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# The Rise of Gender Quota Laws: Expanding the Spectrum of Determinants for Electoral Reform

KAREN CELIS, MONA LENA KROOK and PETRA MEIER

*The seminal work of Arend Lijphart, Electoral Systems and Party Systems (1994), limits the definition of electoral reforms to those affecting electoral formulas, district magnitudes, assembly size, or electoral thresholds. Following this definition, studies on electoral reform have put political parties and their motivations at centre stage. Expanding the definition of electoral reform, however, requires a move beyond parties to explore the multiple possible sources of change. This article examines the most common reforms of recent years, electoral gender quota policies, and points to at least four explanations for the adoption of gender quota laws. Based on extensive data from gender quota campaigns, the article suggests that the literature on this topic would benefit from efforts to broaden the analytical focus to include the role of agency, group interests, and discursive struggles, and to call attention to the possibility of causal diversity by revealing different routes to electoral reform.*

Electoral systems have been a central focus of research in comparative politics, with scholars analysing such questions as their origins, features, and effects. The vast majority of research to date focuses on the pivotal role of electoral formula in shaping the transformation of votes into seats. Consequently, studies of electoral reform tend to recognise only this small range of ‘major’ changes in the rules governing elections (Lijphart 1994; cf. Leyenaar and Hazan 2011). The focus on electoral formula, in turn, leads to primary attention to political parties and their motivations for supporting or opposing reform. The result is that the existing literature tends to offer ‘universal’ and ‘single track’ explanations for electoral change, namely that these occur when and if the parties in power have something to gain from moving to a new electoral formula.

However, as other contributors to this special issue point out, a much broader array of modifications to electoral rules might be categorised as

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'electoral reform' (Jacobs and Leyenaar 2011; Leyenaar and Hazan 2011), at the same time that actors other than political parties might influence, or have a stake in, the shape of these regulations (Hooghe and Deschouwer 2011; Katz 2011; LeDuc 2011; Renwick 2011). Expanding the research agenda on electoral reform thus requires revisiting – and ultimately rethinking – the prevailing framework of determinants of electoral reform (Rahat and Hazan 2011). Although consistent with the search for an expanded and more nuanced framework, a largely overlooked aspect of these calls is attention to the possibility of multiple paths. More specifically, acknowledging that different actors may be involved in various ways suggests that – at a broader level – single explanations may be insufficient for capturing the dynamics at work across diverse cases (Ragin 2000; cf. Krook 2009; Renwick 2010).

The usefulness of these three innovations – an expanded definition of 'electoral reform'; a recognition of a more diverse set of actors, motivations, and strategies for change; and the possibility of multiple paths to reform – becomes clear in the course of a dialogue with research on electoral gender quota policies. These measures are among the widest-reaching electoral reforms of recent years, but have rarely been viewed as such, leading to a disconnect between insights on electoral change, on the one hand, and detailed case studies of quota introduction, on the other (for a partial exception, see Baldez 2004). Gender quotas are not usually analysed as an instance of electoral reform, but instead as a major development related to gender and candidate selection. Yet these measures clearly aim to influence 'who' may be nominated and elected as political candidates, thereby shaping electoral outcomes.

This is especially true of gender quota laws,<sup>1</sup> which entail modifying constitutions and electoral laws to set aside seats for women or to require the selection of a certain percentage of female candidates. More than 50 countries – democratic, semi-democratic, and non-democratic – have instituted such reforms, nearly all within the last 15 years (Krook 2009). The recent and rapid spread of these policies provide an ideal lens through which to engage in a dialogue with existing research and to develop and assess new theories of electoral reform. In particular, a focus on quotas – and close attention to the diverse insights of the quota literature – opens up opportunities to observe the processes by which electoral reforms have been instituted over a relatively short period of time in countries with a diverse array of social, economic, cultural, and political characteristics. This exercise reveals that it is necessary to revise prevailing frameworks of determinants to incorporate a wider range of actors, motivations, strategies, and paths to electoral reform.

