

Electoral Gender Quotas and Democratic Legitimacy

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Abstract

Gender quotas are used to elect most of the world's legislatures. Still, critics contend that quotas are undemocratic, eroding institutional legitimacy. We examine whether quotas diminish citizens' faith in political decisions and decision-making processes. Using survey experiments in twelve democracies with over 17,000 respondents, we compare the legitimacy-conferring effects of both quota-elected and non-quota-elected local legislative councils relative to all-male councils. Citizens strongly prefer gender balance, even when it is achieved through quotas. Though we observe a quota penalty, wherein citizens prefer gender balance attained without a quota relative to quota-elected institutions, this penalty is often small and insignificant, especially in countries with higher-threshold quotas. Quota debates are thus better framed around the most relevant counterfactual: the comparison is not between women's descriptive representation with and without quotas, but between men's political dominance and women's inclusion.

Constitutions, electoral laws, or party rules in more than 130 countries require that women be included alongside men as legislative candidates or as representatives (Hughes et al. 2019, 219). Gender quota policies are endorsed by organizations including the United Nations and the European Union and are strongly supported by domestic and international women’s movements. Yet, quotas have not been universally embraced. Indeed, they often face considerable resistance before, during, and after their implementation. As Ireland prepared for its first election after adopting a gender quota in 2012, an editorial in *The Irish Times* argued that quotas would weaken confidence in the government.¹ In a more recent quota debate among Liberal party members in Victoria, Australia, policy opponents argued that quotas would undermine the egalitarian ethos of the party.²

These claims represent a broader concern about quota policies—that by including gender as a criterion for political representation, quotas cast doubt on the legitimacy of political decisions and decision-making institutions. Though a large body of work finds that women’s equal presence improves citizens’ perceptions of their governing bodies (Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo 2019; Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Valdini 2019; Morgan and Buice 2013), skeptics expect either null or negative effects when gender balance is achieved via quotas. Indeed, resistance to adopting gender quotas often centers on concerns that quota-elected politicians may lack legitimacy (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Zetterberg 2009; Clayton 2015). This perception could corrode the legitimacy-conferring effects of women’s presence on deliberative institutions.

We examine quotas’ effects on the perceived legitimacy of political decisions and decision-making bodies. We use survey experiments to compare reactions to a local-level council composed of: (1) only men; (2) four men and four women, with no mention of how gender balance was attained; or (3) four men and four women, elected via a rule requiring all parties to run equal numbers of men and women candidates.³ Our sample covers twelve democracies with varying quota policies,

¹Byrne, Derek J. “Gender Quotas Not the Answer for Women in Politics.” *The Irish Times*, March 9, 2015. Accessed March 26, 2024.

²Sakkal, Paul. “Victorian Liberals Abandon Push for Gender Quota.” *The Age*, December 3, 2021. Accessed March 26, 2024.

³Expectations were preregistered in advance of the study via the EGAP/Center for Open Sciences registry (see the pre-analysis plan in SI Section J of the Supplementary Material).

allowing us to consider whether the percentage of women candidates required by the country’s current policy—the quota threshold—moderates the relationship between women’s presence, quotas, and citizens’ perceptions of legitimacy. To do so, we assess citizens’ views of both quota-elected and non-quota-elected local legislative councils (relative to all-male councils and relative to each other), both overall (on our pooled twelve-country sample) and by country. Our cases include the full spectrum of countries’ experiences with candidate quotas, from no quotas (the United States) to well-enforced statutory quotas requiring gender parity at every level of government (Mexico).

Citizens strongly prefer gender-balanced governing bodies, even when achieved through quotas. On average, respondents across twelve Anglophone, European, and Latin American democracies perceive the processes and outcomes of decision-making institutions to be fairer when presented with gender-balanced legislatures as compared to all-male legislatures. The legitimacy-conferring effects of gender balance are strongest on measures related to procedural legitimacy, meaning the legitimacy accorded to the decision-making procedures and the institution itself. Importantly, these legitimizing effects persist even when respondents were informed that gender balance was attained via a rule requiring parties to run “equal numbers of male and female candidates.” Respondents view gender-balanced institutions elected without a quota policy as somewhat more legitimate than gender-balanced institutions achieved through quotas, but respondents overwhelmingly see all-male decision-making bodies as the least legitimate composition. Quota penalties are especially weak, and typically not statistically differentiable from zero, for respondents in countries with high quota thresholds.

Our results contribute to the growing literature on citizens’ attitudes towards, and reactions to, gender quota policies (Alexander 2012; Barnes and Córdova 2016; Beauregard 2018; Beauregard and Sheppard 2021; Bolzendahl and Coffé 2020; Coffé, Saha and Weeks 2023; Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020; Keenan and McElroy 2017; Kim and Fallon 2023; Kim and Kweon 2022; Kerevel and Atkeson 2013; Shiran 2024). We find little evidence to support quota skeptics’ claims that raising women’s descriptive representation via affirmative action would diminish democratic legitimacy. Respondents far prefer gender-balanced decision-making bodies attained via quotas to all-male groups. Our

findings thus urge scholars, policymakers, and observers to consider the relevant counterfactual when discussing the effects of quota policies on perceptions of democratic legitimacy: the comparison is not between women’s descriptive representation with and without quotas but between men’s political dominance and women’s political inclusion. Because quotas are adopted to remedy women’s systematic under-representation in politics, the alternative state of the world is not political institutions comprised of many women elected “on their own.” Rather, the alternative is institutions that jeopardize their legitimacy by continuing to over-represent men.

Representation, Gender Quotas, and Democratic Legitimacy

Building on the extensive literature examining the link between women’s representation, gender quotas, and citizens’ attitudes and behaviors, we develop our argument in five parts. First, we propose that, on average and across countries, citizens prefer women’s presence to women’s absence. Second, we describe how surveys show broad support for quotas among citizens in many quota-adopting countries. This generalized support suggests that citizens evaluate quota-elected institutions more favorably than all-male decision-making bodies. Third, we recognize that while researchers often find broad support for quotas, in some cases some citizens perceive quotas as illegitimate, influenced in part by political elites’ critiques of affirmative action. This suggests that quota-elected institutions may be seen as less legitimate than gender-balanced institutions elected without quotas. Fourth, we posit that the size of this “quota penalty” is likely moderated by country-level quota experiences. Finally, we draw on literature linking women’s descriptive representation to women’s substantive representation, contending that the effects of gender-balanced institutions on legitimacy beliefs will be strongest when legislatures debate women’s rights.

Gender-balanced institutions and democratic legitimacy

Citizens respond to women’s (under)representation in political office. In many cases worldwide, studies have found that women’s descriptive representation influences citizens’ political knowledge

(Wolak 2020; Dassonneville and McAllister 2018), sense of political efficacy (Stauffer 2021), and belief in women’s ability to govern (Alexander 2012; Alexander and Jalalzai 2018). In some contexts, women’s representation also appears to bolster women’s political engagement, increasing women’s political interest and participation and even inspiring them to seek elected office (Barnes and Burchard 2012; Campbell, Childs and Lovenduski 2010; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020; Lee 2022; Stauffer and Fisk 2022; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2025).

Women’s equal representation is also increasingly linked to perceptions of democratic legitimacy. Survey research indicates that citizens view governments as more democratic when women are better represented in elected office (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Karp and Banducci 2008), and that support for gender equality in representation is often grounded in democratic and justice-based values (Allen and Cutts 2016; Espírito-Santo 2016). In the United States, Stauffer (2021) finds that citizens who believe more women are represented in office also view government as more responsive. Among Americans, Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo (2019) find that women’s presence confers legitimacy to legislative decisions and decision-making processes.

These legitimacy-conferring effects are not confined to specific regions or groups. Kao et al. (2024) find similar results for respondents in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, and Arnesen and Peters (2018) see similar patterns in Norway. In a framing experiment in Spain and Portugal, Verge, Wiesehomeier and Espírito-Santo (2020) find that the symbolic effects of women’s representation are driven by citizens’ perceptions that women and men have equal access to power. The legitimizing effects of gender-balanced institutions even hold among citizens who are expected to have weaker preferences for inclusion, including men and right-leaning respondents, particularly when those institutions are making decisions that undermine women’s rights (Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo 2019; Verge, Wiesehomeier and Espírito-Santo 2020). This growing body of scholarship suggests that across countries **citizens accord more legitimacy to political decisions and decision-making processes when institutions are gender-balanced compared to when they are all-male.**

Gender quotas and democratic legitimacy

In most countries, progress toward gender-balanced political institutions is achieved through the implementation of gender quotas. Quotas serve as remedies for women's exclusion from historically male-dominated institutions but are also often framed as mechanisms to promote gender balance. Rather than explicitly setting thresholds that women must attain, quota policies typically specify minimum representation thresholds for any sex or for the "underrepresented sex." In this way, quotas address both the exclusion of women and the broader goal of gender-equal representation as a means of deepening and strengthening democracy. As Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer (2012, 16) observe, "gender quotas are not only institutional mechanisms for getting more women elected to office but are political symbols of the value that government places on gender equality and a truly representative democracy. Quotas symbolize the value that a democratic system places on social inclusion."

In practice, gender quotas not only promote gender-balanced institutions but also do so without compromising the quality of representation. Research consistently shows that women elected following quota implementation are as qualified and effective as their peers (Allen, Cutts and Campbell 2016; Franceschet and Piscopo 2014; Murray 2010; Lühiste and Kenny 2016; O'Brien 2012; Weeks and Baldez 2015; Josefsson 2014). Following the Swedish Social Democratic Party's implementation of a 50-50 quota for municipal positions, for example, women became perceived as more qualified for top leadership positions (O'Brien and Rickne 2016). Consistent with these findings, Radojevic (2023) finds that a "quota woman" framing did not negatively affect party elites' evaluations of women politicians in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland.

Quotas may even enhance the quality of representation. In some cases, the implementation of gender quotas can force lower-performing men out of office (Besley et al. 2017). Quotas can also improve women's standing within political institutions. For instance, quotas can ameliorate gender gaps in prestigious committee appointments (Kerevel and Atkeson 2013) and participation in legislative debates (Fernandes, Lopes da Fonseca and Won 2023). Quotas may also increase overall diversity in both sub-national (Barnes and Holman 2020) and national legislatures (Hughes 2011).

Given both the normative arguments in favor of quotas and the broadly positive effects of quota implementation, it is not surprising that citizens often respond positively to these policies when surveyed. Across Latin America, many respondents report that they approve of quota policies (Barnes and Córdova 2016). A majority of Brazilian (Batista Pereira and Porto 2020) and French (Coffé, Saha and Weeks 2023) survey respondents likewise support quotas, as did a majority of respondents in the Spanish province of Catalonia (Verge and Tormos 2023). A near majority of Irish respondents agree that “parties should be forced to nominate more women candidates” (Keenan and McElroy 2017). In the United Kingdom, voters do not punish quota-elected women (Allen, Cutts and Campbell 2016). Even in the United States, Bush, Donno and Zetterberg (2023, 11) find that American citizens tend to view other countries as more democratic if they have a gender quota compared to those that do not.

Beyond direct support for quota policies, research indicates that quota implementation can positively influence a wider range of voters’ attitudes. Following the implementation of quotas for village-level governments in India, Beaman et al. (2009) find that quota-induced exposure to women leaders decreased implicit gender biases over time. Also at the sub-national level, Clayton (2018) finds similar results among young women in Lesotho. Focusing on trust in political institutions, Hinojosa and Kittilson (2020) find that both women and men responded positively to Uruguay’s implementation of its national quota law. Coupled with citizens’ broad support for gender-balanced political institutions, this research suggests that **citizens accord more legitimacy to political decisions and decision-making processes when women make up an equal share of representatives as compared to all-male decision-making bodies, *even if gender balance was achieved via a quota policy.***

The quota penalty

We expect citizens to view gender-balanced institutions as more legitimate than male-dominated decision-making bodies, even when gender balance is achieved through quotas. At the same time, quota policies do often face criticism, particularly during their adoption. The introduction of quotas

can generate significant internal conflict within political parties, as incumbent men are displaced to make room for women candidates. Opponents argue that quotas are illiberal, as they make gender a criterion for candidate selection. They also see quotas as undemocratic, contending that they constrain parties' autonomy and limit voters' freedom to choose their representatives (Bacchi 2006; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2024). Although gender quotas that apply to candidate lists are written in a "gender-neutral fashion" (Krook and Norris 2014, 1271), both party elites and voters also sometimes view them as handouts to women that undermine merit (Dahlerup 2007).

Researchers document how, in some instances, women elected following quota implementation are derided by their fellow legislators. In the early years of Argentina's statutory quota adoption, Congresswomen reported being labeled as "quota women" in ways that minimized their competency (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). Women in the British parliament, especially those elected via Labour's all-women shortlists, reported similar stigmas (Childs and Krook 2012). Likewise, women in reserved seats in Tanzania reported feeling like "second-class" MPs, with their work receiving inadequate recognition (Yoon 2011).

