

THE IMPACT OF GENDER QUOTAS ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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INTRODUCTION

In many countries, gender quotas have been introduced as a policy tool to increase women's political participation.

Despite the presence of quotas in many countries, their real impact on women's participation is still debated.

The importance of gender quotas lies not only in increasing numerical representation, but also in improving their effective political participation. The purpose of this research is to study how gender quotas influence women's participation in political field.

Although gender quotas are implemented in many countries, women's political role in decision-making processes remains unclear. In this regard, the main research question is: how do gender quotas influence women's political participation in both their representation and political influence?

To achieve this aim, the following objectives are set: to analyze the impact of gender quotas in women's participation in politics, to examine women's role in decision-making processes, to assess the effectiveness of gender quotas in ensuring political participation and to study changes in women's representation in politics. It is hypothesized that gender quotas increase the number of women in politics, but women's actual influence in political decision-making may vary depending on political context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers explain gender quotas as important mechanisms which can increase women's political participation and reduce gender inequality in society. Research by Mona Lena Krook (2006) underlines that gender quotas help women to gain access to power and increase their representation.

According Krook's perception, gender quotas have spread around the world through the impact of international organizations, women's movements, political parties and democratic reforms. Also, she explains that different approaches about political representation affect how quota systems are adopted and implemented in many countries.

Research by Jessica Kim and Kathleen Fallon (2023) focuses on the societal impact of gender quotas and public attitudes about women's role in politics. Using cross-national data from 87 countries, the research highlights that gender quotas increase the visibility of women in political life and may change perceptions about female leadership.

Additionally, research by Pamela Paxton, Melanie Hughes and Matthew Painter (2026) shows that the institutional factors can affect women's political representation. They also analyze the importance of democracy, electoral systems and gender quotas in

order to show how they affect the shaping of women's political participation. Researchers use cross-national data from 110 countries to analyze that proportional representation systems and strong institutional structures can create opportunities for women in political life. They show gender quotas as institutional mechanisms that help women to achieve political positions.

Moreover, research by Joni Lovenduski and Judith Squires (2009) examines that the arguments about quota reforms are shaped by different perceptions about equality, representation and political identity. Their research identifies several models of citizenship and explains how these models can affect the adoption and implementation of gender quotas in many political systems.

Although articles analyze the role of gender quotas in increasing women's political representation, several limitations remain underexplored. Firstly, researches focus mainly on the increase of women's number in political institutions, but they do not analyze the influence of women in political decision-making processes. Secondly, the effectiveness of gender quotas in cultural, political and economic contexts is not fully explained. For example, although gender quotas are introduced in many countries, women continue to face barriers in political systems. Additionally, some studies highlight the implementation and adoption of gender quotas rather than their political and societal results in the long term. Therefore, future researchers should examine the real influence of gender quotas, their effectiveness and how gender quotas function in different political systems.

THEORY

This study is grounded in several sociological and political theories that explain the association between gender quotas and women's political participation. These theories are liberal feminism, descriptive and substantive representation theory, institutionalism and feminist critical theory. These concepts provide information about how gender quotas function and what effects they produce in political systems.

One of the main theoretical foundations is liberal feminism. This theory emphasizes individual rights, the equality of opportunities and equal access to political participation. From this perspective, women's underrepresentation in politics is not about individual ability, it is seen as a violation of democratic equality. According to this approach, all people should be equal in political participation regardless of their gender. However, discrimination, traditional gender roles and unequal access to political systems limit women's opportunities. Therefore, gender quotas can work as a mechanism that ensure equal chances in political participation. In this theory, gender quotas are viewed as a tool to achieve fair competition in political life. This theoretical approach is connected to the arguments presented by Mona Lena Krook. Her research explains that gender quotas are introduced to reduce gender inequality and to help women gain equal opportunities in political representation.

Representation theory also plays a central role in this study. This theory distinguishes between descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation focuses on increasing the number of women in politics, while

substantive representation investigates whether women influence political decision-making processes and political outcomes. At present gender quotas aim to improve descriptive representation by increasing the number of women in parliaments and decision-making bodies. But, women's effect on substantive representation still remains complex. This theory is important because it helps not only to increase the number of women, but also to analyze their political influence. Krook and Paxton mention that gender quotas help to increase women's descriptive representation in political institutions. However, numerical growth does not guarantee women's real influence in political decisions.