In seeking to extend and improve the framework of determinants of electoral reform, the ambition of this article is not to assess the relative explanatory value of the factors emphasised by these two literatures. Rather, the aim is to critically compare the *types* of determinants signalled by

research on ‘major’ electoral reforms, on the one hand, and ‘non-major’ electoral reforms like gender quotas, on the other. The resulting ‘meta-analysis’ indicates important differences in emphasis across these two strands. Nonetheless, it also suggests that attention to multiple determinants offers a substantial improvement over existing explanatory frameworks by providing a ‘heuristic toolkit’ for explaining different types of electoral reform.

The article begins by briefly summarising dominant approaches to the study of electoral reform, as well as a series of recent critiques calling attention to the limits of this work. The second section provides an overview of gender quota laws and puzzles surrounding their adoption. The third addresses the growing body of research on these measures and what it suggests in terms of the determinants of electoral reform. The analysis uncovers four main explanations for the rise of quota laws that draw attention to the varied ways, and diverse contexts, in which quotas reach the political agenda. Juxtaposing the insights with the literature on electoral change, the fourth section then fleshes out more concretely a list of actors, motivations, and strategies by which actors may variously realise electoral reform. The article concludes by reflecting on the implications of this revised framework for the broader project of expanding the types and determinants of electoral change.

### **Approaches to the Study of Electoral Reform**

As discussed in the introduction of this special issue, the study of electoral reform has long been characterised by a focus on ‘major’ reforms, initiated by political parties and guided by partisan interests (Leyenaar and Hazan 2011). Given that these changes largely concern the proportionality of the electoral system, touching on the power balance between parties, scholars have logically explained such reforms with reference to parties and their strategic interests (Benoit 2004; Colomer 2007). Drawing on the principles of rational choice, they predict reform in relation to how parties and their leaders seek to maximise gains – or minimise losses – of political power.

Other scholars, however, have criticised the predictive power of this approach (Katz 2005; Pilet and Bol 2011). They suggest that parties are not simply motivated by strategic advantage, but also by core values, norms, and ideologies. Electoral systems are part of the putting into practice of preferred models of democracy based on normative ideals like freedom, liberty, justice, equality, and participation (Katz 1997). Institutional choices may thereby be guided by goals like fair representation (maximising proportionality), governability (maximising the seats of the largest party), social and political engineering (managing conflict between rival groups in society), and increased participation and efficacy (making elections accessible and meaningful).

This approach stresses that electoral systems do not emerge in a void, but rather that parties make path dependent choices that take place in specific historical, societal, institutional, and international contexts. Consequently, it views changes in the societal and political environment – whether these involve historically unique events or long-term demographic, social, and economic developments – as determinants of electoral reform. In other words, electoral reforms happen because of expected direct benefits to the political system as a whole, and, at most, indirect benefits to the political parties in power.

Building on these critiques, recent work seeks to enrich these perspectives by broadening the scope – as well as the actors and motivations taken into account – when studying the determinants of electoral reform. On the one hand, scholars like Jacobs and Leyenaar (2011) expand the definition of ‘electoral reform’ to include what they categorise as major, minor, and technical reforms. ‘Minor’ and ‘technical’ reforms are different from ‘major’ reforms in that they deal with dimensions of the electoral system beyond proportionality. They may concern the inclusiveness of the electoral system, the ballot structure, and electoral procedures. Research on gender quotas, in particular, suggests that inclusiveness may generate new stakeholders, namely groups that were formerly excluded like women and minorities. An implication of expanding the range of ‘electoral reform’, therefore, is that new actors are introduced into the picture whose motivations and strategies must be taken into account.

On the other hand, there have been increased efforts to elaborate more diverse and nuanced models of electoral change. In an important new contribution, Renwick (2010) distinguishes between reforms resulting from elite majority imposition versus elite–mass interaction. The latter brings ordinary people in as important actors who may have distinct motivations for pursuing electoral change than elites, who are restricted in their capacity to act unilaterally as hypothesised in earlier accounts. Other new work theorises more complex routes to electoral reform in the shape of the ‘barriers model’, which posits a sequential process explaining reform as well as non-reform (Rahat and Hazan 2011), as well as the ‘policy cycle model’, which focuses on the stages of agenda-setting, policy-making, implementation, and feedback to explain when and how reform occurs (Norris 2011). Both approaches expand the range of actors and motivations that may play a part in generating – or not blocking – electoral reform. Nevertheless, neither model exhausts the range of actors, motivations, and processes that may be involved in electoral change, nor are they explicit about how actors and incentives might converge in diverse ways to press for electoral reform.