Just as quota-elected women can be stigmatized by fellow legislators, related work finds that citizens may express skepticism about quota-elected representatives. In Lesotho, for instance, villages reserved for quota-elected councilors saw a decline in women's political engagement, as citizens viewed the quotas as externally imposed rather than arising from local demand (Clayton 2015). Reflecting on the extensive research into India's application of gender quotas for village governments, Kudva and Misra (2008) wonder whether the limited participation and policy influence of quota-elected women would undermine support for the policies. Indeed, support for quotas appears low in some countries and among some groups. When surveyed in 1990, most Canadians opposed gender quotas (Gidengil 1996). More recently, the 2014 New Zealand Election Study found little support for increasing women's representation via quotas (Bolzendahl and Coffé 2020). Fewer than a quarter of respondents to the 2016 German Longitudinal Election Study supported legal or voluntary party quotas for women (Coffé and Reiser 2023). A growing body of research

further highlights skepticism and even backlash towards quota policies within certain segments of the polity (Brulé 2020; Beauregard and Sheppard 2021; Barnes and Córdova 2016; Kim and Kweon 2022; Clayton 2015).⁴

Taken together, this work suggests the existence of a gender quota penalty. That is, we anticipate that gender quotas somewhat diminish perceptions of the legitimacy of political decisions and processes compared to institutions that achieve gender balance without these policies. At the same time, we expect that citizens prefer inclusive institutions over exclusionary ones, irrespective of how politicians are selected. Across countries, we thus posit that, on average, **citizens accord the most legitimacy to political decisions and decision-making processes when institutions are gender-balanced, followed by quota-elected gender-balanced institutions, and lastly to all-male institutions.**

Country-level quota experiences

We expect that the legitimizing effect of gender-balanced institutions, whether achieved through quotas or not, will generalize across democracies. At the same time, we recognize that quota policies differ by country. Some democracies have no quotas, and for those that do, policies are shaped by specific political, electoral, and institutional contexts (Zetterberg et al. 2022; Hughes et al. 2019). Countries' quota experiences may, in turn, affect their citizens' reactions to these policies.

Few advanced democracies have neither party nor statutory quotas. The popularity of these policies suggests a clear divide between choosing quotas in some form and eschewing them entirely. Countries and parties that continue to resist gender quota adoption may do so in part because the measures are (assumed to be) unpopular among citizens and counter to the interests of political elites. In these contexts, quotas may have delegitimizing effects.

Conversely, adopting quotas signals an acknowledgment that gender inequality in political

⁴In other cases, quotas do not provoke backlash, but they also fail to produce positive effects. For instance, while Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer (2012) found that quotas enhanced women's political engagement in cross-national analyses, their pre-post studies of quota implementation in Uruguay and France revealed only limited effects. Similarly, Zetterberg (2009) found no significant relationship between quotas and women's political engagement at the national level in Latin America. This pattern persisted at the sub-national level in Mexico (Zetterberg 2012).

institutions constitutes a democratic deficit and that positive action measures are an important remedy for resolving this problem in the short term (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005). When campaigning for quotas, advocates rely on discourses that emphasize the importance of gender-balanced representation and link women’s inclusion to democratic quality (Towns 2012; Piscopo 2016). Exposure to arguments connecting gender quotas to democracy throughout the adoption and implementation processes may increase acceptance of these policies.

Beyond the simple presence or absence of a quota, these policies also differ in their design, including variation in penalties for non-compliance and placement mechanisms that ensure women winnable positions (Schwindt-Bayer 2009; Hughes et al. 2019). Importantly, quotas also differ in their thresholds—the percentage of candidacies allocated to women. Some policies mandate low thresholds (historically as low as 5 percent), while others require gender parity (Hughes et al. 2019).

Thresholds have symbolic importance. They set a target for women’s representation and signal societal expectations regarding political inclusion. A parity quota communicates that men and women should equally share power, while a 30 percent quota suggests lesser representation suffices. In democracies, the modal pathway to a high-threshold quota is an initially lower-threshold quota law that is then raised over time (Piscopo 2015; Hughes et al. 2019). These reforms occur at the national, sub-national, and party levels as quotas gradually become more palatable and less contentious (Piscopo and Vázquez Correa 2023). Higher threshold quotas thus suggest that elites and voters alike have become accustomed to—and are accepting of—gender quotas. Consistent with this expectation, citizens in democracies that have implemented statutory candidate quotas with high thresholds are more likely to approve of these policies than citizens in other states, irrespective of the level of women’s descriptive representation in the country (Batista Pereira and Porto 2020; Coffé and Reiser 2023; Bolzendahl and Coffé 2020; Gidengil 1996; Verge and Tormos 2023).

Thresholds also usually affect de facto quota strength. A high threshold is a necessary, though not always sufficient, condition for a quota to achieve gender balance in legislatures.⁵ The overall goal of quota strengthening—such as by introducing placement mechanisms and sanctions—is to reach

⁵In SI Section E, we present country-level results focusing on different measures of quota effectiveness.

the threshold: to bring the number of women nominated or elected closer to the level envisioned by the quota policy. Strong quotas that include high thresholds can in turn expose citizens to quota-elected women performing effectively, reinforcing support for women’s representation and mitigating concerns that quotas compromise representation quality. For example, using World Values Survey data from 187 country-waves, Kim and Fallon (2023) find that respondents in countries with “robust candidate quotas” are almost 40 percent more likely to approve of women in politics than those in countries without quotas.

Whether quota discourses are causing more quota acceptance or quotas are being adopted—and their thresholds’ increased—where polities are already more accepting, a high-threshold quota indicates the polity’s openness to the measure. In contexts of high threshold quotas, we expect that gender balance achieved both with and without quotas has similar effects on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs relative to all-male groups. We thus posit that **citizens apply a smaller quota penalty in countries with higher-threshold quota policies.**

Issue area

We have theorized broad legitimacy-conferring effects of gender-balanced political institutions. Our expectations are grounded in the theoretical and empirical connections between diverse, inclusive decision-making bodies and citizens’ perceptions of the fairness and justice of these institutions. Yet, other arguments for promoting gender equality—including via quotas—focus specifically on the importance of women’s presence in deliberations where the outcomes touch on women’s lives. Because of longstanding gender roles, citizens expect women to bring unique experiences, behaviors, and preferences into policymaking (O’Brien and Piscopo 2019). Indeed, although scholars have carefully documented how the link between descriptive and substantive representation is neither automatic nor seamless, women politicians remain generally more likely than men to advocate on behalf of women’s interests (Barnes 2016; Betz, Fortunato and O’Brien 2023; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). On average, women’s presence in political office leads to more legislative attention to issues that disproportionately affect women’s rights and women’s welfare (Clayton, Josefsson and

Wang 2017; Wängnerud 2009; Weeks 2022).

Women’s presence in deliberations on women’s rights thus serves as an important cue that women’s experiences and perspectives were accounted for. The public seems especially outraged when an all-male group makes decisions on women’s healthcare or reproductive rights, for instance (Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo 2019). Consequently, although we expect to observe legitimacy-conferring effects across issue areas, we posit that **gender-balance—achieved with or without gender quotas—will confer greater legitimacy when legislatures are considering a women’s rights issue as compared to an issue not directly involving women’s rights.**

Experimental Design and Measurement

We test our main hypotheses using a survey experiment in which respondents across twelve countries read a short fictional newspaper article about an eight-member city council in a neighboring municipality.⁶ The article varies on two dimensions. First, we vary the gender composition of the city council to consist of: (1) only men; (2) four men and four women, with no information about how the women were elected; or (3) four men and four women, with information that the women were elected via a quota policy. The relevant treatment language reads (randomized components indicated in brackets): “The council is composed of [all men] / [four men and four women] / [four women and four men, following a new rule that requires all parties to run equal numbers of male and female candidates].” Our quota treatment is designed to reflect the language commonly found in quota legislation, which rarely uses the term “quota” explicitly but instead specifies requirements for the distribution of candidacies by sex/gender.⁷

Second, to test whether our findings differ across issue areas, we vary the policy area under consideration. Though all vignettes explain that the neighboring municipality recently adopted a

⁶Because parity quotas already exist in the parliaments in many of our cases, we chose a sub-national rather than a national-level legislature. We opt for a city council rather than a state/provincial legislature because our cases include a mix of federal and non-federal countries.

⁷For instance, countries like Mexico, Portugal, and Spain write their quota laws as “guaranteeing that half of political decision-making positions be held by women,” “the minimum representation of each sex,” or “a balanced composition of women and men, with at least 40% of candidates of each sex,” respectively. Our treatment is thus designed to reflect the reality that the term “quota” is rarely used in the statute itself.

policy requiring workplace training for certain employees, we vary whether that training applies to a women’s rights issue (sexual harassment) or to an issue not directly related to women’s rights (animal mistreatment on commercial farms). These issue areas were used by Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo (2019) following extensive pre-testing on a U.S. sample to select two issues that varied in their substance (clearly signaling women’s rights versus not) but were otherwise comparable on other dimensions (e.g., salience and potential for respondents to have varied views on the topic).⁸ For both issue areas, the substance of the policy decision is held constant. In all treatments, the city council decides to require that the relevant employees complete the training. The complete wording for all six treatment conditions (3 council compositions x 2 issue areas) can be found in Supporting Information (SI) D.

Following Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo (2019), our outcome variables capture two aspects of citizens’ legitimacy beliefs: substantive legitimacy and procedural legitimacy. Substantive legitimacy pertains to citizens’ perceptions of the content of the decision reached; it measures whether citizens perceive the decision itself as correct or fair. We measure substantive legitimacy based on respondents’ answers to three questions immediately following the vignette (randomized text to match treatment condition indicated in brackets):

1. Please tell us if you agree: The council made the right decision for all local citizens.
2. Please tell us if you agree: The council made the right decision for [women / the treatment of animals].
3. How fair was this decision [to women / for the treatment of animals]?

Procedural legitimacy gauges citizens’ perceptions of the fairness of decision-making procedures, as captured through citizens’ assessments of the decision-making process, acquiescence to the group’s decisions, and trust in representative institutions. Again following Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo (2019), we measure procedural legitimacy based on respondents’ answers to the following three questions:

⁸Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo (2019) pretested several control scenarios, including texting while driving, workplace bullying, and issues around homelessness. Farm animal mistreatment had balance with their main sexual harassment scenario on several key dimensions, namely, perceived liberal/conservative divide, issue salience, and potential to agree or disagree with the outcome.

1. Thinking for a moment about the gender composition of the council, how fair was the decision-making process?
2. Please tell us if you agree: The council’s decision should be overturned. (Reverse coded)
3. Please tell us if you agree: The council can be trusted to make decisions that are right for local citizens.

By directly prompting respondents to evaluate the gender composition of the council, our procedural legitimacy measure draws out explicit rather than implicit views on how the council’s gender makeup influences their perceptions of legitimacy. This is important for elucidating the connection between political representation and procedural legitimacy, and reminiscent of numerous media accounts and activist efforts aimed at highlighting women’s exclusion from political office.⁹

The questions we use for each of the two measures are highly internally correlated and each loads together onto a single factor (for both scales across all countries, Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq 0.70$). We thus generate composite scores of each legitimacy measure, which closely mirror the 1-4 range, Likert-type scales of the individual response questions (from strongly disagree to strongly agree / very unfair to very fair). We standardize responses within countries such that scores represent standard deviations from the country average.

Measuring Legitimacy Beliefs in Twelve Countries

We analyze how gender quotas influence citizens’ perceptions of democratic legitimacy across twelve established democracies. We focused on democracies from three world regions—the Americas, Europe, and Australasia—and prioritized middle- to high-income countries with reputable online survey firms (see SI Section A).¹⁰ Within these criteria, cases were selected to represent variation

⁹Subsequent research could explore how procedural legitimacy beliefs are shaped more subtly, without direct gender references in the question. We also note that the gender prompts reflect an important distinction between our two legitimacy belief measures. When we ask respondents to think about the decision that the council reached (substantive legitimacy), we are not priming gender, whereas assessments of procedural fairness more directly implicate who the decision-makers are, a point that we return to below when discussing different effect sizes across the two outcome measures.

¹⁰Since economic development correlates with significant proportions of the population having internet access, online surveys are more representative of the national public in middle to high-income cases.

along several key dimensions, including electoral system (majoritarian, PR, and mixed), strength of democracy (from newly-established to long-established), linguistic and social tradition (Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, Lusophone, and Nordic) and ranking on women’s rights indicators (from second in worldwide gender equality to 95th, see SI Table SI.2). Importantly, our cases vary in quota experience (from nonexistent to parity). However, in all countries with gender quotas, the quota had been in place for four or more election cycles before fieldwork, an important scope condition we return to after presenting our results.

We have four cases from Latin America, a region that remains in the vanguard of quota adoption and implementation (Piscopo 2015; Piscopo and Vázquez Correa 2023). The sample includes Argentina, which led the contemporary era’s quota wave by adopting a 30 percent quota in 1991, and has since strengthened its quota to parity, and Mexico, which adopted its gender quota in 2002 and then became the first country in the region to implement gender parity across all three government branches. We include Peru, an earlier adopter of gender quotas in 1997 that, unlike Argentina and Mexico, did not make significant strengthening reforms until recently.¹¹ We also surveyed respondents in Brazil, an outlier in the region for its weak quota, first adopted in 1997 but inadequately enforced and not well designed to work with the country’s open-list proportional representation system (Wylie and Dos Santos 2016).

We include four European cases with varying levels of quota adoption and strength. We fielded our study in Spain, which adopted a well-enforced 40 percent quota in 2007, and Portugal, which adopted a well-enforced 33 percent quota in 2006 (later increased to 40 percent) (Hughes et al. 2017). Our sample includes France, which adopted a weakly enforced parity quota in 2000. Adherence to this 50 percent quota has improved over time (Murray 2010). We also have data from Norway, one of the first countries in the world in which major parties adopted strong voluntary quotas, beginning in 1974 (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005).

We examine four Anglophone countries. We surveyed respondents in Australia and New Zealand, where the main center-left parties implement voluntary quotas. Our sample also contains

¹¹Peru implemented a parity quota in the 2021 elections, shortly before we fielded our survey in the country.

respondents from the United Kingdom, where the center-left Labour Party applied a voluntary quota, using all-women shortlists in half of its winnable districts for all general elections between 2002 and 2019 (Nugent and Krook 2016). Finally, we include the United States, which does not use quotas.¹² In all cases, except for the United States and the United Kingdom, quotas also exist at the sub-national level (the level of government featured in our vignettes). We describe the quota experiences of each of the twelve cases in SI Section B.

