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Quota Laws for Women in Politics: Implications for Feminist Practice

Abstract

More than fifty countries have adopted quota laws to regulate the selection or election of women to political office. This suggests that states have begun to identify quotas as a new state-led strategy for incorporating women into public life and, by extension, for promoting feminist aims to improve women's overall social, economic, and political status. This article explores the reasons why quotas have been so readily adopted in diverse countries around the world, as well as possible implications for women as political actors and for women as a group, to gauge the broader meaning of quotas for feminism in practice.

More than fifty countries around the world have adopted quota laws to regulate the selection or election of women to political office, while many more have proposed or repealed quota laws in recent years. Although some of these laws appeared as early as the 1930s, most quotas prior to the 1990s were adopted voluntarily by political parties and, as such, were directed only at a single party's selection practices. Over the last decade, however, a growing number of national legislatures have amended constitutions or

electoral codes to mandate that all parties increase the percentage of women they put forward for local or national elections. These developments suggest that states have begun to identify quotas as a crucial new state-led strategy for incorporating women into public life and, by extension, for promoting feminist aims to improve women's overall social, economic, and political status.¹

While the global diffusion of any policy is a notable development, the rapid diffusion of candidate gender quotas *per se* is particularly remarkable. This is because positive action for women in electoral processes contradicts—or at least appears to challenge—a number of other recent trends in international and feminist politics, namely rising neoliberalism, supposed decline in women's movement activity, growing skepticism about the unity of “women” as a category, and ongoing challenges to links between descriptive and substantive representation. The spread of quota laws thus raises two related sets of questions. First, why have quotas been so readily adopted in diverse countries around the world? Who mobilizes for and against quotas, and for what reasons? Second, does the apparently widespread support for quotas in fact mask other political intentions? More specifically, do they constitute a feminist demand articulated by a new global women's movement, or instead, reflect a more cynical attempt among elites to mask other struggles under the guise of concern for the political status of women?

This article addresses these questions in three parts. The first section identifies three kinds of quota policies: party quotas, reserved seats, and legislative quotas. Focusing on the latter two types of measures, it outlines the basic features of legal strategies to increase the number of women in political office, as well as similarities and differences in the motivations and circumstances surrounding their adoption. The second section draws on the broader literature on gender quotas to distill four explanations for quota adoption, which it then uses to “map” quota campaigns to explore how feminist and non-feminist actors are involved in various kinds of quota debates. The third section considers how these origins may affect the meanings of quota reforms and, in turn, their implications for women as political actors and their impact on women as a group. The final section concludes with some thoughts regarding the contributions and challenges of quota laws to feminist practice.

Mapping Gender Quota Laws

The recent wave of quota laws forms part of a larger global movement to employ quotas to increase the number of women in elected and non-elected political assemblies (Dahlerup 2006; Krook

2009). Together, these measures—which include party quotas, reserved seats, and legislative quotas²—have now been adopted in more than one hundred countries around the world (Krook 2006).³ As a result, work on gender quotas has become one of the fastest growing subfields of research on women and politics. Until recently, most of these studies have focused on party quotas. This is not surprising, because although reserved seats first appeared in the 1930s, party quotas were the most prevalent type of quotas until the 1990s. These policies aim to increase the proportion of women among individual parties' candidates and generally mandate between 10 and 50 percent women. Initially, they were found in Western Europe, where they were adopted mainly over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, but they are now present in all regions of the world.

In most cases, party quotas entail reforming individual party statutes. They are usually approved at national party conventions, but almost always originate in demands for increased representation made by women inside and outside the parties (Bruhn 2003; Christensen 1999; Tripp 2001). Some parties adopt quotas for normative reasons related to their party ideologies or beliefs about the importance of group representation (Kolinsky 1991; Meier 2000; Opello 2006). However, similar policies sometimes spread to other parties through the effects of electoral competition. In those instances, quota adoption by one party may spur quota adoption by other parties (Caul 2001; Kaiser 2001), as well as better quota implementation across all parties (Davidson-Schmich 2006; Meier 2004). The longer history of these measures, combined with interest in party competition as a mechanism of change (Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Matland and Studlar 1996; Wängnerud 2001), has resulted in a wide comparative literature on party quotas that concludes that left-wing parties are most likely to adopt them, while centralized parties are most likely to implement them (Caul 2001; Davidson-Schmich 2006; Lovenduski 2005).

