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# Gender Quotas for Legislatures and Corporate Boards

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women's representation, politics, business, parity, policy diffusion,  
inclusion

## Abstract

The global proliferation of quotas for women over the past 30 years is both remarkable and consequential. Targeting decision-making positions historically resistant to women's equal inclusion, the adoption of electoral and corporate board quotas has at times been controversial. After adoption, quotas have influenced women's numbers, the performance and outcomes of decision-making bodies, and broader public attitudes. In this review, we distinguish among types of electoral and corporate quotas, trace arguments for and against the adoption of quotas, and review research on factors that influence quota adoption across time and space. After outlining the methodological difficulties in demonstrating an impact of gender quotas, we review research that is able to isolate an impact of quotas in politics and business. We conclude by providing several suggestions to ensure that future research continues to advance our understanding of the form, spread, and impact of gender quotas.



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**Electoral quota:**

constitutional regulations, electoral laws, or political party rules that require a certain percentage of candidates or legislators to be women (or men)

**Corporate board quota:**

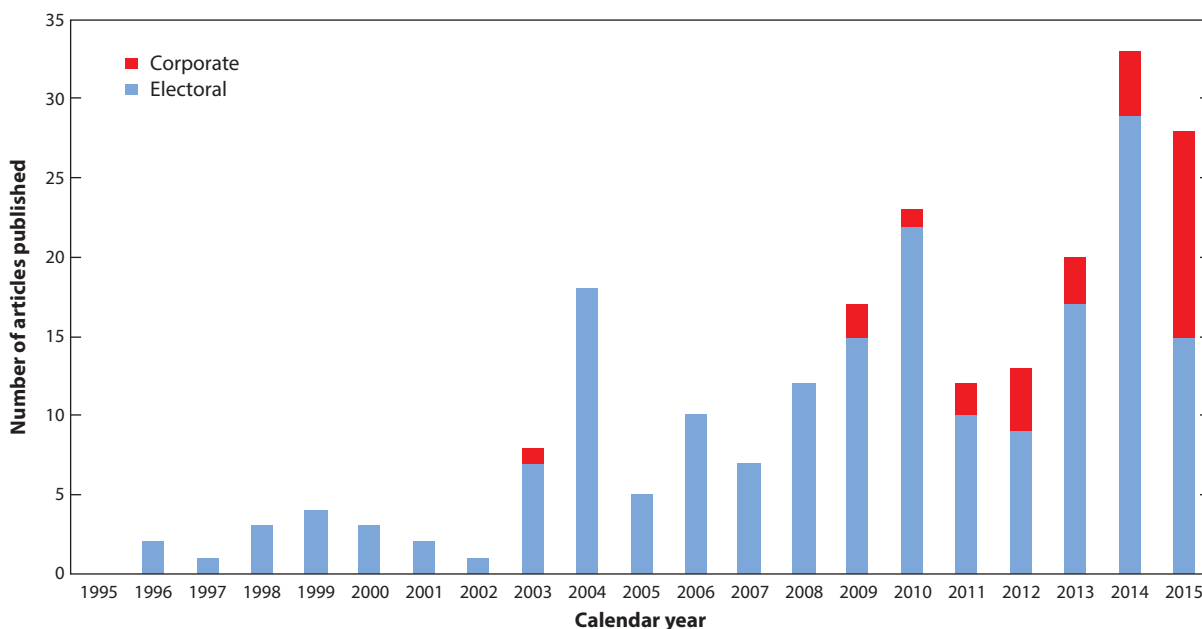
laws requiring that women (or men) make up a minimum share of the board of directors of a company

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Quotas for women—policies mandating that a certain proportion of women be included in institutions—are one of the most important sociopolitical developments of the past 30 years. In the 1970s, quotas regulating women’s legislative representation existed in only a handful of countries. Today, electoral quotas exist in more than 130 countries in all regions of the world. Although fewer in number, corporate board quotas have also started to spread, most notably in Europe. Scores of other countries are considering quota reforms, either adopting quotas for the first time or strengthening policies currently in place. The sheer number of countries involved alone means that the spread of gender quotas rivals other major sociopolitical trends, such as the third wave of democracy, the diffusion of neoliberal policies, and the rise of corporate responsibility.

Electoral and corporate board quotas target decision-making positions that are among the most resistant to women’s equal inclusion. In many countries, women comprise half of voters and workers, yet they average just 21% of seats in national legislatures and 10% of board directorships worldwide (IPU 2016, Terjesen et al. 2015).<sup>1</sup> Gender quotas have proven to be an effective, albeit controversial, tool for helping women to break into these positions. Quotas have also influenced outcomes beyond numbers, shaping the performance and outcomes of decision-making bodies and transforming public attitudes about gender equality and democracy, as well as politics, business, and society more generally (Franceschet et al. 2012, Huse & Seierstad 2013).

Mirroring their spread around the world, research on gender quotas has also exploded. **Figure 1** shows the growth of refereed journal articles on electoral and corporate board gender quotas



**Figure 1**

Refereed journal articles about electoral and corporate board gender quotas, 1995–2015.

<sup>1</sup>This statistic on women’s share of corporate boards takes the average in 67 countries in 2013. However, cross-country comparisons are hindered by differences in the numbers of firms and the ways that sources count firms. See Terjesen et al. (2015, p. 234).

between 1995 and 2015. Over the first half of this period, 47 articles on gender quotas were published, a figure that quadrupled over the second half (to 179 articles). And although corporate quotas are a new field of study, 14 articles were published on the topic in 2015 alone. Furthermore, interest in quotas is on the rise not just in sociology but also in political science, public policy, business, law, economics, area and international studies, and women's and gender studies. This review summarizes the central insights from this ever-expanding body of research and points to potential directions in future research.

## 2. GENDER QUOTA BASICS

What are gender quotas? Gender quotas require that women (or men) make up a minimum share of a group, list, or institution. As a form of affirmative action, gender quotas are designed to help women overcome obstacles to their election or appointment, such as cultural stereotypes that make them less likely to aspire to or be selected for such positions (Dahlerup 2006, Geissel & Hust 2005). Quotas set a specific number or percentage—a threshold—for the selection or nomination of women, distinguishing them from less binding goals, targets, or recommendations.<sup>2</sup> Beyond this basic feature, quotas regulate different institutions and are designed differently.

Electoral quotas regulate women's election to legislatures or assemblies and come in three main types: reserved seats, candidate quotas, and political party quotas (Dahlerup et al. 2014, Krook 2009). Reserved seats set aside a certain share of seats in an assembly for women, regardless of the number of women candidates or nominees. Some reserved seat systems set fairly low thresholds of about 10–15% or less, but some countries reserve nearly a third of seats for women. Reserved seats are filled in different ways: some through separate women's electoral districts or lists; others through best-loser systems, in which unelected women candidates who receive the most votes fill the quota seats; and still others through appointments or selection by winning political parties after elections.