### **The Adoption of Electoral Gender Quotas**

Gender quotas are rarely analysed as an instance of electoral reform, but clearly entail modifications to election rules by stipulating who may – and

may not stand as a political candidate. As such, they can be considered to be the most prevalent electoral reforms of recent years. Their global diffusion has been dramatic, with more than 100 countries now applying some type of gender quota, although slightly more than half of these have been introduced via voluntary changes to internal party statutes and are thus not considered here (for details on selected cases, see Kittilson 2006; Meier 2004; Opello 2006). In stipulating the nomination of female candidates via legal and constitutional means, quota laws can be viewed as directly affecting ‘who’ is elected. While the evidence is mixed, these outcomes may also indirectly influence the outcomes of legislative policy-making (Celis 2009; Childs and Krook 2009), as well as the views that citizens hold with regard to the legitimacy and effectiveness of government (Karp and Banducci 2008). However, these laws vary in terms of the forms they take, where they appear, and what effects they have on the numbers of women elected. Consequently, there is substantial diversity in their design and impact, despite the fact that these measures ostensibly share the same goal of increasing women’s political representation.

Reserved seats, as their name suggests, set aside seats for women that men are not eligible to contest. They are often established through changes to constitutions, but in some cases also electoral laws, to mandate a minimum number of female legislators. The proportion is often very low, usually between 1 per cent and 10 per cent of all elected representatives. However, since 2000, several countries have instituted much larger provisions of 30 per cent (see Table 1). These measures are applied in a variety of ways. In some cases, reserved seats apply to single-member districts in which only women may run for election. In others, they are allocated in multi-member districts

TABLE 1  
RESERVED SEATS FOR WOMEN IN SINGLE OR LOWER HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT  
(AS OF DECEMBER 2009)<sup>a</sup>

Country	Percentage	Year adopted	Women in parliament
Afghanistan	27	2004	28% (2010)
Bangladesh	13	2004	19% (2008)
Djibouti	10	2002	14% (2008)
Egypt	12	2009	13% (2010)
Eritrea	30	Unknown	22% (1994)
Jordan	5	2003	11% (2010)
Kenya	3	1997	10% (2007)
Morocco	9	2002	11% (2007)
Pakistan	18	2002	22% (2008)
Rwanda	30	2003	56% (2008)
Somalia	12	2004	7% (2004)
Sudan	13	2005	26% (2010)
Tanzania	30	2005	36% (2010)
Uganda	18	2001	31% (2006)

<sup>a</sup>Does not include provisions adopted earlier in each country, or quotas adopted and subsequently overturned. For historical data, see Krook (2009: 227–38).

Source: Krook (2009: 227–38), updated.

to the designated number of women that win the most votes. In yet others, women are selected to these seats several weeks after the general elections by an electoral college. As a group, these policies appear in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. They first emerged in the 1930s and were the main type of gender quota adopted through the 1970s. Since the year 2000, however, they have been passed increasingly in countries with low numbers of women in politics.

Legislative quotas, in comparison, require parties to nominate a certain proportion of women. Enacted through reforms to electoral laws and sometimes constitutions, they generally call for women to form between 25 per cent and 50 per cent of all candidates (see Table 2). In most instances, the language is gender-neutral, speaking of women and men together or making reference to the 'underrepresented sex'. Yet these measures vary in terms of how strictly their goals are articulated: some speak vaguely about 'facilitating access', while others offer concrete guidelines regarding the selection and placement of female candidates. Legislative quotas are implemented in different ways depending on the electoral system, applying to party lists or a group of single-member districts. Given their status as law, these measures may contain sanctions for non-compliance and be subject to oversight from external bodies. With some notable exceptions, they are found primarily in developing countries, especially Latin America, and post-conflict societies, mainly in Africa, the Middle East, and south-eastern Europe. They appeared for the first time only in the 1990s, but today are more common than reserved seats.