Additionally, the research incorporates the theory of institutionalism. This theory examines how formal political rules, structures and institutions affect political actions and outcomes. According to this theory, political institutions are not neutral, they can influence who access to power. In many political systems, traditional institutions prefer men through party structures and candidate selection processes. From this perspective, gender quotas are introduced as a formal institutional reform that changes these structures. Also, institutionalism defines that the effectiveness of gender quotas depends on how they are implemented within political contexts. Paxton, Hughes and Painter state that electoral systems and democratic institutions affect women's representation. Countries with proportional representation systems achieve better results in women's political participation. Therefore, institutionalism is important, because it helps to explain why gender quotas produce different results across countries.

Moreover, feminist critical theory is main theoretical foundation in this study. It investigates patriarchy and structural inequality in society. It examines that political systems are influenced by male-dominated power structures, that is why it cannot be solved through legal equality. Jessica Kim and Kathleen's approaches are connected to feminist critical theory.

Their research shows that gender quotas can change societal attitudes toward women's leadership and they may reduce traditional gender stereotypes. They argue that the visibility of women in political life is not enough to eliminate inequalities which are shaped over many years. Therefore, this theory helps to analyze structural and cultural barriers that women still continue to face in political participation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research uses a qualitative dominant comparative method to examine the role of gender quotas in women's political participation. The main purpose of this research is to analyze not only whether gender quotas increase women's numerical representation, but also their real impact on decision-making processes. As gender quotas function differently across political systems and societies, a comparative approach is considered the most appropriate method to explain these differences.

This research is based on qualitative approach supported by comparative analysis. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand not only statistic data, but also deep political and social processes behind gender quotas. This approach is especially

beneficial for exploring women's political impact, institutional barriers and their role in decision-making processes behind gender. Moreover, the research includes limited quantitative analysis, because it helps to measure changes in women's participation across countries. For instance, women's percentage in parliament before and after quota implementation provide clear evidences about quota's effectiveness.

The primary method used in this study is comparative case study analysis. A comparative method is the most appropriate, because countries have implemented gender quotas differently relying on political institutions, selection systems, cultural traditions and democratic development. By comparing different conditions, the research identifies factors that affect successful and unsuccessful implementation of gender quotas.

The research compares countries that have strong quota systems such as Mexico and Rwanda, with countries that have voluntary party quotas or no quotas at all. Rwanda is considered the most successful country, because women hold a very high percentage of parliamentary seats after implementation of constitutional quotas. On the other hand, women's political participation slowly develops in many countries that have no quota system. This comparison helps to understand how institutional structures affect political outcomes.

The research is based on secondary data collection. Primary surveys and interviews were not conducted. Instead of this, the study entirely relies on academic literature, international reports and statistical data related to gender quotas and women's participation in politics. The main sources of information are based on the reports which are gathered from international organizations such as United Nations, UN Women and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), scientific journals and comparative-political studies. Academic works by Mona Krook, Pamela Paxton, Melanie Hughes, Joni Lovenduski and others are used throughout the research, because these materials provide theoretical and empirical perceptions about gender quotas and their real roles. Using secondary data allows researcher to analyze the political systems of different countries in a short time. It also increases the reliability of this study because the data comes from academic and institutional sources.

The study includes qualitative analysis with quantitative evidences. Qualitative analysis is the most important because the research focuses on political structures, institutions, social norms and gender relations. Also, quantitative data such as women's representation percentages in parliament and global statistics in their political participation are used to enhance the arguments and support empirical analysis.

ANALYSIS

The analysis of this study shows that gender quotas are considered the most important political mechanism around the world. Over the last decades, many countries have introduced gender quota systems as a tool that reduces gender inequality in democratic reforms and political institutions. However, the results of this research demonstrate that gender quotas' influence is complex and manifold. While quotas usually success in terms of increasing women's numerical representations, their

effectiveness in ensuring women's real impact is related to political, institutional, cultural and social factors.

One of the main findings of the research is that gender quotas have increased women's descriptive representation in politics. Descriptive representation means the numerical presence of women's woman in parliaments, cabinets and local governments. Before the implementation of quota systems, democratic development and economic modernization in many countries, women were underrepresented in politics. Traditional political systems have historically supported men's political participation because political institutions and parties are mostly controlled by men.

The introduction of gender quotas has created institutional mechanisms that directly resisted these inequalities. Gender quotas increased women's access to politics by requiring political parties or governments to include women in candidate lists and demanding seats for female representatives. This finding strongly supports the arguments presented by Mona Lena Krook, because she explains that gender quotas work as a mechanism that helps to reduce historical discrimination and exclusion in political systems.

The impact of quotas on women's representation is visible in countries that gender quotas are legally enforced. For example, Rwanda represents one of the main examples of quota effectiveness. After the 1994 genocide, Rwanda have introduced modern quota system. In these days, Rwanda has one of the highest levels of female representation in the world that women occupy more than 60% of parliamentary seats.³³ This major growth demonstrates that institutional reforms can quickly change political representation when quotas are effectively implemented and supported by political systems.

