Electoral Gender Quotas and Women’s Rights: A Multidimensional Approach to Representation

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Abstract: The past two decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of countries adopting electoral gender quota policies as a way of rapidly increasing female political representation. This research seeks to provide a framework for understanding why an increased presence of women in political institutions may or may not lead to improved women’s rights. This work argues that while quota policies may increase the number of women in politics, their actual political capacity is often constrained by broader institutional structures. Additionally, the symbolic, role model influence of these women often remains constrained by patriarchal legacies.
Since 1991, more than 118 countries and territories have adopted electoral gender quotas as a way of promoting women’s political participation. Advocates of such policies frequently cite their tremendous positive implications, most notably claiming that placing women in positions of political power creates avenues for them to promote women’s rights, improving the status and conditions of women across society (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; Araujo & Garcia, 2006; Krook, 2006). However, little research has attempted to assess the extent to which this relationship—increased numbers of women elected to political institutions and substantive improvements for women across societies—has materialized when quota policies influence the electoral process. Moreover, the minimal research that has been conducted on this topic has been limited to individual analyses of a single case. This research seeks to build upon previous case studies and provide a more universal framework for answering the following question: why have countries seen varied success in translating the adoption of electoral gender quota policies into improved women’s rights?

Because the central link between electoral processes and societal outcomes is political representation, this paper argues that constraints on political representation explain this variation across countries. Specifically, because representation is a multidimensional concept, understanding constraints on these various dimensions is necessary to understand the role and capacity of women in politics. The framework presented in this research is based on work by Hanna Pitkin who outlines three dimensions of representation in her 1967 book, *The Concept of Representation*. Pitkin discusses descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation. The first section of this paper defines and unpacks the established literature on each of these dimensions from
both a theoretical and empirical standpoint, then briefly outlines the main argument and methodology employed by this research. The remainder of this paper analyzes how the inclusion of gender quotas policies influences how each dimension operates, which, in turn, is key in explaining why women elected to political institutions through quotas have been better able to promote women’s rights in some countries than in others.

Dimensions of Representation

In her seminal 1967 book, Hanna Pitkin outlines the three dimensions of representation. She first defines descriptive representation as dependent upon “the representative’s characteristics, on what [the representative] is or is like, on being something rather than doing something” (Pitkin, 1967: 61). In political terms, descriptive representation considers not what a legislature does, but how it is demographically composed (Pitkin, 1967: 81). Gender quotas, affirmative action policies specifying minimum levels of representation for each sex employed for the election of legislators are a mechanism of directly affecting descriptive representation (Jones, 1998: 4). Moreover, quotas are empirically proven to be extremely effective in increasing descriptive representation, even when controlling for a range of cultural, societal, and institutional factors (Tripp & Kang, 2008; Reynolds, 1999; Kunovich & Paxton, 2005; Paxton, Hughes & Painter, 2010; Yoon, 2004).¹

The next dimension of representation, substantive representation, is defined as “acting for others” and refers to “¹the congruence between representatives’ actions and the interests of the represented” (Pitkin, 1967: 141; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005: 407). Substantive representation is the mechanism through which female presence in
political institutions translates into the promotion of female interests in political outcomes. In her influential book *The Politics of Presence*, Anne Phillips notes that “women occupy a distinct position within society… there are particular needs, interests, and concerns that arise from women’s experiences, and these will be inadequately addressed in a political system that is dominated by men” (Phillips, 1995: 66; Mansbridge, 1999). From a theoretical perspective then, the link between descriptive representation and substantive representation lies in the shared experiences of women and an assumed mandate that women elected to politics will use their political capital to act for their female constituents. This paper labels the influence through which substantive representation affects outcomes legislative influence—influence achieved through promoting policies and legislation that benefit women.

Empirically, scholars have demonstrated the relationship between descriptive and legislative influence within the developed world—particularly in the United States. Women are more likely than their male colleagues to “advocate for women’s interests in committees, speak about women’s issues on the floor, and invoke their authority as women and mothers in committee and floor debate” (Swers, 2013: 38; Rosenthal, 1998; Shogan, 2001; Norton, 1999; Swers, 2002; Dodson, 2006; Pearson & Dancey, 2011).

Additionally, women are more active sponsors and cosponsors of women’s issue legislation, even when accounting for party affiliation, constituency characteristics, and institutional positions (Osborn, 2012; Gerrity, Osborn & Mendez, 2007; Dodson, 2006; Swers, 2002, 2005, 2013; Wolbrecht, 2002; Bratton & Haynie, 1999; Thomas, 1994). To date, the link between descriptive and substantive representation outside of the developed world has been only marginally explored. However, this sparse research suggests that
“the Western-based work has validity in developing world context” (Devlin & Elgie, 2008: 250; Burnet, 2008; Tamale, 1999; Yoon, 2011).