Candidate quotas are a second type of electoral quota (also called legal or legislative quotas) (see Krook 2014 for a discussion of quota terminology). Candidate quotas require all political parties in a country to field a certain percentage of women candidates, although they may not apply to all parts of the electoral system. Unlike reserved seats, candidate quotas do not guarantee that any share of women will ultimately be elected. Despite the legal mandate, political parties can and do ignore these measures. To ensure that quotas are implemented, some laws impose sanctions for noncompliance. Some countries fine noncompliant parties or provide incentives through opportunities for additional state funding. Other countries reject party list registration, preventing parties from participating in the election if they fail to comply. Political parties may also follow the letter but not the spirit of the law. For example, in countries where parties compete for votes by forming lists of candidates, parties may place women candidates in unwinnable positions at the bottom of electoral lists. To address this problem, some quotas have placement mandates specifying the order of men and women candidates. For example, countries such as Bolivia and Tunisia use what is sometimes called a zipper or zebra system, in which lists must alternate men and women (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005, Jones 2009).

A party quota, the third type of electoral quota, occurs when a political party adopts internal rules requiring that a certain share of its candidates be women. Unlike the first two quota types, which are governed by constitutions and electoral codes, party quotas are regulated voluntarily

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**Threshold:** the number or percentage of women (or men) that a gender quota identifies as a minimum requirement

**Reserved seats:** parliamentary seats that may only be filled by women

**Candidate quota:** type of gender quota that requires all political parties in a country to field a certain percentage of women (or men) candidates

**Party quota:** type of gender quota that is regulated by political parties and not mandated by a country's laws

**Best-loser system:** method of filling reserved seats by women who performed best among those who did not gain a seat

**Sanctions for noncompliance:** penalties assessed on political parties that do not comply with a gender quota

**Placement mandates:** rules about the ordering of men and women on candidate electoral lists

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<sup>2</sup>Many countries issue recommendations or soft targets for women's inclusion that are sometimes analyzed alongside formal gender quotas (Casey et al. 2011; Caul 1999, 2001; Isidro & Sobral 2015; Krook et al. 2009; see also Krook 2014 for a discussion of the distinction). We do not consider these policies here.

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**Parity:** type of gender quota requiring that women and men hold equal shares of seats in national legislatures

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through internal party rules and enforced by party leadership. In some countries, the political party or parties with quotas apply the quota consistently, whereas in other countries, party quotas are applied irregularly across elections. Party quotas may be used by dominant parties or only on the fringes by small parties, at the same time that thresholds for women's inclusion may vary across political parties, further shaping within-country variations.

Corporate board quotas, in contrast, apply to the boards of directors of companies. Like electoral quotas, corporate quotas set thresholds for women's representation (typically 33–50%), and some countries formulate sanctions for noncompliance. Spain limits noncompliant companies' access to public subsidies and state contracts, Germany requires board seats to be left unfilled if qualified women cannot be found, and Norway can dissolve or force relocation of a noncompliant company (Bøhren & Staubo 2016). Like reserved seats, corporate measures focus on the share of women expected to serve on corporate boards, rather than simply the share of women among the candidates to these positions.

In other ways, corporate quotas are different from electoral quotas. Corporate board quotas are legally regulated at the national level (like candidate quotas) but apply to only a subset of boards within a country. Quotas may apply to state-owned enterprises, publicly traded companies, and/or all companies above a certain number of employees or annual revenue threshold. Another difference is that the board composition does not change on a fixed schedule or for all corporations at the same time, as is typical in electoral politics. Therefore, corporate quotas generally specify a phase-in period for compliance, typically between three and five years. Countries may have different deadlines for compliance for different types of companies. A third contrast to electoral quotas is that corporate quotas do not regulate how quota seats are to be filled. Although many countries develop codes or best-practice recommendations, these are nonbinding (Terjesen et al. 2015).

A final important difference across quotas involves the group or groups targeted by a policy. Some quotas are explicitly for women, whereas others are posed in gender-neutral terms as targeting the underrepresented sex (Holli et al. 2006; Krook 2009, 2014; Paxton & Hughes 2015).<sup>3</sup> Parity—laws or policies that call for equal representation of women and men—is framed neutrally as gender equality policies rather than as affirmative action for women. Still, gender quotas are overwhelmingly seen as quotas for women regardless of terminology. Murray (2014) sees this as problematic, arguing that quotas for women perpetuate men's privileged status, and suggests reframing quotas as limits on men's overrepresentation.

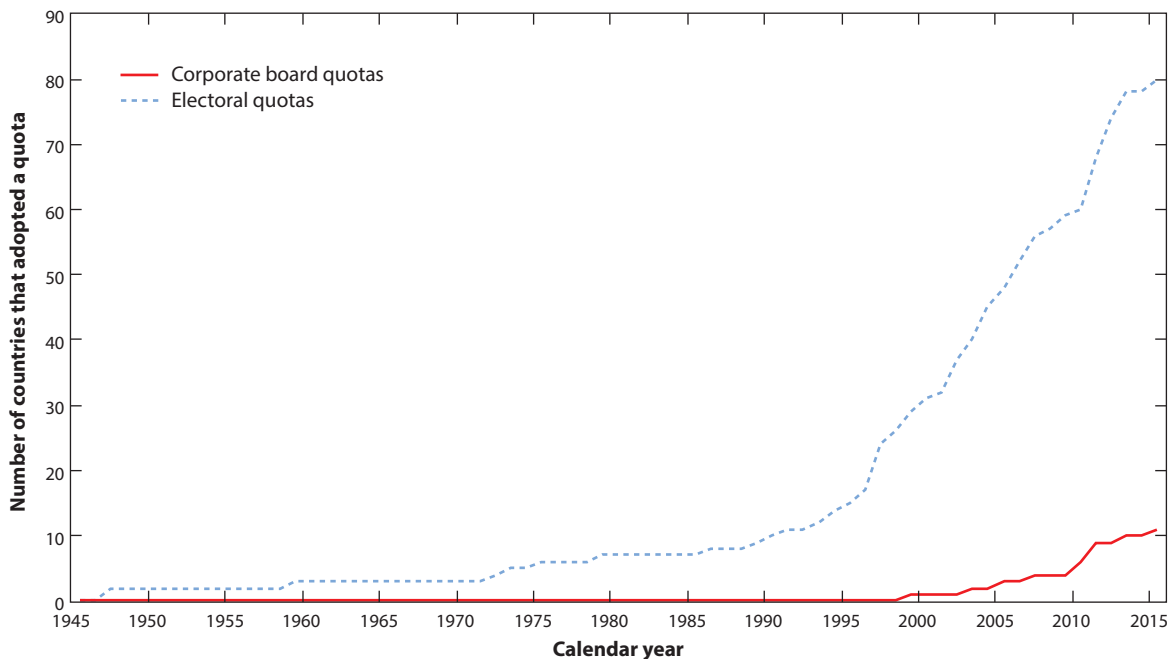
### 3. QUOTA PATTERNS ACROSS TIME AND PLACE