Research on reserved seats and legislative quotas, in contrast, has thus far focused almost exclusively on single cases (but see Bauer 2008; Dahlerup 2006). Viewed through a broader lens, the growing body of work on these measures offers a range of insights into the forms these quotas take, the countries where they are found, the years that they are adopted, and the actors, strategies, and contexts that shape their adoption and implementation. Reserved seats, as their name suggests, are provisions that literally set aside seats for women in political assemblies that men are not eligible to contest. They usually involve only a very small proportion of seats—most often between 1 and 10 percent, but sometimes as high as 30

percent—and, as such, generally seek to guarantee a minimum proportion of women in various political bodies. They are found in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East and have the longest history of all gender quota measures, with the first reserved seats being instituted in 1935 and the most recent provisions being passed in 2005 (Table 1).

Reserved seats are typically established through constitutional amendments or presidential decrees. Proposals for these provisions are sometimes supported by women’s groups, but are most often initiated and approved by almost all-male legislatures or even single male leaders in countries where women’s social and economic status is relatively low (Bih-er, Clark, and Clark 1990; Connell 1998). Reasons for adopting reserved seats vary across national contexts, but include efforts to extend colonial rule (Jenkins 1999; Tinker and Walker 1956), gain national or international legitimacy for a new or existing regime (Goetz 1998; Howard-Merriam 1990; Meena 2003), create new political identities as part of postconflict reconstruction (Powley 2003), build alliances with potential coalition partners (Chowdhury 2002), and strengthen the ruling party’s base in parliament (Shaheed, Zia, and Warraich 1998). Many feminists oppose these provisions, however, because they interpret them as an attempt to make electoral gains among female voters, while promoting the selection of “malleable” women who will not challenge the patriarchal status quo (Goetz and Hassim 2003; Huang 2002; Rai 1999).

These concerns are often borne out during the process of implementation, as reserved seats are generally allocated in ways that undermine the incumbency, as well as the autonomy, of female

Table 1. Reserved Seats in National Parliaments.

Africa	Asia	Middle East
Burkina Faso: 6%	Bangladesh: 13%	Afghanistan: 27%
Djibouti: 10%	India (<i>previously</i>): 4%	Egypt (<i>previously</i>): 8%
Eritrea: 30%	Pakistan: 18%	Jordan: 5%
Kenya: 3%	Philippines (<i>previously</i>): 10%	Morocco: 9%
Rwanda: 30%	Taiwan ^a : 10–25%	
Somalia: 12%		
Sudan: 13%		
Tanzania: 30%		
Uganda: 18%		

Source: Krook (2009).

^aNon-independent territory.

Table 2. Legislative Quotas for National Parliaments.

Africa	Asia	Eastern Europe	Latin America	Middle East	Western Europe
Angola: 30%					
Burundi: 30%	China: 22%	Armenia: 15%	Argentina: 30%	Iraq: 25%	Belgium: 50%
Liberia: 30%	Indonesia: 30%	Bosnia-Herzegovina: 30%	Bolivia: 30%	Palestinian Authority ^a : 20%	France: 50%
Mauritania: 25%	North Korea: 20%	Kosovo (<i>previously</i>) ^a : 30%	Brazil: 30%		Italy (<i>previously</i>): 50%
Niger: 10% ^a	South Korea: 30–50%	Kyrgyzstan: 30%	Colombia (<i>previously</i>): 30%		Portugal: 33%
	Nepal: 5%	Macedonia: 30%	Costa Rica: 40%		Spain: 40%
	Philippines: “must include”	Serbia: 30%	Dominican Republic: 33%		
		Uzbekistan: 30%	Ecuador: 30%		
			Guyana: 33%		
			Honduras: 30%		
			Mexico: 30%		
			Panama: 30%		
			Paraguay: 20%		
			Peru: 30%		
			Venezuela (<i>previously</i>): 30%		

Source: Krook (2009).