Data collection

We fielded our surveys online between July 2020 and January 2024 using three survey firms with high-quality proprietary respondent panels in the countries where they operate. In France, Norway, and Australia, we partnered with the survey firm IPSOS, while in the four Latin American countries, Spain, Portugal, the US, and the UK, we worked with Netquest. In New Zealand, we used the market research firm PureSpectrum. All firms collected informed consent as the first step in the survey process and returned anonymized data to us.¹³ In non-English-speaking countries, surveys were translated and reviewed by native speakers, with adjustments made to ensure the translations reflected the national context.¹⁴

Respondents in each country were selected to create a nationally representative sample of the online population (those with internet access) based on key demographics such as age, race/ethnicity, gender, and geographic region, with additional country-specific variables as needed. On average, we sampled around 1,400 respondents per country, though the sample size was slightly smaller in Peru ($n \approx 1,150$) and larger in New Zealand ($n \approx 2,000$). A full description of survey sampling is available in SI Section A. In total, we surveyed over 17,000 respondents across twelve countries. After removing respondents who failed the manipulation check (incorrectly identifying the council's

¹²For the selection of delegates for the national convention, the Democratic Party does require that State Delegate Selection Plans “provide for equal division between delegate men and delegate women and alternate men and alternate women within the state’s entire convention delegation (determined by gender-self-identification).” This policy does not apply to elected officials.

¹³A detailed discussion of research ethics can be found in SI Section I.

¹⁴Although Latin American and Anglophone countries share widely spoken languages, they often use different terms to describe local governments. To account for this variation, we tailored the terminology in each survey to match country usage.

decision) or completed the experiment module in under ten seconds, our final sample consisted of 13,274 respondents across six treatment conditions.¹⁵

Identifying quota thresholds

Above we hypothesized that the presence and threshold of quota policies would moderate our cross-country results. Table 1 lists the quota policies in each of our twelve cases, ranked by quota threshold. For mandatory quotas, we calculate the quota threshold simply as the quota’s statutory threshold at the time of fieldwork. These statutory thresholds range from 30 percent in Brazil to parity in four cases (Argentina, France, Mexico, and Peru).

For voluntary party quotas, we account for the percentage of seats in the legislature held by the quota-adopting parties. In these cases, we measure quota strength as the party’s quota threshold multiplied by the number of seats the party holds in its single or lower house. For example, at the time our survey was fielded in the UK, the then-parliament had been elected while the Labour Party applied its 50 percent candidate quota and controlled 31 percent of the seats in the British House of Commons. The UK’s quota threshold score is thus: $0.50 \times 0.31 = 0.155$. This measure allows us to conceptualize statutory and voluntary quotas similarly: in the case of statutory quotas, the multiplier is the whole parliament (effectively 1); for voluntary quotas, the multiplier is the total number of seats held by quota-adopting parties (our highest case being Norway at 66%).¹⁶ A fuller description of each case and the specific calculations of the quota threshold variable are included in SI Section B.

We expect that quota thresholds moderate the size of the quota penalty because citizens in countries with stronger quotas are more likely to have encountered political narratives about the

¹⁵Balance diagnostics across treatments included in SI Section F.1. The rate of manipulation check failure did not vary systematically by country or by treatment, and all estimates remain consistent when controlling for country fixed effects and when including the full sample; see SI Section G.

¹⁶In a robustness check below, we also include an alternative measure of quota strength which allows us to account for the fact that some countries do not fully enforce their quotas (e.g., Brazil and France) and that some countries exceed them (e.g., Norway and Portugal). To do this, our alternative measure adds women’s parliamentary representation to the threshold measure, such that, for instance, Brazil’s score is: 0.30 (the quota threshold) + 0.15 (percentage of women in parliament) = 0.45 , and Portugal’s is: 0.33 (the quota threshold) + 0.40 (percentage of women in parliament) = 0.73 . Thus, Brazil is penalized for a weakly enforced quota and Portugal is rewarded for exceeding the country’s effective quota threshold. See SI Section E.

Country	Quota at time of fieldwork (July 2020 - January 2024)	Women’s representation	Quota threshold
USA	None	28%	0.00
United Kingdom	Voluntary quota by main leftist party	34%	0.16
Australia	Voluntary quota by main leftist party	38%	0.23
New Zealand	Voluntary quota by main leftist party	50%	0.25
Brazil	30% statutory quota (weakly enforced)	15%	0.30
Norway	Voluntary quotas by most major parties	44%	0.32
Portugal	33% statutory quota	40%	0.33
Spain	40% statutory quota	44%	0.40
France	50% statutory quota (weakly enforced)	37%	0.50
Peru	50% statutory quota	40%	0.50
Argentina	50% statutory quota	45%	0.50
Mexico	50% statutory quota	48%	0.50

Table 1 Quotas in each of the twelve cases, ranked by quota threshold. Women’s representation is measured as the percentage of women MPs in the country’s single or lower parliamentary house at the time of fieldwork.

importance of gender-balanced representation achieved through these policies. In countries with high quota thresholds—such as those with enforced parity quotas—quota narratives are in discursive circulation; they are a point of discussion among politicians and civil society activists. Conversely, in countries with weak or non-existent quotas, such narratives are far less likely to enter mainstream discussions. This reasoning suggests that citizens should, on average, be broadly aware of whether their country has a quota policy of some kind, and that this awareness should be correlated with the country’s actual quota threshold. Our survey data support these intuitions. Before our experimental vignette, we asked respondents in each country if they knew whether their country had a quota policy.¹⁷ Response options ranged from “no” to “no, but some parties adopt them voluntarily,” to a list of growing statutory thresholds.

Figure 1 shows the correlation between respondents reporting that their country has any quota policy (i.e., any response option other than “no”) and the country’s actual threshold. Consistent with past research (Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020; Stauffer 2021), respondents often fail to identify their country’s quota policy correctly. On the whole, however, respondents do know if their country, or major parties in their country, have quotas, even if they do not always correctly identify the

¹⁷Due to space constraints we did not ask this question in New Zealand.

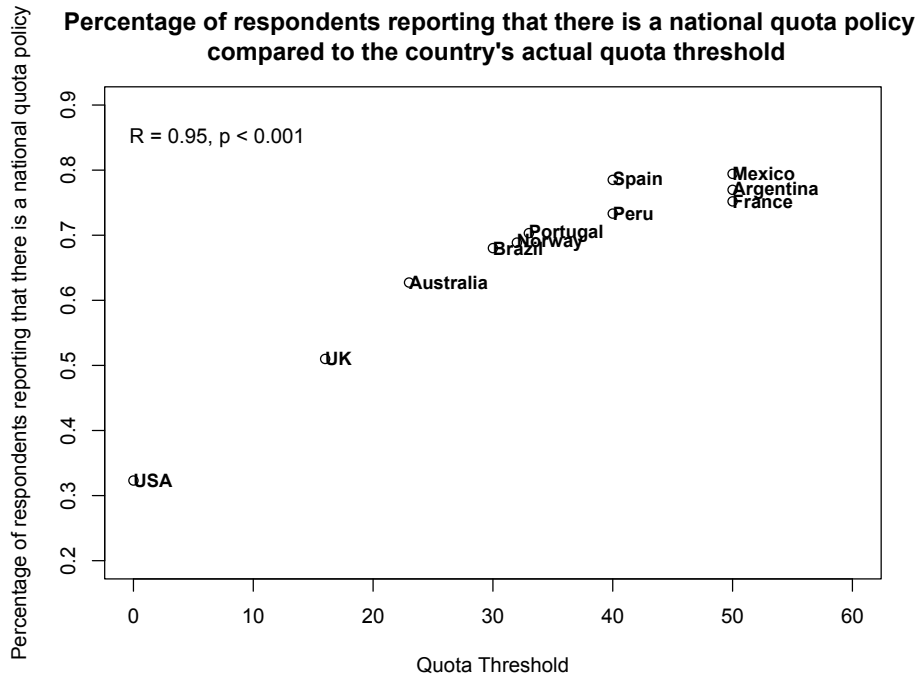


FIGURE 1 The correlation between the percentage of respondents in a country reporting that their country has some sort of statutory or voluntary quota policy as compared to the country’s actual quota threshold. See Table SI.3

threshold. Further, in countries with higher quota thresholds, citizens are more likely to (accurately) report that their country has a quota policy. As Figure 1 shows, this cross-national correlation is very high and statistically significant ($\rho = 0.95, p \leq 0.001$). Thus, we expect that respondents will react to our survey experiment based, in part, on their preexisting knowledge of quota policies in their respective countries.

Results

We theorize that gender-balanced institutions confer legitimacy on political decisions and decision-making bodies, even when this balance is achieved via gender quotas. We now examine the aggregate effects of quota-elected and non-quota-elected institutions on perceptions of substantive and procedural legitimacy when a woman’s rights issue is at stake. We then turn to demonstrate that quota penalties are moderated by countries’ quota thresholds, and lastly examine whether our

results hold in an alternative issue area (in our case, when women’s rights are not at stake).

Aggregate effects on a woman’s rights issue

We begin by examining the results from respondents who read about a council passing a women’s rights issue: preventing sexual harassment. To test our expectations, Figure 2 plots the average substantive legitimacy scores (left panel) and procedural legitimacy scores (right panel) across the three treatment conditions in this issue area, using data from all twelve countries.

For perceptions of substantive legitimacy (left panel), respondents who read about the gender-balanced council with no mention of a quota evaluated the council’s decision 0.30 standard deviations higher than respondents who read about the same decision being made by an all-male council (difference significant at $p \leq 0.001$). Respondents who read about the gender-balanced council elected through a quota still viewed the council’s decision as more legitimate than the all-male council by 0.23 standard deviations (difference significant at $p \leq 0.001$).



FIGURE 2 Average substantive and procedural legitimacy beliefs by council composition for the issue of sexual harassment. Scales standardized within countries. Twelve-country sample. $n = 8,517$ for treatments on this issue area. See also Table SI.6.

The effects are even more pronounced on procedural legitimacy (right panel). Compared to the all-male council, the gender-balanced council with no mention of the quota scores 0.85 standard deviations higher (difference significant at $p \leq 0.001$) and the gender-balanced council elected through a quota scores 0.74 standard deviations higher than the all-male council (difference significant at $p \leq 0.001$). Even more than evaluations of the decision that the council reached, the larger effects for procedural legitimacy underscore the connection respondents make between women’s presence and fair decision-making processes.

Our results also confirm the presence of a modest quota penalty. Respondents evaluate the quota-elected council as slightly less legitimate than when assessing a gender-balanced council with no mention of a quota policy. As shown in Figure 2 this penalty is, on average, small: 0.08 standard deviations across the twelve-country sample for substantive legitimacy and 0.11 standard deviations for perceptions of procedural legitimacy (both differences significant at $p \leq 0.01$). Stated differently, the legitimacy benefits of achieving gender-balanced representation through quotas, as compared to having an all-male decision-making body, far outweigh the quota penalty.

As robustness checks, we also measure treatment effects in models that include country fixed effects and respondent-level covariates. Estimates across specifications are essentially unchanged (see Tables SI.10 and SI.11). As an additional robustness check, we also examine treatment effects in a sample that excludes left-leaning respondents. This approach addresses the possibility that presenting information about the council’s gender composition and quota rule might inadvertently signal something about the ideology or partisanship of its members (see Dafoe, Zhang and Caughey 2018). To mitigate this concern, our design keeps the council’s decision constant (it always supports the required training). However, it is plausible that respondents observe a gender-balanced council (both with and without mention of a quota) as having more politically left-leaning members than the all-male group. In this scenario, left-leaning respondents might be responding positively to the perceived ideology of the council and not to its gender composition or quota status. As a stronger test of our theory, we remove respondents who identify as leftist (scoring a four or lower on a 10-point left / right ideology scale). Our main results hold among the remaining sample of political

moderates and conservatives, although treatment effects are attenuated, as one might expect from this sample (see Tables SI.12 and SI.13). These findings suggest that our results are not driven by left-leaning respondents for whom a gender-balanced council may signal ideological or partisan alignment.

In sum, we find strong support for our expectations. Relative to all-male legislative bodies, women’s equal presence conveys substantive and procedural legitimacy, including when gender balance is attained via quotas. As expected, moreover, quota policies only moderately decrease the legitimacy-conferring effects of gender balance, and quota-elected gender-balanced bodies remain far preferred to all-male institutions.

Quota penalties moderated by quota threshold

Figure 3 shows each country’s quota penalty: the difference in respondents’ average legitimacy beliefs in the gender-balanced council as compared to the gender-balanced council elected through a quota. We order these effects on the x-axis by the quota’s statutory or voluntary threshold in each case (see Table 1). For both measures of legitimacy beliefs and in all countries except one (Norway for procedural legitimacy), these effects are negative: respondents perceive the quota-elected council as having less legitimacy than the non-quota-elected gender-balanced council. Consistent with our expectations, the quota penalty tends to be smaller (and is often not statistically differentiable from zero) in countries that have high quota thresholds. For both substantive and procedural legitimacy, we find significant correlations between the size of the quota penalty and countries’ quota threshold (i.e., the quota penalty moves closer to zero as the quota threshold increases). For substantive legitimacy, the correlation coefficient is $\rho = 0.58$ ($p \leq 0.05$); for procedural legitimacy, the correlation coefficient is $\rho = 0.61$ ($p \leq 0.05$). As a robustness check, we find similar cross-national correlations when we measure quota strength as the country’s threshold combined with women’s parliamentary representation (see SI Figure SI.1 in SI Section E).