The final dimension of representation described by Pitkin is symbolic representation, which refers to “the symbol’s power to evoke feelings or attitudes” from the represented, by acting as a role model (Pitkin, 1967: 97). In the context of this research, the influence of symbolic representation refers to the “attitudinal and behavioral effects that women’s presence in positions of political power might confer to women citizens” (Lawless, 2004: 81). When elected to political office, an incumbent inherits both a political seat as a legislator and the role of a public figure. This latter role is particularly inflated when females are elected to office because of their traditional status as a minority within the political sphere. Despite the abstract nature of symbolic representation, scholars—again largely looking at the Western world—have empirically confirmed the validity of this mechanism of influence, though most have considered political engagement as the dependent variable, rather than broader shifts in the status of women across society (Atkeson, 2003; Atkeson and Carrillo, 2007; Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001; Koch, 1997; Norris, Lovenduski, & Campbell, 2004; Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006). To summarize, political representation is the link between constituents and elected officials. Descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation, then, guide the engagement between legislators and citizens. To date, too few scholars have attempted to explain how these mechanisms operate outside of the developed world and even fewer when the electoral process is influenced by quota policies. This dearth in scholarly research provides the basis for this paper.
The Main Argument

Again, the central question that this research seeks to address is why countries that have adopted gender quotas as a means of fast-tracking female political participation have seen varied success in promoting the status of women across society. This paper argues that constraints on the three dimensions of representation outlined above are important for explaining where political representation breaks down in certain cases. Specifically, there are three potential reasons why the adoption of gender quota policies, and the subsequent increase in the political representation of women, would fail to lead to the advancement of women’s rights. Moreover, each reason relates to a failure of descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation, respectively: (1) a country’s gender quota does not increase the proportion of women in a political institution enough, (2) institutional constraints prevent women from effectively passing legislation and policies that benefit women, and (3) cultural, societal, or other structural constraints prevent female politicians from wielding their symbolic influence.

This research, first, demonstrates that variation in the proportion of women in politics—descriptive representation—across countries is insufficient to explain why some countries have seen more success in promoting women’s rights than others. In other words, increasing the number of women in politics does not necessarily guarantee greater political representation for women. Thus, the bulk of this research focuses on constraints on legislative and symbolic representation. Constraints on legislative influence largely reflect poorly functioning democratic institutions. For example, in political systems where political power is concentrated within an elite group that is not influenced by the proportion of women in political institutions (i.e., party leaders, executive leaders, etc.),
women in political bodies are unable to establish a distinct legislative agenda promoting women’s rights. Constraints on symbolic influence primarily reflect the failure of women to perceive themselves as autonomous and empowered political decision-makers. Electoral processes that promote the notion that women are elected based on their gender rather than based on their qualifications, for example, can foster the perception within political bodies that female politicians are inherently inferior to their male colleagues. To summarize, the central argument presented by this research is that variation in the success seen by countries in relating gender quotas to improved women’s rights is explained by the failure of descriptive, legislative, and symbolic influence, with particular emphasis on the latter two dimensions.

This study demonstrates the validity of treating these constraints as the key determinants of this relationship through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology. First, to understand the significance of descriptive representation, statistical regression techniques are employed to assess the relationship between the proportion of women in a country’s national parliament and that country’s success in promoting women’s rights, after controlling for a variety of economic, political, and social differences. To operationalize women’s rights—an extremely complex and multidimensional concept—the dependent variable used in this model is infant mortality. While this may not be the most intuitive indicator, social scientists have consistently shown that female empowerment—which incorporates aspects of education, autonomy, and decision-making capacity—is the most crucial determinant for the utilization of prenatal, neonatal, and maternal health services, which are key in explaining the divergence in rates of infant mortality globally (Adhikari & Sawangdee, 2011; Amin et
al., 2010; Celik & Hotchkiss, 2000; Gupta, 1990; Hobcraft et al., 1984; Maitra, 2004).

Scholars have shown that infant mortality is more strongly correlated with women’s rights than with even the ratio of doctors to the population, nutrition levels, and income levels, validating the use of improvements in infant mortality as a proxy for improvements in women’s rights (Caldwell, 1990: 47; Wang, 2014; Hobcraft et al., 1984; Boehmer & Williamson, 1996).

To understand the importance of considering constraints on legislative and symbolic influence, I compare two cases: Argentina and Rwanda. These particular cases provide for a meaningful analysis for a variety of reasons. First, nearly all literature on the substantive effects of gender quota policies focuses on a single case study, or multiple cases taken from the same geographic region. By comparing a Latin American and a Sub-Saharan African country, the external validity of this framework is strengthened, as the legitimacy of arguing that these constraints are key determinants inherits a more universal significance.

Argentina and Rwanda are meaningful case studies as both have attracted significant attention from scholars seeking to understand the effects of women in politics. In 1991, Argentina became the first country to adopt national gender quota legislation. Prior to enacting this law, women accounted for 4.2 percent of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies (Gray, 2003: 61). In the first Chamber elected entirely under the quota law in 1995, however, 25.7 percent of the legislative seats were held by female deputies—the highest percentage of any democratically elected legislature in the Western hemisphere at the time. Additionally, Rwanda, in 2008, made history as the first country to have females occupy a majority of seats in its national legislative chamber. Today, following
its 2013 parliamentary election, women hold 63.8 percent of Rwanda’s parliamentary seats, more than three times the global average (The World Bank, 2015). As apparent havens for female political representation, Argentina and Rwanda have been magnets for qualitative research in this field; thus, the availability of primary source materials, most notably interviews with female parliamentarians themselves, from these cases allows for a more meaningful and in-depth analysis of both the actual and perceived limitations placed on women in office.

