

Judging gender quotas: predictions and results¹

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While electoral gender quotas are rapidly disseminating all over the world, they are also meeting with fierce resistance. A closer look at quota debates reveals that a considerable number of arguments for and against quotas take the form of *predictions* of the impact of quotas. This article identifies a number of key predictions from the quota debate in relation to three dimensions: descriptive representation, substantive representation and symbolic representation. Through examples from the growing quota research, the article discusses how nine selected pairs of predictions have been or could be tested empirically. By this we hope to move the discussion of quotas away from the present deadlock between quota proponents and opponents. A central argument made is that the differences in research results do not only derive from variations between the countries, but also from the use of disparate criteria of evaluation. The article points to the need for clarification and the development of common concepts and criteria.

Introduction

In recent years, electoral gender quotas have become a prominent and popular solution in attempts to remedy women's under-representation worldwide. In half of the countries in the world today, some type of gender quota is in use in public elections (Dahlerup, 2006a; Krook, 2009; www.quotaproject.org). However, in a global perspective, women only constitute 19% of all Members of Parliament (MPs), a slight increase from the 13% 10 years ago (www.ipu.org). While electoral gender quotas constitute one of the most extensive electoral reforms in recent years, they are also meeting with fierce resistance. A closer look at the quota debate reveals that a considerable number of arguments for and against quotas take the form of *predictions* of what the adoption of gender quotas might lead to: for example that quotas will lead to the election of unqualified women, as argued by quota opponents or that quotas will enlarge the pool of potential and qualified candidates for election, as argued by quota proponents. These predictions are not always stringent, and they often contradict each other. Scientific research on the effects of quotas differs with regard to its conclusions as well.

In this article a number of predictions regarding the impact of quotas on three key dimensions of women's representation – descriptive, substantive and symbolic – have been selected in order to move the discussion of the effect of quotas beyond the issue of sheer numbers. The issue of quotas and *descriptive representation* involves questions about the effect of quotas on the number of women elected and the social background of candidates in terms of sex, ethnicity, age, etc. *Substantive representation*, a contested concept, includes the effect of quotas on the performance and effectiveness of women politicians, on agenda building and on policy outcomes. The issue of quotas and *symbolic representation* concerns the impact that quotas may have on the legitimacy of the polity and of voters' conceptions of and contacts with their elected representatives (Celis et al, 2008; cf Pitkin, 1967).

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In this article, a selection of predictions is confronted with examples from current research. The article begins with an overview of the rapid diffusion of gender quotas and the many types of quotas that are currently in use. We then identify key arguments in the quota debate that take the form of predictions with regard to three key dimensions of representation and present them, where possible, in pairs. In the final section, we challenge the predictions with examples from contemporary research on actual experiences with quotas. By scrutinising a number of central predictions in relation to actual experiences, we hope to move the discussion of quotas away from the present deadlock between proponents and opponents of quotas. The ambition is neither to come up with conclusive answers nor to examine all of the works within this rapidly expanding research field. Rather, the main purpose of this article is to discuss how to formulate quota predictions in such a way as to facilitate empirical research on the effects of quotas, especially cross-national, comparative research. A central argument made is that the differences in conclusions do not only derive from variations between the countries selected for research but also from the use of disparate criteria of evaluation.

Electoral gender quotas

During the past two decades, electoral gender quotas have been introduced by law in almost 50 countries. In an additional 50 countries at least one of the political parties represented in parliament makes use of voluntary party quotas (Dahlerup, 2006a; www.quotaproject.org). The rapid diffusion of gender quotas worldwide has been followed by a large number of studies on this topic. To date, most of this research has focused primarily on questions of design, adoption and numerical impact (see Opello, 2006; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009).

In relation to *design*, Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2009) have constructed a taxonomy of quotas, which distinguishes between six different types of electoral gender quotas based on two dimensions. First, quotas vary depending on where they are mandated. Legal quotas are mandated in the constitution and/or electoral law and are, consequently, binding for all political parties. Voluntary party quotas are mandated in the party statutes or party programme and are adopted by individual parties for their own electoral lists. Second, quotas vary depending on what stage in the electoral process they target: the pool of aspirants who are willing to stand for election (for primaries and shortlists), the candidates who are nominated to represent the party and the elected representatives (reserved seats).

With regard to *adoption*, case studies show that several key groups of actors have been vital (Krook, 2009). Studies show that the promotion of quotas is not started until women's groups have identified quotas as a legitimate means (Kittilson, 2006). Other studies show that women's campaigns for quotas tend to succeed when quotas are identified as a strategic benefit among the political elites, when quotas are linked to existing notions of equality and representation, and when quotas are supported by international organisations and transnational networks (Araújo and García, 2006; Bauer and Britton, 2006; Norris, 2007).

