

Electing Women to National Legislatures

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In 1945 women held 3 percent of seats in the world's 26 legislatures. Over the course of the twentieth century, both numbers increased dramatically: by 1995, legislatures existed in 176 countries, with women holding 11.6 percent of seats in these bodies. Women's representation then doubled in the next 20 years, with female legislators occupying 23.4 percent of the seats as of January 2017 (IPU 2017a, b). The percentage of women elected to national legislatures is the most common benchmark of women's political empowerment. This indicator of women's participation in formal, national-level politics informs aggregate measures that define women's empowerment more broadly, such as the United Nations' Gender Development Index or the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report. Scholars exploring how women's political inclusion connects to women's empowerment in society and the economy frequently rely on women's representation in national legislatures to capture women's access to political power.

This focus on women's presence in national legislatures—often called women's descriptive or numeric representation—is well-founded.

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Legislatures pass laws that affect women's well-being across all policy areas, making women's inclusion essential for countries' equitable economic, social, and political development. Even when legislators' power and independence are more circumscribed (as in parliamentary systems or semi-democratic nations), the election of women to lawmaking bodies signals the inclusivity of the political system. If women are systematically excluded from office or discriminated against during electoral campaigns, their political rights are restricted and they are not empowered within the political system.

This chapter assesses women's election to national legislatures and parliaments.¹ Drawing on the definition of women's political empowerment as the assets, capabilities, and achievements of women in gaining political authority relative to men, we first conceptualize women's election to national legislatures as an achievement in and of itself. We highlight cross-national patterns in attaining different levels of women's representation, and we analyze how women's capabilities or assets shape their access to these posts. We argue that demographic factors that place women in the pipeline for elected office matter little: women's access to education and employment does not drive their increased descriptive representation, nor are women less politically ambitious than men. Instead, the institutional and organizational dimensions of politics—such as the electoral system, political parties, and candidate recruitment procedures—condition women's access to parliaments.

These structures also explain *which* women benefit most from election to national parliament. Elected women's personal, educational, and professional backgrounds may reveal certain gendered trends (i.e., female legislators are less likely than male legislators to have young children), but like their male counterparts, women come from the country's elite and bring significant credentials and qualifications to the table. Comparative research further suggests that female lawmakers are as dedicated—or perhaps even harder working than—their male colleagues. Analyzing the types of women who become politically empowered provides another lens for conceptualizing women's assets and capabilities: the talents and qualifications women bring to parliamentary office. And while these talents and qualifications show that women are equal to men in terms of their résumés, we find that structural barriers limit their ability to transform these assets and capabilities into influence within parliament.

We then focus special attention on women's greatest asset in raising their numeric representation: candidate quota laws and reserved seats policies.

Now in place in over 80 countries across the globe (Dahlerup and Norris 2014), these affirmative action measures either require that political parties nominate specified percentages of female candidates, or set aside a certain number of electoral districts or parliamentary seats for women. While the numeric impact of gender quotas and reserved seats continues to fall short of parity in most cases, their symbolic, normative, and descriptive effects have been so significant that we argue for viewing their widespread adoption as an achievement in its own right.

Together, these two achievements—women’s increased election to national legislatures and the diffusion of affirmative action—offer reasons for optimism concerning this measure of women’s political empowerment. Women across the globe are gaining access to parliaments, most frequently because states behave as “gender equality activists” (Piscopo 2015), compelling political parties to take women’s inclusion as candidates and legislators seriously. Shifting the lens to women’s assets and capabilities, however, reveals less cause for celebration. Women—especially those from their country’s dominant social groups—have the preparedness and qualifications necessary to win nominations, gain legislative office, and become successful parliamentarians. But their ability to capitalize on these skills and talents remains circumscribed by male-dominated party organizations and legislative environments, which keep the playing field unequal. Our chapter concludes by assessing how the effects of descriptive representation on women’s political empowerment change depending on how “women” is construed. That is, our conclusions vary depending on whether we consider the empowerment of female citizens, individual politicians, or women in different racial, ethnic, class or other identity-based subgroups.

GLOBAL PATTERNS IN WOMEN’S ELECTION TO NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

Women’s representation in parliaments is as high as it has ever been. The number and type of countries in which women have witnessed the greatest gains have become more diverse over recent years. While Scandinavian and Northern European countries once led the globe in women’s election to national legislatures, Table 7.1 shows that a number of countries from the Global South currently occupy the top positions (but also the bottom spots). Women now hold about one-quarter of seats in the world’s parliaments, yet this average obscures significant country-level variation. Paxton

Table 7.1 Women's representation in national parliaments (lower or unicameral chamber). Countries in the top 20 and bottom 20 as of January 2017