In this research, I understand and operationalize constraints on legislative influence through qualitatively evaluating party dynamics, power distribution, and limitations on democratic processes. I assess constraints on symbolic influence through analyzing interviews conducted by scholars with female parliamentarians, male parliamentarians, and non-elite citizens in both Argentina and Rwanda. This research takes from interviews conducted by Jane Jaquette, Susan Francheschet, Jennifer Piscopo, Miguel De Luca, Mark Jones, and Maria Tula in Argentina. This research takes from the interviews of Timothy Longman, Claire Devlin, Robert Elgie, Jennie Burnet, Gretchen Bauer, and Hilde Coffé in Rwanda.

**Descriptive Representation**

The first claim that this research seeks to address is that in countries where gender quotas have not led to improvements in women’s rights, simply not enough women have been elected to political office, reflecting a failure of sufficient descriptive representation. To address this claim, I use an ordinary least squares linear regression modeling a country’s change in infant mortality from 2010-2013 as a function of the proportion of its parliamentary seats held by women in 2010. This follows the intuition
that in countries with a higher proportion of women in politics, the improvement in infant mortality (reflecting an improvement in women’s rights) three years later would be higher than in countries with lower proportions of women in politics. Naturally, a variety of other factors also contribute to explaining variation in infant mortality rates across countries. When choosing control variables, consideration must be given to ensuring that each indicator is broad enough for coverage across countries to prevent selection bias due to case dropping from missing data. The models shown in Appendix C include 174 countries, and a summary of the variables included in the models is provided in Appendix A.

Model 1 in Appendix C shows how the proportion of women in parliament in 2010, GDP per capita, level of democracy, and development status explain variation in changes in infant mortality across countries. The model explains 56.2 percent of the variation, and shows that the proportion of women in parliament is not statistically significant in predicting the change in a nation’s infant mortality rate three years later.

Some scholars have argued that the increased presence of women in a legislative body only becomes meaningful once a critical mass is reached—when women reach a large enough minority to form a collective voice (Childs & Krook, 2006; Bratton, 2005; Yoon, 2011). The critical mass theory has been heavily debated regarding where this threshold lies and whether this threshold exists. However, those arguing in favor of this theory have generally considered the threshold to fall between 30 percent and 50 percent, at which point women are no longer a minority. Models 2 and 3 in Appendix C follow the same methodology as Model 1; however, they operationalize descriptive representation as a binary variable indicating whether or not the 30 percent and 50 percent threshold are
reached rather than as a continuous variable of the proportion itself. In these models too the proportion of women in parliament is not statistically significant in predicting the change in infant mortality, indicating that variation in descriptive representation across countries is not sufficient in explaining why some countries have seen greater success in translating increased female political representation into improved women’s rights. The remainder of this paper analyzes the constraints on substantive and legislative influence that can most meaningfully be understood through comparative case studies rather than through applying quantitative methodology.

**Argentina**

Argentina’s constitution, last modified in 1994, established a federal republic form of government with a separation of the executive, legislative, and judiciary functions. Legislative power at the federal level resides in its National Congress, a bicameral body composed of the Senate and the Chamber of National Deputies, which contain representatives from each province as well as from Buenos Aires. With the exception of the president and vice president, all other elected officials ranging from national legislators to municipal council members are chosen within the boundaries of the country’s 23 provinces and Buenos Aires. Voters select national deputies from closed lists using a proportional representation system with the entire province serving as the constituency. Given the provincial nature of Argentine politics, governors, subnational party leaders, and other provincial political leaders have tremendous influence over the candidate selection process for most offices (Luca, Jones & Tula, 2002).

Gender quotas entered the Argentine electoral system in 1991 under the Ley de Cupos or “Law of Quotas” (Jones, 1996). This law requires (a) that a minimum of 30
percent of the candidates on the closed party lists in all of the country’s 24 multimember electoral districts be women and (b) that these women be placed in electable positions on the party lists (Constitution of Argentina). Compliance with this policy has been strong. In 1990, before the adoption of the quota, the proportion of female deputies was 6.3 percent, while in the next two elections 21 and 28 percent of elected deputies were women (The World Bank, 2015). Since 2001, women have held at least 30 percent of the seats in the chamber. They currently occupy 36.6 percent of seats (Appendix D, Figure 1).