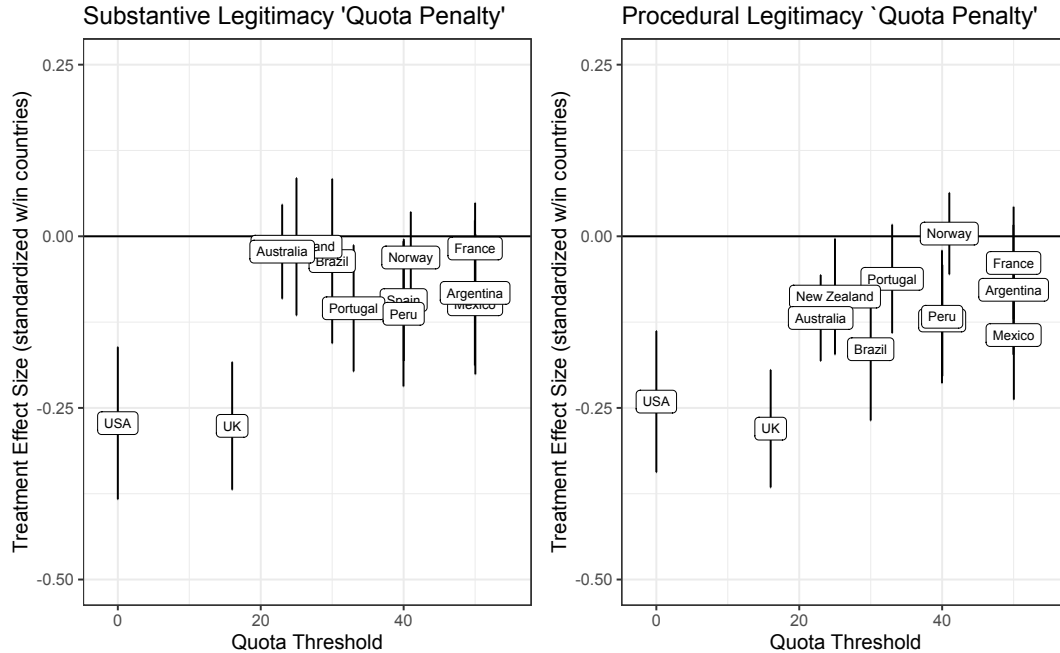


FIGURE 3 The quota penalty for substantive and procedural legitimacy for each of the twelve countries sampled. Countries are arranged on the x-axis by their statutory or voluntary quota threshold. $n = 8,517$ for treatments on this issue area (sexual harassment). See also Table SI.7.

Two other sets of findings warrant attention from the cross-national results. First, except for the UK, citizens' responses in countries with quotas are broadly similar in low- and high-threshold cases. For example, the quota penalty in Brazil, which has a weakly enforced 30 percent statutory quota, is similar to the penalties in Spain, Portugal, Argentina, and Mexico, where higher-threshold statutory quotas are better enforced. Likewise, respondents in countries like Australia and New Zealand, which rely on voluntary quotas and thus have lower thresholds, express similar preferences to respondents in countries where statutory quotas are enforced. This pattern suggests that the adoption of a quota policy—or the prevailing political culture within countries that have implemented such policies—exerts a greater influence on citizens' perceptions than the strength of the policy per se. Even when quotas are poorly implemented, or implemented by only a subset of parties, there is often little difference in citizens' evaluations of quota-elected councils compared to non-quota elected councils.

Second, the United States and the United Kingdom have much higher quota penalties than the ten other countries in our sample. Both countries have single-member district electoral systems, have

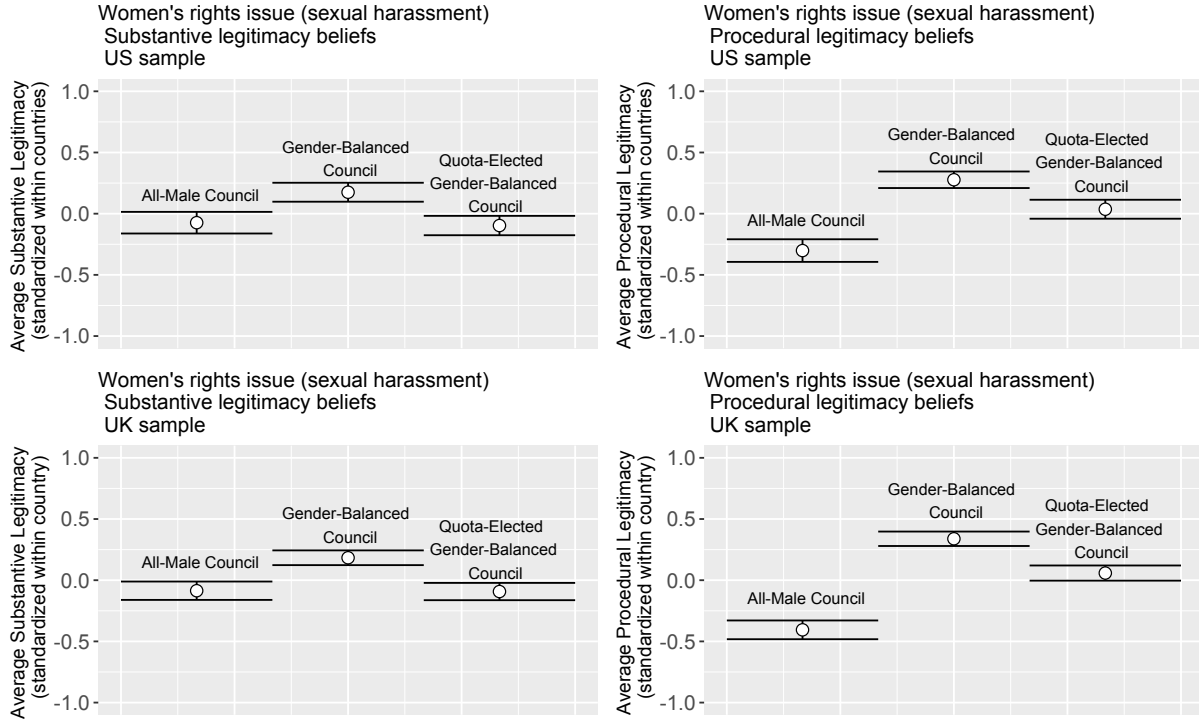


FIGURE 4 Average substantive and procedural legitimacy beliefs by council composition for the issue area of sexual harassment, US (top row) and UK (bottom row) samples. $n = 441$ in for the US, and $n = 626$ for the UK. See also Table SI.8.

refrained from adopting quota laws mandating women’s inclusion as candidates or representatives, and do not have quotas in place at the local level. In both countries, women are significantly underrepresented in the major right-wing political parties, and political conservatives oppose the use of affirmative action more generally.

Focusing on these quota resisters, Figure 4 shows the average substantive and procedural legitimacy scores for both the U.S. (top row) and the U.K. (bottom row) for each of the three treatment conditions on the women’s rights issue. Both cases reveal a similar pattern. In both countries, the quota penalty is large enough that substantive legitimacy beliefs are the same in the all-male condition as in the quota-elected council condition ($p = 0.84$ in the U.S. and $p = 0.94$ in the U.K., also see Table SI.8). Yet, on procedural legitimacy, even American and British respondents view gender-equal councils elected through quotas as more legitimate than the all-male institutions ($p \leq 0.01$ in both cases, see Table SI.8).

Aggregate effects across issue areas

Finally, we ask whether gender balance, attained via quotas, also confers legitimacy when the council considers an issue that does not directly pertain to women’s rights. Figure 5 shows the averages on the substantive and procedural legitimacy scales for the issue of animal mistreatment.¹⁸ Consistent with our expectations, the legitimacy conferring effects of gender-balanced institutions are smaller than on the issue of sexual harassment prevention, but they remain statistically significant.

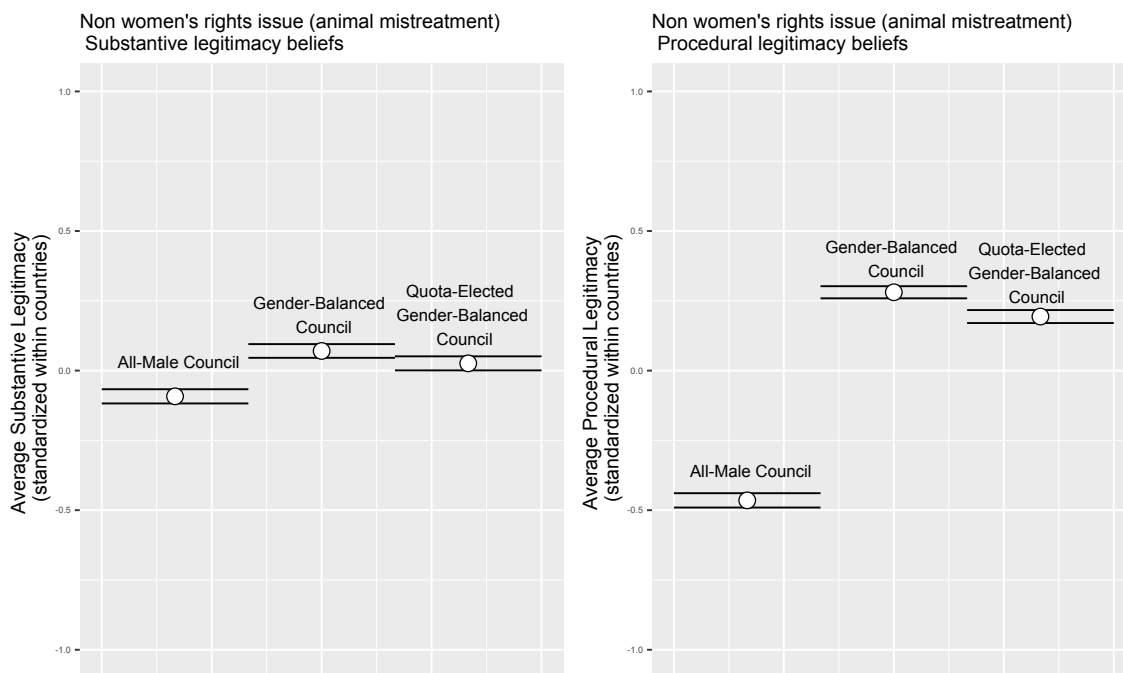


FIGURE 5 Average substantive and procedural legitimacy beliefs by council composition for the nominally non-gendered issue (animal mistreatment). Scales standardized within countries. $n = 4,757$ for treatments on this issue area. See also Table SI.9.

For substantive legitimacy, relative to the all-male council, the gender-balanced council scores 0.16 standard deviations higher. The quota-elected council scores 0.12 standard deviations higher. These effect sizes, while all statistically significant ($p \leq 0.01$), are about half of the magnitude of what we found in Figure 2 on the women’s rights issue. When examining the quota penalty, we again find that it is about half the magnitude that we observed on the women’s rights issue (0.04

¹⁸Here, our sample includes nine countries rather than twelve. These estimates exclude France, Norway, and Australia. We fielded in these three countries last and opted to include only the women’s rights policy area to have more power to observe cross-national variation in the quota penalty results.

vs. 0.08 standard deviations). We find this notable, as it suggests that backlash to quotas might be particularly pronounced on the issue of women’s rights (see, e.g., Brulé 2020). Related to this point, we provide a preliminary analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects in SI Section H, and find some evidence that the quota penalty is strongest among men and those on the far right.

For procedural legitimacy, the differences across issue areas are much smaller: relative to the all-male council, the gender-balanced council scores 0.75 standard deviations higher and the quota-elected council scores 0.66 standard deviations higher (both significant at $p \leq 0.01$). These effect sizes are only marginally smaller than those on the women’s rights issue (0.85 and 0.74 standard deviations, respectively), and the quota penalty is similar on this measure across issue areas (0.09 standard deviations and 0.11 standard deviations, respectively). Even on an issue not directly related to women’s lived experiences, citizens across democratic contexts prefer women’s inclusion, with quotas or without, to all-male institutions.

Quota Resisters, Scope Conditions, and Directions for Future Work

We show that respondents in Anglophone, European, and Latin American democracies perceive political decision-making processes and outcomes as more fair when institutions are gender-balanced. The effects are most pronounced for measures of procedural legitimacy and in contexts where women’s rights are at stake, but they also extend to substantive legitimacy and issues unrelated to women’s rights. Notably, the legitimacy-enhancing effects of gender balance persist even when achieved through gender quotas. Respondents consistently prefer gender-balanced institutions over all-male ones, even when this balance is a product of institutional design.

Our findings are likely generalizable to democracies beyond our sample, particularly given that most countries worldwide implement statutory or voluntary gender quotas (Hughes et al. 2019). However, important nuances emerge in specific contexts, particularly in two of our cases. Below we discuss resistance to gender quotas in the United States and Britain, as well as the contextual

factors shaping the generalizability of our results.

Resistance in the United States and the United Kingdom

Despite the broad, legitimacy-conferring effects of gender-balanced institutions relative to all-male bodies, we observe particular resistance to gender quotas in the United States and the United Kingdom. What should observers and researchers make of these results, particularly those invested in increasing women's representation in these countries? On the one hand, even American and British respondents prefer women's presence to their absence when evaluating procedural legitimacy, especially when women's rights are at stake. On the other hand, respondents in these two cases remain skeptical of quota policies. Neither country has statutory quotas, perhaps because their political cultures remain especially opposed and/or because voters and elites alike perceive quotas as incompatible with their electoral systems, which use plurality rules to elect representatives from single-member districts in a single round.¹⁹

This cultural and institutional resistance helps explain why American and British respondents exhibit greater skepticism toward quota-elected bodies and suggests that this bias might persist even if statutory quotas were introduced. However, in many of the other countries in our sample, voters and elites expressed an initial hostility toward gender quotas (Bruhn 2003; Lépinard 2016), but now view gender-balanced institutions elected with quotas as no (or minimally) less legitimate than gender-balanced institutions elected without them. This minimal penalty holds in cases like Mexico and France, where the statutory quota applies to the lower chamber's single-member districts. American and British respondents could then, in theory, become accustomed to quotas over time.

Scope conditions

Our findings are likely generalizable to democracies beyond our sample. Our dataset encompasses respondents from twelve countries across diverse regions, capturing a range of democratic trajectories

¹⁹No other country in our sample uses SMDP rules to elect their lower or unicameral chamber in a single round. France uses SMDP in two rounds. Australia uses single-member districts with Alternative Vote.

and political systems. Nonetheless, elements such as quota effectiveness, time since quota implementation, quota policies' wording, and the distinctions between democratic and authoritarian contexts constitute important scope conditions relative to our findings.