^aNon-independent territory.

representatives. For example, they may convert constituencies into “women’s districts” for only one election cycle (Narayan et al. 2000), compel women to run in super constituencies that map onto as many as ten districts (Tripp 2000), or grant party leaders or national legislators the right to appoint women to the reserved seats in line with the proportion of votes their parties received in the most recent elections (Afzal 1999). Although reserved seats almost always result in full implementation,⁴ therefore, their existence may create a ceiling on women’s representation, as citizens assume that seats not reserved for women are thereby reserved for men (Nanivadekar 2003), while the particular form they take may make it difficult for women to nurture individual constituencies and gain the necessary political experience to contest non-reserved seats (Tamale 2003).

Legislative quotas, sharing certain features with party quotas and reserved seats, focus on the candidate stage but require that all parties nominate a certain proportion of women. They span between 5 and 50 percent and, with some notable exceptions, tend to be found in developing countries, especially in Latin America, and in postconflict societies, primarily in Southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Aside from informal regulations in some Communist countries,⁵ these measures are the newest type of gender quota policy, appearing first only in the 1990s. They involve reforming the constitution or the electoral law—and sometimes both—and thus apply to all political parties in a given country, even those opposed to quotas (Table 2).

While officially passed by male-dominated legislatures, proposals for legislative quotas almost always spring from women’s groups inside and outside the parties, who generally learn about quotas through international organizations and transnational women’s networks and mobilize for change with women from other parties (Htun and Jones 2002; Lokar 2003; Tripp, Konaté, and Lowe-Morna 2006). In some cases, the focus on constitutional and legal reform also involves national and international courts, who may be called upon to pass judgment on the constitutionality or legality of these provisions (Durrieu 1999; Mossuz-Lavau 1998; Russell 2000). Explanations for the adoption of legislative quotas include concerns to extend a logic of group representation to women (Meier 2000), ensure women’s inclusion during the creation of new democratic institutions (Camacho Granados, Povedano, and Serrano Madrigal 1997), overcome a perceived crisis in representation (Costa Benavides 2003; Varikas 1995), sustain an existing regime (Durrieu 1999; Schmidt 2003), express support for women’s rights without necessarily altering existing patterns of representation (Htun and Jones 2002), institutionalize procedures for candidate selection that enforce central party

decisions (Baldez 2004), or meet recommendations made by various international and regional organizations (Krook 2006).

These diverse motivations partly explain the shape and impact of these quota policies, which almost invariably result in gaps between the percentage specified in the quota and the proportion of women actually elected. Other influences include the electoral system (Htun and Jones 2002; Schmidt and Saunders 2004), as well as the wording (Baldez 2004; Htun 2002), requirements (Chama 2001; Jones 2004), sanctions (Jones 1996; Murray 2004), and perceived legitimacy of the quota (Guadagnini 1998; Lépinard 2006; Russell 2000). As a consequence, some quotas achieve dramatic increases in the numbers of women elected (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005; Jones 2004; Krook 2005), while others register little change (Htun and Jones 2002; Murray 2004), lead to decreases (Araújo 2003; Schmidt 2003), or are declared unconstitutional or illegal before they can ever be applied (Mossuz-Lavau 1998). These dynamics indicate that reasons for adopting legislative quotas may be far removed from goals to empower women in politics. Juxtaposed with campaigns for reserved seats, which share a similar orientation towards legal strategies, these cases reveal that feminist and non-feminist actors may press for gender quotas, influencing at least to some degree what these reforms might mean more broadly for feminism in practice.

Explaining Quota Adoption

Taken together, the insights of various case studies point to at least four distinct accounts as to why quotas are adopted: women mobilize for the adoption of quotas to increase women's representation, political elites recognize strategic advantages for supporting quotas, quotas are consistent with existing or emerging notions of equality and representation, and quotas are supported by international norms and spread through transnational sharing. Disaggregated, these narratives suggest three broad groups of actors involved in quota campaigns, as well as seven possible motivations for quota reform. The three sets of actors who participate in quota campaigns are located in civil society, the state, and the international and transnational spheres. Civil society actors include grassroots women's movements, women's movement organizations, women's sections inside political parties, cross-partisan networks of female politicians, and individual women active inside and outside parties. Most of these actors mobilize for gender quotas (Bruhn 2003; Dahlerup 2006; Kittilson 2006; Lovenduski 2005), but some occasionally organize against quotas (Amar 1999; Kishwar 1998). They are

frequently the actors who initiate quota campaigns, which they direct towards state actors, sometimes with ideas or help from international and transnational actors.