Legislative Influence

Although the proportion of women in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies has risen following the adoption of electoral quota policies, few pieces of women’s rights legislation have successfully passed, despite numerous attempts by women to wield substantive representation. Between 1989 and 2007, for example, 67 bills were introduced to expand the use of gender quotas beyond congressional candidates or to increase the quota beyond its 30 percent threshold. However, only one—the 2002 Labor Union Quota—succeeded (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). Additionally, of the 93 bills introduced dealing with reproductive rights by women, only two succeeded (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). Empirically, legislation on women’s issues fails more than twice as frequently than do bills dealing with other topics (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). Since adopting gender quotas in 1991, only three pieces of legislation substantively promoting women’s rights have emerged from Argentina’s parliament: the aforementioned Labor Union Quota in 2002, a Sexual Health Law in 2001, and a Surgical Contraception Law in 2006.
The primary institutional constraints that contribute to explaining this failure of legislative influence relate to the discrepancy between increasing numbers of women in parliament and actual increases in the political power held by these women. As one legislator noted, “It’s totally up to the committee chair [whether a bill advances],” which is particularly alarming given that women are largely underrepresented in leadership positions within Chamber committees as shown by Figure 3 in Appendix D (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 416). Particularly within committees that address conventionally important or controversial political issues—the budget, finance, the economy, foreign affairs, and trade—women currently hold no committee leadership seats.

Additionally, political power in Argentina remains heavily concentrated within political parties, more specifically within “party elites, usually men” (Jaquette, 2009: 55; Jones & Hwang, 2005; Jones & Micozzi, 2013). One deputy noted that regardless of political will within the Chamber, “someone higher up [within the party] will send signals to committee chairs about whether a bill should move or not” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 416). Party elites, particularly party presidents, perform important legislative gatekeeping functions: “leaders can block their colleagues’ legislative initiatives from floor discussions and determine which legislators participate in parliamentary debates” (Luca, Jones & Tule, 2002). Interviewees repeatedly cited “party leaders’ agenda control” as a key obstacle to establishing a gendered political agenda (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 416).

Because political power is centralized in the hands of a small number of party leaders in Argentina, legislators’ need for future resources ensures party discipline, thereby undermining legislator autonomy (Jones, 2008). When a parliamentarian casts a
vote on a women’s issue bill abiding by party lines rather than gender lines, their gender is essentially meaningless in promoting women’s rights legislation. In interviews with Susan Franceschet, deputies repeatedly noted the country’s traditionally strong party discipline as a “critical factor” in reducing opportunities to build cross-partisan consensus on women’s rights initiatives (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 416; Ballington & Matland, 2004).

The final constraint presented in this research on the legislative influence of women in Argentina lies in the “significant concentration of executive power” (Levitsky & Murillo, 2008: 19; Jones & Micozzi, 2013). This lack of executive accountability has been especially reinforced during the Kirchner era—the presidencies of Néstor Kirchner from 2003-2007 followed by his wife Christina Fernández de Kirchner—through “the absence of a credible opposition or serious electoral competition” (Levitsky & Murillo, 2008: 23; Calvo & Murillo, 2013). The Kirchner presidencies have been characterized by “blunt concentration of presidential powers, constant resort to emergency legislation and executive decrees, and repeated encroachments on judicial autonomy” (Grugel & Peruzzotti, 2010; Levitsky & Murillo, 2008). Increasing the number of women in the Argentine Chamber simply cannot have a substantive impact on political agendas when these agendas are established within the executive, with minimal consultation with or consideration of the other political branches. To summarize, the legislative influence of women elected to Argentina’s Chamber of Deputies has been constrained by strong party discipline and executive power concentration. One legislator succinctly articulated this phenomenon: “The quota increased the number of women [in the Congress]; it hasn’t increased their power” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 418).
Symbolic Influence

Symbolic influence, as previously suggested, is a way in which women elected to office through gender quotas can promote women’s rights, even when operating within democratically flawed political institutions. This influence is dependent, however, upon the self-perception of genuine empowerment by the elected women, which interviews with Argentine parliamentarians indicate is not present for a variety of reasons (De Luca, Jones & Tula, 2002; Mainwaring, 1999). First, the candidate nomination process is dominated by political parties, specifically by a small number of elites within parties. Party lists, that are the mechanism through which gender quotas enter the electoral process, “are put together behind closed doors, and men who have a lot of power in the party make the final decision as to who will be a candidate,” according to one interviewee (Jaquette, 2009: 55). In speaking with politicians in Argentina, Jaquette repeatedly heard the claim that, “In general, the parties tend to view female candidates solely in terms of their gender and not as individuals with particular experiences and capabilities” (Jaquette, 2009: 56). Further, because political party negotiations operate as largely male-dominated arenas, women often functions as pawns in negotiations among men (Jaquette, 2009). Interviews conducted by Susan Franceschet and Jennifer Piscopo affirm these findings: “the nomination practices can create the demeaning notion that quota women are unnecessarily privileged, less capable, and blindly loyal to male party bosses” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008, 2008: 403).