The adoption of gender quota laws is puzzling for several reasons. First, they are often framed as 'unfair' or as promoting 'unqualified' individuals over more 'qualified' ones. However, they have gained the support of legislators, as well as party and election officials, in countries with a diverse range of characteristics. Second, in most instances<sup>2</sup> quotas for women require, by definition, a reduction in the number of men. Yet most policies are passed quickly, and often with substantial margins of support, by legislatures largely dominated by men. Third, gender quotas are frequently criticised on the grounds that they overlook diversity and reify 'women' as a group. Nonetheless, they have been taken up by many women's organisations around the world. Viewed together, these developments indicate a growing international trend recognising the need to include more women in political decision-making (Krook 2006).

### **Determinants of Gender Quota Adoption**

Given the diversity in the design and numerical impact of these measures, it is perhaps not surprising that gender quotas reach the political agenda in multiple ways. The four main explanations often given for the origins of quota policies place emphasis on distinct primary actors and motivations, connected in most instances to divergent contexts of gender quota reform.

TABLE 2  
 LEGISLATIVE QUOTAS FOR WOMEN IN SINGLE OR LOWER HOUSES OF  
 PARLIAMENT (AS OF DECEMBER 2009)<sup>a</sup>

Country	Percentage	Year adopted	Women in parliament
Albania	30	2008	16% (2009)
Angola	30	2005	39% (2008)
Argentina	30	1991	39% (2009)
Armenia	15	2007	9% (2007)
Belgium	50	2002	39% (2010)
Bolivia	30	1997	25% (2009)
Bosnia-Herzegovina	30	2001	17% (2010)
Brazil	25	1997	9% (2010)
Burkina Faso	30	2009	15% (2007)
Burundi	30	2005	32% (2010)
China	22	2007	21% (2008)
Costa Rica	40	1996	39% (2010)
Dominican Republic	33	2000	21% (2010)
East Timor	25	2006	29% (2007)
Ecuador	30	2000	32% (2009)
France	50	1999/2000	19% (2007)
Guyana	33	Unknown	30% (2006)
Honduras	30	2004	18% (2009)
Indonesia	30	2003	18% (2009)
Iraq	25	2004	25% (2010)
Korea, North	20	1998	16% (2009)
Korea, South	50	2004	15% (2008)
Kyrgyzstan	30	2007	23% (2010)
Liberia	30	2005	13% (2005)
Macedonia	30	2002	33% (2008)
Mauritania	30–50	2006	18% (2006)
Mexico	30	2002	26% (2009)
Nepal	5	1990	33% (2008)
Niger	10	2004	12% (2004)
Panama	30	1996	9% (2009)
Paraguay	20	1996	13% (2008)
Peru	30	2000	28% (2006)
Philippines	Must include women	1995	22% (2010)
Portugal	33	2006	27% (2009)
Serbia	30	2004	22% (2008)
Spain	40	2007	36% (2008)
Uruguay	30	2008	15% (2009)
Uzbekistan	30	2004	22% (2009)
Venezuela	30	1998	17% (2010)

<sup>a</sup>Does not include provisions adopted earlier in each country, or quotas adopted and subsequently overturned. For historical data, see Krook (2009: 227–38).

Source: Krook (2009: 227–38), updated.

Most scholars combine elements of these accounts, but notably do so in different ways. When seen together, they present conflicting views: no single account suffices to explain all, or even the majority of, cases of quota adoption. Remaining open to causal diversity, however, suggests that each offers a partial explanation that must be supplemented by others, although these combinations may be varied and not engage all actors to the same degree.



A common approach is to explain gender quota adoption with reference to the mobilisation of women's groups, arguing that – even where male elites are ultimately responsible for the decision to establish quotas – the initial impetus comes from women themselves. These groups may include women's organisations inside parties, women's movements in civil society, bureaucrats in women's policy agencies, and even individual women close to powerful men (Bruhn 2003; Kittilson 2006). Mobilisation generally occurs as women's groups come to realise that gender quotas are an effective, and perhaps the only, means for increasing women's political representation.