Similarly, Mexico has also seen a big increase in women's political representation after introducing gender parity reforms. Electoral laws that require political parties to nominate an equal number of female and male candidates have significantly increased women's presence in national political institutions. Mexico's experience shows that strong legal enforcement is important for the success of gender quotas. Without enforcement, political parties may try to bypass the rules by manipulating where candidates are placed on the list.

The analysis also confirms the arguments by Pamela Paxton, Melanie Hughes and Matthew Painter. They mention the importance of electoral system in shaping women's political representation. Their research illustrates that proportional representation systems bring better results rather than majoritarian representation systems. This research also supports this finding because gender quotas effectively function in proportional representation systems where political parties present candidates lists. In contrast, majoritarian electoral systems create additional barriers for women, because political competition is individualized and political parties' control over candidate selection is weaker. As a result, quotas in proportional systems increases women's

³³ Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2026. "Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments." Parline: Global Data on National Parliaments. ipu.org.

representation rather than quotas which are implemented in winner-take-all electoral systems.

However, the results of this study show that a numerical increase in women's representation does not guarantee real political influence. Although quotas increase the number of women in politics, the influence of women in decision-making processes, policymaking and governance often remains limited. This finding directly supports the hypothesis of this research, which argues that gender quotas only increase women's representation, while women's real influence may vary depending on political contexts.

Representation theory is useful for understanding the main difference between descriptive and substantive representation. While descriptive representation focuses on numerical inclusion, substantive examines a woman's actual role in legislation and political representation. The analysis illustrates that women who access to power through gender quota system continue to face structural and institutional barriers. In dominated political environments, female politicians may be excluded from important decision-making networks, leadership positions, and parliaments. As a result, even though women have formal political positions, they do not possess equal political power.

This issue is visible in political systems where patriarchal norms remain deeply within society. Feminist critical theory helps to explain this contradiction. According to feminist critical approach, political institutions are shaped by patriarchal power structures and it is impossible to transform it through legal reforms. Therefore, while quotas enhance formal representation, they cannot eliminate cultural stereotypes, gender discrimination or unequal government relations in political systems. For example, in many countries, women who are elected through gender quotas are assigned to "soft policy" areas such as education, health or social welfare, while men are still dominated in finance, defense, security, or economic policy systems. Therefore, the presence of women in political institutions does not always mean equal participation in all areas of governance.

The analysis shows that the effectiveness of gender quotas is related to institutional structure and implementation mechanism. Some quota systems are legally and strictly enforced, while others are voluntary party initiatives with weak monitoring mechanisms. Therefore, not all quota systems bring similar results. Reserved seat quotas produce the fastest result, because they guarantee the percentage of parliamentary seats for women. Rwanda is the clearest example of this model. Also, in Mexico, Argentina and some European countries, legislated candidate quotas tend to produce strong outcomes.³⁴ In contrast, voluntary party quotas bring inconsistent results, because their effectiveness depends on political parties. While some political parties support gender equality, others adopt quotas symbolically without changing recruitment practices. As a result, voluntary quotas increase women's participation in some parties, while others have minimal influence.

³⁴ International IDEA. 2024. "Gender Quotas Database." International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. [idea.int](https://www.idea.int/gender-quotas-database).

These findings support the theory of institutionalism. According to the theory, political outcomes are established by institutional rules and structures. Institutionalism explains why countries with similar quota percentages may result very different outcomes depending on political culture, electoral systems, and enforcement mechanisms. The analysis also reveals that political culture plays an important role to determine the effectiveness of quotas. In societies with gender norms, gender quotas are accepted as a legal democratic reform. However, in conservative societies, quotas may face resistance from political elites and religious institutions.

Jessica Kim and Kathleen Fallon mention that quotas can change public attitudes in society by increasing the visibility of women in leadership positions. The results of research also support this argument: the increase of women's representation helps to changing societal perceptions about women's political capabilities. In this sense, quotas contribute to long-term cultural transformation by normalizing women's leadership in politics.

Nevertheless, the analysis shows that a symbolic visibility is not enough to achieve political equality. In some situations, quotas can cause to create tokenism rather than substantive empowerment. Tokenism occurs when women gain political representation, but they are excluded from decision-making processes. This problem is common in semi-authoritarian political systems, because political participation is strongly controlled. Therefore, numerical increases in women's representation should not always lead to gender equality. Another important finding of this research shows that international organizations and transnational norms play an important role in the spread of gender quotas. Mona Lena Krook states that international institutions, women's movements, and global norms contributed to the diffusion of quotas. The results of this research also support this argument. International conferences, treaties and development programs encouraged governments to adopt quota reforms in order to support the statistics of gender equality and democratic legitimacy.