Concerning *impact*, research has shown that various types of quotas function differently in several respects (Matland, 2006; Norris, 2007; Bauer, 2008; Krook, 2009). While some countries have experienced big increases following the adoption

of quotas (Bauer and Britton, 2006, Kittilson, 2006), others report on minor changes (Murray, 2004) and even decreases (Htun and Jones, 2002).

Predictions embedded in the quota debate

Accompanying the worldwide introduction of quotas are debates which make predictions – positive and negative – about the outcomes of quotas. Although embedded in national discourses, quota debates are similar around the world. In order to assess competing expectations, nine predictions have been identified from global quota debates (Dahlerup, 2006a; EUPARL, 2008). These predictions relate to the three dimensions of political representation – women’s descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation, see Figure 1.

Figure 1: Nine quota arguments in the form of predictions

Proponents’ predictions (PP)	Opponents’ predictions (OP)
Descriptive representation	
PP1: Quotas will result in and are necessary for a rapid increase in women’s political representation.	OP1: Quotas are unnecessary, since the proportion of female parliamentarians will gradually increase in a natural way.
PP2: There will be a sufficient number of women who are willing to participate in politics, if political parties seriously strive to become more inclusive.	OP2: It will not be possible to find a sufficient number of (qualified) women. Women will not want to be selected because of their sex. Quotas will constitute a glass ceiling for women.
PP3: Quotas will contribute to enlarging the pool of potential candidates and, thus, better use will be made of various and diverse qualifications in society.	OP3: Quotas will result in the nomination and election of unqualified candidates and, consequently, quotas are demeaning to women and undermine the principle of merit.
Substantive representation	
PP4: A critical mass of women will bring a different style and approach to politics.	OP4: Women elected via quotas will only be seen as representatives of the group ‘women’, and their political effectiveness will, consequently, be limited.
PP5: A critical mass of women will be able to introduce new policy concerns onto the political agenda.	OP5: Quotas will contribute to a suspicion that women have been promoted thanks to their sex rather than their talent. Women elected on the basis of quota rules will be stigmatised and consequently ‘quota women’ will not be able to function well as politicians.
PP6: Women will contribute to more gender sensitive legislation and policy outcomes.	OP6: Women elected on the basis of quota rules will tend to be regarded as ‘tokens’ or ‘proxy women’, too dependent on their party or their husbands. They will not be able to represent women and women’s interests – or they have no qualifications of their own.

Symbolic representation	
PP7 Gender will remain one of the most important axes of power in society. Gender quotas are, thus, necessary and essential.	OP7: After gender quotas, other groups will also demand quotas – where does it stop? Volvo owners, left-handed people, redheads!
PP8: Quotas will contribute to the process of democratisation in a country and to the legitimacy of new and established democracies.	OP8: Quotas will result in the ‘balkanisation’ of politics (and sheer interest politics).
PP9: Quotas will contribute to the process of democratisation by opening up the ‘secret garden of nomination’.	OP9: Quotas will only treat the symptoms of women’s under-representation and consequently will only be a symbolic gesture.

In the debate of women’s *descriptive representation*, one major issue is whether intervention is needed at all in order to achieve gender balance in politics, as for instance expressed in the *Beijing platform for action* (UN, 1995), or whether gender balance or at least a substantial increase in women’s political representation will come, although with some timelag as society develops (Karvonen and Selle, 1995). These opposing views are expressed as predictions PP1 and OP1.

For the liberal opponents of gender quotas, the classic issue of merit is of major concern. There is a fear that less qualified people will be elected, since quotas lead to selection based not on merit but solely on gender. Another argument frequently used is that women will not want to be selected due to their sex (OP2–3). The sociologist Claus Offe (2001) argues, although without any empirical evidence, that women do not want to be selected on the basis of quotas. In contrast, quota advocates predict that there will be a sufficient number of qualified women to fill all of the posts (OP2–3), as in the following quotation: ‘Of course women want to be elected on their merits. However, women do have proper qualifications, they have the merits needed. The problem is that they incorporate men’s views on quotas as demeaning’ (former female MP, Swedish Center Party, cited in Freidenvall, 2006: 244).

Predictions also vary when it comes to the effect of gender quotas on the *substantive representation of women* (PP4–6 and OP4–6). Quota advocates predict, or at least hope, that the increasing number of women in politics, especially if they come to constitute a ‘critical mass’, will bring about change in the male style of politics, will bring women’s issues onto the formal political agenda and will eventually change legislation (PP4–6).

In this discussion of women’s substantive representation, one can identify another group of quota opponents, who could be labelled *feminist opponents*. Even if they share the goal of gender balance in political assemblies and agree with the critique of male dominance in politics, these opponents are concerned about a predicted lack of effectiveness of women politicians elected through quotas, often labelled ‘quota women’. They fear that being elected on the basis of quotas could in fact be counterproductive for women’s empowerment. According to Tripp et al (2006: 124), many African critics of quotas, even among feminists, believe that quotas will lead to tokenism and might become yet another mechanism in the service of patronage politics.