In these cases, women pursue quotas for both normative and pragmatic reasons. They believe that there should be more women in politics in order to achieve justice, promote women's interests, and make use of women's resources for the good of society. However, absent any natural trend towards change, they acknowledge that this is likely to be achieved only through specific, targeted actions to promote female candidates. These dynamics operate in many different contexts, from well-established democracies (Freidenvall *et al.* 2006) to countries experiencing dramatic changes in gender roles (Bauer and Britton 2006; Htun and Jones 2002) and transitioning from conflict situations (Krook *et al.* 2010; Longman 2006).

Another conventional account is that political elites pursue gender quotas for strategic reasons, generally related to competition with other parties. Various case studies suggest, for example, that party elites often adopt quotas when one of their rivals introduces them (Matland and Studlar 1996; Meier 2004). Support for quota laws may be similarly heightened if the party is seeking to overcome a long period in opposition or a dramatic decrease in popularity. The aim is to capture women's votes in the face of a perceived gender gap in voting behaviour by portraying the party as open to women and their concerns (Htun and Jones 2002; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Matland and Studlar 1996). Further, individual elites, like party leaders and male incumbents, have proven to be important allies when they perceive personal gains from allying with gender quota advocates (Baldez 2004; Fréchette *et al.* 2008). In most instances, however, this support appears to be insincere.

While gender quotas appear to demonstrate a degree of commitment to women, they can preserve elites' control over candidate selection (Baldez 2004), increase the apparent incumbency advantage of male politicians (Murray 2008), and do little to alter existing patterns of inequality (Htun and Jones 2002). Evidence suggests that elites may also see quotas as a means to maintain control over rivals within or outside the party (Baldez 2004; Bird 2003; Chowdhury 2002). If these motives are correct, the adoption of gender quotas may be less about empowering women in politics and more about how quotas fit in with other struggles among political elites. These motivations have also been observed in a variety of cases, although they are the most common in countries with strong party systems, whether organised around a single or multiple parties (Goetz and Hassim 2003),

as well as those undergoing dramatic political shifts like a change in regime or long-established party control (Bauer and Britton 2006; Bruhn 2003; Russell 2005).

A third possibility is that gender quotas are adopted when they mesh with existing or emerging notions of equality and representation (Krook *et al.* 2009). For example, left-wing parties are generally more open to measures such as quotas because these match with their more general goals of social equality (Kittilson 2006; Opello 2006). Gender quotas also tend to be adopted in countries characterised by egalitarian political cultures (Loveenduski and Norris 1993). In other countries, gender quotas may be viewed – in light of consociational or corporatist notions of group representation – as an extension of guarantees given to other groups based on linguistic, religious, racial, and other cleavages (Krook and O'Brien 2010; Meier 2000). Finally, many gender quotas emerge during periods of democratic transition, when quotas may be seen as a way to establish the legitimacy of the new political system, as has been the case in many post-conflict societies (Bauer and Britton 2006).

As such, gender quotas may 'fit' with features of the political context, rather than reflect principled concerns to empower women or pragmatic strategies to win or maintain power. An ethos of inclusion seems to have particular resonance in states emerging from periods of authoritarianism and/or war, where these experiences – and pressure from the international community – lead actors to contemplate new ways of doing politics (Bauer 2008; Dahlerup 2006). Historical legacies may also legitimise the adoption of gender quotas (Jimenez Polanco 2001) or ban them as a feasible option, as was the case in Eastern Europe in the 1990s (Galligan *et al.* 2007). All the same, it is also crucial to recognise the central role of discursive struggles in attaining a 'fit' – or overcoming an apparent 'misfit' – identifying the under-representation of women as a political problem and quotas as a legitimate means for solving it (Sgier 2004). Such arguments tend to be the most effective when linked to questions of the general interest, even as they entail a fundamental transformation of the gendered nature of the public sphere (Dahlerup 2006; Meier 2008).