The Beijing Platform for Action adopted in 1995 affected in developing women's political representation. After this conference, many governments introduced quota reforms as a part of international commitments to gender equality. It shows that global norms and international pressure can affect domestic political reforms. However, the analysis shows that the adoption of quotas does not always guarantee gender equality. In some conditions, governments may introduce quotas for symbolic or strategic reasons. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union, more than 130 countries have implemented different forms of gender quota.³⁵ However, the level of women's actual political influence differs across the political systems. It reveals that the formal adoption of quotas doesn't ensure real gender equality. Therefore, the presence of quota is not enough, implementation mechanisms are important.

Research by United Nations Women shows that countries which implement strong enforcement mechanisms and penalties for non-compliance achieve good results in

³⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2019. "New IPU Report Shows Well-Designed Quotas Lead to Significantly More Women MPs." Inter-Parliamentary Union. ipu.org.

terms of women's representation. The findings of the study also show that women's political participation is determined through broader social economic conditions. Countries with higher levels of female education and labor force participation show stronger representation systems because women have greater social and economic resources for their political engagement. For example, Nordic countries such as Sweden, Norway and Finland always rank the highest in female representation with occupying 45-47% of parliamentary seats.³⁶ In countries with poverty, limited education opportunities and traditional gender roles, reduce the political participation of women regardless of quota policies. This finding indicates that quota may open institutional doors for women, but political equality requires social, economic and cultural changes.

The analysis also shows that female politicians are not a unique group with identical interests and political priorities. Female politicians may vary through ideology, class, religion and ethnicity. Therefore, the increase of women's representation does not guarantee support their policies. While some female politicians support gender equality, others may show party loyalty. That is why, the findings indicate that quotas can strengthen democratic legitimacy by implementing representation in political systems. While women establish about half of the global population, their underrepresentation is considered against the democratic principles of equality. According to global statistics, women occupy about 27,5 % of parliamentary seats.³⁷ It shows that gender equality still remains as an important problem.

Finally, the results of this research strongly support the hypotheses presented in the introduction. Gender quotas increase women's numerical representation and improve descriptive representation in many political systems. However, women's actual political influence may vary depending on the democratic development, institutional effectiveness, political parties and political culture. Therefore, gender quotas should not be viewed as a main solution for this problem. Instead, they work as institutional tool that can create opportunities for political inclusion, while structural inequalities continue to influence political results. Overall, this analysis illustrates that gender quotas have transformed modern political representation by increasing women's visibility in political life. But, the relationship between quotas and political governance still remains complex. Modern political systems recognize the importance of women's political participation, however achieving real political equality in society requires deeper social, cultural and political transformations.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of gender quotas on women's political participation by analyzing descriptive representation and substantive political impact. The results of research demonstrate that gender quotas are effective institutional mechanisms that increase women's numerical representation in politics. Evidence from countries such as Rwanda and Mexico shows that legally enforced quota systems significantly improve the number of women in political institutions, especially in

³⁶ World Economic Forum. 2024. "Global Gender Gap Report 2024." World Economic Forum. [weforum.org](https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2024).

³⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2026. "Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments." Parline: Global Data on National Parliaments. [ipu.org](https://www.ipu.org/parline).

proportional representation systems that have strong enforcement mechanisms. In this regard, the study confirms that gender quotas successfully achieve their main goal of enhancing women's descriptive representation in politics.

However, the results of this study also show that the numerical increase of representation does not always translate into real political influence. Women who access to politics through quota systems face institutional, cultural, structural barriers that limit their actual participation and leadership in decision-making process. In many cases, women are concentrated in less influential areas, while men still continue to control in key political decisions. This demonstrates that descriptive and substantive representations are not equivalent and they should be separated when it comes to assess the effectiveness of gender quotas.

Therefore, the findings strongly support the main hypothesis of this research presented in the introduction. Gender quotas systems increase the number of women in politics, but women's real influence in decision-making processes depends on enforcement mechanisms and political culture. This means that, quotas work as an important mechanism, but they do not guarantee gender equality in political life.

Overall, this study concludes that gender quotas are necessary, but insufficient for ensuring full gender equality in politics. They are considered an important tool for increasing the political visibility of women, but deeper structural changes are still required. Achieving real gender equality depends not only on institutional reforms, but also on long-term reforms in culture, social norms and political transformations.

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