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Percent Women</i>	<i>Quota</i>
1	Rwanda	61.3	LQ
2	Bolivia	53.1	LQ
3	Cuba	48.9	
4	Iceland	47.6	PQ
5	Nicaragua	45.7	LQ
6	Sweden	43.6	PQ
7	Senegal	42.7	LQ
8	Mexico	42.4	LQ
9	Finland	42.0	
9	South Africa	42.0	PQ
11	Ecuador	41.6	LQ
12	Namibia	41.3	PQ
13	Mozambique	39.6	PQ
13	Norway	39.6	PQ
15	Spain	39.1	LQ
16	Argentina	38.9	LQ
17	Ethiopia	38.8	PQ
18	Timor-Leste	38.5	LQ
19	Angola	38.2	LQ
20	Belgium	38.0	LQ
20	Netherlands	38.0	PQ
173	Swaziland	6.2	
174	Thailand	6.1	
175	Iran	5.9	
175	Maldives	5.9	
177	Sri Lanka	5.8	
178	Nigeria	5.6	
179	Nauru	5.3	
180	Belize	3.1	
180	Lebanon	3.1	
182	Comoros	3.0	
183	Papua New Guinea	2.7	
184	Kuwait	2.0	
184	Solomon Islands	2.0	
186	Oman	1.2	
187	Haiti	0	
187	Micronesia	0	
187	Qatar	0	
187	Tonga	0	
187	Vanuatu	0	
187	Yemen	0	

Key: *LQ* legislative quota, *PQ* party quota

Source: IPU (2017c)

and Hughes (2016, 73–82) identify five pathways that explain countries' changing level of descriptive representation from 1945 to 2010. Each pathway encompasses a diverse set of countries.

First, the “flat” pathway captures countries where the descriptive representation of women has not changed over time: this group includes “low-flat” countries in the Middle East and North Africa, where women’s representation hovers at 5 percent or lower (e.g., Kuwait and Yemen); an eclectic mix of “middle-flat” countries where women’s representation remains at 10 percent (e.g., Liberia and India); and communist “high-flat” countries where women’s representation is above 20 percent (e.g., China, North Korea, and Vietnam). Whereas cultural and religious beliefs about women’s unsuitability for political office explain their near-total exclusion from legislatures in low-flat countries, political commitments to attaining gender equality in communist regimes explain women’s greater inclusion in high-flat countries. Nonetheless, women’s representation remains far from parity in these countries.

When compared to the high-flat communist regimes, formerly communist countries have much lower rates of representation. Countries with previous left-leaning authoritarian governments (military dictatorships as well as communist regimes) occupy the second pathway, “the plateau.” In plateau countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Albania, women’s representation was below 10 percent before the authoritarian period, increased to 10, 20, or even 30 percent during authoritarianism, and then returned to below 10 percent with democratization. Authoritarian left regimes kept women’s numeric representation artificially high, in that single parties or repressive governments determined who sat in parliament. As democratization raised the influence and prestige of the national assembly, women’s representation returned to its previously un-manipulated and low levels (Paxton and Hughes 2016, 81).

Indeed, the (re)emergence of electoral competition during democratization—the return to “politics as usual”—has historically been associated with the resurgence of male dominance, and the foreclosure of electoral opportunities for women (Baldez 2002). Yet, unlike formerly left-authoritarian states, several countries in Latin America and Africa explicitly made space for women, adopting affirmative action as they democratized. Legislative quota laws especially appeared in countries where women’s human rights or peace activism played significant roles in discrediting the authoritarian regime and thus precipitating democratization.

Quota adoption and implementation pushed Latin American and African countries onto either the third or fourth pathway, depending on

the quota laws' timing and effectiveness. Countries on the "increasing" pathway show steady gains in women's numeric representation in the 1960s, with more steep climbs beginning in the 1980s. Those on the "big jumps" pathway show even more dramatic increases, mostly in the 1990s. Currently, women's descriptive representation ranges between 20 and 30 percent for increasing countries, and between 20 and 50 percent for big jump countries. Rwanda perfectly illustrates the success of big jump cases: due to a gender quota, women's representation doubled overnight, climbing from 25.7 percent to 48.8 percent after the 2003 elections (Paxton and Hughes 2016, 78). Women presently occupy 61.3 percent of seats in the Rwandan legislature, making Rwanda and Bolivia—which has 53.1 percent women in parliament—the only two majority-female legislatures in the world (see Table 7.1).

Northern European countries also followed the increasing pathway, largely because strong traditions of gender equality enabled them to eschew quotas and take the "slow track" to gender equality (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005). The slow track has proven especially successful in the Scandinavian countries, which Paxton and Hughes classify as a subgroup of "high increasing" (2016, 76–77). In Scandinavia, women's representation began its initial climb slightly earlier than the rest of the group, in the 1950s rather than the 1960s. Today, women hold 41.5 percent of legislative seats in the Nordic countries, compared to 23.2 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and 26.9 percent in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin America (IPU 2017b, c).