A fourth explanation, focused especially on accounting for the rapid diffusion of gender quotas, links their spread to support given by international organisations and information gained via transnational connections. Over the last 15 years, many international organisations – including the United Nations, the Socialist International, the European Union, the Commonwealth, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, and the Organization of American States – have issued declarations recommending that all member states aim for 30 per cent women in all political bodies. At the same time, numerous transnational actors have contributed to the rapid spread of quotas, especially following the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Htun and Jones 2002). These include non-governmental organisations (NGOs),

groups formed under the auspices of international institutions, and formal and informal networks of scholars, activists, and politicians, who share information across national borders enabling campaigns to learn new tactics for reform and import strategies from other countries into their own (Krook 2006).

In some cases, international actors play a direct role in pressing for the adoption of quotas for women (Krook *et al.* 2010). In other countries, campaigns develop locally prior to international conferences establishing the legitimacy of quotas as a measure to increase women's representation, as women's groups and transnational NGOs share information on quota strategies across national borders (Lubertino Beltrán 1992; Russell 2005). As a consequence, international events provide leverage to domestic campaigns already in progress, rather than as initial inspirations for these campaigns (Araújo and García Quesada 2006; Bauer and Britton 2006). The states that are most subject to international and transnational influence tend to be post-conflict societies and developing countries (Bauer and Britton 2006; Dahlerup 2006), where outside actors may play a larger role in shaping electoral structures via moral or material pressures.

### **Towards a New Framework of Electoral Reform**

Comparing insights on the adoption of gender quota laws to the literature on electoral change reveals that both literatures address determinants of electoral reform, albeit using different vocabularies and approaches. A shared focus is on the role of parties and political elites, although the quota literature tends to view these actors as only one part of a larger explanation of quota reform. Another point of intersection is interest in historical and political legacies – whether these take the form of events or political values and norms – and their impact on the prospects for, and ultimate shape of, electoral change. Finally, both bodies of research also pay attention to international organisations and transnational trends, although studies of gender quotas are much more explicit in placing these factors at the centre of analysis.

Yet these two literatures do not simply speak to, complement, and nuance one another. Taking the insights of the research on quota adoption seriously requires an expansion – and, to some extent, a fundamental rethinking – of traditional frameworks of determinants of electoral reform. This project builds on – but also goes beyond – the recent innovations outlined above, seeking to expand the range of actors, motivations, strategies, and paths that are considered as part of the 'tool kit' for explaining electoral reform. In terms of *actors*, studies of gender quotas highlight the central role of civil society organisations, which may lobby political elites but also work together with international and transnational actors to press for quota reform. While resonating with Renwick's (2010) attention to changes originating in elite–mass interaction, as well as established via referendum,

gender quota scholars put a much stronger emphasis on the masses and the role of social movement organising.

In contrast, there is shared interest among both sets of researchers in terms of the importance of political elites. Gender quotas are indeed more likely to be adopted when they fit into parties' vote-seeking strategies to win female votes, exploit the gender gap in voting behaviour, claim credit with female constituents, and appear 'women-friendly'. Importantly, however, these are seldom strategies that stem from parties and elected officials themselves. Rather, they are generally a reaction to pressures from women's organisations, both inside and outside the party. Moreover, there are some cases where parties play little or no role in quota reform, as in countries where the head of state introduces gender quotas by decree, or alternatively, outside powers – whether colonial regimes or international organisations – impose quotas unilaterally (Krook 2006, 2009).

Taken together, these trends suggest that a distinction should be made between electoral reform that is incited by actors in government possessing the political power to enforce reform, especially political parties, on the one hand, and pursued and lobbied for by actors outside government lacking the political power to change the electoral system on their own, like civil society organisations, international and transnational organisations, and women's organisations inside parties, on the other. Stated slightly differently, a dialogue across these literatures indicates that parties are not the only 'stakeholders' with an interest in the design of electoral institutions. As such, any study focused solely on the incentives of political elites is likely to miss out on a fuller picture of the origins and influences on various types of electoral reform. The axiom that parties are the only relevant participants should be replaced by empirical investigation of who potential stakeholders are, what drives them, and the conditions under which they become involved in pressing for electoral change.