Women’s political representation is increasingly being discussed in terms of *symbolic representation*, that is, of macro issues, such as the development of democracy, the legitimacy of the political system or the voter–representative relationship. PP7–9

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and OP7–9 depict contrasting predictions with regard to the impact of quotas on symbolic representation. The following two quotations show that the connection between the inclusion of women and the legitimacy of democracy is an issue in the context of established democracies and in post-conflict countries. In both cases, the use of quotas is recommended:

We really want to have half of it, that's why we are calling for the zebra (party) list. To us that constitutes justice ... it constitutes legitimacy ... women are the majority in [Namibia] so if women are not involved in decision making then the question of legitimacy comes up.... (SWAPO Women's Council leader Eunice Ipinge, cited in Tripp et al, 2006: 127)

"The current under-representation of women in most elected assemblies in Europe, including in the European Parliament, is a serious democratic deficit threatening the legitimacy of European institutions and political parties." (European Women's Lobby, 2008)

The predictions in Figure 1 illustrate that quotas are thought to have a multitude of effects, both positive and negative, pertaining not only to the number of women elected but also to the impact of women in politics and the relationship between the electorate and its representatives. In the following section, we discuss the extent to which these selected pairs of predictions are empirically testable. On the basis of the mounting research on quotas, we present what is known about the actual effects of electoral gender quotas in contrast to what is predicted. Empirical research on the effects of gender quotas in politics is still unevenly distributed both geographically and thematically. Therefore, studies from a variety of countries that relate to the predictions in Figure 1 have been selected. It is also apparent that, different evaluations of electoral gender quotas are found among researchers, as the next three sections illustrate.

Quotas and women's descriptive representation

Quota advocacy rests on the idea that the introduction of electoral gender quotas can and will increase women's political representation. It may even be expressed in the way that gender quotas are a necessary condition for a rapid increase (PP1). Opponents of gender quotas argue that they are unnecessary and may even be counterproductive (OP1). Opinions also differ as to the possibility of recruiting a sufficient number of (qualified) women (PP2–3 and OP2–3). We now examine how the three first pairs of predictions have been or could be addressed in research on quotas.

Will gender quotas lead to an increase in women's representation?

The predictions PP1 and OP1 illustrate fast-track and incremental-track models, based on two contradictory discourses. The fast-track discourse (PP1) expressed by quota advocates implies that gender balance will not occur by itself and that active measures are needed. The incremental-track discourse (OP1) rests on the

assumption that equality will come about in due time as a country develops and that affirmative action policies such as quotas are unnecessary and 'unnatural' (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2005).

For decades, the Nordic countries and the Netherlands topped the world rank order of women's political representation. Today, however, several other countries have made it to the top of the list: Argentina, Costa Rica, Belgium, Rwanda, South Africa and Spain, all by the use of some type of electoral gender quota (www.quotaproject.org). By 2003, Rwanda had overtaken Sweden as the number one country in the world. With the 2008 election, Rwanda became the first country in the world to have a female majority in parliament, 56.3%, compared with Sweden's 47.3%.

There is general agreement among researchers that a proportional representation (PR) electoral system is more favourable to the representation of women than the single-member constituency system. But there is no agreement on the effects of gender quotas. While some studies find quotas to be one of the key explanatory factors in the variation of women's descriptive representation across states (Tripp and Kang, 2008), other studies find that quotas are not a statistically significant factor (Tremblay, 2007). A European Union study shows little difference between countries with quotas and countries without quotas (EUPARL, 2008: 27). Furthermore, countries such as Denmark and Finland have a high level of women's representation – 37% and 42% respectively – without any type of electoral gender quota.

These results indicate, first, that there are many ways of achieving high representation for women and that the adoption of electoral gender quotas is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for reaching over 30% of women in parliament. Second, large-scale analyses comparing women's representation in countries with and without electoral gender quotas are meaningless unless consideration is given to the importance of the *quota regime*, defined here as the type of quota in use within a specific electoral system.

It is difficult to substantiate the prediction that equal representation will come in due time (OP1) as this does not specify what a 'natural' development is and what timeframe should be applied. However, there is current research that relates to the prediction by quota proponents (PP1) taking into account the quota regime.

From the growing number of studies of gender quotas we know that the effects of gender quotas on women's political representation varies depending on a number of factors, such as the level of mobilisation behind the demand, political will and type of quota adopted (eg quota size, rules about rank order and sanctions for non-compliance).

In one of the first large-scale analyses of the introduction of quotas in Latin America, Htun and Jones (2002) argue that four conditions need to be met for quotas to be effective: high district magnitude, an electoral system of closed-lists proportional representation, rank order requirements and good-faith compliance on the part of the political parties. On the basis of an examination of quota regulations all over the world, Matland (2006) replaces high district magnitude for high party magnitude, since quotas work best where parties gain many seats in their district (mostly relevant to PR systems). Sanctions for non-compliance have proved to be important, too. The most effective is when an electoral commission has the power to reject candidate lists that do not have the required number or share of women and when this power is used (eg Costa Rica). Financial sanctions have proven less

effective, especially in the case of prosperous political parties (eg France, national election). Legal sanctions for non-compliance are only applicable in countries where quotas are introduced by law.