Finally, a mixed group of countries follows the fifth pathway, "low increasing." These countries have made gains over time, but less than the increasing countries of Europe, Latin America, and Africa. Women's representation in places as diverse as Uruguay, the United States, and Morocco climbed from less than five percent post-World War II to just 10 or 15 percent by 2010. The reasons for these small gains are neither immediately apparent nor consistent across the group. Uruguay is among the few Latin American countries with no candidate quota law, but enjoys a well-deserved reputation as a social democratic state with liberal gender equality policies.² While the United States has high levels of women's workforce participation and educational attainment, candidate selection procedures and the electoral system represent a challenge for female aspirants. Morocco implemented a reserved seat system in 2002 and enjoys comparatively high female workforce participation rates for the region, yet women's numeric representation remains below the global average.

The five distinct pathways for attaining women's increased descriptive representation—flat, plateau, increasing, big jumps, and low increasing—indicate significant global variation in this basic measure of women's political empowerment. Even the pathways that map onto regional trends, such as the increasing pathway in the cases of Northern Europe and Latin America, and the plateau pathway in the cases of the Middle East and North Africa, have significant outliers. For instance, both Algeria and Tunisia outpace their neighbors, electing over 30 percent women to their parliaments. By contrast, Brazil has a gender quota law but consistently elects less than 10 percent women to its lower house, earning the country the dubious distinction as the worst-performing Latin American country on this measure of women's political empowerment.

Moreover, few countries have raised women's descriptive representation to parity or near-parity. The top 20 countries (see Table 7.1) followed different pathways, from increasing to big jumps. Yet just 12 of these countries have elected more than 40 percent women, many (though not all) through quota laws. Only in a handful of exceptional cases can women's political empowerment, as measured by access to parliament, be considered equal or nearly-equal to that of men. Despite progress in raising the proportion of female legislators, this measure of women's political empowerment suggests that women's full inclusion in the polity remains a distant—but nonetheless achievable—goal.

EXPLAINING NUMERIC REPRESENTATION: BEYOND ASSETS AND CAPABILITIES

Alexander, Bolzendahl, and Jalalzai (this volume) define women's political empowerment as the enhancement of women's assets, capabilities, and achievements in order to gain equality to men in influencing and exercising political authority. Though women have expanded their access to national legislatures, they generally have not attained parity on this measure. Yet the failure to achieve parity does not stem from deficiencies in women's preparedness for public office. Individual women's assets and capabilities are not to blame. Institutions, political party organizations, and social structures combine to restrict women's access to candidacies, even when their educational levels and employment histories position them as well-qualified for careers in elected office. These institutional and organizational barriers likewise erode women's political ambition.

Women and the Pipeline to Legislative Office

Early work explaining women's entry into national legislatures focused on supply-side issues, asking whether a country had sufficient numbers of qualified or prepared women to fill the pipeline. Supply-side factors often emphasized countries' levels of development. As Matland explained, "When women approach men in levels of literacy, workforce participation, and university education—and thus become men's equals in the social sphere, they are more likely to be seen as men's equals in the political sphere and therefore their representation will increase" (2002, 6). In addition to preparing women for office, development also precipitates shifts from the traditional values associated with patriarchal and religious societies to more modern values, including gender-egalitarianism and secularism (Alexander and Welzel 2011; Alexander 2015).

Yet socioeconomic variables such as women's workforce participation and education rates are not always associated with higher levels of women's descriptive representation (Paxton 1997). And while cultural views do affect women's access to legislative representation (Paxton and Kunovich 2003), they are neither perfectly correlated with socioeconomic development nor women's representation. For instance, respondents answering the World Values Survey question "Do men make better political leaders than women" agree *more* strongly in Spain than in Uruguay (Paxton and Hughes 2016, 120–123), even though Spain outpaces Uruguay on the United Nations' Human Development Index and in the percentage of women in parliament (United Nations 2014; IPU 2017c). Countries such as the United States, Canada, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, and Israel all fall within the top 20 on the UN's Gender Development Index—which examines women's life expectancy, expected years of school, and per capita income—while having average or below average levels of women's legislative representation (United Nations 2015; IPU 2017c). High levels of gender development, then, do not necessarily lead to greater levels of women's numeric representation. Electing more women to national legislatures depends neither on a country's changing attitudes nor incorporation of more women into educational systems and the economy.

Institutional and Organizational Barriers

Given the limited explanatory power of supply-side explanations, current political science research emphasizes how structures and institutions shape women's access to legislative candidacies. The most-cited variable

explaining this system-level “demand” for female candidates has been electoral rules. Women’s political representation is often higher in countries using proportional representation electoral systems (Paxton and Hughes 2016). Proportional systems rely on multi-member districts, which allow political parties to run more than one candidate in each district. Women can thus run for elected office without wholly displacing male candidates, allowing parties to “safely” present lists that more broadly reflect the demographic makeup of the constituency. In majoritarian systems, where parties can nominate only a single candidate, the zero-sum nature of nominating procedures forces women to compete with established men. These systems can also discourage parties from supporting female candidates if they fear that women are less viable contenders.