State actors encompass national women's policy agencies, national leaders, governing coalitions, representatives in parliament, party leaders, and judges in national and local courts. They are often the most powerful voices for and against quotas because of their broad visibility and their capacity to institute or reject quotas within political parties and national assemblies (Lovenduski 2005; Lubertino Beltrán 1992). They occasionally propose quotas, but are most often the targets of campaigns waged by civil society and international and transnational actors. International and transnational actors, finally, comprise international organizations of global and regional scope; groups formed under the auspices of international organizations; transnational non-governmental organizations; and transnational networks of activists, politicians, and scholars (Krook 2006). In a handful of earlier cases,⁶ colonial governments also played a central role in instituting quota reforms. These actors almost invariably support gender quotas but at times prove to be an effective obstacle to quota adoption (Ciezahl 2003; Pires 2002). For the most part, they provide inspiration and resources for civil society actors in their quest to convince state actors of the virtues of gender quotas.

The seven motivations for quota reform that emerge from various case studies include principled stands, electoral considerations, empty gestures, promotion of other political ends, extension of representational guarantees, international pressure, and transnational learning. Most of these motivations contain normative and pragmatic elements, and in many cases, several distinct motives operate simultaneously to promote or foil quota reform. Principled stands are present when women's groups pursue quotas out of the belief that women should be better represented (Dahlerup 2006; Lovenduski 2005; Opello 2006), elites undertake repeated quota reform out of concerns to improve women's political access (Meier 2004; Mossuz-Lavau 1998), political parties and state adopt quotas to promote equality or redefine citizenship in more inclusionary directions (Inheteen 1999; Meier 2000), and international and transnational organizations recommend quotas as a way to foster gender-balanced decision-making (Krook 2006). Normative arguments, however, also offer strong ammunition against gender quotas, when opponents insist that quotas do not empower women, discriminate against men, restrict voters' choices, and contravene articles of the law that enshrine equality

between women and men (Guadagnini 1998; Russell 2000; Varikas 1995).

Electoral considerations come into play when elites decide to introduce quotas after one of their key rivals adopts them (Davidson-Schmich 2006; Kaiser 2001; Matland and Studlar 1996). A crucial mechanism is mobilization by women's sections, which draw on gains made by women in other parties to press for quotas in their own parties (Lovenduski and Norris 1993). In these instances, advocates identify quotas as an effective tool for winning women's votes, especially in cases where the party seeks to overcome a long period in opposition or a dramatic decrease in popularity (Perrigo 1999; Stevenson 2000). Electoral incentives, nonetheless, may prove a double-edge sword, as opponents also argue against quotas for women on the grounds of electoral competition, claiming that women are less effective candidates than men and thus that increasing the proportion of women threatens to decrease the party's electoral fortunes (Bruhn 2003; Murray 2004).

Empty gestures are related to electoral considerations and generally occur in cases where political elites view quotas as a relatively easy way to demonstrate commitment to women's rights without necessarily altering existing patterns of representation (Htun and Jones 2002). In these cases, leaders enthusiastically embrace gender quotas out of the belief or knowledge that these policies will not personally affect them, will never be implemented, or will be deemed unconstitutional before they can ever be applied (Araújo 2003; Mossuz-Lavau 1998). In this sense, empty gestures embody both a strategy and a counter-strategy for quota adoption and implementation.

The promotion of other political ends as a motivation for quota reform takes a number of different forms. It generally comes into play when elites decide to pursue quotas in order to achieve other political goals, like consolidating power over party representatives and political rivals and demonstrating autonomy from other branches of government. As a result, the adoption of quotas enables elites to hand-pick "malleable" women who will not question or challenge the status quo (Costa Benavides 2003; Goetz and Hassim 2003), institutionalize procedures for candidate selection that enforce central party decisions (Baldez 2004; Bruhn 2003), build alliances with potential coalition partners (Chowdhury 2002; Shaheed, Zia, and Warraich 1998), manifest independence from other centers of government (Baldez 2004), and—more broadly—establish the national and international legitimacy of a particular regime (Nechemias 1994; Howard-Merriam 1990; Reyes 2002). The promotion of other political ends, however, may also undermine

quota adoption, if opponents argue that other projects are more pressing than women's political representation.