In general, it is more difficult to construct a quota system that fits a single-member district system, since each party only presents one candidate per district. The two different quota regimes in France may illustrate this. In the case of national elections to the National Assembly in France, the seemingly radical 50-50 quota for all candidate lists (*parité*) resulted in an increase from 10.9 to only 12.3% women in the election in 2002, increasing further to 18.5% in 2007. Research has shown that women candidates were disproportionately placed in unwinnable seats (Murray, 2004). In contrast, in French municipal elections in towns with more than 3,500 inhabitants, which operate under the PR system, the quotas provision in combination with stronger sanctions for non-compliance resulted in an historic leap in women's representation from 25.7 to 47.5 and later to 48.5% (Sineau, 2008).

The *quota size* built into a quota system is of utmost importance. A quota system with a modest target of 10–15% women (Armenia and Niger) does not yield results comparable to those in a quota system that requires 50% women among the candidates with strong rank order rules (Belgium) or requires 30% women among those elected (Rwanda). In Spain, women already had 38% representation when the new equality law of 2007 was adopted. Surprisingly, the law only required a minimum of 40% of each sex and a rank order of at least two of each gender for every five names on a list, and the result was almost no change: 38.3% women in the election of 2008.

In conclusion, the first part of the prediction – that quotas will lead to a greater number of women in politics (PP1) – cannot be supported without further qualifications. However, there are many examples of successful gender quotas that have led to an increase in the number of women nominated and elected (Dahlerup, 2006a; EUPARL, 2008; Krook, 2009).

The second part of the prediction – that gender quotas are necessary for a *rapid increase* – is interesting. If we define a leap in women's representation as an increase of 10 percentage points or more in one election, we find that the Nordic countries, well known for their very high level of women's representation in politics, have never experienced an increase of more than 8–9 percentage points in a single election. Until very recently these states operated predominantly on the basis of an incremental-track model (Freidenvall et al, 2006). However, a number of countries, among them Argentina, Belgium and Costa Rica have experienced a rapid and substantial increase of 10–25 percentage points overnight, which would most certainly not have occurred without the introduction of gender quotas (Araújo and García, 2006; Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008; Meier, 2008). In Rwanda, the election in 2003 resulted in an exceptional leap in women's representation from 25.7 to 48.8 and later to 56.3% in 2008 (Longman, 2006; www.ipu.org).²

The introduction of reserved seats can lead more easily than candidate quotas to historic leaps in women's representation, as in the case of Rwanda. This is provided, of course, that the reservation is not as low as, for instance, Jordan's 6% or Morocco's 9%. The cases of South Africa and Mozambique, which like Rwanda have one dominant party, show that even voluntary party quotas under such conditions may lead to historic leaps in women's representation (Bauer, 2008).

Will there be a sufficient number of women candidates?

A common argument among quota opponents is that it will not be possible to find a sufficient number of (qualified) women (OP2–3). The premise of this argument is that increasing women's political representation must take time and that the political parties, by forcing developments too much, will risk having unqualified and less committed politicians elected. Furthermore, it is argued that women do not want to be nominated on the basis of their gender. In contrast, the quota advocates argue that there are a sufficient number of women candidates, provided the political parties seriously look for them and open up to women (PP2–3). These predictions can be tested by studying the nomination process, an often non-transparent process.

Most research on quotas focuses on the number of women elected. However, when evaluating the effects of quotas it is essential to analyse changes in the number of women *candidates*. One approach is to look at the actual numbers or percentages of women candidates before and after the introduction of gender quotas, preferably embedded in a longer time series that can reveal longitudinal trends. Several studies have shown actual increases in the share of women candidates following the introduction of quotas, in the case of both voluntary candidate quotas and legislated candidate quotas (EUPARL, 2008). In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) had to make some amendments to its candidate lists in the first democratic election of 1994 in order to fulfil the party's 33% quota for women candidates. But by the second election in 1994, 'a sufficient proportion of women had made their way onto the list through the branch nomination system for the party not to have to "engineer" the list' (Tripp et al, 2006: 131).

A second approach is to look at the use of sanctions for non-compliance. In general, there are few records of shortages of female candidates for national legislatures in countries with quotas. Countries with the stiffest sanctions for non-compliance – for example rejection of the list by the electoral authorities as in Costa Rica and France at the local level – do not report on the number of rejections. This is probably because there are few since the political parties in these cases work hard to recruit the necessary number of women. More research is needed on the response of both political parties and electoral authorities to quota reforms.