Quota efficacy

Our study focuses on highly effective quota policies. We compare a parity quota applied to the fullest extent to women's total exclusion. In practice, quotas do sometimes lead to dramatic increases in women's presence in legislatures, increasing their representation by 20 percentage points or more (e.g., in Namibia, South Africa, Senegal, and Kyrgyzstan) (see Clayton and Zetterberg 2018, 921). However, quotas can also produce more modest results. For example, when France first implemented its parity quota, women's representation increased by only 2 percentage points. Looking across countries, (Clayton and Zetterberg 2018) find that, on average, quotas double women's descriptive representation in national parliaments following their first implementation.

We leave open to future work how citizens perceive quota-elected bodies when quotas are less effective at increasing women's representation or are applied when women's representation is already at some meaningful threshold. Still, our results show that citizens are not averse to sizable "quota shocks." This suggests that when implementing a quota policy, adopting a well-enforced parity law may be better than a partial or weak measure. Indeed, citizens may be skeptical of quotas that result in limited gains in women's inclusion. For example, Clayton, O'Brien and Piscopo (2019) found that in the United States, the legitimacy-enhancing effects of women's presence were absent when the political body included just one woman. The addition of token women representatives—whether elected via quotas or not—appears unlikely to significantly improve public perceptions of legitimacy and may even undermine them.

Critically, all-male groups are often viewed as undemocratic due to their perceived deficits in representation. To foster democratic benefits, alternatives to all-male groups must visibly and meaningfully signal women's political inclusion, and gender balance is the clearest such signal. Gender quotas are crucial to achieving gender balance, even when they fall short of reaching full

parity. Future research should explore the thresholds at which these legitimacy effects emerge and how these thresholds might vary across different political and cultural contexts.

Time since implementation

In our eleven quota-adopting cases, the quota existed for some time prior to fieldwork. Eight of the eleven countries adopted quotas before 2000, and in all eleven cases, the country’s quota policies had been implemented for at least four election cycles. Except for the United States, we surveyed respondents exposed to quotas for at least thirteen years (Spain) and up to fifty years (Norway).

This exposure time presents a potentially important scope condition for our work. Our results might differ for citizens in countries with more recently adopted quotas. Quotas are sometimes met with initial backlash that dissipates over time as citizens become used to the idea that inclusion achieved through quotas is part of the democratic process. Indeed, quota thresholds often increase as elites and citizens increasingly tolerate quotas (Hughes et al. 2019). An extension of our work, which we cannot address with our current sample, could examine whether legitimacy-conferring effects hold for more recent quota adopters.

Policy wording

Our experiment mirrors the language of quota laws, which do not typically use the word “quota.” Instead, we use the word “rule” (i.e., “a new rule that requires all parties to run equal numbers of male and female candidates”). While this approach follows how actual statutes and policies are written, the negative connotation of “quota” could mean that respondents reacted less strongly to our treatment than if we had used this term. Future work could explore whether explicitly referencing “quotas” leads to different results. Previous work suggests that while “quota” may serve as a useful shorthand for scholars and activists, quota advocates may wish to eschew this language in broader discourse. Indeed, using the term “quota” may underestimate the level of public support for the policy (Verge and Tormos 2023; Coffé, Saha and Weeks 2023; Gidengil 1996).²⁰

²⁰For example, replacing “quotas” with “positive action” increased support for gender balance on corporate boards from 75% to 89% among Catalanian respondents (Verge and Tormos 2023). Similarly, Coffé, Saha and Weeks (2023)

Authoritarian regimes

Finally, quotas may not confer democratic legitimacy in autocracies. Given how the stigma of being “quota elected” attaches especially to women representatives, autocracies’ introduction of gender quotas may lead citizens to view women as agents of the regime. Indeed, Kim and Fallon (2023) document backlash to robust reserved seat policies, a quota type commonly used by autocratic regimes. Even if quotas do confer legitimacy, this result could reflect a troubling phenomenon wherein savvy autocrats introduce gender-balanced decision-making institutions to distract from their other misdeeds (Valdini 2019). Evidence suggests that this strategy can pay off, as gender quotas improve authoritarian states’ international reputations for democracy (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2022; Bush and Zetterberg 2021; Bush, Donno and Zetterberg 2023; Tripp 2019). Using gender quotas to add women to decision-making bodies might diminish regime critics’ ability to denounce authoritarian governments’ abuse of human rights, including women’s rights. Whether our results generalize to non-democratic regimes thus remains an open question and an important direction for future research.

Conclusion

Gender quotas, whether adopted by political parties or in statutes and constitutions, exist in more than 130 countries. They are the most popular electoral reform of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, adopted in response to normative and empirical arguments that men’s political over-representation produces democratic deficits (Bjarnegård and Murray 2018; Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo 2023, 2024; Murray 2014; Mansbridge 1999). Yet detractors worry that applying gender quotas carries costs, in that a quota stigma may attach to the women representatives presumed to benefit from these policies and ultimately to the quota-elected institutions themselves. A quota penalty may thus erode—rather than enhance—democratic legitimacy. Our research directly

find greater support for “parity” over “quotas” in France (though no framing effects for British respondents). In Canada, the use of the term “quotas” increased opposition to affirmative action by seven percentage points among men (Gidengil 1996).

addresses these concerns by illustrating that, on average, the legitimizing impact of women’s and men’s equal presence endures even when gender-balanced institutions are achieved through quotas. Respondents consistently favor gender balance over an alternative all-male decision-making body, even when equality is achieved by institutional design.

These findings make important contributions to the scholarship on the broader effects of women’s descriptive representation. First, we demonstrate that the legitimacy-conferring effects of women’s presence are neither isolated to the United States nor contingent on countries’ particular histories of women’s political inclusion. In their U.S.-based study, Clayton, O’Brien and Piscopo (2019) concluded that their finding linking women’s representation to democratic legitimacy “raises clear questions as to whether [this relationship] varies in countries that have experienced different levels of—and debates around—women’s descriptive representation.” Our work helps answer these questions. We show that across democracies in different world regions, despite varied trajectories of democratization and different national political institutions, women’s equal presence confers democratic legitimacy to decisions and decision-making procedures. Further, these effects persist in countries with fewer women in office relative to the U.S. (e.g., Brazil), a similar number compared to the U.S. (e.g., the U.K.), or more relative to the U.S. (e.g., Mexico). Respondents in countries with varied levels of women’s descriptive representation view gender-balanced decision-making bodies as more legitimate.

Second, our work does more than replicate the relationship between women’s equal presence and democratic legitimacy across twelve cases. We extend the analysis by considering whether attaining gender balance via electoral gender quotas matters for perceptions of democratic legitimacy. As the most significant electoral reform of the past half century, quotas have played a pivotal role—likely the most significant role—in changing the gendered composition of the world’s national and sub-national legislatures (Tripp and Kang 2008; Schwindt-Bayer 2009; Hughes et al. 2019; Krook, Lovenduski and Squires 2009; Paxton and Hughes 2015). Where adopted, gender quota policies have not eroded democratic legitimacy, as critics feared. Rather, our findings mirror what often plays out in the real world: in countries that have implemented gender quotas, more gender-balanced institutions foster

democratic legitimacy, irrespective of women's pathways to power.

Of course, neither gender quota adoption nor gender-balanced decision-making institutions are panaceas for democratic deficits. Though citizens prefer women's political inclusion, including via quota policies, this preference does not negate the challenges faced by women who enter office following quota implementation. Though these policies apply to all legislators, men's persistent over-representation often leads elites and voters alike to perceive women as the ones benefiting from gender quotas. In addition to navigating individual label effects, women representatives may face collective backlash as they make inroads in traditionally male-dominated arenas (Brulé 2020; Liu 2018; Erikson and Josefsson 2019; Kim and Kweon 2022). Women in both quota-elected and non-quota-elected institutions can benefit from broader efforts to change political cultures to be more accepting of women's presence and contributions (Erikson and Josefsson 2019; Lovenduski 2005).

Our study makes an important intervention into the literature on representation, gender quotas, and democratic legitimacy. Our results speak directly to anti-quota arguments that focus on quotas' alleged delegitimizing effects on elected women and the legislatures they will enter. Contrary to some arguments, the choice is not between decision-making bodies composed of women who can make it on their own versus institutions composed of women benefiting from affirmative action. Rather, given the direct link between adopting and implementing gender quotas and rapidly increasing women's descriptive representation (Tripp and Kang 2008; Schwindt-Bayer 2009), the choice is between women's inclusion via quotas or the continued persistence of male-dominated political bodies. Inclusion matters for legitimacy, and where quotas offer a fast track to inclusion (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005), they also bolster citizens' perceptions that democratic institutions are operating fairly and justly.

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Supporting Information for “Electoral Gender Quotas and Democratic Legitimacy”

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A Extended survey description

We fielded our survey experiment to online samples in twelve countries using three different survey firms that contain proprietary samples in the countries in which they work. Table SI.1 lists each country, the month the survey was fielded, the survey firm used, and the sample size.

Country	Date survey fielded	Survey firm	n
USA	June 2022	Netquest	1,371
Brazil	July 2022	Netquest	1,332
United Kingdom	July 2020	Netquest	1,308
Australia	January 2024	IPSOS	1,500
New Zealand	July 2023	PureSpectrum	2,045
Portugal	July 2020	Netquest	1,314
France	January 2024	IPSOS	1,500
Spain	July 2020	Netquest	1,428
Peru	June 2021	Netquest	1,147
Norway	January 2024	IPSOS	1,500
Argentina	July 2022	Netquest	1,333
Mexico	June 2021	Netquest	1,259
Total			17,037

Table SI.1 Survey features in each of the twelve cases.

Compared to face-to-face or phone surveys, online studies reduce costs, increase opportunities for more sophisticated survey instrumentation, and offer a quick turnaround on data delivery. Quality and coverage for online surveys are conditional on the existence of high-quality service providers with expansive panels from which non-probability samples can be drawn using sophisticated sampling methods. The best practice known to us is a technique called “sample matching” described by Rivers (2011): a target is selected from the sampling frame (e.g., a national census) using random sampling of some type. Then the closest match in the pool of available respondents (i.e., the panel) is chosen for surveying. This matching is performed using some distance function measuring the similarity between pairs of respondents. The resulting sampling distribution is similar to simple random sampling from the population if the pool is sufficiently large and diverse (Rivers, 2011).

In eight of the twelve cases, we partnered with the survey firm Netquest. For several of these countries, this was done in conjunction with a research center at one of our universities. Netquest assisted us with all of our cases in the Americas. In the Americas outside of the U.S. and Canada, to our knowledge, no provider invites panelists according to a probability selection approach, targeting the general population. Therefore, at best, any sample drawn from an online subject panel will be a non-probability sample that approaches (but will not be equivalent to) either the actual or online population in the country (conditional on what is possible). To conduct our surveys, we typically partnered with a firm, Netquest, which has proprietary panels in most Latin American and several European countries, to implement the best-practice approach for this study.

Netquest has proprietary panels and maintains a database of background data on its members. They allowed us direct access to potential respondents’ profiles. We drew random target samples, stratified by region and urban/rural status where available, from census microdata from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS). We then matched Netquest panelists to each member of the target sample to achieve a matched sample. This process was iteratively repeated

until more than 90% of target records had received a match; the resulting sample was later post-stratified on several characteristics to better approximate the census population.

The selection of panelists to approximate the random target sample was based on all socio-demographic variables common between panel records (Netquest) and census records (IPUMS). The main constraint on the set of variables was the availability of variables in public microdata. The variables that we used to match target and panel records are as follows: gender, age, education level, employment status, whether the respondent is head of household, geographic location (latitude and longitude), and number of persons in the household. In specific countries, we also used different proxies for household wealth, such as washing machine ownership (Brazil) or the number of light bulbs in the dwelling (Mexico).

Netquest’s main recruitment channel consists of invitational ads on social networks. Frequent updates to the panel and quality checks of panelists prune inactive panelists and lead to an average panelist lifetime of one year. Respondents are rewarded with “caracolas,” a Netquest-owned panel currency that can be traded for rewards, in proportion to median survey times in each project. In our case, 35 caracolas were awarded for each complete, as well as 3 caracolas for each rejection due to filled quotas. Each caracola is equivalent to about USD 0.18, and can be traded in for rewards on the Netquest platform.

Netquest administers anti-fraud measures to their panels, including various types of verification (Captcha, 2-factor verification, screening of social media, phone number, and more), blacklisting of repeat offenders, and a duplicates algorithm to prevent the same user enrolling in the panel more than once.

In three of the twelve cases (France, Australia, and Norway), we worked with the survey firm IPSOS. IPSOS also has an opt-in propriety panel of potential respondents. It selects respondents to mirror a nationally representative sample in the following way. It uses an interactive selection algorithm that balances one variable at a time in order of priority, as follows:

- The first step is to extract all active and available panelists that meet the screening criteria (ex. demographic, geographic).
- The sample pool is randomly sorted.
- The algorithm then examines the first (primary) variable and selects the number of panelists who satisfy each target. (Sometimes, there may not be enough available sample to fill all cells and since some variables are more important than others, lower priority variables may not balance precisely).
- Finally, the sample may be distributed and balanced among more than one cell so that different treatments or surveys may be fielded in equal balanced groups or cells.

The variables that IPSOS stores from those who opt-in to its propriety panel and which they used in our study to approximate the national population are the following: gender, birth year, state/province/region, occupation category, and market size (the size of city/town the respondent lives in).

Ipsos uses a point system to incentivize panelists, along with sweepstakes draws. Incentive points are allocated depending on the questionnaire length. Panelists who don’t qualify for a survey (ex. are screened out after the screening questions) receive a small number of points for their willingness

to participate. Accumulated points can be redeemed on the dedicated panelists' website for a variety of rewards.