This demeaned notion is reinforced by another concept that interviewees repeatedly brought up: *mujeres de* (literally, “woman of [a man]”). This term refers to the notion that political parties complied with the new gender quota law by simply replacing
male candidates with female relatives, typically wives (Piscopo, 2006; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). One male party leader interviewed by Franceschet noted that his wife was placed in the second list position—after himself—and explicitly stated, “We have complied with the quota through our marriage” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 418). Another legislator commented, “The women keep the seats warm until the men come back” and “the women pick up the phone and ask the man, how should I vote, and so they vote.” It is difficult to discern precisely how widespread this phenomenon is in practice. However, anecdotal evidence, combined with the pervasive nepotism and clientelism within the Argentine political system, contribute to the belief that the issue deserves attention.4 “Politicians’ preoccupation with mujeres de suggests that the problem is perceived to be real” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 406). Additionally, the concern over the prevalence of mujeres de is dangerous in affecting perceptions and dynamics between women parliamentarians and their male colleagues, and between women parliamentarians and their constituents, as one deputy shows:

"I had been a community organizer in the barrio [neighborhood] for years. The party boss nominated me because of my work as a party militant. Yet the minute I received the nomination, they [other party members] said I had slept with him." (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 420)

The inferior self-perception of women elected to parliament is also developed and reinforced by the culture in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, which is characterized as “machista” [chauvinistic] (Jaquette, 2009: 57). One female member of parliament noted, “Legislators work from 9am to 10pm, and at 10pm women go home or phone home while the men begin their planning and strategy session... I think they chose that time because they know we won’t stay” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 417). Other female politicians
shared their discomfort with attending nighttime meetings, many of which are held in off-site bars (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 417).

The nature of the candidate nomination process, perceived prevalence of *mujeres de* women, and overall masculine culture within the Argentine parliament contribute to different standards for men and women. “A man gives his opinion and everyone listens; a women gives her option and she needs boxes of documents and experts waiting outside to back her up” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 417). This is consistent with literature by scholars noting the potential for quotas to create a demeaning belief that women elected through quotas are inherently under-deserving or under-qualified, regardless of whether this belief is empirically justified (Chowdhury, 2002; Dahlerup, 2006; Nanivadekar, 2006; Tripp, 2003; Piscopo, 2006). The confounding factors presented in this section have prevented women legislators in Argentina from feeling empowered within political institutions. Thus, they have been largely unable to effectively project an image promoting empowerment to their female constituents, preventing symbolic influence from taking form.

To conclude, although the descriptive representation of women in politics increased since Argentina adopted quota policies in 1991, this has failed to result in significant substantive or symbolic influence promoting the status of women, as these affirmative action policies were implemented “without an underlying cultural shift that supported women’s accumulation of political power” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 404).
Rwanda

Rwanda’s current political system was established following its transitional period between the end of its civil war and genocide in 1994, and began with the country’s first elections, albeit “falling short of the normal standards of ‘free and fair’” in 2003 (Devlin & Elgie, 2008: 242). In addition to presidential and parliamentary elections, a constitutional referendum was held in 2003 that established the country’s current presidential republic and bicameral parliament. Written into the newly adopted constitution was a clause stating, “The Chamber of Deputies is composed of eighty members consisting of… twenty-four members of the female sex” (Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda). The twenty-four women are selected by a joint committee of the members of the relevant local authority and the members of the executive committee of women’s organizations at the relevant level.

The rise of women’s political participation, however, far surpassed these quotas. Although the constitutional quota for the legislature guaranteed women 30 percent of seats, women won 48.8 percent in the country’s 2003 parliamentary elections. The twenty-four reserved seats were filled through women-only ballots established by provincial women’s councils, while the other fifteen women were elected to non-reserved seats through a party-list proportional representation system of voting. Since 2003, compliance with the reserved seat quota mandate has remained strong and the number of women winning open seats has steadily increased. Currently, women hold 51 of the 80 seats in the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies (Appendix D, Figure 2).
Legislative Influence

Empirically, however, “the majority female parliament has created little legislation improving the status or rights of women” (Burnet, 2011). The legislative influence, the ability of women elected to office to effectively promote legislation and policies that promote women’s issues, has been sharply inhibited in Rwanda. Since electoral quotas were adopted in 2003, only one significant piece of legislation promoting women’s rights, the 2008 Gender-Based Violence Bill, has emerged from the Rwandan government. This research argues that two key structural constraints have contributed to this failure: strong single party influence and executive dominance.

Rwanda’s current political system must be understood as a product of the country’s civil war. The current ruling political party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was founded in 1987 by mainly Tutsi rebels in Uganda under the leadership of current Rwandan President Paul Kagame (United Nations, 2014). Three years later, the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the armed wing of the RPF invaded Rwanda inciting a four-year civil war, which included the infamous genocide in 1994 that killed an estimated 800,000 people in fewer than 100 days. The RPF eventually emerged victorious and established its claim to legitimacy by “stopping the genocide and winning the war” in July of 1994 (Gready, 2010; Burnet, 2011). It then established a supposed coalition government with Kagame serving as vice president and defense minister. In 2000, following the resignation of then-President Paster Bizimungu, Kagame inherited the presidency. In 2003, his title was confirmed when he was elected to his first term as President.