The extension of representational guarantees operates when the adoption of gender quotas is linked to existing approaches for recognizing difference. In some countries, advocates argue that quotas for women simply build on various guarantees already given to other groups based on language, religion, race, ethnicity, youth, or occupation. These measures typically serve to safeguard the participation of vulnerable groups or to redefine citizenship in a more inclusionary direction by ensuring some degree of proportional representation (Bih-er, Clark, and Clark 1990; Htun 2004; Meier 2000). Existing representational measures, however, are also often used to argue effectively against gender quotas on the grounds that "gender" is not a relevant category of political representation on par with other recognized group identities (Jenkins 1999).

International pressure influences quota adoption when leaders include a range of different social groups in an attempt to establish the international legitimacy of a new regime (Howard-Merriam 1990; Nechemias 1994), conform to emerging international norms following the direct intervention of international and transnational organizations (Dahlerup and Nordlund 2004; Krook 2006), or—in several earlier instances of quota reform—maintain colonial-era policies following independence or secession (Afzal 1999; Everett 1979; Krook 2005). In rare cases, however, pressure from international actors may force national actors to abandon quotas as a strategy to increase women's representation on the argument that quotas do not constitute international "best" practice for conducting elections (Pires 2002).

Transnational learning, finally, occurs when women's groups share information with each other across national borders on successful strategies for increasing women's representation (Lubertino Beltrán 1992; Tripp 2004), or transnational organizations and networks transmit information to domestic groups to suggest new tactics for reform (Russell 2005). These processes rarely reveal direct application of lessons learned, but frequently involve efforts to "translate" quotas to suit specific domestic contexts (Krook 2006). Opponents hardly ever use this strategy, apart from some attempts to delegitimize quotas through association with fallen Communist regimes (Matland and Montgomery 2003).

Re-aggregating these accounts, it becomes clear in many cases that feminist and non-feminist actors are frequently involved on both sides of these debates, influencing at least to some extent the degree to which quotas can be considered "feminist" reforms. To be sure, "feminism" takes on a number of different forms that include

distinct perspectives on the value of engaging with formal politics and the state (cf. Chappell 2002; Kantola 2006). However, the core conviction uniting all these diverse approaches is their common concern to improve the lives of women in some way. In this context, it is crucial to acknowledge that the adoption of gender quotas does not always stem from principled concerns to empower women in politics. Rather, most quota policies are the result of combined normative and pragmatic motivations, pursued by varied but multiple groups of actors who support reform for various and often conflicting reasons. As these constellations vary substantially across cases, the relationship between gender quotas and feminist projects of empowerment remains an empirical question, not a theoretical given.

Many case studies implicitly trace these alliances, recounting how actors work together in various ways within and across civil society, the state, and the international and transnational spheres. Although the potential combinations are endless, it is possible to discern a number of common coalitions that come together during quota campaigns. A first set of alliances brings together women in civil society and women in the state, who take principled stands on the need for increased female representation. Examples include campaigns that mobilize women's movement organizations and/or women inside the political parties, who work with members of women's policy agencies to support quota reform (Durrieu 1999; Franceschet 2005; Kittilson 2006; Lovenduski 2005).

A second set of alliances join women in civil society and men in the state. While civil society groups generally assume principled stands, male elites within the state typically espouse quotas for pragmatic reasons: they respond to electoral considerations, make empty gestures, promote other political ends, or extend representational guarantees. In some cases, women inside the parties gain concessions from party leaders when the former convince the latter that doing so will attract more female voters (Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Perrigo 1999; Wängnerud 2001). In others, women's movement organizations press for quotas, and elites take up this demand in order to appear open to demands from civil society or to consolidate control over their political rivals (Baldez 2004; Htun and Jones 2002). In these instances, quotas do originate with women's movements, but serve other—sometimes pernicious and even antidemocratic—goals.