Recent studies, however, cast doubt on the overarching explanatory power of electoral rules (Roberts et al. 2013). Scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the gatekeepers to legislative office: political parties (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016). In most countries, political parties control ballot access and distribute (or withhold) resources from candidates. These political parties are male-dominated. In advanced industrialized democracies between 1965 and 2013, only 61 of 441 party leaders (14 percent) were women (O’Brien 2015). In Latin America, of 168 political parties studied between 2004 and 2012, only 25 (15 percent) had a female president or party secretary (Funk et al. 2018). Women’s presence among the party elites bolsters the number of female candidates and legislators in the Global North (Kittilson 2006), though recent research from Latin America shows no such relationship (Funk et al. 2018).

Parties’ procedures for candidate selection may matter more than the gendered composition of the selectorate itself. Institutionalized or rule bound procedures make candidate selection more transparent (Caul 2001), facilitating female aspirants’ ability to put themselves forward while circumscribing party leaders’ ability to bend the rules in favor of certain (male) candidates. From Scotland to Thailand to Latin America, institutionalized candidate selection facilitates women’s access to the ballot (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2016). Whether these institutionalized procedures operate at the national or local level can also matter. On the one hand, community politics provides a pathway to office for many women, so localized (as opposed to national) nomination procedures may boost parties’ proportions of female candidates (Caul 2001). On the other hand, local party chapters may be more parochial than national party organizations: centralization can help national-level

leaders—who may hold more progressive and egalitarian values than their local-level counterparts—enforce norms about women's inclusion (Hinojosa 2012).

Finally, women may attain greater legislative representation in left parties as compared to right parties (Caul 2001). Right parties are more apt to advance nonfeminist and antifeminist claims (O'Brien 2016). Even today, though right parties have made gains with respect to women's representation, in advanced industrialized democracies they are still outpaced by the left (O'Brien 2016). Yet a difference appears in how party ideology shapes access to the ballot when compared to access to office. In Latin America, left parties may nominate more female candidates, but this difference disappears when controlling for other factors, and no pattern emerges for whether left or right parties elect more women (Funk et al. 2018).

Gendered Barriers to Office and the Ambition Deficit

Taken together, institutional rules and party organizations mean that female aspirants confront significant obstacles to landing nominations and winning elections. Women must displace male elites and incumbents who look to preserve their power, and they must overcome organizational practices, norms, and values that privilege male leadership. New research on gender and political ambition suggests that female aspirants correctly perceive these obstacles to building national-level political careers. Research from the United States has shaped scholars' understanding of the ambition gap. Across all levels of government, Lawless and Fox (2010) show that women are less interested in political candidacy than men. Their survey of likely aspirants reveals, for example, that only 41 percent of women had considered pursuing elected office—as compared to 56 percent of men (2010, 321). Women are also less likely to perceive themselves as qualified for office, and place a greater value on having certain qualifications than their male counterparts.

This ambition deficit does not suggest, however, that women are inherently less interested in politics. To the contrary, women observe and respond rationally to gendered barriers to office. Given deep-seated norms about political leadership as an inherently masculine endeavor, women receive less encouragement than men to pursue political posts. This encouragement gap exists not only among family and friends, but also among political elites. Indeed, party leaders have been shown to underestimate women's ability to successfully contest elections (Norris and Lovenduski

1995). This underestimation in turn reinforces the prioritization of men during candidate selection. In Mexico, for example, party leaders protested the 40 percent quota on the grounds that there were no qualified female candidates. In response, women’s organizations published the names of over 1000 women with the requisite credentials (Piscopo 2016).

Women recognize that party selectorates and voters hold female candidates to especially high standards. Shames (2017) finds that women in pipeline educational fields in the United States—those receiving graduate degrees in law and public policy—perceive that female candidates experience more sexism than male candidates. Women are correct to place a higher value on their qualifications: research shows that in order to “perform on par with men, women incumbents would need to be approximately one standard deviation greater on the quality scale than their male counterparts” (Fulton 2012, 308). That is, after accounting for candidates’ “performance, service, integrity, and dedication,” a clear gender disadvantage emerges. Holding these non-policy characteristics constant, Fulton (2014) finds a three percent vote deficit for female candidates. In effect, women must be higher-quality politicians in order to overcome their gendered disadvantage in the electorate.