A third approach is to study the actual nomination processes. In a study of the 2002 nomination process in Sweden, selection committee chairs were asked about the extent to which they found it easy to recruit female candidates from among potential aspirants to fill the party lists (Freidenvall, 2006). A large majority of the respondents (89%) answered that they found it 'easy' or 'very easy' to find female candidates. Compared to figures from a similar survey in 1994, nomination committee chairs were more positive: 89% in 2002 compared with 64% in 1994. This change is explained by an increase in the pool of female aspirants following the Swedish quota debates in the 1990s, prompting more or less all of the political parties to respond to pressure from women's organisations to increase the number of women in politics. It is also explained by the threat by the government to introduce legal quotas if the parties did not increase their share of female candidates. Gender balance was, indeed, identified as an important value but not necessarily as more important than the right of local party organisations to decide over their own lists.

This indicates that the promotion of gender balance requires constant negotiating within non-quota parties (Freidenvall, 2006: 247f).

Whether *candidate quotas* will result in an increase in the percentage of women elected is dependent on many factors, such as whether women are placed at the top of the candidate lists with good chances of election, the size of the party and the effects of preferential voting, when applied. In contrast, under the *reserved seats system* the election of a certain number of women is built into the electoral process itself, and there is no record of seats being left empty. In India, 33% of the seats in the local Panchayats are reserved for women. Within a span of 10 years about six million women have participated as candidates in these elections and most of the Indian states have managed to meet the constitutional target of 33% women (Rai et al, 2006: 233–4).

Will quotas produce a glass ceiling?

Opponents of gender quotas predict that quota provisions will come to constitute a *glass ceiling*, which will tend to prevent women from being nominated and elected beyond the quota requirement (OP2).

The Rwandan case speaks against this prediction. In the 2008 election, women comprised 55.1% of the candidates and 56.3% of those elected to a parliament of only 80 seats. In Rwanda, 24 seats, two per district, are reserved for women to be elected by special electoral colleges. In addition, a relatively large number of women stood as candidates and were elected for the general constituency seats (21 women against 35 men). A closer look at the ‘quota women’ reveals that 113 female candidates competed for the 24 reserved seats in the 2008 election— on average 4.7 candidates per seat (www.ipu.org; see also Hansson, 2007). In Uganda as well, an increasing number of women have run for constituency seats (Tripp et al, 2006: 129). However, in Morocco, women’s organisations complain that the 30 seats reserved for female candidates in nationwide elections leads to women not being nominated to the party lists “now women have had their share”.³ Obviously, longitudinal comparative studies of the effects of reserved seats on the nomination and election of women to general seats are required. One key question is the extent to which women once elected to reserved seats later become candidates for the general district seats.

Will unqualified women get elected?

The third set of quota arguments concerns the background characteristics of representatives. A common argument put forward (PP3) is that quotas will increase the size of the pool of potential candidates and that better use will be made of diverse qualifications in society. Multicultural theorists argue that, as with women, special measures for group representation should be granted to ethnic and racial minority groups, sexual minorities, disabled and disadvantaged people, as a response to oppression or systematic disadvantage that they have experienced and in order to produce full inclusion of group members in elected bodies (Young, 1990; Kymlicka, 1995). In a similar vein, some scholars stress the importance of studying the intersections of gender, ethnicity and other identity markers and political representation. In the publication *All the women are white and all the blacks are men*,

Hull et al (1982) draw attention to the gendered and racialised invisibility of black women in American politics.

A key concern among quota opponents is that the promotion of candidates based on identities such as sex, ethnicity and age may infringe upon the principle of merit (OP3). This may result in the promotion of less qualified candidates at the expense of more qualified candidates. Thus, competent white, middle-aged men might be 'disfavoured'.

While comprehensive research on the link between gender quotas and ethnic diversity is still largely lacking, a case study from the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia represents an interesting case. Since here many political parties are based on ethnic background, the 30% quotas for women on all candidate lists introduced in 2002 and revised in 2006 require that women are represented within all ethnic party groupings. In the 2002 election the number of women elected almost tripled to 22 women (18.3%), and since then the development has continued upward, leading to 39 women being elected (31.8%). This included eight Albanian female MPs in the most recent election in 2008 (Freidenvall, 2009). Another case study from Macedonia shows that education is particularly important for women in making a political career. In the three elections prior to the introduction of gender quotas, all of the women candidates nominated held a university degree (Ristova, 2003). Ristova concluded that women without a university degree had limited chances of being nominated or elected. Even if men with a lower level of education were nominated to a lesser degree than men with a university degree, men without university education made their ways to elected positions. The study also shows that the same bias exists at the Cabinet level as well: all female members in the government between 1995 and 2003 had a doctoral degree, but this was far from the case among male ministers.