Finally, in New Zealand, we had the opportunity to join colleagues from universities in the US and Australia to include our module on a joint survey conducted by the market research firm PureSpectrum. PureSpectrum maintains a proprietary panel of respondents and routinely removes respondents from the pool who demonstrate inconsistent behavior on surveys, indicating fraud, low attention, or speeding.

B Extended case description

B.1 Quota features

In this section, we expand on the quota experience for the cases in our sample, including how we calculated the quota threshold for cases with voluntary party quotas.

Statutory Quotas:

Argentina:

First adoption: 1991 (30% threshold)

Quota features: Placement mandates and strong sanctions for non-compliance

Significant reforms: Increased threshold from 30% to 50% in 2017.

Electoral system: Proportional representation (closed list)

Sub-national quota: Yes

Case description: Argentina led the contemporary era's quota wave by adopting a 30% quota with strong sanctions for non-compliance and placement mandates in 1991, which it implemented in the 1993 elections. In 2017, it strengthened its quota to parity, which it implemented in the 2019 general election.

Brazil:

First adoption: 1997 (25% threshold)

Quota features: No placement mandates and weak sanctions for non-compliance.

Significant reforms: Increased threshold from 25% to 30% in 2000. Adopted weak sanctions for non-compliance in 2009.

Electoral system: Proportional representation (open list)

Sub-national quota: Yes

Case description: Brazil first adopted a 25% candidate quota in 1997 and implemented it in elections the following year. It increased the quota to a 30% threshold in 2000, which it implemented in the 2002 elections but with no sanctions for non-compliance. It adopted weak sanctions for non-compliance in 2009, which it implemented in the 2010 elections. The country is an outlier in the region for its weak quota, due to the quotas' mismatch with the open-list proportional representation (PR) system and its weak enforcement.

France:

First adoption: 1999 (50% threshold)

Quota features: No placement mandates and weak sanctions for non-compliance.

Significant reforms: Sanctions for non-compliance strengthened in 2012, but are still weak.

Electoral system: Plurality/majority (two-round system)

Sub-national quota: Yes

Case description: France adopted a weakly enforced parity quota in 1999, which was implemented for the first time in the 2002 elections. With no placement mandates and very weak sanctions for

non-compliance, women's representation in Parliament only increased from 11% to 12% with the 2002 elections. The quota law was reformed in 2012 and adherence has improved over time, but still falls short of fulfilling its goal of parity. At the time of fieldwork, women's representation in the French Parliament was 37%.

Mexico:

First adoption: 2002 (30% threshold)

Quota features: Placement mandates and strong sanctions for non-compliance

Significant reforms: Threshold increase to 40% in 2008 and 50% in 2014.

Electoral system: Mixed-member proportional (MMP)

Sub-national quota: Yes

Case description: Mexico's political parties had significant voluntary quotas before the first statutory quota was passed. Mexico first adopted a statutory 30% quota in 2002, which it implemented the following year. It strengthened the threshold to 40% in 2008 and to 50% in 2014. The quota has strong placement mandates and sanctions for non-compliance. Mexico is the first country in Latin America to adopt and implement gender parity across all three government branches.

Peru:

First adoption: 1997 (25% threshold)

Quota features: No placement mandate but strong sanctions for non-compliance

Significant reforms: Threshold increase to 30% in 2001 and 50% in 2021.

Electoral system: Proportional representation (open list)

Sub-national quota: Yes

Case description: Peru adopted a 25% candidate quota in 1997, which it implemented in the 2000 general elections. In 2001, it strengthened the threshold to 30%. In the spring of 2021 (shortly before our fieldwork in July 2021), the country implemented a parity quota in its general elections.

Portugal:

First adoption: 2006 (33% threshold)

Quota features: Strong placement mandate but weak sanctions for non-compliance.

Significant reforms: None to date

Electoral system: Proportional representation (closed list)

Sub-national quota: Yes

Case description: Portugal adopted a 33% candidate quota in 2006, which it implemented in the 2009 general elections. The quota has placement mandates and sanctions for non-compliance, although these actions are weak. Portugal somewhat outperforms the quota's target; 40% of seats in its lower parliamentary house are filled by women.

Spain:

First adoption: 2007 (40% threshold)

Quota features: Strong placement mandate and strong sanctions for non-compliance.

Significant reforms: None to date

Electoral system: Proportional representation (closed list)

Sub-national quota: Yes

Case description: Spain adopted a 40% candidate quota in 2007, which it implemented in elections the following year. The quota has placement mandates and strong sanctions for non-compliance. Several leftist parties adopted voluntary quotas before the statutory quota was implemented, and have been strengthened over time to be in accordance with the statutory quota.

Voluntary Quotas:

Australia:

First adoption: 1994

Quota features: Voluntary quota by the main leftist party (ALP)

Significant reforms: ALP adopted a 35% threshold quota in 1994, which increased to 40% (2012), 45% in 2022, and then to 50% by 2025.

Electoral system: Plurality/majority (alternative vote)

Sub-national quota: Yes (voluntarily by ALP)

Case description: In Australia, voluntary party quotas were introduced by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1994. The party currently has a 45% quota on its party lists, but has a target to increase this to 50% by 2025. At the time of fieldwork (January 2024), the Labour Party held 51% of seats, making its quota threshold $0.51 * 0.45 = 0.23$.

New Zealand:

First adoption: 1996 (soft quota)

Quota features: Voluntary quota by the main leftist party (Labour)

Significant reforms: The principle of gender balance in candidate selection was introduced in the Labour Party constitution in 1996. The party codified a 45% quota in the party constitution in 2013, which it increased to 50% in 2017.

Electoral system: Mixed-member proportional (MMP)

Sub-national quota: Yes (voluntarily by Labour)

Case description: When New Zealand moved to a mixed-member proportional system in 1996, the Labour Party adopted a soft quota. It changed its constitution to include a principle of “gender balance” for all selection procedures. At each candidate selection conference, the party was instructed to “pause for thought” after each bloc of five candidates to consider the balance of gender, ethnicity, age, and experience (Krook, Lovenduski and Squires 2009, 793). The Labour Party amended its constitution in 2013, including a change that read: “that the resultant Caucus will comprise at least 45 percent women. For the 2017 and subsequent elections the percentage shall be at least 50 percent.” Per the 2022 Constitution of the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Greens “aim to achieve balanced representation in appointments and elected roles,” where balanced representation “reflects the diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand’s society, including, but not limited to, diversity of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age and geography.” This

policy is not framed as a gender quota, and women significantly outnumbered men in the party's parliamentary caucus when our survey was fielded (July 2023). When we fielded our survey, Labour held 50% of seats, making its quota threshold: $0.5 * 0.5 = 0.25$. New Zealand exceeds this threshold; at the time of fieldwork, it had a parity parliament.

Norway:

First adoption: 1974

Quota features: Voluntary quota by leftist and center parties

Significant reforms: Three major parties have adopted gender quotas since 1974 in addition to several smaller parties

Electoral system: Proportional representation (closed list)

Sub-national quota: Yes (voluntarily by several parties)

Case description: Norway was one of the first countries in the world in which major political parties voluntarily adopted gender quotas for party lists. Venstre (Liberals) adopted gender quotas for national and local party lists (as well as internal governing bodies) in 1974, Sosialistisk Venstreparti (Socialist Left) in 1975, Arbeiderpartiet (Labour) in 1983, Senterpartiet (Centre Party, Agrarians) in 1989, Kristelig Folkeparti (Christian Democrats) in 1993, Rødt (Socialists, former Communists) in 2007, and Miljøpartiet de Grønne (Greens) in 2010. Høyre (the Conservative Party) does not have a gender quota. In practice, however, they do typically balance their lists. The Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet), the country's radical right party does not have a quota. At the time the survey was fielded (January 2024), the Labour Party held 28.4 percent of seats (multiplied by 50 percent quota = 0.142); the Centre Party held 16.6 percent of seats (multiplied by a 40 percent quota = 0.066); the Socialist Party held 7.7 percent of seats (multiplied by a 50 percent quota = 0.038). All other parties held a combined 14.4% of seats (multiplied by a 50% quota = 0.072). The sum of the quota threshold is thus: $0.142 + 0.066 + 0.038 + 0.072 = 0.319$.

United Kingdom:

First adoption: 1993

Quota features: Voluntary quota by the main leftist party (Labour)

Significant reforms: None to date.

Electoral system: Plurality/majority

Sub-national quota: No

Case description: In the UK, the center-left Labour Party has a voluntary quota, using all-women shortlists (AWS) in half of its winnable districts. During the 1993 Labour Party Conference, all-women shortlists were endorsed by the party. The measure was applied for the first time for candidate selection for the 1997 general elections. Quota implementation was paused midway through candidate selection for that election when an industrial tribunal found the Labour Party had violated the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. Following the legalization of voluntary gender quotas via the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002, the Labour Party used all-women shortlists for candidate selection for the 2005 election. It continued to use AWS in every election until 2022. In the 2022 general elections, Labour did not use the AWS system because a majority of its MPs were women. At the time our survey was fielded in 2020, the Labour Party had a 50% candidate quota, and controlled 31% of the seats in the British House of Commons. The UK's

quota threshold score is thus: $0.50 \times 0.31 = 0.155$.

No Quotas:

United States of America:

First adoption: NA

Quota features: NA

Significant reforms: NA

Electoral system: Plurality/majority

Sub-national quota: No

Case description: There are no quotas of any type in the US, either voluntary by either major political party or statutory. For the selection of delegates for the national convention, the Democratic Party does require that State Delegate Selection Plans “provide for equal division between delegate men and delegate women and alternate men and alternate women within the state’s entire convention delegation (determined by gender-self-identification).” This policy does not apply to elected officials.

B.2 Other case features

Country	GDPpc	FLFP	GII ranking	Polity Score
Argentina	14,000	51	75	9
Australia	65,000	62	25	10
Brazil	10,000	53	95	8
France	44,000	53	8	9
Mexico	14,000	47	71	8
Peru	8,000	66	87	9
Portugal	27,000	55	18	10
New Zealand	49,000	68	24	10
Norway	88,000	62	2	10
Spain	33,000	53	16	10
UK	49,000	58	26	8
USA	82,000	57	46	8

Table SI.2 General case description: GDP per capita are World Bank estimates from the year the survey was fielded, listed in USD and rounded to the nearest 1000. Female labor force participation (FLFP) is measured by World Bank estimates in the year the survey was fielded in each country. Polity Scores are based on the Polity IV score from 2018. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) ranking is from the United Nations, and the ranking is based on a world ranking of 168 economies.

C Quota knowledge

Country	% responding affirmatively	Actual quota threshold
USA	32.3	0
United Kingdom	50.9	16
Australia	62.7	23
Brazil	68.0	30
Norway	68.8	32
Portugal	70.3	33
Spain	78.5	40
Peru	73.3	40
France	75.2	50
Argentina	76.9	50
Mexico	79.4	50

Table SI.3 Percentage of respondents who responded that their country had a quota policy (even if they identified the threshold incorrectly), and each country's actual quota threshold.

D Treatment wording

Our six vignettes are as follows (note that randomized text in bold.):

Treatment Vignettes 1 - 3:

[All-Male / Gender-Balanced] Council Adopts New Sexual Harassment Policy

A neighboring municipality recently elected a new eight-member council. The council is composed of [all men] / [four men and four women] / [four women and four men, following a new rule that requires all parties to run equal numbers of male and female candidates].

The new council recently adopted a policy on sexual harassment in the workplace. It requires that public employees receive training about sexual harassment prevention.

The council defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances and remarks, as well as requests for sexual favors. The training explains which behaviors are prohibited and includes information about the remedies available to victims. Nationally, over 80% of sexual harassment suits are filed by women.

The policy was among several items approved last month by the [all-male council] / [gender-balanced council]/ [gender-balanced council elected under the new rule].

Treatment Vignettes 4 - 6:

[All-Male / Gender-Balanced] Council Adopts New Animal Mistreatment Policy

A neighboring municipality recently elected a new eight-member council. The council is composed of [all men] / [four men and four women] / [four women and four men, following a new rule that requires all parties to run equal numbers of male and female candidates].

The new council recently adopted a policy on animal mistreatment on commercial farms. It requires that farm employees receive training about the prevention of animal mistreatment.

The council's definition of animal mistreatment includes confined spaces and unclean pens. The training explains which behaviors are prohibited and includes information about improving practices on commercial farms. Nationwide, 80% of animals are raised on commercial farms.

The policy was among several items approved last month by the [all-male council] / [gender-balanced council]/ [gender-balanced council elected under the new rule].

E Quota penalty: alternative quota strength measure

As an alternative measure of quota strength, we add the quota threshold (as calculated in the main text) to a measure of women’s descriptive representation in the single or lower parliamentary house at the time of fieldwork. This allows us to account for the fact that some countries do not fully enforce their statutory quotas (e.g., Brazil and France) and that some countries exceed them (e.g., Norway and Portugal). To do this, our alternative measure adds women’s parliamentary representation to the threshold measure, such that, for instance, Brazil’s score is: 0.30 (the quota threshold) + 0.15 (percentage of women in parliament) = 0.45, and Norway’s is: 0.32 (the quota threshold) + 0.44 (percentage of women in parliament) = 0.76. Thus, Brazil is penalized for a weakly enforced quota and Norway is rewarded for exceeding the country’s effective quota threshold. When we array each country’s quota penalty along an x-axis that consists of this alternative measure of quota strength (see Figure SI.1), we get similar results to what we present in the main text (see Figure 3).

