberg, 2009a).

These projects raise new issues linked to methodology and concept formation, like the degree to which citizens are aware that quotas exist; the role of time in conditioning quota impact; and the overlap between the effects of quotas, on the one hand, versus those of sex and gender, on the other (cf. Franceschet et al., 2012). Moreover, gender quotas may potentially affect a wide range of processes connected to the conduct and aftermath of elections, not simply those that have been the subject of study to this point. Gaining the analytical leverage necessary for answering these new questions will thus require further conceptual precision. A fruitful guide in this endeavor, this article argues, is the distinction between background and systematized concepts, which permit and acknowledge diverse approaches to the formulation of concepts used in political analysis—retaining the same underlying concept but highlighting different features depending on the outcome of interest. As research expands to address new questions, therefore, scholars should reflect over the implications of conceptual choices, ensuring that these link up with theories about what these policies “are” and “do”—in turn contributing, in a more reflective and self-aware fashion, to more systematic, cumulative, and comparative research.

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Notes

1. Quotas for women also exist in other levels of government, both legislative (local, regional, and European Parliament) and executive (cabinet positions). They have also been applied to women in trade unions in some countries and have recently been the focus of campaigns to increase women's presence on corporate boards.
2. This tension can also be seen in the title of a symposium appearing in 2012 on "Gender Parity and Quotas in European Politics" in *West European Politics* 35(2): 286-414.
3. See <http://www.quotaproject.org>.
4. Personal communication with (Drude Dahlerup).
5. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/12/no-women-no-elections/>
6. I am deeply grateful to Susan Franceschet for the initial insight that inspired this argument.

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