The strong position of the RPF characterizes Rwanda’s political system as a dominant party system, one in which a single party has “successively won election
victories and whose defeat cannot be envisaged or is unlikely in the foreseeable future” (Suttner, 2006: 277). In 2003, the RPF won 33 of 53 parliamentary seats and through coalitions with other parties, effectively controlled 40 seats. Moreover, the smaller parties held “little influence over policy” and “cooperated with, rather than criticized, the RPF” (Devlin & Elgie, 2008: 242; Longman, 2006: 148). Through this coalition government, perhaps more accurately characterized as a “consensual dictatorship,” the RPF has consistently held an overwhelming majority within Rwanda’s parliament, while the party’s leader, Paul Kagame, has maintained control over the presidential seat (Burnet, 2011: 309).

Following the genocide, the RPF gained popular support by promoting inclusion, and promising a return to stability. However, this “much-promoted ‘transition to democracy’ was in fact tightly controlled and resulted in greater consolidation of power by the party, even as it gave an illusion of power distribution” (Bauer & Britton, 2006: 146). “Despite the appearance of political pluralism, e.g. through a ‘coalition government,’ the RPF managed to monopolize real, though sometimes less visible, decision making” (Reyntjens, 2011: 16). In an interview with Timothy Longman, one civil society activist noted, “The RPF focuses on diversity so that they can appear democratic even though they control all power” (Longman, 2006). Still today, free governance in Rwanda faces serious democratic weaknesses, including “broad political intolerance, attacks on politicians critical of the RPF,” and generally “limited party competition and political diversity” (Coffë, 2012: 289). Summarizing this key constraint on the legislative influence of women in Rwanda’s legislature, Longman notes, “The
larger number of women in parliament today may make it easier to adopt legislation that benefit women—but only when it is consistent with the agenda of the RPF leadership.”

The second constraint on the legislative influence of female parliamentarians lies in the increasing concentration of political power within the executive, as noted in Argentina. “Parliament lacks the capacity to serve as vigorous checks on executive authority” (Pearson & Powley, 2008: 38). A majority of laws are developed by “technocrats in the ministries or within the RPF executive council, after which the parliament is asked to pass them” (Coffé, 2012). Noting this constraint, one parliamentarian interviewed by Elizabeth Powley said, “We were busy with all these laws [from the executive] just falling on our heads… we were in reaction mode, we were not proactive… there has only been one law initiated in the lower chamber of parliament… we are always dealing with laws that are popping in from the executive” (Powley, 2007).

Since first coming into office, President Paul Kagame, especially, has “increased his own power substantially” (Bauer & Britton, 2006: 146). Moreover, the possibilities for criticism of Kagame are extremely limited, as anyone who publically criticizes the regime “risks being labeled ‘divisionist,’ or a supporter of social division and genocide” (Bauer & Britton, 2006: 146). The electoral landslides of Kagame in 2003 and 2010, winning 95.1 percent and 93.1 percent of the total vote respectively, coupled with the “arrests, ‘disappearances,’ and intimidation” marring the campaigns, are indicative of the effective suppression of political opposition by Kagame and his supporters (Reyntjens, 2004: 186; 2011). To summarize, the inability of females elected to parliament in Rwanda to pass a legislation promoting women’s rights can be attributed to the
domination of the political agenda by political elites within the RPF, complemented by the increasingly strong hold of political power within the executive branch.

*Symbolic Influence*

While structurally flawed institutions have inhibited women elected to Rwanda’s parliament, even in their large numbers, from passing legislation benefiting women, qualitative research suggests that these female parliamentarians have been able to serve as symbolic representatives. Through the observed behavior of female parliamentarians and through analyzing interviews, it becomes clear that these women do not consider themselves to be inferior to their male colleagues. Empirically, women in Rwanda’s parliament have not constrained themselves to traditional women’s areas. Rather, women occupy a majority of seats in nearly all standing committees and more than 75 percent of seats in committees on many politically important topics not considered traditional ‘women’s issues:’ economic affairs and trade, the national budget, political affairs, agriculture, and the environment, as shown in Figure 4 in Appendix D.

Additionally, the feeling of gender equality within the parliament is both reinforced by, and reinforces, a “positive overall change in parliamentary culture” (Devlin & Elgie, 2008: 244). Specifically, women parliamentarians noted that they “felt more comfortable, more confident, and more ‘at home’” following the implementation of gender quotas, and the subsequent increase in the numbers of female representatives (Devlin & Elgie, 2008: 245). Moreover, many of these women have noted, “In Rwanda today, unlike in the past, women who serve [in politics] are respected in the same way as male government officials” (Bauer & Burnet, 2013: 109). As one deputy noted, “the women participate, even more than the men” (Devlin & Elgie, 2008: 245).
Further, the recognition by these parliamentarians of the capacity of symbolic influence is evident by the focus of their work on direct engagement with constituents. Many of these women explicitly articulated that they “value their function as role models more than their role in policy-making” (Bauer, 2012: 379). Many also noted that they feel that they are more valued “for their general leadership abilities and their function as role models, than for their perceived or actual role in policy formulation” (Powley, 2007). Further, one parliamentarian noted the importance of stressing her “activities, priorities, and work” when communicating with constituents, to prevent being “held up as ‘example for examples’ sake” (Powley, 2007).