Electoral gender quotas trace back to the 1930s. In 1935 in British India, the Crown allocated women less than 4% of seats in national assemblies. After Pakistan's independence in 1947, a similar seat share was set aside for women in its Constituent Assembly (Krook 2009). The same year, women's activists in China won a decade-long battle for a 10% gender quota (Edwards 1999). Reserved seats for women proliferated slowly across the next few decades in Asia and Africa (Abou-Zeid 2006, Huang 2015, Tripp et al. 2006). These quotas tended to be like Pakistan's, allotting women just a handful of seats.

From the 1950s through the 1980s, several of the countries with the highest levels of women's legislative representation achieved their position with the help of party quotas. In the 1950s, the use

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<sup>3</sup>Quotas may also apply to subgroups of women, in what are sometimes called nested quotas (Bird 2014, Hughes 2011). For instance, Afghanistan allots women 3 of the 10 seats reserved for Kuchi nomads.



**Figure 2**

Growth in electoral and corporate quotas, 1945–2015.

of a party quota by the Peronist Party in Argentina resulted in the election of women to 15% of the national legislature in 1952 and 22% in 1955 (Jones 1998). Other global leaders in representation that used party quotas included Scandinavian countries such as Norway and communist countries such as the Soviet Union and East Germany (Caul 1999, Nechemias 1994). Although party quotas in some Scandinavian countries are still in place, Soviet quotas fell with communism.

The landscape of gender quotas shifted dramatically in the 1990s. In 1991, Argentina became the first country in the world to adopt a significant candidate quota.<sup>4</sup> Over the next decade, countries around the world instituted similar national reforms (Krook 2009, Piatti-Crocker 2011), and quotas spread, too, at the subnational level in Argentina and elsewhere (Barnes 2016, Jones 1998). In fact, between 1995 and 1999 alone, 13 countries adopted national candidate quotas, most of these in Latin America (Hughes et al. 2016). Although more slowly, reserved seats for women also continued to spread, particularly in Africa and the Middle East.

Over the past decade, “quota fever” has persisted (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005, Paxton & Hughes 2016). Between 2006 and 2015, 34 countries newly adopted either reserved seats or candidate quotas (Dahlerup et al. 2014, Hughes et al. 2016). As **Figure 2** shows, proliferation of electoral quotas at the national level follows the pace set in the prior decade. As a consequence, gender quotas today touch all corners of the globe and have been adopted by countries at all levels of economic development and democracy (Dahlerup 2006, Krook 2009, Muriaas et al. 2013).

As shown in **Figure 2**, corporate quotas started later than electoral quotas. The first country to legislate women’s inclusion on corporate boards was Israel. In 1993, Israel began requiring that

<sup>4</sup>Nepal was the first country to adopt a candidate quota in 1990, but it required just 5% of each party’s candidates for the lower house to be women.

all publicly traded companies must include “appropriate representation” of both sexes “in so far as is possible” (Cohen-Eliya 2014, p. 124). Although not yet a quota, this policy laid the groundwork for a 1999 law requiring that all publicly traded companies have at least one woman board director.

As in the case of electoral quotas, the real turning point for corporate quotas came when a much more expansive policy was first passed. In 2003, Norway adopted a wide-reaching policy, setting a threshold at 40% women. Norway’s quota applied to state-owned firms in 2004 and publicly traded firms in 2008 (Teigen 2012). Corporate quotas then snowballed across Europe to Finland, Spain, Iceland, Belgium, France, Italy, and Germany (Huse & Seierstad 2013). Outside Europe, only Israel and Kenya have corporate board quotas, although reforms have been proposed in both South Africa and Canada.

In addition to adoption patterns, there are other noticeable time trends. For one, electoral quota thresholds have ratcheted up over time (Franceschet & Piscopo 2013, Paxton & Hughes 2015). In 1989, Uganda became the first country to cross the 10% barrier. Over time, reserved seat thresholds also increased. In 1991, Argentina set a threshold more than twice that of any prior country: 30%. As a result, candidate quotas typically came with higher thresholds of 25% or 30%. The year 1999 marked another watershed moment, when France became the first country in the world to set the bar at parity. Over the past 15 years, 10 other countries have adopted parity quotas. Other notable reforms to electoral quotas include strengthening their requirements, typically by adding or increasing placement mandates, sanctions for noncompliance, or both. Countries with reserved seats have also made changes to the way that the seats are filled, moving from appointment to direct election.

Over time, quotas have also expanded their reach within countries. Success in the political sphere may inspire supporters to pursue quotas in other arenas (Lépinard 2016, Meier 2014). Franceschet & Piscopo (2013) describe this dynamic as the broadening of quotas, in which quotas extend from the legislative arena to elsewhere and states assume more active roles as guarantors of gender equality (see also Piscopo 2015). New quota adopters are also more likely to adopt comprehensive quotas that apply to many, if not all, positions regulated by the government (see the sidebar titled Comprehensive Quotas).

Looking across both electoral and corporate quotas, it is clear that different types of quotas are not randomly distributed around the world. Countries tend to adopt quotas like the standout examples in their geographic region. Reserved seats were first adopted in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and remain the most popular in those regions. Argentina’s candidate quota set the

## COMPREHENSIVE QUOTAS

Quotas are not just used in legislatures and corporate boards. A growing number of countries now have comprehensive quotas that apply to many if not all positions regulated by the government. Countries have gained these inclusive policies through two principle routes. First, electoral quotas may expand to other institutions inside government (such as cabinets, public administration, and the judiciary) and elsewhere (such as labor union directorates, civil society organizations, and chambers of commerce). For example, France’s 1999–2000 electoral parity law paved the way for the 2014 generalizing of parity to all public institutions, including national theaters, agricultural associations, and sports federations. Comprehensive quotas can also be instituted across multiple spheres with a single reform. One example is the 2010 constitution in Kenya, which permits no more than two-thirds members of the same sex in all elected and appointed bodies at all levels of government, including state commissions. Or consider Ecuador and Bolivia, where constitutional assemblies in 2008–2009 established parity in all branches and levels of government, including the administrations of the autonomous indigenous communities (Piscopo 2015).

trend in Latin America. Today, nearly all countries in Central and South America have adopted candidate quota provisions. In Europe, where Scandinavian countries jumped out ahead with party quotas, it is party quotas that are still most common. Europe is also out ahead with corporate quotas, following Norway's leading example.