While Ristova's study does not analyse educational status among candidates after the introduction of quotas, the prediction that women have lower qualifications seems less credible in this case. However, predictions such as this should be studied systematically, for instance by comparing the profiles of parliamentarians by age, education, profession and previous political experience. These profiles are usually published on official websites. On the other hand, it could be argued that elected bodies should reflect the people. An elected body with only university professors, upper-class women and other elites in society is usually not a very good reflection of the social composition of the electorate. These studies should also reflect on why only diversity among women, but not among men, is questioned.

Quotas and women's substantive representation

The most conflicting predictions and even research results are found in relation to the issue of women's substantive representation (PP4–6, OP4–6). We argue that the discrepancies in the scientific evaluations of the performance of women politicians in general and of 'quota women' in particular may be an effect of the use of disparate criteria used in these evaluations and reveal the need for theoretical and methodological discussions within this field.

As mentioned previously, the concept of 'women's substantive representation' is ambiguous. Two sets of problems can be identified in this discussion: first, the effect of quotas on *the status and effectiveness* of women politicians once elected,

and second, the effect of quotas on the *political agenda and legislation*.⁴ Further, two contrasting definitions of effectiveness can be identified: Goetz (2003: 29) defines the 'effectiveness' of women politicians as 'the ability to use "voice" to political issues of concern to women'. Alternatively, the effectiveness of women politicians can be defined more broadly as their ability to perform their tasks as elected representatives in the way they themselves want, feminist or non-feminist. Obviously, these two alternative points of departure will lead to different evaluations, since we know that not all female parliamentarians are feminists.

Women politicians face many contradictory expectations. They are accused by liberal opponents of having shortcomings and of only representing women (OP4). Paradoxically, acting on behalf of women is exactly what women's movements want women politicians to do. As the argument goes, women lack representation in politics, lack someone who, in Hanna Pitkin's (1967) terms, will 'act for' women (PP4–6). Women politicians are also accused by feminist quota opponents (OP6) and even by some feminist quota advocates of being too dependent on their political parties. In the following, the predictions and research results concerning substantive representation will be discussed.

Will quota women change the style, agenda and outcome of politics?

In the quota debate, the link between women's presence in politics and their political influence is made through the critical mass assumption: that it takes a certain number of women to change the style of politics, the political agenda and the policy outcomes (PP4–6). Even if researchers have pointed to the importance of *critical acts* (Dahlerup, 1988) and *critical actors* (Childs and Krook, 2006) rather than critical mass, these assumptions are often heard in the quota debate and, consequently, 30% has become the most common quota percentage (Dahlerup, 2006b).

To study the attitudes as well as parliamentary actions and contacts between MPs and women's organisations, surveys among female and male politicians are a commonly used approach. This type of research usually concludes that there is a link between the sex of MPs and the extent to which they are engaged in women's issues, even if party affiliation is important as well (see Sawer et al, 2006; Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008; Wängnerud, 2009). Here, only evaluations of the effects of being elected in a system based on gender quotas are discussed, not the effects of women in politics in general – two different aspects that are often confused.

For obvious reasons, there is a growing interest in studying the impact of the large influx of women in the Rwanda Parliament: it is one of the smallest parliaments in the world but has the world's highest representation of women; and it is a country that is not fully democratised. A 2004 survey of politicians elected to the Rwanda Parliament showed that both men and women politicians agreed that women's priorities were more likely to include education, health, children, basic needs and social issues (Powley, 2008). Furthermore, with regard to policy outcomes, new laws have been passed on women's and girls' rights to inherited land, on the protection of children and on violence against women. In these cases, female MPs in Rwanda have been proactive (Bauer, 2008).

However, the Rwandan case illustrates how complex the question of the effects of quotas is. Research indicates that all the female MPs worked together for these

reforms in the Forum for Rwandan Women Parliamentarians (FFRP) irrespective of their electoral base. According to Powley's (2008: 5) research, 'female parliamentarians in Rwanda are seen by colleagues as the "natural" guardians of children's rights because of their experience as mothers. They have used this presumed moral authority to mobilize support for children's protection'. But Delvin and Elgie (2008) point out that gender issues seem to have been established as part of the agenda prior to the increase in the number of women and point to the dynamic process of engendering politics in Rwanda after the genocide. Moreover, Powley (2008: 18) concludes, perhaps surprisingly, that 'their presence has yet to transform society' as there is the huge gap between legislation and implementation in Rwanda. This is, of course, crucial but something that is a problem for all legislation in Rwanda. In general, we cannot judge women politicians solely on their capacity to radically transform society as this is a goal many of them may not even share.

Will quota women be less effective because of stigmatisation?

It is often argued by quota opponents that women elected on gender quotas are more often than other women MPs subject to stigmatisation, which makes it difficult for them to function as politicians (OP5). We argue that in most cases the argument is meaningless. Unless there has been a public debate over moving specific candidates up or down on a list, the voters and even colleagues in political assemblies are usually unaware of the details of the nomination process in local party organisations.