Turning to *motivations*, research on gender quotas suggests a need to move beyond strategic, vote-seeking interests as a primary incentive to consider the role of values and – perhaps more strikingly – the importance of group interests in mobilising for electoral change. The leading motivation for quota reform on the part of women's organisations is largely a principled one, emerging from the belief that increasing the number of women in office is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving fair and just representation. However, their goals may also be utilitarian or strategic, as they often expect that the greater presence of women will lead to increased attention to women's interests in politics.

In this scenario, the group in question cuts across party electorates and ideological cleavages and is engaged in a struggle with parties, governments, presidents, and other actors in order to increase the power of their particular group. Such group interests could be viewed as a form of aggregated or collective self-interest. Nonetheless, they transcend the interests of a particular organisation, such as a political party, to promote the status of

a larger and less structured social group. Attention to a broader range of motivations, consequently, sheds light on the multiple ways in which quotas – and other types of electoral reform – may reach the political agenda.

Related to its attention to a broader range of actors and motivations, literature on gender quotas also expands the range of *strategies* that play a role in the decision-making processes eventually resulting in electoral reform. They include mobilisation by social movements and lobbying and the sharing of ‘best practices’ among international and transnational actors. However, perhaps the main innovation of research on quotas is its attention to discursive struggles as part of the process of electoral reform. This insight is implicit but largely under-developed in accounts put forward by critics of traditional approaches to the study of electoral reform. The latter highlight the importance of values, norms, and ideologies, exploring how divergent notions of the ‘general interest’ are juxtaposed and negotiated against each other among actors in positions of power.

Quota proponents, in contrast, often challenge reigning ideas about ‘fair’, ‘just’, and ‘effective’ government (Dahlerup 2006; Meier 2008), problematising assumptions that ‘general interests’ exist ‘out there’, ready to be brought into the political process. They employ discursive strategies to rethink the scope and content of concepts like ‘democracy’ and ‘representation’. Despite being in relatively less powerful positions, they seek – and sometimes succeed – in making their conceptualisations accepted as a correct reading or extension of the dominant view. Attention to discursive struggles such as these opens up a spectrum of possibilities in terms of *how* actors of various types may initiate and achieve electoral reform, above and beyond negotiations among political elites. It also highlights the potential of discourse to confer new meanings to widely accepted political values.

Expanding the menu of relevant actors, motivations, and strategies involved in processes of electoral reform, in turn, reveals that single explanations are insufficient for capturing the dynamics at work in diverse instances. These variations are most evident when studies of several cases are compared, casting doubt on the power of individual accounts to offer full analytical leverage in explaining puzzles of electoral change. Research on gender quotas is well placed to uncover these multiple *paths to electoral reform*, given that – as this body of work has grown at a rapid rate, mirroring the diffusion of quota policies worldwide – scholars have increasingly sought to situate their analyses of individual countries in relation to other cases. As a result, it provides a greater range of insights than the traditional literature on electoral reform in terms of the variety of forms of campaigns may take, as well as the many contexts in which these campaigns may occur.

There is some attention to causal diversity in the barriers and policy cycle models developed elsewhere in this collection (Norris 2011; Rahat and Hazan 2011), in the sense that both models acknowledge the ongoing

potential for setbacks and unintended consequences. Nonetheless, these contributions still propose a unified framework for theorising broadly similar paths to electoral reform. What the quota literature adds to the conversation is an explicit recognition of the many ways in which quotas may reach the political agenda, whether initiated by civil society, party, state, or international and transnational actors; inspired by strategic, normative, or mixed motivations; and spread via mobilisation, sharing, or discursive innovation. Viewed in relation to the diverse contexts of reform, for example, the shape and content of campaigns appear to vary systematically according to the location of these debates across both time and space.