A third type of coalition occurs between women in civil society and various kinds of transnational actors, including transnational NGO's and transnational networks. Both groups are generally inspired by principled concerns, but transnational actors are also

motivated by the possibility for transnational sharing. Indeed, most transnational networks exist to serve as conduits of information on various policy models and tactics for change (cf. True and Mintrom 2001), as well as to act as allies in persuading governments to adopt new policy innovations (Keck and Sikkink 1998). In quota campaigns, this dynamic is present in countries where women's movement organizations learn new tactics for reform through their involvement in various kinds of regional networks (Htun and Jones 2002; Tripp 2004). It also exists in cases where women inside the parties discover that quotas have been used effectively in similar parties abroad over the course of international meetings of their party federations (Lubertino Beltrán 1992; Russell 2005).

A fourth kind of alliance links women in civil society with global and regional international organizations. While both sets of actors are publicly committed to gender quotas for principled reasons, international organizations—by virtue of the fact that they bring together but also stand above national governments—also exert international pressure in order to gain compliance with emerging international norms. Examples include campaigns where international organizations give new force to the normative arguments presented by women's movement organizations by framing quotas as a central feature of a modern state, and even as the best route to economic modernization and development (Krook 2006; Towns 2004). This partnership is particularly effective when states are sensitive to international scrutiny, where elites come to view quotas as a means to cultivate international legitimacy, foster perceptions of domestic legitimacy, or avoid being viewed as pariahs in the international community (Howard-Merriam 1990; Reyes 2002).

A fifth type of coalition appears between women in civil society across two or more countries. These groups—generally women's movement organizations or women's sections inside the political parties—espouse similar normative beliefs regarding the need to increase the number of women in elected office. Their interest in exchanging information on concrete strategies for adopting and implementing quota policies, however, means that they are also motivated by a need for transnational sharing. These groups often organize sessions during meetings of regional and global organizations (Araújo and García Quesada 2006; Tripp, Konaté, and Lowe-Morna 2006), but they also frequently initiate their own contacts by planning conferences, arranging personal visits, and circulating memos (Lubertino Beltrán 1992). In some cases, their contacts are facilitated through the financial and logistical assistance of national and transnational research centers on women and politics. Viewed together, these five distinct configurations indicate that

evaluating the feminist nature of individual quota campaigns requires careful attention to the alliances—both intended and unintended—that come together to promote quota reform.

Theorizing Quota Adoption

A shared tendency to adopt quotas thus masks a great deal of variation in the reasons for pursuing quotas, which may—in turn—influence the particular meaning of quota policies in distinct political contexts. Researchers have offered several speculations as to what quotas might mean within larger political processes (Skjeie 2001; Tinker 2004). Generally expressing pessimism about the feminist potential of gender quotas, they argue that these policies are most likely not the result of a new normative consensus regarding the need to promote women in politics. Rather, quotas have emerged at the same time as four other trends that appear to work against quota diffusion and thus undermine their broader feminist impact: rising neoliberalism, supposed decline in women's movement activity, growing skepticism about the unity of "women" as a category, and ongoing challenges to links between descriptive and substantive representation. To make sense of this paradox, scholars have drawn on these apparent contradictions to suggest four possible meanings of quota reform, with varied implications for women as political actors and for women as a group.

The first intuition is that quotas contribute—within a global context of growing neoliberalism—to an increasing separation between political empowerment, on the one hand, and social and economic empowerment, on the other (cf. Phillips 1999). More specifically, because quotas target political office, they are consistent with the broader ethos of neoliberalism focused on non-intervention in the economy. At the same time, they enable governments to appear responsive to the demands of civil society for changes in the status of women, without the need to pursue more thoroughgoing changes in the social and economic standing of women and other marginalized groups (cf. Young 2000). In this scenario, quotas thus appear to be a major concession to women's movement demands, but in fact serve two decidedly non-feminist ends: to demobilize feminists through the guise of empty promises, and to mask enduring—and, some might argue, more pressing—inequalities among women themselves, particularly along class and racial lines.