A candidate quota regulation requiring, for instance, no less than 30 or 40% of candidates to be women or from either sex does not single out individual women as 'quota women'. The use of the 'zipper system' with 50% male and 50% female candidates in the Swedish Social Democratic Party entails that all of the candidates, not anyone in particular, are nominated on the basis of quotas. Consequently, in the Scandinavian countries women politicians are not labelled 'quota women'. In contrast, Francheschet and Piscopo (2008) find a negative labelling effect of 'quota women' in the Argentinean context, which especially hits younger women and political newcomers. It is possible that such negative labelling is more likely in the case of a fast-track increase in the share of women politicians in contrast to the gradual increases in the Scandinavian countries. The *reserved seat system* presents a unique opportunity to focus on predictions concerning women MPs' stigmatisation (OP4-6). We can easily identify women who are elected to reserved seats in contrast to candidate quota systems.

The fast-track policy of Rwanda shows that stigmatisation is not an inevitable effect of a sudden rise in women's representation, since no stigmatisation has been demonstrated by the research on women in Rwandan politics. Even the Speaker of the House was herself elected to a reserved seat (Hansson, 2007; Schwartz, 2004; Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Powley, 2008). Research thus far on the issue of the stigmatisation of quota politicians has shown that most cases of stigmatisation seem to occur when only a few women are elected and mostly in countries characterised by a general hostility towards women politicians (Abou-Zeid, 2006). The very design of quota regulations may, however, influence the status of women politicians. If a quota system is designed in such a way that 'quota women' do not have a constituency of their own, their status and room for manoeuvre may diminish (Frankl, 2004).

Stigmatisation should be reserved for those cases where it becomes almost impossible for women politicians to perform their task. Such stigmatisation is constructed within a complex constellation of many factors. For empirical testing, analysis of media coverage, interviews with women politicians and their colleagues in countries or parties operating under quota systems as well as surveys among voters would seem to be relevant methods. Comparison with other groups elected on the basis of quotas could also be relevant.

Will 'quota women' be regarded as 'token women' and 'proxy women'?

Predictions of 'tokenism' (OP6) are especially feared when quotas are introduced as reserved seats. But even candidate quotas sometimes meet with suspicion. In Argentina, the quota law resulted in the negative label '*mujeres de*' – wives or relatives of male party leaders (Franseschet and Piscopo, 2008). In an African context, many opponents of gender quotas, even among feminists, believe that the practice leads to tokenism and can become yet another mechanism in the service of patronage politics. There is a concern that the women elected will not be qualified and will be unable to work the system (Tripp et al, 2006; see also International IDEA, 2004).

In Egypt, where gender quotas were in practice during 1979–84, the women elected on the basis of quotas were heavily criticised, not least by the women's movement (Abou-Zeid, 2006). In India, the many women who have been elected to the local Panchayats since the 33% quota amendment have often been accused of being 'proxy', that is, stand-ins for their husbands or fathers-in-law. Research on the Indian case has revealed such situations, but also examples of women breaking out of this dependency (Rai et al, 2006). In the case of Rwanda, Longman (2006) asks whether the many female politicians represent the achievement of equality or whether they are 'serving an authoritarian state'. This highly relevant issue is also raised in South Asia and in many other parts of the world. Women elected to reserved seats in Uganda and to the 'National List' in Morocco are accused of being too dependent on the party leadership that nominated them.

Yet in every party-controlled political system, all of the candidates are dependent on the party leadership, be it local or national, for their nomination. The political parties are the gatekeepers to political representation – even for men. In most cases, women politicians are no more 'tokens' than their male colleagues, and quotas do not alter this. Within most electoral systems there are many incumbents and many safe seats. Most of these safe seats are occupied by men who owe their positions to the nominating party organisation. 'Pure feminist' women politicians, which feminist movements tend to desire, are rare. When discussing the family ties of the relatively large number of women in top positions in South Asia and South East Asia, parallel studies of the family ties of male politicians would also be relevant.

Quotas and women's symbolic representation

The concept of symbolic representation touches upon crucial aspects of representative democracy: the voters' feelings of being represented, the legitimacy of the political institutions and the importance of inclusion for the functioning of democracy and for processes of democratisation (PP7–9, OP7–9).

Even if most of these questions are far too complex for simple empirical testing, the cases of many post-conflict countries can address some of them. The demand for gender balance in politics, which has often been extended to local offices as well, may be seen as an integral part of the reconciliation process in countries like Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Uganda – and even the highly controversial cases of Afghanistan and Iraq. In most of these cases it is difficult to imagine a democratisation process including ethnicity but not gender, even if that has been the norm in the past. Instead of seeing the demands for gender balance as a further ‘balkanisation’, another example of interest group claims (OP9), engendering, even if only symbolic, was in most cases an integral part of reconciliation. The active involvement of women’s groups across ethnic lines may have been positive for the process – supported by the international community, the international feminist movement and UN Resolution 1325. The new discourse of inclusion points to the importance of the integration of women for the legitimacy of political institutions and the process of democratisation. Kayumba (2010:190) argues that in Rwanda the dominant political elite, in trying to get away from the Tutsi–Hutu politicised differences, saw gender equality as ‘the appropriate and unthreatening identity to nation-building’.

