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The Dynamic Relationship between Gender Quotas and Political Institutions

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Scholars of gender quotas have paid increasing attention to the ways in which formal and informal institutions shape the outcome of this electoral reform (Hassim 2009; Jones 2009; Zetterberg 2009). Quotas, however, are not only affected by the institutional context in which they are adopted; their transformative nature also implies that they (should) contribute to changing political institutions. This dynamic relationship has consequences for the analysis of key institutions within representative democracy: Electoral quotas may, in some cases, challenge well-defined analytical frameworks and established ways to study political life. This essay aims to demonstrate theoretically how quota adoption exerts an impact on established political structures and thus challenges existing understandings within subfields of comparative politics. More specifically, I bring up two institutions within representative democracy that are likely to be affected by quotas: the political recruitment process and intraparty politics within legislative institutions.

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Party Gatekeepers and the Bureaucratization of Candidate Selection Processes

A frequently presented argument within quota debates is that quotas should be temporary measures, to be removed as soon as the political playing field between men and women has been leveled (Rahat 2009). Such an ambition, however, presupposes that quota adoption eventually brings about a break with the structures that brought women out of power in the first place. In order for quotas to eventually be unnecessary, they should contribute to making political recruitment processes more gender equal. One way to do that is to increase the demand of female candidates.

Here, I suggest two ways in which this may be achieved. First, gender quotas do sometimes challenge accustomed attitudes and behavior among party gatekeepers. This has repercussions on the ways in which we study political parties and processes of political recruitment. For instance, Bhavnani (2009) shows that a particular system of reserved seats breaks with men's incumbency advantage and creates a new set of incumbents: In India, where a number of districts in local elections are randomly designated to only female contestants, women's probability to win an open seat is significantly greater if the district was previously designated to only female contestants. Thus, quotas appear to alter the mindset of male party gatekeepers by revising their strategic calculations regarding who is a strong candidate and what criteria an attractive candidate should meet.

Second, quotas may, under certain conditions, alter the ways in which political parties select their candidates (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2011). Although quotas are mainly designed to have an impact on the *result* of the selection process, they may sometimes transform established procedures for selecting candidates by increasing the rule-boundedness, or bureaucratization (or formalization or institutionalization), of the candidate selection process.

Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2011) argue that such a transformation is most likely for candidate quotas, both voluntary party quotas and mandated legislative quotas. Whereas reserved seats are commonly add-on positions that do not interfere with the regular selection process, quotas targeting candidates put certain constraints on party gatekeepers in the nomination process. When implemented, these quotas require party gatekeepers to identify, screen, and recruit potential female candidates. In doing so, this quota type has the potential to institutionalize deliberative practices within the selection process: Party gatekeepers will—at least in theory—have to discuss and seriously consider female candidates, with all that implies in terms of weighing their merits and competencies. Thus, implementing candidate quotas leaves less room for improvisation in the selection process.

Despite the rapid diffusion of electoral quotas, and despite the ways quotas disrupt established intraparty practices, political party researchers have rarely brought quotas into their analyses. The lack of attention paid to quotas within party research is likely to generate a blurred picture of how institutional frameworks condition the work of political parties. One of the few scholars taking quotas into account is Rahat (2009), who brings up at least one way in which quotas may revise established analytical frameworks within political party research. He suggests that quotas have the potential to increase so-called functional decentralization of candidate selection—that is, a selection mechanism that includes a selectorate of a distinct group in society (women, minorities, etc.) who selects its own delegates. As a consequence, quotas may potentially revise legislators' representative roles: Those elected on quotas may be less loyal to the party and more prone to represent the interests of his or her specific group.

Party Discipline vs. Mandate Effects

An underlying aim with quotas is that they should not only increase the influx of women legislators, but also contribute to changing legislative processes and outcomes (Phillips 1995). It has been suggested that women have different experiences than men. They should, therefore, make a special contribution in politics and push for reforms that benefit women as a group (Schwindt-Bayer 2010). As a consequence, gender quotas have the potential to generate a *mandate effect* in which women elected through a quota mechanism feel obliged to represent women substantively (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008).