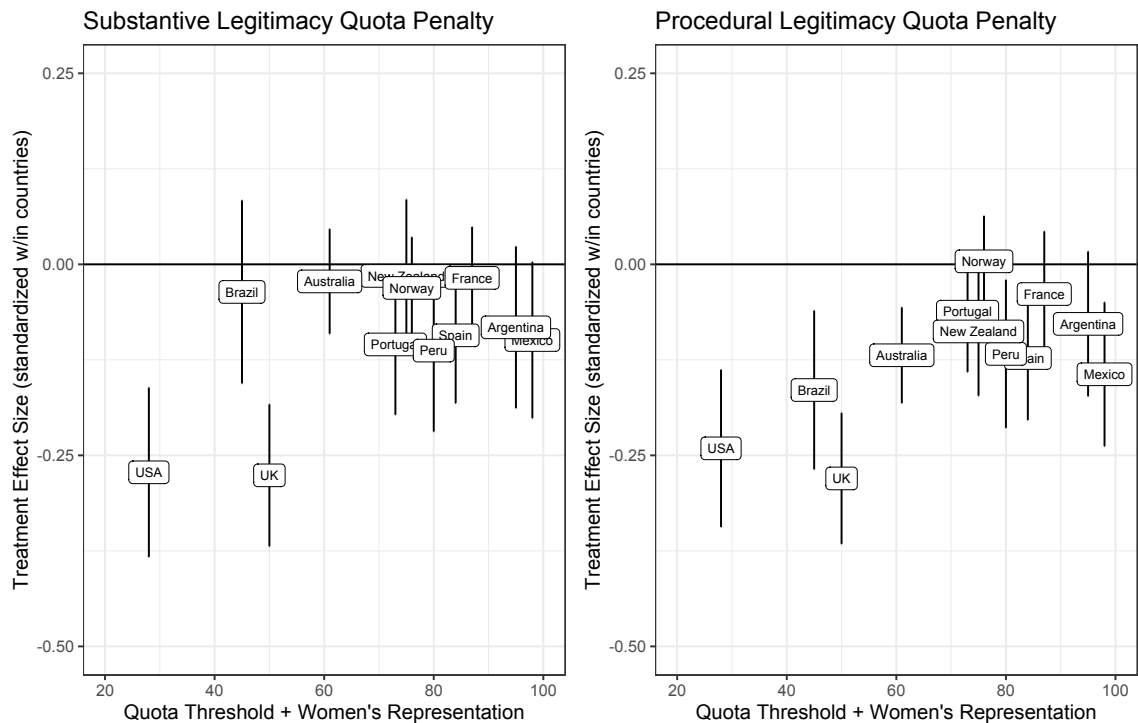


FIGURE SI.1 The quota penalty for substantive and procedural legitimacy for each of the twelve countries sampled. Countries are arranged on the x-axis by their statutory or voluntary quota threshold plus women’s parliamentary representation.

F Results tables

F.1 Balance

Table SI.4 shows balance diagnostics across the three treatment conditions on sexual harassment using the covariates that we include in Tables SI.10 and SI.11. Other covariates have different scales within countries (e.g., education, income), and thus are difficult to incorporate in cross-national models. Balance is achieved on these variables within each country. Chi-squared tests show the treatments were successfully randomized on each variable ($p \geq 0.10$). We included all six treatments in nine out of the twelve countries. In three countries, we only included the three sexual harassment vignettes (Australia, France, and Norway), hence their larger share of the sample. The inclusion of country fixed effects addresses this issue.

	All-male	Gender-balanced No Quota	Gender-balanced Quota
Percent women	0.53	0.53	0.54
Ideology Score (1 - 10)	5.35	5.40	5.36
Argentina	0.06	0.06	0.06
Australia	0.14	0.14	0.14
Brazil	0.05	0.05	0.05
France	0.14	0.14	0.13
Mexico	0.06	0.06	0.06
Norway	0.15	0.15	0.15
New Zealand	0.06	0.06	0.06
Peru	0.06	0.06	0.06
Portugal	0.07	0.07	0.07
Spain	0.08	0.08	0.08
UK	0.07	0.07	0.08
USA	0.05	0.05	0.05

Table SI.4 Balance diagnostics for sexual harassment treatments

Table SI.5 shows balance diagnostics across the three treatment conditions on animal mistreatment using the covariates that we include in Tables SI.10 and SI.11. Chi-squared tests show the treatments were successfully randomized on each variable ($p \geq 0.10$). We included these treatments in nine out of the twelve countries.

	All-male	Gender-balanced No Quota	Gender-balanced Quota
Percent women	0.50	0.52	0.50
Ideology Score (1 - 10)	5.46	5.45	5.40
Argentina	0.10	0.11	0.10
Brazil	0.09	0.09	0.09
Mexico	0.11	0.12	0.11
New Zealand	0.10	0.10	0.10
Peru	0.11	0.11	0.10
Portugal	0.13	0.14	0.13
Spain	0.15	0.14	0.14
UK	0.13	0.13	0.13
USA	0.09	0.08	0.09

Table SI.5 Balance diagnostics for animal mistreatment treatments

F.2 Treatment effect tables

	All-male council	Gender-balanced council	ATE (95 % CI)	All-male Council	Quota-elected council	ATE (95 % CI)
Substantive legitimacy	-0.176	0.127	-0.303 (-0.355, -0.252)	-0.176	0.051	-0.227 (-0.279, -0.174)
Procedural legitimacy	-0.529	0.322	-0.851 (-0.900, -0.802)	-0.529	0.214	-0.743 (-0.793, -0.693)

All differences significant at $p \leq 0.001$.

Table SI.6 Respondents' average legitimacy beliefs across the twelve country sample on the issue of sexual harassment prevention. Group means and differences by treatment condition. Scores standardized within countries to have a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1. $n = 8,517$.

Country	Quota Penalty (Sub. Legit.)	SE	Quota Penalty (Pro. Legit.)	SE	Quota Threshold
UK	-0.28	0.09	-0.28	0.09	16
Spain	-0.09	0.09	-0.12	0.08	40
Portugal	-0.10	0.09	-0.06	0.08	33
Peru	-0.11	0.11	-0.12	0.10	40
Mexico	-0.10	0.10	-0.14	0.09	50
USA	-0.27	0.11	-0.24	0.10	0
Argentina	-0.08	0.11	-0.08	0.09	50
Brazil	-0.04	0.12	-0.16	0.10	30
New Zealand	-0.02	0.10	-0.09	0.08	25
Australia	-0.02	0.07	-0.12	0.06	23
France	-0.02	0.07	-0.04	0.08	50
Norway	-0.03	0.07	0.00	0.06	32

Table SI.7 Quota penalty (difference between legitimacy beliefs in the gender-balanced condition and the quota-elected-gender balanced condition) on the issue of sexual harassment prevention in each of the countries surveyed. Scores standardized within countries to have a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1. $n = 8,517$.

	All-male council	Gender-balanced council	ATE (95 % CI)	All-male Council	Quota-elected council	ATE (95 % CI)
USA:						
Substantive legitimacy	-0.073	0.175	-0.249 (-0.479, -0.017)	-0.073	-0.096	-0.023 (-0.210, 0.256)
Procedural legitimacy	-0.301	0.277	-0.579 (-0.804, -0.353)	-0.301	0.036	-0.338 (-0.575, -0.100)
UK:						
Substantive legitimacy	-0.085	0.183	-0.269 (-0.459, -0.080)	-0.085	-0.092	-0.006 (-0.195, 0.209)
Procedural legitimacy	-0.405	0.338	-0.744 (-0.934, -0.554)	-0.405	0.058	-0.463 (-0.657, -0.270)

Table SI.8 Respondents’ average legitimacy beliefs in the US and the UK on the issue of sexual harassment prevention. Group means and differences by treatment condition. Scores standardized within countries to have a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1. $n = 441$ in for the US, and $n = 626$ for the UK)

	All-male council	Gender-balanced council	ATE (95 % CI)	All-male Council	Quota-elected council	ATE (95 % CI)
Substantive legitimacy	-0.092	0.070	-0.162 (-0.231, -0.093)	-0.092	0.025	0.118 (-0.188, -0.048)
Procedural legitimacy	-0.464	0.281	-0.745 (-0.811, -0.679)	-0.464	0.193	-0.658 (-0.726, -0.590)

All differences significant at $p \leq 0.001$.

Table SI.9 Respondents’ average legitimacy beliefs on the issue of animal mistreatment. Group means and differences by treatment condition. Scores standardized within countries to have a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1. $n = 4,757$ for treatments on this issue area. The sample includes nine of the twelve countries where we included these treatment conditions. It excludes France, Norway, and Australia.

G Additional robustness specifications

	Model 1 (AMC v. GBC)	Model 2 (AMC v. Qu-GBC)	Model 3 (Quota Penalty)
(Intercept)	-0.309*** (0.076)	-0.239** (0.077)	0.463*** (0.089)
Treatment	0.304*** (0.026)	0.230*** (0.027)	-0.076** (0.025)
Female	0.026 (0.026)	0.073** (0.027)	0.119*** (0.025)
Ideology (L/R)	-0.029*** (0.006)	-0.034*** (0.006)	-0.054*** (0.005)
Australia	0.030 (0.065)	0.060 (0.066)	0.089 (0.062)
Brazil	-0.023 (0.081)	0.004 (0.082)	0.087 (0.078)
France	-0.145* (0.065)	-0.092 (0.066)	-0.019 (0.062)
Mexico	-0.022 (0.075)	-0.023 (0.077)	0.089 (0.072)
Norway	-0.039 (0.064)	-0.009 (0.065)	0.047 (0.061)
New Zealand	-0.072 (0.076)	-0.042 (0.078)	0.024 (0.073)
Peru	0.000 (0.077)	-0.005 (0.079)	0.081 (0.073)
Portugal	-0.056 (0.073)	-0.066 (0.075)	0.075 (0.070)
Spain	-0.062 (0.072)	-0.068 (0.073)	0.059 (0.069)
UK	0.043 (0.073)	-0.046 (0.075)	0.013 (0.070)
USA	0.058 (0.079)	-0.031 (0.081)	-0.002 (0.077)
R ²	0.030	0.023	0.027
Adj. R ²	0.028	0.020	0.024
Num. obs.	5756	5697	5695

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SI.10 Treatment effects on substantive legitimacy. Twelve-country sample with fixed effects and covariates for respondent gender and ideology. Ideology is self-reported on a 10-point scale from very liberal to very conservative.

	Model 1 (AMC v. GBC)	Model 2 (AMC v. Qu-GBC)	Model 3 (Quota Penalty)
(Intercept)	-1.357*** (0.072)	-1.243*** (0.074)	0.722*** (0.079)
Treatment	0.851*** (0.025)	0.750*** (0.026)	-0.104*** (0.022)
Female	-0.067** (0.025)	-0.033 (0.026)	0.026 (0.023)
Ideology (L/R)	0.002 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.044*** (0.005)
Australia	0.147* (0.061)	0.121 (0.063)	0.083 (0.055)
Brazil	0.038 (0.077)	-0.007 (0.079)	0.046 (0.069)
France	-0.094 (0.062)	-0.076 (0.064)	-0.083 (0.056)
Mexico	0.026 (0.072)	-0.011 (0.074)	0.015 (0.065)
Norway	-0.110 (0.061)	-0.075 (0.063)	0.121* (0.055)
NZ	-0.022 (0.072)	-0.038 (0.075)	0.041 (0.065)
Peru	0.021 (0.073)	0.008 (0.075)	0.022 (0.065)
Portugal	-0.036 (0.070)	-0.039 (0.072)	0.055 (0.063)
Spain	-0.011 (0.068)	-0.039 (0.070)	0.051 (0.061)
UK	0.069 (0.070)	-0.027 (0.072)	-0.028 (0.062)
USA	0.093 (0.075)	0.006 (0.078)	-0.084 (0.068)
R ²	0.175	0.134	0.026
Adj. R ²	0.173	0.132	0.024
Num. obs.	5756	5697	5695

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SI.11 Treatment effects on procedural legitimacy. Twelve-country sample with fixed effects and covariates for respondent gender and ideology. Ideology is self-reported on a 10-point scale from very liberal to very conservative. Right is those that score 7 or higher on the 10-point ideology scale.

H Heterogeneous treatment effects

H.1 Treatment effects excluding political liberals

In this section, we show our three main comparisons only on a sample of respondents who self-identify as politically moderate or politically conservative. This is taken from a question that we asked in every country for respondents to place themselves on a 10-point scale ranging from very far left (1) to very far right (10). We include only those who rate themselves as 5 (a true moderate) or higher (somewhat to very conservative).

Our treatments vary in their information about the gender balance of the council and whether there is mention of a gender quota. In addition to our intended signals (gender composition and institutional rules), our treatments might also signal how progressive the council members are (or the polity that elected them). In this case, it could be that respondents on the political left react positively to the perception that a gender-balanced council is more politically liberal, while respondents who are politically moderate or conservative react negatively to this signal. An important test of our theory—that it is the gender composition and electoral rule that are doing the work and not the perceived ideology of the council—is whether our results hold among individuals who would not respond positively to both signals: moderates and conservatives.

The tables below show our results for political moderates and conservatives. Importantly, we find that across all six models for both outcome measures (substantive and procedural legitimacy), our main results hold. We do however note that the coefficients for this group when comparing the all-male council to the gender-balanced council and the all-male council to the quota-elected gender-balanced council (Models 1 and 2 in both tables below) are attenuated. They are about 30% smaller than the main treatment effects we report in the tables above and the main manuscript. Of course, we do not know if these treatment effects are smaller because this group of respondents does not like the perceived liberalness of the council that they read about or if they are less affected by the gender composition and quota status of the council. We also note that the quota penalty (Model 3 in both tables) is slightly larger than for our main results. We discuss this result more thoroughly in the next SI section.

