

The two faces of gender quota: How do gender quota affect female representation?

The effects of electoral systems and gender quotas on female political representation

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ABSTRACT

In the literature it is well established that electoral systems (especially the difference between proportional and majoritarian systems) make a difference for the representation of women. A recently introduced instrument to achieve gender balance in parliaments are gender quotas. This study investigates how quotas affect the proportion of women in parliament in different electoral systems.

We find that whereas quotas do not matter in countries with proportional representation and mixed systems, they increase the representation of women in majoritarian.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a highly salient topic and several countries are discussing how they can promote more equal representation of men and women national legislatures. This is not only desirable since it reflects the democratic principle of equal representation in national legislation (Mainsbridge, 2005), but also because it indicates the status women have in a society and the way of how women's rights are treated. Many states have adopted the

instrument of gender quotas in order to increase the share of women in parliament. At the same time, other factors, such as the electoral system of a country have been found to increase women representation in parliament as well.

In this article we add to the existing literature by investigating the effect of gender quotas by first looking at the independent effects of gender quotas and electoral system. Subsequently we will consider the interaction of both variables and establish whether the effect of quotas is the same or differs in different electoral systems. .

THEORY

Previous findings suggest that proportional systems are effective in promoting gender equality than majoritarian systems (Norris, 1996). Among the explanations for this effect are that, in single-member districts, parties are hesitant to nominate female candidates against male ones, as female candidates are considered more of an electoral risk. In multi-member districts this risk is reduced and parties aim to appeal to the electorate by presenting a

balanced ticket. Our electoral system hypothesis is therefore:

Countries with a mixed electoral or a proportional system have a higher percentage of women in parliament than countries with a majoritarian system.

Gender quotas have led to a large increase in female representation in Latin American (IDEA, 2005). Although in some other countries, this effect was not found, it is generally believed that quotas are considered as an effective means to increasing the share of women in parliament (Dahlerup & Freidenwall, 2006). Hence, our gender quota hypothesis reads as:

Countries with gender quotas have a higher percentage of women in parliament than countries without gender quotas.

In majoritarian systems, the effect of quotas might be weaker as a party might nominate female candidates in electoral districts that are likely to be lost, as the female candidates are still considered a risk. On the other hand, if a quota is present in a proportional representation system, every party has to nominate a certain share of women on their ticket, which ensures that this proportion of women is going to go to parliament. Our interaction hypothesis is therefore:

In majoritan systems, the positive effect of quotas on the percentage of women in parliament is weaker than in countries with a mixed electoral formula or proportional system.

DATA AND OPERATIONALIZATION

To test the three hypotheses formulated in the previous section, we used data from the Quota and ACE Projects. We tested our hypotheses for a sample of well-established democracies,

selecting countries that were classified as “free countries” in the Freedom House Index. Our dependent variable is the percentage of women in the lower house in a bicameral system or the parliament in a unicameral system. .

RESULTS

In our analyses, the electoral system hypothesis was confirmed. Whereas the mean percentage of women in parliament lies at 12.4%, in proportional and mixed systems, it is at 23.1% (Sig.=.001). Hence the electoral system has a significant effect on the percentage of women in parliament.

Concerning the female quota, however, the hypothesis cannot be corroborated. The difference between those countries that have and don not have quotas is not statistically significant (Sig = 0.224). Accordingly, the data do not indicate any effect of quotas on the percentage of women in parliaments.

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<i>Report</i>			
Proportion of women in parliament			
Gender Quota	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
at all			
No quota	16,0743	35	11,57595
Any quota	22,6170	47	10,76210
Total	19,8244	82	11,51633

Finally, the results of testing the interaction hypothesis contradicted our expectations. The effect of any quota is larger and more significant than expected in majoritarian systems while is rather insignificant in non-majoritarian systems. Whereas the hypothesis implied that the effect of quota would be higher in non-majoritarian systems, in fact we find a

reverse effect. Whereas in proportional and mixed systems, only a slight increase of less than 1% on average can be observed, for majoritarian systems the mean percentage almost doubled from 9.9 to 18.6.

Report

Proportion of women in parliament

Electoral System		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Majoritarian	No quota	9.9222	18	7.95306
	Any quota	18.6286	7	6.92717
	Total	12.3600	25	8.52746
Not Majoritarian	No quota	22.5882	17	11.39687
	Any quota	23.3150	40	11.21936
	Total	23.0982	57	11.17524
Total	No quota	16.0743	35	11.57595
	Any quota	22.6170	47	10.76210
	Total	19.8244	82	11.51633

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our research showed that the electoral system hypothesis was confirmed. On average the percentage of women in national parliaments is 4.8 percentage points higher in non-majoritarian systems than in majoritarian systems. The gender quota hypothesis, however, had to be rejected. With regard to the latter hypothesis it seems that legally binding and voluntary gender quotas do not have an effect on female representation in parliaments. This stands in opposition to the claim that is often made that gender quotas are having a positive effect on female representation in parliaments. Unfortunately, this is bad news for those countries that are aiming to increase the percentage of women in their parliaments in the near future, since structural factors (such as the electoral system) are much more difficult to change and influence than establishing a gender quota.

Our results for the interaction hypothesis, however, show that this conclusion might be too pessimistic. Our findings demonstrate that

gender quotas can have an impact in majoritarian systems. This research is especially interesting for countries that are considering a change in their electoral system or are making the transition to a democratic system and have to decide which electoral system suits their circumstances best.

The model presented in this research excludes a number of further factors involved in explaining the variation in percentages of women in parliament across countries. Nonetheless, this research has helped to get a more thorough understanding of the mechanisms that determine the representation of women in parliament. It combines and compares the effect of gender quotas and institutional circumstances and shows that two current recommendations to policy makers are misleading. Not only is the influence of quotas not present when controlled for institutions, also the line of thought presented in the IDEA guide on increasing female representation (2005), which holds that quotas will be less effective under majoritarian systems, could be rejected.

For future research it would be interesting to study the effects of these variables on regional parliaments, as this would allow for a higher number of cases and therefore would make a more parsimonious model possible.

Hopefully, a better understanding of this challenge will lead to policy and structural changes that will improve female representation in national parliaments around the world.

ROLE OF THE STUDENT

This paper is the final result of an academic project on inequality in the B.Sc. programme European Public Administration at the University of Twente. The students wrote this

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