## 4. THE ADOPTION OF GENDER QUOTAS

One of the most well-studied aspects of gender quotas is their adoption. Numerous studies have traced electoral quota debates and the circumstances of their passage in different parts of the world (Dahlerup 2006, Krook et al. 2009). The diverse countries that have introduced electoral quotas share little in the way of social, political, economic, and cultural conditions, leading scholars to theorize multiple paths to quota adoption (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005, Krook 2009). With the majority of adoption accounts focusing on Norway (Teigen 2012), research on corporate quotas has paid less attention to their paths to introduction. In this section, we review the debates surrounding quotas, as well as the factors identified as central in their adoption.

### 4.1. Quota Debates and Controversies

Although quota reforms have diffused rapidly around the globe in recent years, these measures are often controversial. Much of the early research on electoral quotas explored the arguments for and against them (Bacchi 2006, Dahlerup 2007). Advocates assert that quotas promote equal opportunities for women, assist qualified women in being elected, enable the articulation of women's concerns and perspectives in public policy, enhance democracy, and affirm the importance of women's political participation (Beaman et al. 2009, Burnet 2011, Franceschet & Piscopo 2008; for a theoretical treatment, see Phillips 1995). Opponents of electoral quotas contest each of these points, suggesting that, instead, quotas violate principles of equality, promote unqualified individuals, do not further women's interests in policy making, are undemocratic, and are demeaning to women (Franceschet et al. 2012, Krook 2009).

Quotas for women on corporate boards have provoked similar debates. As Villiers (2010) notes, two main discourses frame arguments for and against corporate quotas: the social justice and human rights case and the utility and business case. The first perspective emphasizes democratic justice and economic fairness, with quotas moving corporate leadership recruitment in a more egalitarian direction (González Menéndez & Martínez González 2012, Szydło 2015). The business case stresses that including women will make use of the full range of talent available, incorporate more diverse perspectives and life experiences, and—in turn—lead to greater innovation, higher productivity, and better working conditions (Nielsen & Huse 2010, Seierstad 2015, Torchia et al. 2011). Some business leaders and ethicists, however, insist that quotas are undemocratic, are discriminatory, and undermine merit (Dubink 2005, Gopalan & Watson 2015), casting these measures as unwelcome state interference in corporate life, with potential supranational solutions infringing on the principle of subsidiarity—the notion that policy problems should be handled at the lowest possible governance level (Szydło 2015).

### 4.2. Strategic Actors: Women's Mobilization and Men as Allies

Who are the main drivers of gender quota adoption? First and foremost, both electoral and corporate quota research emphasize the role of women's mobilization. Pressure from women in favor of quotas may emanate from women's sections inside political parties (Bruhn 2003, Freidenvall 2005, Kittilson 2006, Terjesen et al. 2015), women's movements in civil society (Bauer &

Britton 2006, Buckley 2013, Edwards 1999, Gwiazda 2015, Tripp et al. 2006, Yoon & Shin 2015), women's policy agencies inside the state (Lépinard 2016, Lovenduski 2005, Tadros 2010), women as participants in peace talks and constituent assemblies (Abbas 2010, Anderson & Swiss 2014), or individual women close to powerful men (Abou-Zeid 2006).

Studies of corporate quotas identify the support of men cabinet ministers as being crucial to the passage of quota reforms, without much further elaboration as to the motives of these men (Storvik & Teigen 2010, Terjesen et al. 2015). Alternatively, case studies of electoral quota adoption contend that women's lobbying efforts tend to succeed when targeted elites—usually men party leaders and incumbents—perceive personal gains from allying with quota advocates. In particular, quotas may enable parties to appear women-friendly while providing important strategic benefits to elites keen to gain or maintain power. Dynamics of party competition, for example, may drive parties to follow one another in adopting quotas, usually in a quest to win women's votes (Caul 2001, Kenny & Mackay 2014, Meier 2004).

In some contexts, quotas can enable party leaders to increase their standing relative to internal and external rivals (Baldez 2007) and enhance the perceived legitimacy of single-party regimes (Darhour & Dahlerup 2013, Goetz & Hassim 2003, Muriaas et al. 2013, Nechemias 1994). Recognizing these potential gains, party leaders may use mechanisms of party discipline to ensure that members cast votes in favor of quota provisions (Driscoll & Krook 2012, Murray et al. 2012) or, where possible, simply institute quotas in a top-down fashion (Wang 2015). In a similar fashion, observers of corporate quota adoption in Norway note that the debate was polarized between industrialists, who opposed the quota proposal, and the media and politicians, who largely supported it (Storvik & Teigen 2010).

### 4.3. Domestic and International Influences

Recent work has begun to explore some of the contextual factors that shape quota adoption. Domestic factors favoring quota reform include political ideologies, political values, and political opportunities. Ideologically left-wing parties, as well as left-wing governments, tend to be more open to quotas, with right-wing parties often opposing their introduction (Baum & Espírito-Santo 2012, Dubrow 2011, Kittilson 2006, Terjesen et al. 2015).

Prevailing values of equality and representation at both the national and party levels also shape quota debates (Krook et al. 2009). Quotas may be viewed as consistent with constitutional principles of equality (Dahlerup 2007, Krook 2016) or guarantees for other groups based on linguistic, religious, racial, and other identities (Htun 2016, Inhetveen 1999, Krook & O'Brien 2010, Meier 2000). Instituting quotas for elected positions, furthermore, may validate quotas as a strategy, setting a precedent for corporate quota adoption. In Norway, the small share of women in top management paled in comparison to the high proportion of women in electoral office, generating pressures to undertake similar reforms (Teigen 2012). Nonetheless, emerging studies contest these narratives of spillover and diffusion. India, which has reserved seats for Scheduled Castes and Tribes since its independence, has resisted similar national guarantees for women (Randall 2006). In some countries with a history of party quotas, corporate board quotas have been rejected by government officials and the business community in favor of targets, mentoring, and the introduction of other gender-friendly human resource practices (Chandler 2016, Freidenvall 2015, Villiers 2010)—or, when introduced, impose weaker requirements and penalties, favoring self-regulation of companies rather than direct state monitoring and intervention (Verge & Lombardo 2015).