The evidence for these claims is mixed. Although neoliberalism is often associated with the end of special measures to help under-represented groups, concerns to improve economic efficiency have in fact bolstered the case for quotas. Indeed, international actors like

the United Nations and the World Bank often explain their support for these measures on the grounds that the increased representation of women contributes to greater gains in social and economic development (cf. Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002; Towns 2004). In practice, therefore, quotas and neoliberalism are not mutually exclusive, but instead often partners in the pursuit of a new world order. Similarly, the passage of quota policies has varied effects on women's movements: while in some countries quota reforms result in a decline in women's movement activity (Giraud and Jensen 2001), in others they spur continued mobilization to ensure that quotas are implemented in line with the spirit of the reform (Durrieu 1999; García Quesada 2005; Jones 2004). As a consequence, gender quotas may undermine the feminist cause, but also may lend renewed energy to feminist organizing.

A second possibility—often raised by feminist critics of quotas—is that these policies result in the election of more women, but only those who will reinforce rather than challenge the status quo. This argument aims to expose why quota policies, which appear to be a radical departure from politics as usual, are often adopted relatively quickly by party leaders and nearly unanimously by national parliaments (Krook 2009). To support this claim, most point to the rules for implementing these provisions, which often place considerable autonomy in the hands of party leaders and/or confer extensive discretion to electoral authorities (Htun 2002; Meier 2000). While some parties ignore the requirements by claiming that they cannot find a sufficient number of qualified female candidates (Holli, Luhtakallio, and Raevaara 2006; Murray 2004), others simply use this opportunity to select a slate of female candidates who are decidedly non-feminist (Abou-Zeid 2006; Nanivadekar 2006). Still others appeal these policies in various kinds of courts, which occasionally overturn quotas on the grounds that they violate basic principles of equality and representation (Guadagnini 1998; Mossuz-Lavau 1998; Russell 2000), or merely refuse to intervene to ensure proper quota implementation (Schmidt and Saunders 2004).

Although some work suggests that women elected through quotas are more loyal to party leaders than women who win open seats (Cowley and Childs 2003), the presence of quotas does not always preclude the ability of women to represent women's concerns. Indeed, in some cases these policies confer a special mandate on women who are elected this way, precisely because their election is intended specifically to improve the representation of women as a group (Schwartz 2004; Skjeie 1992). Further, while many elites—and some male aspirants—do seek to subvert the impact of quota provisions, including through legal or constitutional challenges,

some of these events in fact reinvigorate quota campaigns. In a growing number of cases, these renewed efforts lead to new specifications of the quota provisions (Childs 2003; Krook 2009), which can result in dramatic changes in the numbers and types of women elected (Chama 2001; Jones 2004). These dynamics suggest that quotas may undercut feminist progress by masking steps backward as steps forward for women. However, disappointment with the lack of progress following the introduction of quotas may also spur feminists into action in order to achieve more substantial change, both in the election of women and the representation of women's concerns.

A third expectation is that quotas serve to reify "women" as a political category. While this creates the false impression of a unified group that does not in fact exist (cf. Mansbridge 2005), it also restricts the scope of women as political actors, as well as the recognition of the diverse needs of women as a group, by anticipating that women can only represent "women's issues" (Childs and Krook 2006; Skjeie 2001). In some cases, these suspicions seem to be borne out: both anecdotal and hard evidence suggests that female candidates are often viewed—or at least perceive themselves to be viewed—as representatives of women, rather than as representatives of other groups (Childs 2004; Swers 2002). In contrast, male candidates are rarely seen as advocates only of men—indeed, they are rarely considered as such—but instead as representatives of a host of other social and economic identities. All the same, quotas vary importantly in the degree to which they essentialize women: some measures are sex-specific, indicating that women are the group that requires special treatment, while others are gender-neutral, providing for a minimum representation of both women and men. In addition, the proportion provided for ranges enormously across quota policies, from as little as 1 percent to as much as 50 percent (Krook 2009), thereby establishing different opportunities for the election of a diverse group of legislators. As a result, some quota policies may create wider or narrower definitions of "women," opening up or restricting the capacity for those elected through quotas to pursue a broad range of policies that might benefit women as a group.