The results of these attempts at using symbolic influence as a mechanism of affecting positive change for have been clear: “widespread symbolic representation effects have transformed the perception of women and their capacity as leaders in Rwandan society” (Bauer & Burnet, 2013: 110). According to Burnet, interview respondents “consistently reported that women felt freer to speak out in public, had increased access to education, and had become entrepreneurs in every area” (Burnet, 2011). Further she notes that “most respondents agreed that gender quotas and increased representation of women in the political system have encouraged women to take leading roles in other areas of Rwandan society” (Burnet, 2011). Burnet summarizes her interviews through simply articulating that gender quotas have had a clear effect on women in their families and communities: “women have found respect” (Burnet, 2011).

Conclusion

This research seeks to provide a framework for attempting to understand variation in the success seen by countries that have implemented gender quotas in improving the
status of women across society. Empirically, implementing gender quotas policies increases the descriptive representation of women in politics. However, this by itself is not sufficient for promoting women’s rights. Rather, the ability of female politicians to successfully wield their legislative and symbolic influence is reliant upon a myriad of social, political, cultural, and historical factors.

While the framework presented here offers a foundation for understanding how electoral quota policies influence mechanisms of political representation, much more scholarly work in this area is necessary. Qualitative methodology is useful to interpret and incorporate broader context, socio-political intricacies, and other intangible factors. Given the rapid pace at which countries are adopting quota policies, supplementary quantitative analysis to further understanding variation in legislative and symbolic influence is also necessary. Uniformly operationalizing complex constraints on these dimensions of representation is extremely difficult across countries, so attempts to quantify the relationship between gender quota policies and substantive and symbolic influence must use caution to ensure that important context is not omitted or inaccurately captured.

Additionally, the two cases chosen for this research were partially chosen based on their availability of primary sources through the work of other scholars. Applying this framework to other cases, then, requires scholars to engage in similar work as Jane Jaquette, Susan Franceschet, Timothy Longman, Jennie Burnet, and others in countries beyond Argentina and Rwanda. Before encouraging countries to adopt electoral gender quotas based on an assumed relationship between women in politics and women holding genuine political power, this assumption needs to be tested by the international academic
community through interviewing women once elected and through in-depth analysis of political institutions, dynamics, and outcomes.

To conclude, this research offers a framework for understanding how gender quota policies affect the relationship between political representation and women’s rights. As noted by Susan Franceschet and Jennier Piscopo, “Gender quotas cannot change the institutional rules and norms that govern the legislative process,” meaning that quotas cannot guarantee improvements in women’s representation as an outcome (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 421). Nonetheless, the potential for gender quotas to have powerful benefits for women cannot be overlooked. It is imperative to further understand and promote the circumstances that allow for the positive relationship between quota policies and women’s rights to take form.
Notes

1 The most robust analysis of the factors related to women’s political representation to-date controls for differences in electoral institutions, democracy, years since women could run for office, religion, female education enrollment, and level of economic development (Tripps & Kang, 2008). Applying similar methodology to the most recent data available, the strong association between gender quotas and the proportion of women in political institutions is affirmed (Appendix B).

2 Women’s issues are defined as “issues that are particularly salient to women because they seek to achieve equality for women, they address women’s special needs, such as women’s health concerns or child care; or they confront issues with which women have traditionally been concerned in their role as caregivers, such as education or the protection of children (Swers, 2002: 34).

3 The first documented use of gender quotas in Argentina, and globally, was actually in the early 1950s by the Peronist Party for congressional elections as a direct consequence of the lobbying efforts by former First Lady of Argentina, Eva Perón (Jones, 1998). Largely credited to the political instability in Argentina from 1955 to 1983, compliance with this policy was extremely weak, thus, this research considers the start of contemporary quota policies to be those implemented following Argentina’s democratic transition in the 1980s.

4 Charges of nepotism became particularly salient during the last presidential campaign when President Néstor Kirchner was succeeded by his wife, Christina Fernández de Kirchner. This notion was largely perpetuated by the Argentine media, who “dwelled on the fact that Christina Fernández de Kirchner was the First Lady, rather than the fact that she was a two-time national senator who had entered electoral politics prior to her husband’s election as president” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008: 419).
Bibliography


Araújo, Clara, and Ana Isabel Garcia. 2006. “Latin America: The experience and the Impact of Quotas in Latin America.”


*Constitution of Argentina and its Amendments of 1994.*


The World Bank. 2015. World Development Indicators.