Political opportunities, finally, include both more stable and more contingent features of the political context. The electoral quota literature has paid extensive attention to the openings



inherent in democratic transitions and postconflict reconstruction, which have enabled new electoral and constitutional arrangements, including quotas (Bauer & Britton 2006, Hughes & Tripp 2015, Tajali 2013, Tripp 2015). Corporate quota studies point to the importance of the 2008 global financial crisis as an opportunity to institute new practices within the corporate sector (Teigen 2012, Terjesen et al. 2015).

In addition to these domestic factors, quota researchers have increasingly considered regional, international, and transnational influences that could account for patterns of quota adoption (Hughes et al. 2015, Huse & Seierstad 2013, Krook 2006, Piatti-Crocker 2011, Teigen 2012). A growing body of research highlights global forces for change, including the emergence of international norms in favor of women's political inclusion; momentum created through international women's conferences, particularly the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995; and the growing strength of the international women's movement (Anderson & Swiss 2014, Hughes et al. 2015, Krook 2006, Swiss & Fallon 2016). The fact that nonadoption is now something to be explained, rather than the reverse, is one indicator of how widespread the pressure for quotas has become (Baker 2014, Gaunder 2015, Marshall 2010, Randall 2006).

Other scholarship points to geographical diffusion: Over time, growth in quotas in a region increases the chances of quota adoption and predicts the types of quotas adopted (Bush 2011, Hughes et al. 2015, Swiss & Fallon 2016). Furthermore, some transnational influences may be felt more acutely in developing countries. For example, Bush (2011) finds that the presence of international peacekeeping forces, international election monitoring, and dependence on foreign aid all increase the chances that developing countries will adopt quotas.

Although studies of corporate quotas increasingly acknowledge international diffusion processes (Teigen 2012), this appears to be due less to direct policy transfer than to domestic sources of inspiration that, on occasion, referenced Norwegian debates (Lépinard 2016, Verge & Lombardo 2015). Nonetheless, debates at the European Union level in 2011 and 2012 inspired new discussions regarding corporate quotas in different corners of Europe and the adoption of a corporate quota law in Germany in 2015.

## 5. THE IMPACT OF GENDER QUOTAS

Quota debates reveal that quotas are not simply about increasing women's numbers. Rather, both supporters and opponents point to ways quotas may change politics and business more broadly. In this section, we discuss research on whether gender quotas have an impact on the numbers of women in legislatures and on boards, qualifications of legislators and board members, policy making and performance, and the effects on individual attitudes and behaviors outside the institutions themselves (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2010, Franceschet et al. 2012).

### 5.1. Methodological Challenges in Demonstrating Quota Effects

Demonstrating quota effects is methodologically challenging. For one, women's representation in national legislatures and on corporate boards tends to increase over time, even without quotas. So research needs to show that it was the quota that made the difference to women's numbers—not simply the passage of time. For gender quotas that operate through political parties, the success of the quota is determined in part by how successful the parties with strong quotas are at gaining seats (Paxton & Hughes 2016). And, for both electoral and corporate quotas, women may already have a presence prior to quota implementation, which must be accounted for in demonstrating quota impact (Krook 2009). An additional complication for corporate board quotas is anticipatory increases to women's presence on corporate boards prior to implementation deadlines, making before-and-after comparisons difficult (Isidro & Sobral 2015).

To assess quota effects on policies or performance, research must demonstrate an effect of quotas, not simply an effect of gender (Franceschet et al. 2012). When quotas are confounded with gender—when they apply to all women candidates or board members but not to men—research cannot determine whether any observed effect is due to the presence of the quota or to differences between men and women (see O’Brien & Rickne 2016 for a concise review).

A related methodological challenge is controlling for other features of the broader context that might affect the outcomes being evaluated. In politics, these factors include party affiliation, committee assignments, and the amount of power held by quota women compared to their nonquota counterparts. All these factors affect the scope and possibility for legislators—including quota women—to act and make decisions. Similarly, corporate boards differ in size, internal norms, and ability to influence or implement firm policy. Firm performance, moreover, is difficult to separate from national or global economic trends. Furthermore, market reactions to the introduction of corporate quotas may stem from a negative view of women’s inclusion or from a reaction to government regulation more generally. These dynamics complicate efforts to disentangle these effects from the impact of the quota per se.

A final issue in current research on corporate board quota impact is that the Norwegian quota had the earliest compliance deadline. As a result, most studies focus on Norway. Yet the implementation of the quota law in Norway closely corresponded to the financial crisis, which, if not acknowledged, could make implementation appear harmful when it is not. For example, Matsa & Miller (2013) compare pre- and postmandatory compliance in Norway and find that the gender quota produced negative effects on profitability for companies (see also Bøhren & Staubo 2016). But these analyses suffer from conflation with the financial crisis years (see Dale-Olson et al. 2013 for an extended critique). Dale-Olson et al. (2013) stop their analysis in 2007 and find no effect of the quota on profitability. Likewise, Eckbo et al. (2016) extend the postquota-implementation period to 2013 and find no effect on profitability.

Addressing these methodological challenges requires comparative and longitudinal designs, consideration of cases that allow comparison between quota and nonquota women, and/or the use of natural experiments. Luckily, research increasingly considers quotas longitudinally or under quasi-experimental conditions, which greatly enhances our ability to parse the influence of quotas.

## 5.2. Women’s Representation in Legislatures and on Corporate Boards

Quotas are designed to jump-start women’s representation—to move from incremental gains to substantial growth in women’s presence (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005). Research has shown that the implementation of gender quotas can increase the percentage of women elected to office or appointed to corporate boards, contingent on when the quota was implemented; the strength of the quota; and, in the case of electoral quotas, how the quota interacts with other features of the electoral system.

Numerous case studies have evaluated the influence of gender quotas on women’s presence in national legislatures, finding that quotas sometimes increase women’s numbers. Examples of quotas having strong numerical impact include countries such as Afghanistan, Argentina, and Rwanda (Dahlerup & Nordlund 2004, Franceschet & Piscopo 2008, Longman 2006). But other cases such as France suggest that quotas can lead to small or even no immediate changes in representation for women (Murray 2010).

The 40% corporate board quota in Norway was the world’s first of its kind and is the most studied. Between 2005 and 2007, when Norway required compliance with the quota, the average percentage of women directors increased from 24% to 40% (Eckbo et al. 2016; see also Storvik & Teigen 2010). Average board size did not increase, meaning that changes in gender composition were obtained through replacement of men directors with women directors.