In spite of these barriers, women are still willing to pursue elected office. Women are simply more strategic in their decision to run than men, entering the race only when the expected benefits of office outweigh the costs (Shames 2017). Small nudges can highlight these benefits even further. For example, framing political careers as advancing communal (as opposed to power-related) goals significantly increases women’s interest in seeking elected office (Schneider et al. 2015). Likewise, encouragement from personal networks and political elites closes the gender gap in political ambition (Lawless and Fox 2010), as does providing female aspirants with positive feedback about their political knowledge and skills (Preece 2016). Together, these studies highlight how the gender gap in political ambition is neither inherent nor innate. Rather, women’s ambition is shaped by significant structural barriers, and can be remedied with encouragement from political elites.

Intersectionality and Access to Office

Institutional barriers disadvantage even the most privileged women, suggesting that women from marginalized groups will face additional challenges to attaining political office. Some countries still formally restrict the

political rights of minority groups (Paxton and Hughes 2016, 245). Even when the full rights and benefits of citizenship exist on paper, minorities may struggle to gain access and voice in practice. Women from ethnically marginalized communities may confront both racial and gender discrimination from the majority group and also patriarchal norms within their own communities. Globally, ethnic minority women are underrepresented in legislatures and parliaments. Hughes (2013) used data from 81 democratic or semi-democratic countries to calculate the composition of an average national parliament: 72 percent majority men, 15 percent majority women, 11 percent minority men, and 2 percent minority women. These proportions indicate the overrepresentation of minority men and an underrepresentation of minority women, both of whom actually constitute an average of 9 percent of the population (Hughes 2013, 501).

Clearly, male dominance in politics persists across racial and ethnic identities in many parts of the world. At the same time, in some advanced industrialized democracies, minority women win elective office at greater rates than minority men (Paxton and Hughes 2016, 254–255). In the United States, Bejarano (2013) describes the “Latina advantage”: Hispanic-heritage women often benefit from racialized stereotypes (e.g., that Latinas are maternal and community-minded) whereas Hispanic-heritage men confront negative stereotypes (e.g., that Latinos are violent or aggressive). In Europe, ethnic minority women’s presence on electoral lists can symbolize parties’ commitments to inclusion, secularism, and Western values (Mügge 2016). Political parties seeking to diversify their candidate slates thus see minority women as representing both women and their group. This “complementarity advantage” (Celis and Erzeel 2017) can bring more minority women into office relative to minority men, especially when countries have both ethnic quotas and gender quotas (Hughes 2011). Such double-counting can raise minority women’s descriptive representation, but also reflects parties’ efforts to preserve most available candidacies for majority men.

Even when ethnic minority women benefit relative to ethnic minority men, they still remain underrepresented relative to their proportion in the general population. The underrepresentation of minority women poses one challenge to conceptualizing women’s descriptive representation as an achievement. The systematic exclusion of certain subgroups of women suggests that not all citizens benefit equally from this measure of political progress.

FEMALE LEGISLATORS: ASSETS AND CAPABILITIES

Institutional, organizational, and structural barriers—rather than individual women’s assets and capabilities—shape women’s election to national legislatures. Questions about female politicians’ preparedness also matter beyond the candidate selection stage. Once elected to office, concerns about female legislators’ qualifications come to the fore again. Do female parliamentarians have the resources, skills, and networks necessary to legislate effectively? Studies from a broad set of countries suggest that women and men bring the same backgrounds and qualifications to elected office. As legislators they perform as well, if not better, than their male counterparts. Yet these assets and capabilities do not always translate into greater agency. As with female aspirants who must overcome structural barriers to nomination and election, female parliamentarians must confront limitations stemming from masculine institutions and organizational cultures that continue to sideline them and their work.

Parliamentarians are drawn largely from dominant social groups. Female legislators’ elite status may make them unrepresentative of the population as a whole (though the same is true for male legislators). However, their elite status also means they will resemble men in terms of their educational and professional credentials. For instance, Schwandt-Bayer (2011) finds that both male and female legislators in Latin America typically have college degrees; follow traditional career paths in law, business, and the public sector; have prior political experience; and express aspirations to reelection and/or higher political office. From Argentina (Franceschet and Piscopo 2014) to France (Murray 2010) and Uganda (O’Brien 2012), men and women legislators are highly educated and experienced. Across Asia, elected women are likewise well-educated and drawn from upper-class professions (Joshi and Och 2014). Women elected under gender quotas also have talents and qualifications that match those of men (Franceschet and Piscopo 2014; Joshi and Och 2014; Murray 2010; O’Brien 2012). O’Brien and Rickne (2016) show, for example, that quota implementation by the Swedish Social Democratic party led to the election of greater numbers of well-educated women from the party’s pipeline professions.