Appendix A: Variable Descriptions and Data Summary

Variable Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Women in Parliament</td>
<td>Percentage of parliamentary seats in a single or lower chamber held by women</td>
<td>World Bank World Development Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (logged)</td>
<td>Gross domestic product divided by midyear population in current U.S. dollars, log transformed</td>
<td>World Bank World Development Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Population</td>
<td>Percentage of people living in urban areas</td>
<td>World Bank World Development Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Score</td>
<td>Average of numerical ratings (from 1–7) of political rights and civil liberties, with 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free</td>
<td>Freedom House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quota Policy</td>
<td>Factor level variable indicating whether a country has adopted a quota policy at a national, subnational, or political party level (0 = has not adopted, 1 = has adopted)</td>
<td>The Quota Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral System</td>
<td>Factor level variable indicating whether a country has a proportional representation electoral system (1 = PR, 0 = other)</td>
<td>The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Status</td>
<td>Factor level variable indicating whether a country is characterized as developed (1 = developed, 0 = not developed)</td>
<td>CIA World Factbook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Women in Parliament</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>18.45</td>
<td>19.81</td>
<td>63.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>226.5</td>
<td>5,779.0</td>
<td>14,390.0</td>
<td>110,700.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Population</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>58.37</td>
<td>58.48</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Score</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>7.00</td>
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</table>

Counts (0) Counts (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Counts (0)</th>
<th>Counts (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>101</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral System</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Status</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Women (30)</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Linear Regression of the Proportion of Women in National Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of Women in Parliament</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>std. Beta</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>10.52</td>
<td>-3.54 - 24.58</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.18 - 0.26</td>
<td>.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (logged)</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-1.45 - 2.10</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.18 - 0.26</td>
<td>.719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Population</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.17 - 0.02</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.34 - 0.05</td>
<td>.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Score</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>-0.18 - 1.67</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.03 - 0.28</td>
<td>.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quota Policy</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>3.02 - 9.57</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.13 - 0.41</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral System</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>2.41 - 9.03</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.10 - 0.39</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Status</td>
<td>10.99</td>
<td>5.68 - 16.30</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.18 - 0.52</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 172
R² / adj. R²: .298 / .272
AIC: 1280.959

Diagnostics Summary: Exploratory data analysis indicated that GDP per capita was heavily right skewed, thus was log transformed to ensure that the Ordinary Least Squares assumption of linearity between parameters was met. A Breusch-Pagan test confirms the homoscedasticity of this model (p=0.648), as does the randomness in the residuals. Although the correlation between GDP per capita and Development Status is high (0.67), this multicollinearity does not bias the coefficients of this model and only contributes to model inefficiency. Both a Durbin-Watson test (p=0.842) and a Breusch-Godfrey test (p= 0.282) confirm that autocorrelation is not an issue in this model.
Appendix C: Linear Regressions of the Change in Infant Mortality

Model 1 (Proportion of Women in Parliament as continuous variable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Change in Infant Mortality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( B )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-11.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Women in Parliament (T-3)</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (logged)</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Score</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Status</td>
<td>-0.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations | 174  
R\(^2\) / adj. R\(^2\) | .562 / .551  
AIC | 675.595

Model 2 (Proportion of Women in Parliament as binary with threshold at 30 percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Change in Infant Mortality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( B )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-11.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Women (30)</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (logged)</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Score</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Status</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations | 174  
R\(^2\) / adj. R\(^2\) | .565 / .555  
AIC | 674.113
Model 3 (Proportion of Women in Parliament as binary with threshold at 50 percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>std. Beta</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-11.73</td>
<td>-13.87 - -9.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Women (50)</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
<td>-4.12 - 2.49</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.13 - 0.08</td>
<td>.627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (logged)</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.96 - 1.42</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.56 - 0.82</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Score</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>-0.45 - -0.15</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>-0.35 - -0.12</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Status</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
<td>-1.90 - -0.16</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.28 - -0.02</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diagnostics Summary: Because the diagnostics for all three models are extremely similar, p-values are only reported for Model 1. All other diagnostic information holds for all three models presented in this section. Exploratory data analysis indicated that GDP per capita was heavily right skewed, thus was log transformed to ensure that the Ordinary Least Squares assumption of linearity between parameters was met. A Breusch-Pagan test confirms the homoscedasticity of this model (p=0.223), as does the randomness in the residuals. Although the correlation between GDP per capita and Development Status is high (0.67), this multicollinearity does not bias the coefficients of this model and only contributes to model inefficiency. Both a Durbin-Watson test (p=0.976) and a Breusch-Godfrey test (p= 0.433) confirm that autocorrelation is not an issue in this model.
Appendix D: Argentine and Rwandan Parliament Figures

Figure 1: Proportion of Seats Held by Women in Argentina’s National Parliament

Data Source: World Bank World Development Indicators, United Nations Statistics Division

Figure 2: Proportion of Seats Held by Women in Rwanda’s National Parliaments

Data Source: World Bank World Development Indicators, United Nations Statistics Division
Figure 3: Female Representation in Argentina’s Chamber of Deputies Committee Leadership

Data Source: Republic of Argentina Chamber of Deputies Official Website (http://www.hcdn.gob.ar/)
Figure 4: Female Representation in Rwanda’s Chamber of Deputies Committees

Data Source: Republic of Rwanda Parliament Official Website (http://www.parliament.gov.rw/)