The temporary adoption of quotas in Italian local elections from 1993 to 1995 is a particularly useful case to consider because only some municipalities were subject to electoral quotas (Weeks & Baldez 2015). Looking over 1985 to 2007, de Paola et al. (2010) show that women's representation increased significantly more in municipalities that were affected by quota reform than elsewhere (see also Baltrunaite et al. 2014). Furthermore, those effects continued past the termination of the quota policy.

Cross-national analyses of electoral quotas consider countries with and without quotas (Hughes 2009, Paxton & Hughes 2015, Paxton et al. 2010, Tripp & Kang 2008; see also Hughes 2011, Schwandt-Bayer 2009). These show mixed effects on women's numerical representation depending on the time period considered. The earliest time periods (1995 or 2000) show no effects or very small effects of quota policies across countries (Hughes 2009, Paxton & Kunovich 2005, Paxton et al. 2010). But, in 2006, Tripp & Kang (2008) show quotas did increase women's representation across countries. Quotas are more likely to have sizeable effects on women's legislative outcomes at more recent time points. Indeed, using a longitudinal model from 1990 to 2010, Paxton & Hughes (2015) document that quotas at the end of the period are twice as effective as quotas at the beginning of the period. However, quotas adopted in postcommunist countries may remain less effective in later periods (Fallon et al. 2012).

With Norway as the only country that instituted a corporate quota with sanctions implemented before 2012, cross-national comparisons are scarce and typically include unenforced quotas, targets, or simple reporting requirements alongside quotas. Looking across 91 countries in 2015, Sojo et al. (2016) find that, compared to countries that have taken no action at all, simple reporting requirements do not produce increases in women's presence on corporate boards, whereas both targets and quotas do produce higher numbers of women (see also Labell et al. 2015).

Policy design can influence the size of a gender quota's effect on women's representation (Jones 2009, Paxton & Hughes 2015, Schwandt-Bayer 2009). Quotas with a higher threshold should produce higher levels of women's legislative presence (Paxton & Hughes 2015, Paxton et al. 2010, Schwandt-Bayer 2009). But there is not a 1:1 relationship between the legislated quota threshold and the ultimate representation of women. For example, Bonomi et al. (2013) simulate the introduction of a gender quota of 50% in four Italian regions. Their results suggest that a 50% gender quota would increase women's probability of receiving a vote by approximately 20%. Looking across 20 years and 145 countries, Paxton & Hughes (2015) find that countries achieve less than 1% more women's seats for every 1% increase in the quota threshold.

Research also shows that placement mandates are effective in increasing the return on gender quotas (Jones 2004, Paxton & Hughes 2015, Schwandt-Bayer 2009). Compared to countries with only sanctions for noncompliance, countries with placement mandates achieve an additional 1% return for every 10% increase in the quota threshold (Paxton & Hughes 2015). Sanctions for noncompliance vary from strong to weak sanctions. On their own, therefore, they appear to add little value to candidate quotas (Paxton & Hughes 2015, Schwandt-Bayer 2009). In Latin America, however, electoral tribunals have played a key role in interpreting quota requirements, in the process strengthening placement mandates and imposing sanctions that compel parties to comply (Piscopo 2015).

Electoral gender quotas interact with other electoral laws in increasing the presence of women. Jones (2009), for example, shows that a variety of other electoral laws influence whether gender quotas are able to increase the representation of women. In Peru, variation in electoral laws across municipal districts influenced women's representation on municipal councils (Schmidt & Saunders 2004). Within proportional representation systems, quota impact depends on whether open or closed lists are used (e.g., Htun & Jones 2002, Jones 2009). Internal party selection mechanisms matter to quota effectiveness as well (Kittilson 2006, Verge 2010), with party elites having crucial

influence on women's actual acquisition or retention of power. For example, Weeks & Baldez (2015) showed that despite being equally qualified and successful as legislators, Italian quota women were less likely than nonquota women or men to be reelected. With the quota removed in 1996, party elites buried these women in unwinnable positions on the candidate list.

Gender quotas may also increase the numbers of women in leadership posts, giving them opportunities to join forces to support other women as candidates or top-level employees. Thus, quotas could have a positive acceleration effect on women's future numbers and access to other top posts (O'Brien & Rickne 2016; see also Bhavnani 2009, Darhour & Dahlerup 2013, Kittilson 2006). O'Brien & Rickne (2016) consider this process in the zipper quota adopted by Sweden's largest political party in 1994. Longitudinally, over 15 years of leadership appointments, they find that quotas are positively associated with parties' selection of a woman leader but that quotas do not influence the tenure of incumbent women. Similarly, after the corporate quota, companies in Norway were more likely to have a woman chair the board of directors and also then more likely to have a woman CEO (Wang & Kalen 2013). Simulating the adoption of a board quota in the United States, Kogut et al. (2014) suggest that even a quota of 20% women would create a network of well-connected and influential women directors.

### 5.3. The Characteristics of Officeholders

What kinds of women and men are elected under quotas? Some observers are concerned that women who achieve positions through gender quotas may be seen as inferior in their qualifications compared to more meritorious men (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2010). Interviews with women politicians who achieved their positions through quotas in Argentina (Franceschet & Piscopo 2008), Britain (Childs & Krook 2012), and Tanzania (Yoon 2011) indicate that they had their professionalism challenged or were treated as second-class politicians. In the corporate arena, observers wondered whether there was a sufficiently deep pool of women to fill board quotas (Ahern & Dittmar 2012).

A growing literature on both electoral and corporate quotas explores the qualifications of women selected via quota mechanisms. According to a review by Weeks & Baldez (2015), scholars generally agree that qualifications for elected office include prior experience holding elected office and education. Are quota women different from nonquota women or from men on these qualifications? Looking at Italy, Weeks & Baldez (2015) find that the quota improved the overall level of qualifications of politicians: Quota women were 5% more likely to have local government experience than other representatives. Nugent & Krook (2016) also find that quota women in Britain were significantly more likely to have prior experience in elected office than their nonquota counterparts. However, other research suggests quota representatives have less political experience (Franceschet & Piscopo 2012).<sup>5</sup>

In terms of education, Allen et al. (2014) compare women elected through quotas to women and men elected outside quotas in Britain and find no significant differences. More than 75% of newly elected members of Parliament (quota, nonquota, men, and women) had at least an undergraduate degree. In Uganda, too, women quota recipients are similar to nonquota women and to men in their education (Josefsson 2014, O'Brien 2012). Using the Italian natural experiment to address this question, Baltrunaite et al. (2014) find that gender quotas actually improved the average level of education of all elected politicians. The increase is due partly to the higher number of elected

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<sup>5</sup>Sometimes the quota women are closer on attributes like age or professional background to men than their prequota counterparts (Murray 2010, Allen et al. 2014).

women, who are on average more educated than men, but also to fewer low-educated men being elected. In Sweden, party-based quotas improved the pool of qualified women (O'Brien & Rickne 2016) and improved men's competence through the replacement of mediocre men leaders with more qualified men (Besley et al. 2013).