The possibility that quotas provide women with an additional mandate has not been highlighted in institutional accounts to legislative behavior. Rather, this literature has mostly focused on the ways in which the electoral system (Carey and Shugart 1995), as well as candidate selection procedures (Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008), shape legislators' behavior. By acknowledging a fundamental dilemma between the collective interest of a given political party (i.e., to push through its political agenda) and an individual politician's personal interest (i.e., to be reelected), scholars suggest that legislators in some institutional contexts will take action that benefits their party; in other situations, they will cultivate a personal vote and thus have other representative orientations (Carey and Shugart 1995; Rahat 2009).

Thus, when scholars attempt to understand legislators' behavior, they suggest that members of parliament (MPs) make a calculus based on institutional incentives. For instance, whenever they operate in a party-centered system, with closed lists and centralized selection procedures, legislators will tend to be loyal to the party: They will give priority to collective party programmatic goals over individual ones (Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). On the other hand, in a more candidate-oriented system, with open lists and a more inclusive selectorate, such

as primary elections, legislators will be more likely to sell an individual position and possibly dissent from the party position in order to secure personal support and name recognition (Proksch and Slapin 2012).

Yet if Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) are correct about mandate effects, then this has repercussions on the ways in which institutions shape legislative behavior: First, the idea of a mandate effect introduces the issue of duty, moving beyond the rationalistic notion that MPs' behavior is predominantly a cost-benefit analysis. The incentives to move beyond a party vote may be related to a perceived obligation to represent female constituents and not necessarily to personal vote seeking. Second, any mandate effect is likely to broaden the representative orientations and potentially bring a larger array of interests onto the legislative arena. As a consequence, when dealing with issues that are relevant to women, female legislators may feel obliged to be responsive to the interests of women rather than to the party; at least in theory, they are ready to dissent from the party position if it collides with women's interests.

I thus suggest that if quotas generate mandate effects, and the feeling of obligation is translated into action, and women's interests are not always identical to party interests, then quota policies are likely to decrease party discipline. In addition to institutions, such as electoral systems and candidate selection systems, quota policies may affect the interplay between MPs and their respective political parties. By not including quotas in their analyses, scholars focusing on legislative behavior overlook the incentives that a new institution is likely to create among an increasingly large group of MPs. As a consequence, the picture of how institutions shape intraparty practices within elected bodies as well as legislator behavior is obscured. Viewed from a different perspective, the tension between mandate effects and party discipline also highlights another potential effect of quotas: the disruption of intraparty dynamics within parliament.

In reality, however, the magnitude of the mandate effect should be likely to vary across context, depending on the electoral system, regime type, the candidate selection system or quota type, among other considerations. To give an example, women directly elected to “women-only” seats or districts should have a larger mandate effect than others (see also Rahat 2009). In addition, and following the political party literature (Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008), it should be easier to transform a mandate effect into action whenever women elected through quotas are selected by a fairly large selectorate, due to smaller personal costs for going against the party line.

Thus, quota policies are likely to interact with other dynamics in the electoral arena, including those that previous research on intraparty politics and legislative behavior has highlighted. Quite obviously, women’s behavior is affected by established intraparty and parliamentary practices. The main point here, however, is that quotas have the potential to disrupt these practices. The reform itself, at least in theory (cf. Cowley and Childs 2003), is likely to provide a push toward more personal vote seeking, a broader representative repertoire, and potentially decreased party cohesion (see also Rahat 2009).

Quotas and Group Representation

In this essay, my ambition has been to demonstrate theoretically that the exclusion of quotas from analyses within subfields of comparative politics inhibits scholars from fully understanding the dynamics of representative processes. Quotas, among other institutional factors, are likely to provide key actors within representative democracy, such as party gatekeepers and MPs, with distinct incentives and opportunities, and they set processes in motion among female as well as male political actors. A key task for future research on party politics or on institutional accounts

to legislative behavior is to disentangle these dynamic and complex processes in order to understand better how quotas challenge basic assumptions and established theories within comparative politics.

Perhaps the main implication of this first theoretical scrutiny is the need for problematizing the concept of representation. Although quotas focus on demographic groups in society, the issue of group representation has been given limited attention in parliamentary literature as well as in political party research (for good exceptions, see Rahat 2009; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). It is, therefore, important to investigate whether quotas increase group thinking in representative democracies. For instance, do quotas increase the use of functional decentralization in candidate selection processes? And to what extent and in which institutional contexts have quota adoptions generated the entry of group delegates into legislative bodies? These are crucial questions to address in order to understand the functioning of representative democracy in the era following the great expansion of electoral quota policies.

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