

ELECTORAL GENDER QUOTAS AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

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My current project examines why male-dominated authoritarian governments decide to adopt laws that increase women's access to the legislature. As the quintessential electoral reform in recent decades, gender quotas are one of the most common types of institutional adaptation within authoritarian regimes. I argue that authoritarian leaders strategically decide to adopt gender quota laws in response to pressures from local and international opponents. Faced with demands for liberalization, autocrats seek to balance the simultaneous need to minimize institutional uncertainties while maximizing international reputation and material benefits. In an era with readily available comparative scorecards ranking regimes on democracy and human rights, autocrats are increasingly concerned about their international reputation. This reputation comes with certain material benefits like foreign aid. However, political opening comes with increased institutional uncertainty. Gender quotas may decrease these uncertainties if the incumbent party is able to coopt women. These policies can also enhance the regime's reputation among the international community, which has widely embraced quotas and the concept of parity democracy. Therefore, autocrats may strategically decide to adopt gender quotas. Using event history modeling and a dataset covering all countries from 1975 to 2015, I find support for this theory.

Yet when faced with similar pressures, not all autocrats eagerly embrace gender quotas. The cases of Uganda and Kenya are illustrative. When Yoweri Museveni came to power in Uganda in 1986, he immediately embraced gender quotas from the local to the national level. By contrast, Kenyan elites only enacted gender quotas after a protracted constitutional review process that prompted the post-election violence of 2007-08. To date, the policy has yet to be fully implemented. What explains the different causal processes

in these two cases? Using a comparative historical analysis that draws on eight months of field work, including elite interviews and archival data, as well as memoirs and other historical records, I argue that the political conditions within the two cases prompted divergent elite strategies. In Uganda, the autonomous mobilization of women made the new regime eager to coopt elite women and ordinary female voters. Faced with weak countermobilization and strong international support for the policy, the regime proceeded to claim credit for giving women political space. By contrast, in the case of Kenya, ethnic voting patterns, a historically weak women's movement, and counter-mobilization against quotas disincentivized their adoption. Only after women mobilized for the policy, drawing local and international attention, did the regime reluctantly introduce gender quotas

to avoid being blamed for failing to do so.

Does this mean we should reject gender quotas as tools for authoritarian repression and cooptation? Or do these policies still provide some positive benefits? The second part of the project explores these questions in more detail. First, I conduct a large-n analysis testing whether electoral gender quotas provide women with increased political opportunities in authoritarian regimes. Using latent growth curve models, I explore the immediate and long-term effects of these policies on women's descriptive representation. Given the strategic origins of quotas, it is equally important to explore how women contribute to policies that benefit the regime. Therefore, I also qualitatively explore debates surrounding two pieces of legislation in Uganda and Kenya that were designed to entrench the regime.

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