Boards in Norway appear to have replaced their least experienced men directors with highly qualified women. As explained by Bertrand et al. (2014, p. 26), "Despite businesses' fear that there were not enough qualified women to fill the board positions, the new reserved seats were filled with women who are observationally better qualified to serve on boards than women appointed before, suggesting that previously untapped networks of top business women were activated by the policy."

Bertrand et al. (2014) find that after the Norwegian quota, the percentage of women on corporate boards with business degrees or MBAs increased substantially. The increase was large enough that the gender gap in educational background that had existed prior to the quota was erased (see also Wang & Kelan 2013). Ahern & Dittmar (2012) similarly find that new women directors were more highly educated than the men directors retained on boards after the corporate quota. They also find that the women directors were younger than the men directors and tended to have had less experience as CEOs (see also Eckbo et al. 2016).

Despite these positive effects, quotas could also exacerbate patronage (see Clayton et al. 2014 for a review) or inhibit diversity along other demographic dimensions. Although there is certainly concern that only elite women are drawn into power through quotas (Dahlerup 2006, Hughes 2011, Randall 2006, Tadros 2010), in Sweden, the introduction of a zipper gender quota had no effect on intersectional representation of men or women (Folke et al. 2015). Minority women's representation increased to the same extent as majority women, and minority and majority men also had similar gains (see also Hughes 2011).

#### **5.4. Women's Influence on Policy and Performance**

Do quotas make a difference to policy or the policy-making process? Some research suggests that quotas can influence the representation of women's interests in public policy (Beaman et al. 2009, Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2004, Franceschet & Piscopo 2008). Keeping in mind some of the methodological problems that arise when researchers attempt to demonstrate that a quota, rather than something else, has an effect, we highlight studies that use clever research designs to assess influence.

Some studies suggest that electoral quotas help increase discussion and debate on women's issues (Devlin & Elgie 2008, Xydias 2007). Franceschet & Piscopo (2008) argue that quota policies generate a mandate for women legislators to represent women's interests. Indeed, women elected through quotas in the British Parliament identified more with women as a group and felt more obligated to work for women than did nonquota women (Childs & Krook 2012). The effect appears to extend to men in Germany, where men members of quota parties participate more in debates on women's issues (Xydias 2014).

But do quotas result in policy changes? India adopted a unique system of gender quotas for leadership of the village councils in its rural villages, whereby one-third of village chiefs had to be women and this leadership was assigned randomly. India has therefore proved to be a fruitful site for researchers interested in using natural experiments to understand a quota's impact. Under this system, Chattopadhyay & Duflo (2004, p. 1440) found that "women elected as leaders under the reservation policy invest more in the public goods more closely linked to women's concerns."

On the flip side, interviews in Rwanda suggest that women's greater numbers after the introduction of the gender quota did not have a significant impact on policy (Devlin & Elgie 2008; see

also Burnet 2011). In Argentina, Franceschet & Piscopo (2008) show quotas increased bill introduction on issues relevant to women, but not legislative success. There, the evidence reveals that elected women are successfully gendering the legislative agenda but not successfully gendering legislative outcomes.

In terms of contributions to policy making more generally, are quota officeholders more or less effective than other legislators? Weeks & Baldez (2015) find that quota women attend legislative sessions 7% more often than their men counterparts (see also Murray 2010). In Mexico, women sponsored and passed bills, held leadership positions, and served on power committees at fairly similar rates before and after quotas were introduced (Kerevel & Atkeson 2013). Similarly, Murray (2012) finds similar rates of legislative activity among quota women, nonquota women, and men in France. In contrast, Clayton et al. (2014) find that, in Uganda, women elected to reserved seats were less recognized by name in plenary debates compared to their men and women colleagues in open seats. These differences suggest it is important to distinguish aspects of effectiveness over which women have control (e.g., attending sessions) versus aspects that could be indicative of a backlash by men (e.g., recognition in debates).

Finally, do gender quotas for corporate boards impact firm value or performance? The answer is highly contested. The first study to consider the question suggested that the Norwegian quota reduced firm value (Ahern & Dittmar 2012). But Ahern & Dittmar (2012) chose a poor instrument for their analysis (Eckbo et al. 2016; see Dale-Olson et al. 2013 for additional critiques). A more statistically robust reexamination of the question suggests that the quota had no effect on firm value (Eckbo et al. 2016). Furthermore, the postquota period in Norway (2009–2013) showed no change in firm profitability (Eckbo et al. 2016).<sup>6</sup>

## 5.5. Broader Impacts

Do gender quotas affect individual-level behavior or attitudes beyond the legislature or boardroom? Research on the random assignment of quotas in Indian village councils (*panchayats*) has been very fruitful for gauging these kinds of effects. Studies show that gender quotas, by providing first-hand experience with women's leadership, reduce villagers', especially men's, negative perceptions of women leaders' effectiveness and increase their association of women with leadership (Beaman et al. 2009). Women also attend and actively participate in village meetings at a higher percentage when the local political leader position is reserved for women (Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2004). Indeed, the likelihood that a woman speaks in a village meeting increases by 25% under reservation (Beaman et al. 2010). These increases in participation could be a direct result of the presence of a woman leader, or they could be due to changes in social norms related to women's leadership. Furthermore, the Indian quotas led to more women standing for and winning seats on the village councils (Beaman et al. 2009; see also Bhavnani 2009, de Paola et al. 2014).

Interestingly, in another randomized policy design in Lesotho, Clayton (2014) found that women living in districts with a gender quota were less politically engaged compared to women living in unreserved districts or to women living in districts where a woman won office through election. These women citizens were suspicious of quotas for women in politics. Lesotho is one of only two countries in the world with reserved quotas in single-member districts (India is the other), meaning that this quota excludes men candidates in some districts altogether. This finding suggests that policymakers need to be careful where and how reserved seats are implemented.

<sup>6</sup>We do not review the extensive literature on whether the diversity of a board, including gender diversity, matters for performance. This research is not directly about quota-mandated increases in board diversity.

Cross-national analyses of the effect of gender quotas on women's political engagement provide more mixed results. Across several countries, Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer (2012) find that gender quotas decrease gaps between men and women in political interest but not in political discussion. Zetterberg (2012) examines variation in quota adoption across Mexican states and found no effect on women's interest in politics. Neither does he find quotas to be associated with political interest or activities across 17 Latin American countries (Zetterberg 2009). Barnes & Burchard (2013) point out, however, that not all quotas produce increases in women's representation. Their analysis suggests that only quotas that increase women's numerical representation produce increases in women's political engagement.