The study of symbolic representation can be operationalised through an assessment of contacts between female MPs and women’s organisations. Case studies on Rwanda show that women MPs appear to have more frequent contacts with women’s organisations than their male colleagues and ‘women elected on quota are vaguely more enthusiastic toward representing women’s interests than their female colleagues elected on party lists’ (Schwartz, 2004: 49). Comparative studies on these types of contacts should be a welcome contribution to research.

It is also important to consider the cross-cutting identities that women and men have and the intersections of gender, age, ethnic background and so on when assessing women’s symbolic representation. In general, the two dimensions – gender and ethnicity – are not very well connected in the public debate and in quota legislation (Htun, 2004; EUROPARL, 2008).

It has been argued that gender quotas will lead to endless demands for quotas for other groups as well (OP7). We have seen that women’s under-representation has more recently become a part of the public agenda in very many countries and many international declarations also reflect this concern. The under-representation of minority groups and immigrants is slowly reaching public awareness as well, even if minority quotas are rare (Htun, 2004; Freidenvall, 2009; Krook, 2009). However, the prospect of quotas for redheads or for left-handed people is not a serious likelihood.

There is a claim that quotas are only treating the symptoms of women’s under-representation and, consequently, will only be a symbolic gesture (OP9). While most gender quota advocates realise that quotas do not solve all gender-related problems in the world, by breaking down barriers that prevent women from having an equal share of political positions, gender quota provisions may in themselves create a new reality by ensuring a greater number of women in political positions. Moreover, if male homosocial recruitment is diagnosed as one of the main factors behind women’s under-representation, then forcing the political parties to recruit more women is in fact targeting one of the major reasons for the exclusion of women.

In order to study the relationship between gender quotas and the symbolic representation of women, public opinion on gender quotas and their effects could be investigated, preferably by collecting data on views on gender and gender quotas among members of the general public, parties, politicians etc. and comparing shifting views over time and across groups. This exercise could be undertaken in several ways, such as through analyses of media debates on quotas over time and through focus groups, including women, men, majority and minority groups and various age cohorts. Expanding discourse analyses into cross-national and longitudinal analyses could also contribute to our understanding of changes in women's symbolic representation.

Conclusion

Despite the prevalence of predictions in quota debates, research has not yet focused systematically on their empirical validity. In this article, competing predictions regarding the impact of gender quotas on three dimensions of representation have been identified and scrutinised to ascertain the extent to which they can be substantiated in empirical research.

The main conclusions of this article are that many predictions are in need of reformulation and clarification in order to be addressed in empirical research. In relation to descriptive representation it is argued that the numerical effects of candidate quotas are dependent on the combined effects of a number of factors: the design of the quota system and its compatibility with the electoral system (the quota regime), district and party magnitudes, rules regarding rank order and, of course, good-faith compliance on the part of the political parties. When candidate quotas have been introduced by law, legal sanctions for non-compliance have proved important, the most effective being the power of electoral authorities to reject lists with too few women and their willingness to use that power. The outcome of reserved seat quotas obviously depends on the level of quota requirements as well as the opportunity for women to be elected to the non-reserved seats.

As for substantive representation, there are many relevant themes, including the predictions that a certain number or percentage of women is necessary for the promotion of gender-sensitive reforms and that 'quota women' promote, propose and vote for gender-sensitive reforms. However, quite disparate evaluation criteria seem to be in use when the performance of women politicians is discussed, even among researchers. Consequently, we find an urgent need for clarification and the development of common concepts and criteria. That a specific group of 'quota women' can be distinguished from other elected women must be rejected in systems other than the reserved seat system and, maybe, in some cases of historical leaps in women's representation because of quotas.

While some of the predictions have been shown to be dubious, others are clearly in need of more research, especially those concerning quotas and symbolic representation. Also, the development of indicators for the study of the impact of gender quotas is required. To this end, longitudinal in-depth studies as well as studies on a large number of cross-national and cross-party cases with similar or different quota regimes are suggested. Perhaps systematic research on the impact of gender quotas can move the repetitive debate for and against quotas a slight step forward.

Notes

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²If we move from the country level to the level of political parties, rapid leaps and also large decreases in women's representation are more frequent.

³Personal communication from the leaders of Union de l'Action Féminine, a leading Centre-Left women's organisation in Morocco during the nomination period running up to the 2007 election, in which only four women were elected besides the 30 women elected on the national list for women candidates only.

⁴Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) make the distinction between representation as a *process* (changing the agenda) and representation as an *outcome* (changing legislation). They conclude that quota regulations in Argentina resulted in an increase in women-friendly policy proposals, but not in actual policy changes.

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Stockholm University, International IDEA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union: www.quotaproject.org

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