A fourth concern with regard to gender quotas is that they reduce women's effectiveness as political actors. According to this account, these effects are felt both individually and collectively. On the one hand, women elected both with and without the quota face the possibility of being taken for "quota women," as people who did not earn political office "on their own," thus reducing their esteem in the eyes of voters and their colleagues (Goetz and Hassim 2003; Rincker 2006). On the other hand, these perceptions lead—either

implicitly or explicitly—to a reduced scope for action, causing many quota and non-quota women to disavow their association with what are considered to be a “narrow” set of female concerns (Childs 2004). Some evidence does indeed support this claim: some women do report a sense of decreased efficacy as a consequence of gender quotas (Childs 2004; Nechemias 1994). However, many more gain increased confidence over the course of their tenure and bring a range of women-centered issues to political attention (Nanivadekar 2006). In numerous cases, this influences the political engagement of female constituents, who not only contact their representatives with greater frequency (Childs 2004; Kudva 2003), but who also increasingly consider running for political office themselves (Goetz and Hassim 2003). These patterns suggest that quotas do sometimes negatively affect women’s abilities as political actors, but also often generate a host of positive externalities both for individual women and for women as a group.

Analyzing Quotas as Feminist Practice

Candidate gender quotas have now spread to more than one hundred countries around the globe. Most of the measures adopted within the last fifteen years have been one of two kinds of quota laws, reserved seats or legislative quotas. To understand how quotas have reached the political agenda in diverse countries around the world, this article traced the various actors who mobilize for and against quotas, as well as their varied motivations for pursuing or opposing quota reform. It then elaborated on how quota policies are often the result of the combined efforts of feminist and non-feminist actors, who may embrace quotas for distinct and even contradictory reasons. Finally, it outlined and evaluated four possibilities regarding the feminist nature and consequences of quota reform. These intuitions indicate that although both feminist and non-feminist actors pursue gender quota policies, particular measures may in fact “mean” different things within distinct political contexts. It is important to uncover these patterns for empirical reasons, to trace the various machinations that make quota reform possible, as well as for theoretical reasons, to understand what quotas accomplish within a broader feminist framework.

All four intuitions—put forward largely by feminist scholars and activists—express considerable doubt about the intentions of quota reform. They propose that quotas further neoliberal projects, demobilize women’s movements, result in the election of non-feminist women, promote a static view of “women” as a group, and decrease the effectiveness of women as political actors. While a number of

case studies corroborate these expectations, substantial evidence points to a range of positive implications of quota reform. Whether these outcomes are intended or unintended, they suggest that despite some insidious motives for quota adoption, these measures also contribute to concrete gains for women in the political sphere. Moreover, they often revitalize women's groups—whether or not they support quota reform—during quota debates and/or after quotas are introduced. However, quota campaigns themselves vary enormously, in the sense that they are driven by distinct groups of actors and motivations for quota adoption. Assessing the precise meaning of quota reforms thus remains an empirical question: while some policies are deeply informed by feminist projects, others depart dramatically from feminist concerns. Together, these patterns suggest that gender quotas have a somewhat complicated relationship with broader changes in women's overall status. As such, analyzing the dynamics at work in individual campaigns is crucial for ensuring that gender quotas promote the ultimate goal of female political empowerment.

NOTES

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1. There are many different kinds of feminism—liberal, radical, socialist, and postmodern, to name a few—but the core element uniting all these approaches is the concern to improve women's lives in some way. The discussion of feminist practice in this article will focus on “feminism” in this very broad sense.

2. A possible fourth category of quota measures is what Krook, Lovenduski, and Squires (2006) label “soft quotas.” The exact number of such policies is difficult to calculate, however, given that these measures are often not labeled “quotas.” They differ from “hard quotas” in that their main goal is simply to “encourage” increases in women’s representation through informal targets and recommendations and quotas for internal party bodies.

3. For details on current policies, see Global Database of Quotas for Women (2008). Details on proposed or repealed measures are available in Krook (2009).

4. In the first round of local elections in Pakistan in December 2000, social and religious leaders prevented women from becoming candidates in 20 percent of districts (Rizvi 2001).

5. Communist regimes have long applied informal measures to ensure the representation of women in various political bodies (Nechemias 1994; Yoon 2001). Although associated with a particular party, they might also be considered legislative quotas as they are mandated centrally from the state/party apparatus.

6. This is the case in India, as well as the two states that eventually seceded from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

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