Women bring the same skills to national legislatures as men. Though female lawmakers’ similarity to men does not shatter established male standards of competency and qualifications, their educational and career backgrounds enhance their practical skills and civic engagement (O’Brien

and Rickne 2016). This allows women to legislate effectively. Murray's study of the French National Assembly shows no gender differences in levels of parliamentary activity, including numbers of bills, reports, and questions introduced (2010). In Italy, women introduce as many bills as male legislators and are no more likely than men to be absent from parliament (Weeks and Baldez 2015). In the United States, female members of Congress secure approximately nine percent more spending from federal discretionary programs for their districts than their male counterparts (Anzia and Berry 2011). Female lawmakers also sponsor and cosponsor significantly more bills than men (Anzia and Berry 2011; Barnes 2016). Essentially, women work as hard as—or harder than—their male counterparts.

Female legislators thus bring significant assets and capabilities to their work in parliaments—though their overall empowerment in these arenas remains unequal. Despite their talents and accomplishments, women remain underrepresented in parliamentary and party leadership posts and prestigious committee assignments (Bolzendahl 2014; O'Brien 2015). Their access to these positions does increase as their descriptive representation rises (Kerevel and Atkeson 2013, O'Brien 2015, O'Brien and Rickne 2016), but their presence in power positions remains far from proportional to their presence in the chamber. Women remain largely outside these posts because they lack membership in political elites' inner-circles: they enter congress with experience, but not the forms of experience that make them among the party's most-valued members (Franceschet and Piscopo 2014). The formal and informal rules shaping the nature, timing, and pace of legislative work can further exclude women from these elite networks (Ballington 2008). For instance, important conversations may happen in male-only spaces (such as workout facilities) or in late-night meetings that female legislators usually cannot attend given their domestic responsibilities.

Consequently, higher levels of women's descriptive representation signals women's empowerment within the political system, but not necessarily their empowerment within the parliament as a workplace (O'Brien and Piscopo forthcoming). Increasing descriptive representation may in fact generate backlash. Male legislators become more verbally aggressive and controlling in committee hearings as women's participation rises (Kathlene 1995), and women find their work generally more devalued as their numbers in Congress increase (Kanthak and Krause 2012). Women elected under legislative quotas especially complain about marginalization and stigmatization

(Franceschet and Piscopo 2008), notwithstanding the absence of empirical evidence that “quota women” are any less qualified or skilled. Recent scholarship has begun examining the upticks in reports of harassment against female parliamentarians, including not just in-person verbal or physical attacks, but virtual assaults such as cyber-bullying (Krook 2017).

Though it remains unclear whether systematic discrimination against and harassment of female legislators is newly occurring or just newly visible, institutional and organizational characteristics clearly limit female politicians’ achievements once in office. Insofar as women’s political empowerment signifies greater agency (Alexander et al. this volume), these barriers suggest an important distinction between descriptive representation as an avenue for empowering women in the society and descriptive representation as a tool for empowering individual legislators. While female citizens may experience women’s increased presence in office as beneficial, female legislators find themselves capable of doing the work—but also stymied by resistance and backlash.

GENDER QUOTAS AS EMPOWERMENT: ELECTING WOMEN, SYMBOLIZING INCLUSION

The persistence or even reinforcement of masculinist organizational cultures may paradoxically reflect progress, as those who would preserve the status quo react negatively to women’s rapidly increasing presence in national legislatures. Indeed, the data overwhelmingly show positive change with respect to descriptive representation, as women comprise one-third or more of parliaments in 33 countries (the top 20 countries shown in Table 7.1, plus Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, Burundi, Tanzania, Costa Rica, Portugal, Belarus, Serbia, Uganda, New Zealand, and Grenada).³ These gains—especially along the increasing, big jump, and low increasing pathways identified by Paxton and Hughes (2016)—are largely due to countries’ adoption of gender quotas, affirmative action measures that either push parties to nominate specific percentages of women or set aside a certain number of seats for women in parliament. Quota *laws*—where the candidate quota or the reserved seats are encoded into statute—have been implemented in over 80 countries around the world (Dahlerup and Norris 2014). Additionally, more than 30 countries have at least one political party that has adopted a “voluntary party quota,” meaning an internal quota that governs candidate selection within the party (Dahlerup and Norris 2014).

Though quota policies alone are neither necessary nor sufficient for guaranteeing female candidates' election to national assemblies, they are among the strongest predictors of women's presence in legislatures (Paxton and Hughes 2016). As a tool for boosting women's descriptive representation, the conventional wisdom holds that quotas' numeric effects are generally most dramatic when applied in closed-list proportional representation systems (because then parties can intertwine or zipper men's and women's names on the electoral lists); when they are legislated rather than voluntary; and when the state pursues enforcement (for instance, banning noncompliant parties from entering the election). Quotas also constitute a significant achievement for women's descriptive representation in and of itself. The popularity of quotas signals that both national governments and political parties have come to view women's inclusion as essential for democracy (Piscopo 2015). In this sense, quotas are broadly empowering, as they symbolize to female *and* male citizens the importance of women's access to political power.