Looking beyond politics, the educational and career aspirations of Indian girls improved when a woman led their village (Beaman et al. 2012). Aspirations that parents held for their daughters improved, too. For example, "the fraction of parents who believe that a daughter's, but not a son's, occupation should be determined by her in-laws declines from 76% to 65%" (Beaman et al. 2012, p. 584). The change in attitudes changed behaviors: Actual educational outcomes and use of time (e.g., less time spent on household chores) were improved for girls when a woman led the village. After two cycles of a woman leader, in fact, the gap between boys and girls in educational outcomes was completely erased. (See Jayal 2006 for a review of several outcomes for women after quotas were adopted in India's village councils.)

Does an increase in women board members lead to better opportunities or outcomes for women working within their firms? More women on the board may demonstrate their competence, or the women themselves may advocate for more women in management or for policies that could increase the number of women. Bertrand et al. (2014) find that having more women on the board through the quota produced a higher number of women at the very top of the companies (the top five earners). But they do not find effects for other, lower-level outcomes such as women's employment or the percentage of women earning in the top quartile. As for the rest of the population, Bertrand et al. (2014) do not find that the introduction of the Norwegian quota increased young women's interest in business degrees.

## 6. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

During the past two decades, research on gender quotas has flourished in multiple disciplines. This review has addressed types of electoral and corporate board quotas, their adoption and diffusion, and their impact within and beyond the institutions they target. Yet there is still much to learn about the form, spread, and impact of gender quotas.

As with any field, what we know is limited by the availability of good-quality, reliable data. Given the fast-moving target that gender quotas represent, it is especially important that data are longitudinal. Although scholars have collected global longitudinal data on legislative quotas and reserved seats (e.g., Clayton & Zetterberg 2015, Hughes et al. 2016, Paxton & Hughes 2015), cross-national comparative data on party quotas are sparse. Reliable data on party quotas prior to the 1990s for all parties and all countries are just not available. Although collecting party quota data is complicated, focusing on only major parties or only parties in existence for more than two election cycles may allow scholars to test at least some theories. However, researchers must keep in mind that assessing effects of party quotas is complicated by the diversity of measures that might be in use in a single country at a given time.

Much of what we know about quota design is from research on electoral candidate quotas. Researchers should also apply a trained eye to reserved seats. Scholars have rarely unpacked differences in reserved seat systems or considered how differences in the way seats are filled influence women's and men's political behavior. We know reserved seat systems are effective at

reaching numerical quota thresholds. But we know very little about the circumstances under which women are able to run—and win—outside the reserved seats (Yoon 2016). Are nonquota seats effectively seats for men? Or, under certain circumstances, can reserved seats become a floor rather than a ceiling for women’s representation (Paxton & Hughes 2016)?

In many ways, the study of corporate quotas is in its infancy. One reason, of course, is that they are newer policies. It remains to be seen whether corporate quotas will spread to all corners of the globe, as have electoral quotas, and whether the presence of electoral quotas in a country will continue to open the way for subsequent corporate quota reforms (Lépinard 2016, Teigen 2012). Furthermore, because deadlines for corporate quota compliance are still looming, we do not yet know how quotas will work in many of the countries that have them, or what impacts they will have inside and outside firms. As more countries adopt corporate quotas, future research should investigate whether or not dynamics at work in the legislative arena translate to the corporate world.

For electoral gender quotas, we now know a great deal about why certain quotas are adopted and how they diffuse across countries. Research now needs to move beyond adoption of a single type of quota for a single group (Hughes 2011). More scholarship should track and compare the spread of quotas across domains (e.g., from legislatures to companies), across groups (e.g., from ethnic minorities to women), and across levels of government (e.g., from national to local legislatures). In addition, because most of the research on subnational quotas focuses on single countries, future comparative research could unpack differences in state and local electoral quotas and their effects.

Despite methodological challenges, efforts to gauge the impact of quotas should continue, given their vital importance and interest to social scientists, practitioners, and activists. Less promising avenues for quota impact research include large-*N* quantitative cross-national analyses of the effects of quotas on policy outcomes or qualitative interviews with legislators about their opinions on quotas. More promising approaches to demonstrate quota impact convincingly would be (a) creative quasi-experimental designs that allow gender to be separated from quotas and quotas to be separated from parties and time or (b) single-country or small-*N* comparative qualitative studies that are context-specific and longitudinal and draw from a variety of sources and informants.

New research on the broader effects of quotas should also delve more deeply into the dynamics of resistance and backlash. Despite their widespread diffusion, quotas continue to be contested in a variety of countries. Although researchers observe that actors may take steps to thwart or evade quotas (Hughes et al. 2015, Krook 2016), more work is needed to explore potential reactions to quotas, including physical violence, verbal harassment, conversational interruptions, and the marginalization and exclusion of women in parliamentary or corporate spaces. Future studies on quotas, and research on gender in legislatures and on corporate boards in general, should pay closer attention to theorizing and analyzing men’s resistance to women who enter institutions through quotas.

Ultimately, gender equality in decision-making positions is important. As proposed by the social justice perspective on quotas, there are important normative reasons for including women—even if legislatures pass the same laws, firms’ values remain unchanged, and states are no less corrupt with women’s increased presence. Furthermore, given the potential of quotas to enhance women’s representation in highly visible institutions, they may inspire and transform the ambitions of young girls and women. Quota researchers should, therefore, not restrict their focus to changing laws and company values but should also emphasize the greater social good that quotas may impart by transforming gender roles and deepening democratic institutions.



## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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## RELATED RESOURCES

1. Global Database of Quotas for Women: a database that provides current global information on electoral gender quotas at both national and subnational levels. To access the database, see <http://www.quotaproject.org/>.
2. Catalyst: a nonprofit devoted to women's workplace inclusion that provides information on corporate board quotas globally. To access information, see <http://www.catalyst.org/legislative-board-diversity>.
3. Corporate Women Directors International: an organization that promotes the participation on women on corporate boards and presents reports on women's representation on corporate boards in countries and industries. For current reports see <http://www.globewomen.org/CWDInet/>.
4. Inter-Parliamentary Union: an intergovernmental organization that collects data on parliaments across countries. For archived data on women's representation in parliaments, see <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>.
5. Women, Business and the Law: a World Bank group producing reports and data sets on laws and regulations that influence women's economic participation. See <http://wbl.worldbank.org/>.

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