More specifically, given the importance of diffusion processes (Krook 2006), quota campaigns that unfold at earlier points in time tend to witness a larger role played by civil society and state actors, while discussions at later moments often see greater involvement by international and transnational forces. As a consequence, the balance of normative and pragmatic motivations for reform also tends to differ, given distinct points of reference for framing each set of debates. Along similar lines, it is possible to discern differences across campaigns in countries with varying degrees of power in the international system. In general, countries that are more powerful have greater leeway to decide whether or not to adopt a new global policy innovation. The implication is that national level factors play a larger role when powerful states pass reforms, as compared with less powerful ones, where international and transnational pressures are typically greater. What these trends suggest is the need for greater attention to the potential for equifinality, or the presence of several possible routes to the same outcome (Ragin 2000). Such an approach not only helps reconcile competing explanations, but also highlights the potential for electoral reform to emerge in a variety of different ways.

## Conclusions

Echoing the calls made elsewhere in this special issue to expand the definition and determinants of 'electoral reform', this article examines the adoption of gender quotas to contribute further to these emerging sets of debates. The relatively new and growing literature on these measures offers four broad insights as to how to elaborate the existing 'tool kit' for analysing electoral reform. First, it confers a more prominent role to 'outsider' actors like social movements, whether operating at the national or transnational level. The claim is not that civil society actors *per se* are always a central part of the political process leading to electoral reform; electoral change driven solely by parties and elites is indeed possible. However, the expectation that parties are the principal actors driving electoral reform needs to be abandoned in favour of a more inductive approach that questions who the stakeholders are.

Second, with the move away from parties and elites as the sole actors involved in electoral reform, it becomes necessary to envision motivations other than simply seat maximisation as a driving force behind electoral reform. These may also include more principled reasons for pursuing gender quotas, as well as attempts to further group – as opposed to individual – interests. Third, the analysis highlights the role of new strategies for electoral reform, especially the importance of discursive struggles as an opportunity for civil society actors to shape the outcome of electoral reform. Such debates offer an important critique of widely accepted political values, pressing actors of various kinds to consider alternative political arrangements taken to be in the ‘general interest’. Discourse thus provides a means for electoral reform underpinned by alternative views to gain support. Fourth, research on gender quotas draws attention to the need to consider a variety of tracks to electoral reform, given differences in the configurations of actors, motivations, and strategies present across cases.

This broadened framework provides two types of ‘added value’ when applied as a heuristic tool to study cases of electoral change, whether they involve ‘major’ or ‘non-major’ electoral reforms. First, it enables analysts to detect a wider array of explanatory forces and factors that might be left unexplored when limiting the research to political elites and their motivations and actions. While the importance of expanding this lens in relation to studying ‘major’ reforms has already been noted (Renwick 2010), it may also be the case for other types of ‘non-major’ reform, especially those seeking to expand the inclusiveness of the electoral system. Indeed, questions of ‘inclusion’ create categories like ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, calling attention to interests beyond those of parties and strategies that may be employed by the relatively powerless. The factors introduced in this article may thus go far in helping to explain the establishment of quotas and other mechanisms to enhance the participation of ethnic minorities and young people.

Second, this framework may further our understanding of determinants of electoral reform, in the event that future empirical research shows that different types of electoral reform can be systematically explained by a specific set of ‘tools’ of this ‘tool kit’. More specifically, it is possible that the expanded range of determinants identified here might be useful in accounting for other kinds of electoral change, especially in cases where winning parties pursue electoral reform (speaking to new motivations), and where seemingly unfavourable contexts turn into a window of opportunity (highlighting alternative strategies). It may also be the case, however, that different frameworks are suitable for modelling different types of electoral reform. Those seeking to change the proportionality dimension might be well accounted for by more traditional rational choice approaches. In contrast, those addressing questions of inclusiveness might be better explained by the determinants identified here. In this respect, distinguishing between types of electoral reform (cf. Jacobs and Leyenaar

2011) may be a fruitful starting point for future theorising on electoral reform.

## Notes

1. Excluded from this analysis are gender quotas adopted voluntarily by political parties. While they are a crucial part of the landscape of quota reform, these quotas are not introduced at the system level, but are instead regulated internally by the parties which adopt them. As such, they are not properly considered modifications to the electoral rules.
2. In a limited number of countries, like Bangladesh, the adoption of quotas for women has entailed expanding the number of seats in parliament in order to incorporate the quota without the need to displace male office-holders.

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