Quotas as a Tool for Achieving Women's Political Empowerment

Of the top 20 countries for women's descriptive representation (Table 7.1), only 2—Cuba and Finland—attained this status without any form of quota in place. The others used legislative candidate quotas, most with thresholds set at parity (Rwanda, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Senegal, Mexico and Ecuador), or party quotas. In fact, Table 7.1 contradicts the conventional wisdom about party quotas. Long thought to be ineffective due to the absence of statutory enforcement mechanisms and their reliance on party leaders' goodwill for consistent implementation (Hinojosa 2012), party quotas have boosted women's representation to around 40 percent in Iceland, Sweden, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Norway, Ethiopia, and the Netherlands. The popularity and effectiveness of party quotas thus constitutes a surprising trend (Dahlerup and Norris 2014). However, these party quotas appear to be operating effectively in very specific circumstances: in European countries where traditions of gender equality already predominate (Iceland and Norway), or in African states where a single party controls most or all of the legislature (Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa). This pattern continues for the additional 13 countries with more than one-third women in parliament. Candidate quota laws explain women's success in developing or democratizing countries (i.e., Costa Rica, Burundi, Portugal, and Slovenia), whereas party quotas have

significant numeric effects in more advanced democracies (i.e., Germany and New Zealand).

While some countries have enjoyed significant increases following the implementation of quota laws, others have found quotas leading only to modest changes or even setbacks in the proportion of women elected to parliament. First, to significantly increase women's access to political power, the quota threshold must be high (Paxton and Hughes 2016). While some countries require parity in parties' candidate lists (Rwanda and Bolivia), other countries set much lower thresholds, such as 35 percent (Slovenia) or 30 percent (Argentina). Reserved seats, most common in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, create even lower thresholds. For instance Bangladesh reserves 50 of 350 seats (14 percent) for women, and Jordan reserves only 15 of 150 seats (10 percent).

Second, even effective candidate quota laws—those with placement mandates and sanctions for noncompliance—can fail to achieve their numeric goals. Consider Costa Rica, where women's representation, though high (35.1 percent), still falls below the parity mandate. This shortfall occurs for two reasons (Piscopo 2018). Women must be placed high enough on the list to comply with the quota (e.g., one in every two spots for a 50 percent quota), but this rule infrequently translates into naming women to the *first* position. Related, an increase in the effective number of parties means that more parties win fewer seats. The farther down the list women appear, even if it's merely the number two spot, the less likely they will be elected. In the 2014 elections, for example, no parties competing in the capital district placed women in the top spot. Only five of the eight winning parties won two or more seats, meaning three parties elected no women from the country's most significant electoral district. (Picado and Brenes 2014, 403).

Moreover, when parties do name female candidates as list-headers, they often send these lists to losing districts. Running female candidates in places where the party does not anticipate winning also occurs when quotas apply to single-member districts, as in Mexico (Piscopo 2016). Countries have largely acquiesced to vertical parity—that is, the alternation of men's and women's names down an electoral list—but continue to resist horizontal parity—that is, the alternation of men and women as the top candidates across an even mix of winning, competitive, and losing districts. Consequently, political parties find ways to resist even well-designed quota laws. Male political elites enact a wide range of strategies to undermine quotas' numeric impact, violating the spirit—if not the letter—of the law. Tactics include filling quota positions with female

relatives of male politicians (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Hinojosa 2012) and even using violence and intimidation to force female candidates to resign (Krook 2017). Yet, when parties have appealed to constitutional and electoral courts to overturn quotas, they have been unsuccessful, with judges determining that the measures constitute essential principles of democratic governance and fair play (Piscopo 2015).

Quotas as an Achievement in Women's Political Empowerment

Quota policies represent not only a tool for achieving women's political empowerment, but also an achievement in and of themselves. Quota adoption acknowledges that women's underrepresentation is not a matter of too few women fit for the job, but rather a reflection of the formal and informal barriers women face in politics. It accepts that large leaps in women's representation are possible and necessary, but also that women's representation does not increase simply by allowing history to unfold (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005). Quotas thus recognize that women's presence in national assemblies is important for its own sake.

Beyond their symbolic value, quotas are also an achievement insofar as they raise the quality of legislatures by helping to "disrupt the political forces that maintain the dominance of a mediocre male elite" (Besley et al. 2015, 25). Using a measure of competence based on politicians' earnings outside of politics, Besley and coauthors show that quota implementation by the Swedish Social Democrats resulted in the removal of mediocre male local-level leaders and councilors. Similar effects were found in Italian local-level elections, where gender quotas were associated with an increase in the quality of elected politicians (measured via years of education) (Baltrunaite et al. 2014). Beyond the rank and file, quotas can also disrupt leadership patterns by accelerating women's access to positions of power within their parties (O'Brien and Rickne 2016).

Citizens also respond to the achievement of quota adoption. The application of quotas to leadership positions on Indian village councils improved villagers' assessments of female leaders' effectiveness and reduced stereotypical beliefs about gender roles in the public and private spheres (Beaman et al. 2009). Quota implementation similarly closed the gender gap in adolescent educational attainment and resulted in girls spending less time on household chores (Beaman et al. 2012). Cross-national research finds that quotas are especially likely to influence female citizens' political behaviors and beliefs. With respect to political participation and engagement, Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer (2012) show that compared to non-quota

countries, women in quota systems are even more likely than men to both work on campaigns and also seek to persuade others about politics. Quotas can likewise enhance women's confidence in female politicians' capabilities (Alexander 2012) as well as increase their levels of political interest and political trust (Hinojosa et al. 2017). Focusing on Iraq and Spain, Alexander (2015) finds improvements in female citizens' belief in women's ability to govern after the "big jumps" in descriptive representation that followed quota implementation. In Spain, moreover, these effects also hold for men.

Yet not all quota policies generate similar benefits. Quotas' positive symbolic effects appear contingent on their ability to actually raise women's descriptive representation (Barnes and Burchard 2012). Even when quotas do bolster women's numeric representation, they can fail to positively influence citizens' attitudes and behaviors if they are seen as top-down measures imposed by unpopular parties or technocratic elites (Clayton 2015). In fact, support for quota policies is conditional on the broader quality of governance provided by the state (Barnes and Córdova 2016). Quotas may thus require some minimum buy-in to change public views.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This chapter posits that women's numeric representation in national parliaments or legislatures indicates women's political empowerment in several distinct yet related ways. Using the definition of women's political empowerment as the assets, capabilities, and achievements of women in gaining political authority relative to men, we first conceptualize increased descriptive representation as an important achievement in the broader quest for women's political empowerment. Likewise, we view affirmative action policies—namely, candidate quota laws, voluntary party quotas, and reserved seats—not only as tools for increasing women's descriptive representation, but also as important achievements, as they represent a commitment to making the political system equitable and inclusive. Though gender parity in legislative representation remains far-off (the cases of Bolivia and Rwanda notwithstanding), and not all gender quotas are equally effective, recent progress on women's descriptive representation offers reasons for optimism about women's political empowerment.

Turning to assets and capabilities tells a more nuanced tale. The available evidence demonstrates that female aspirants, candidates, and legislators compare favorably to their male counterparts: women politicians are as well-qualified and as skilled as male politicians in terms of their educational backgrounds, professional trajectories, and parliamentary work

ethic. On the one hand, these findings are reassuring. In most countries, at least some classes or subgroups of women will have the status and resources to successfully compete for and perform well in elected office. On the other hand, that female politicians with significant talents and qualifications still encounter barriers as both candidates and lawmakers suggests that pernicious factors are working to disempower women who seek and gain elected office. Political institutions, party organizations, and social structures work together to create an uneven playing field. Female aspirants may express greater reluctance to run for office, given the sexist treatment that they are likely to experience, and female legislators may find themselves excluded from the elite power networks that make and pass policy. Even when well-written and well-enforced quota laws are in place, male political elites largely recruit, support, and promote other men.

Taken together, this analysis of women's descriptive representation in terms of women's assets, capabilities, and achievements signals several promising directions for future theoretical and empirical work. First, examining women's numeric representation as an achievement, compared to examining it as an asset or capability, reveals a distinction between the empowerment of female citizens and the empowerment of female legislators. Women's political empowerment matters not just intrinsically, but instrumentally: political empowerment generates agency, enabling women to challenge the systems of oppression that keep them marginalized from (and within) public life. The symbolic effects of high levels of descriptive representation may well convey agency to women as a group, but the structural barriers that shape the day-to-day business of governing may restrict agency for individual legislators. Political empowerment, then, operates in different ways at different levels.

Second, and related, future work into women's descriptive representation as an indicator of empowerment should attend more carefully to intersectionality. Our distinction between female citizens, on the one hand, and individual women politicians, on the other, obscures how other forms of structural inequality—such as those related to race, class, and sexuality—shape experiences of political empowerment. In countries where certain ethnic or religious groups are systematically marginalized, higher levels of descriptive representation may *not* constitute an achievement for women from these minority groups. Researchers must strive to attend more carefully to the differences among groups of women, as the exclusion of certain classes or groups of women from national-level politics will ultimately limit—and perhaps even undermine—the extent to which descriptive representation can empower female citizens as a whole.

NOTES

1. We use these terms interchangeably to refer to countries' lawmaking institutions.
2. Uruguay adopted a one-time gender quota law, in force only for the 2014 elections. In March 2017 the Senate approved legislation to make the quota permanent from 2019 onwards. This legislation did not pass in the lower house, however, so the fate of the quota policy remains uncertain.
3. Countries accurate as of January 2017.

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