	Model 1 (AMC v. GBC)	Model 2 (AMC v. Qu-GBC)	Model 3 (Quota Penalty)
(Intercept)	-0.393*** (0.101)	-0.365*** (0.104)	0.263* (0.115)
Treatment	0.248*** (0.031)	0.161*** (0.032)	-0.088** (0.030)
Female	0.045 (0.031)	0.091** (0.032)	0.128*** (0.031)
Ideology (L/R)	0.004 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.010)	-0.024* (0.009)
Australia	-0.056 (0.073)	0.090 (0.076)	0.104 (0.072)
Brazil	-0.118 (0.094)	-0.010 (0.098)	0.005 (0.092)
France	-0.206** (0.074)	-0.048 (0.077)	0.008 (0.072)
Mexico	-0.046 (0.086)	0.020 (0.089)	0.124 (0.084)
Norway	-0.191* (0.075)	-0.039 (0.077)	0.011 (0.073)
New Zealand	-0.111 (0.087)	0.008 (0.092)	0.062 (0.085)
Peru	-0.038 (0.085)	0.076 (0.089)	0.162 (0.083)
Portugal	-0.076 (0.087)	0.008 (0.091)	0.151 (0.085)
Spain	-0.223* (0.089)	-0.162 (0.091)	-0.093 (0.087)
UK	-0.045 (0.084)	-0.007 (0.087)	0.018 (0.081)
USA	-0.018 (0.092)	0.010 (0.094)	0.009 (0.090)
R ²	0.132	0.093	0.014
Adj. R ²	0.129	0.090	0.010
Num. obs.	4024	3950	3984

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SI.12 Treatment effects on substantive legitimacy for political moderates and conservatives. Twelve-country sample with fixed effects and covariates for respondent gender and ideology. The sample includes those who self-report an ideology of five or higher on a ten-point scale from very liberal to very conservative.

	Model 1 (AMC v. GBC)	Model 2 (AMC v. Qu-GBC)	Model 3 (Quota Penalty)
(Intercept)	-1.122*** (0.096)	-1.026*** (0.100)	0.539*** (0.103)
Treatment	0.700*** (0.029)	0.591*** (0.030)	-0.109*** (0.027)
Female	-0.058 (0.030)	-0.023 (0.031)	0.057* (0.027)
Ideology (L/R)	0.002 (0.009)	-0.002 (0.009)	-0.022** (0.008)
Australia	0.131 (0.070)	0.164* (0.073)	0.135* (0.064)
Brazil	-0.017 (0.090)	-0.061 (0.094)	0.038 (0.082)
France	-0.089 (0.071)	-0.020 (0.074)	-0.018 (0.065)
Mexico	0.055 (0.082)	0.009 (0.086)	0.068 (0.075)
Norway	-0.157* (0.071)	-0.063 (0.074)	0.106 (0.065)
New Zealand	-0.011 (0.083)	0.041 (0.088)	0.088 (0.076)
Peru	-0.001 (0.081)	0.034 (0.085)	0.100 (0.074)
Portugal	-0.048 (0.083)	-0.009 (0.087)	0.076 (0.076)
Spain	-0.063 (0.085)	-0.113 (0.087)	-0.038 (0.078)
UK	0.041 (0.080)	0.021 (0.083)	-0.042 (0.073)
USA	0.087 (0.088)	0.070 (0.090)	-0.039 (0.081)
R ²	0.132	0.093	0.014
Adj. R ²	0.129	0.090	0.010
Num. obs.	4024	3950	3984

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SI.13 Treatment effects on procedural legitimacy for political moderates and conservatives. Twelve-country sample with fixed effects and covariates for respondent gender and ideology. The sample includes those who self-report an ideology of five or higher on a ten-point scale from very liberal to very conservative.

H.2 Gender, ideology and the quota penalty

We consider whether the estimates of the quota penalty are larger based on two respondent covariates: gender and left-right ideology. Table SI.14 shows results for the quota penalty on perceptions of substantive legitimacy, and Table SI.15 shows results for perceptions of procedural legitimacy. To do this, we include only respondents who viewed the gender-balanced vignette and the quota-elected gender-balanced vignette, such that we compare differences between these two treatments (the quota penalty). The treatment variable in the tables below measures the effect of viewing the quota-elected condition compared to the gender-balanced, no-quota condition. Confirming the figures that we report in the main text, it is negative across models.

All models include country fixed effects and covariates for respondent gender and respondent ideology. Ideology is a self-reported measure on a 10-point scale, ranging from “very liberal” to “very conservative.” We also create a “Right” dummy variable to indicate those that self-report a score of 7 or higher on the 10-point ideology scale. Model 2 in both Table SI.14 and SI.15 shows the interaction between the treatment and respondent gender (coded 1 for woman). This interaction term is positive and statistically significant (at $p \leq 0.05$ for substantive legitimacy and $p \leq 0.10$ for procedural legitimacy). This means that the quota penalty is smaller among women respondents or, put conversely, larger among men.

Model 3 in both tables shows the interaction between ideology and the treatment. The interaction terms are negative but not statistically significant. Model 4 shows the interaction of the treatment and the dummy variable (“Right”) for whether the person identifies as a political conservative (scoring 7 or above on the 10-point scale). This interaction term is negative and statistically significant for measures of substantive legitimacy ($p \leq 0.10$), and negative, but not at the threshold for significance for measures of procedural legitimacy. Negative values can be interpreted as the quota penalty growing larger (i.e., they are even more negative than the baseline difference). We interpret the findings around ideology as providing somewhat weak evidence that the quota penalty is larger for individuals who identify as conservative.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Quota penalty	Quota penalty	Quota penalty	Quota penalty
(Intercept)	0.463*** (0.089)	0.601*** (0.110)	0.298 (0.168)	0.133 (0.085)
Treatment	-0.076** (0.025)	-0.133*** (0.037)	-0.010 (0.062)	-0.063* (0.026)
Female	0.119*** (0.025)	-0.146 (0.129)	0.119*** (0.025)	0.139*** (0.025)
Ideology (L/R)	-0.054*** (0.005)	-0.054*** (0.005)	-0.023 (0.027)	
Australia	0.089 (0.062)	0.092 (0.062)	0.089 (0.062)	0.104 (0.062)
Brazil	0.087 (0.078)	0.090 (0.078)	0.086 (0.078)	0.092 (0.078)
France	-0.019 (0.062)	-0.017 (0.062)	-0.018 (0.062)	-0.015 (0.062)
Mexico	0.089 (0.072)	0.093 (0.072)	0.089 (0.072)	0.089 (0.072)
Norway	0.047 (0.061)	0.051 (0.061)	0.048 (0.061)	0.061 (0.061)
New Zealand	0.024 (0.073)	0.027 (0.073)	0.024 (0.073)	0.047 (0.073)
Peru	0.081 (0.073)	0.086 (0.073)	0.080 (0.073)	0.063 (0.073)
Portugal	0.075 (0.070)	0.078 (0.070)	0.075 (0.070)	0.096 (0.070)
Spain	0.059 (0.069)	0.058 (0.069)	0.060 (0.069)	0.092 (0.068)
UK	0.013 (0.070)	0.015 (0.070)	0.013 (0.070)	-0.005 (0.070)
USA	-0.002 (0.077)	0.002 (0.077)	-0.002 (0.077)	0.015 (0.077)
Female * Treatment		0.106* (0.051)		
Ideo. * Treatment			-0.012 (0.011)	
Right				0.248 (0.254)
Right * Treatment				-0.176 (0.099)
R ²	0.027	0.027	0.027	0.012
Adj. R ²	0.024	0.025	0.024	0.010
Num. obs.	5695	5695	5695	5740

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$

Table SI.14 The quota penalty (assessments of the gender-balanced council v. quota-elected gender-balanced council) for measures of substantive legitimacy. Twelve-country sample with fixed effects and covariates for respondent gender and ideology. Ideology is self-reported on a 10-point scale from very liberal to very conservative. Right is those that score 7 or higher on the 10-point ideology scale.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Quota penalty	Quota penalty	Quota penalty	Quota penalty
(Intercept)	0.722*** (0.079)	0.821*** (0.098)	0.615*** (0.150)	0.468*** (0.075)
Treatment	-0.104*** (0.022)	-0.145*** (0.033)	-0.061 (0.055)	-0.097*** (0.023)
Female	0.026 (0.023)	-0.163 (0.115)	0.027 (0.023)	0.043 (0.023)
Ideology (L/R)	-0.044*** (0.005)	-0.044*** (0.005)	-0.024 (0.024)	
Australia	0.083 (0.055)	0.086 (0.055)	0.083 (0.055)	0.091 (0.055)
Brazil	0.046 (0.069)	0.048 (0.069)	0.046 (0.069)	0.045 (0.069)
France	-0.083 (0.056)	-0.081 (0.056)	-0.083 (0.056)	-0.084 (0.055)
Mexico	0.015 (0.065)	0.018 (0.065)	0.015 (0.065)	0.011 (0.064)
Norway	0.121* (0.055)	0.123* (0.055)	0.121* (0.055)	0.127* (0.055)
New Zealand	0.041 (0.065)	0.044 (0.065)	0.041 (0.065)	0.056 (0.065)
Peru	0.022 (0.065)	0.025 (0.065)	0.021 (0.065)	-0.002 (0.065)
Portugal	0.055 (0.063)	0.057 (0.063)	0.055 (0.063)	0.065 (0.062)
Spain	0.051 (0.061)	0.051 (0.061)	0.052 (0.061)	0.074 (0.061)
UK	-0.028 (0.062)	-0.027 (0.062)	-0.028 (0.062)	-0.051 (0.062)
USA	-0.084 (0.068)	-0.081 (0.068)	-0.083 (0.068)	-0.074 (0.068)
Female * Treatment		0.076 (0.045)		
Ideo. * Treatment			-0.008 (0.009)	
Right				0.081 (0.226)
Right * Treatment				-0.096 (0.088)
R ²	0.026	0.027	0.026	0.014
Adj. R ²	0.024	0.024	0.024	0.012
Num. obs.	5695	5695	5695	5740

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$

Table SI.15 The quota penalty (assessments of the gender-balanced council v. quota-elected gender-balanced council) for measures of procedural legitimacy. Twelve-country sample with fixed effects and covariates for respondent gender and ideology. Ideology is self-reported on a 10-point scale from very liberal to very conservative.

I Human subjects research

This research employs a quantitative analysis of originally collected survey data. This appendix details how precaution was taken to adhere to the APSA Council's Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research regarding the originally collected data.

General principles: The procedures used to obtain the quantitative data in this study respect the autonomy and well-being of respondents and other people affected by the research, as detailed in the following sections.

Power: Survey participants were recruited by the survey firms Netquest, IPSOS, or PureSpecrum from a panel of participants who have previously expressed an interest in completing surveys for compensation. After being recruited, the participant could opt into the online survey. Participation was entirely voluntary. No covert or deceptive research practices were used.

Consent: All respondents were given an information sheet about the study, and gave their informed consent to participate. Respondents were made aware that they could opt out at any point of the survey still receive the same compensation.

Deception: No deception of any sort was used in this study. The researchers accurately described the nature of the research in the survey consent form.

Harm and Trauma: The topic of the surveys—attitudes about gender and representation—did not entail any harm or trauma to participants.

Confidentiality: We did not record identifying information (respondent name, social security number, etc.) for survey respondents.

Impact: The surveys did not compromise the integrity of political processes in any way.

Laws, Regulations, and Prospective Review: To our knowledge, the procedures used to conduct the surveys for this study fully complied with each countries' respective laws at the time of the fieldwork. The procedures also complied with the laws and regulations in the researchers' home countries. This research was approved by the Human Subjects Internal Review Board of the corresponding PI's university (information redacted for author anonymity). Further, the researchers attest to the ethics of the research beyond institutional approvals.

Compensation: Netquest, IPSOS and PureSpectrum compensate individuals for participating in their online survey panel at standard rates that they have set. See also our discussion above on Power for a discussion of the voluntary nature of participation in the research.

Shared Responsibility: The researchers have sought to adhere to the principle of shared responsibility as described in the APSA Council's guidelines.

J Pre-Analysis Plan

Our study’s expectations were pre-registered in advance through the EGAP/Center for Open Sciences registry (refer to the anonymized pre-analysis plan attached below). Our pre-analysis plan outlined our intention to conduct experiments in eight countries—specifically, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Ultimately, we were unable to field our experiment in Ireland, but were able to expand our survey to five additional countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, France, and Norway). Consequently, we acquired a larger dataset than originally anticipated, enriching the breadth and depth of our study.

Pre-Registration Plan for:
Electoral Gender Quotas and Democratic Legitimacy

Research Question:

In previous work from a survey experiment in the United States, Clayton, O'Brien & Piscopo (2019) (hereafter COP 2019) documented that women's equal presence confers institutional trust and acquiescence, thereby legitimizing political decision-making processes and outcomes. Extending this line of inquiry, we now probe two research questions examining procedural legitimacy and the presence of gender quotas (i.e., the presence of affirmative action policies aimed at increasing the (s)election of women candidates for legislative office). First, does women's equal presence also confer legitimacy to political decision-making processes when women are elected through mandatory gender quotas? To address this first question, we compare the legitimacy-conferring effects of women elected with and without quotas ("quota-elected women" compared to "non-quota-elected women") to political decision-making bodies comprised of only men. Second, how does the presence and strength of the country's current quota policy moderate the relationship between quotas, women's presence, and citizens' legitimacy beliefs? To address this second question, we compare whether and to what extent both quota-elected and non-quota-elected women confer legitimacy to decision-making processes (relative to all-male groups) across eight countries with varying levels of quota adoption and strength in national politics.

Hypotheses:

Previous theory-building and empirical work suggest that women's presence conveys legitimacy on political processes and institutions (procedural legitimacy). There is reason to expect, moreover, that citizens will view gender-balanced decision-making bodies as more legitimate than all-male decision-making bodies no matter how women attained their position—that is, even when women representatives are elected through gender quotas. Quota-elected women perform the same representative functions as women not elected through quotas (Mansbridge 1999). Quota-elected women convey that women's perspectives were heard in the decision-making processes (Franceschet & Piscopo 2008). Researchers have found no differences in the preparation or performance of women elected under gender quotas compared to women and men elected without them (Weeks and Baldez 2015; Franceschet and Piscopo 2014; O'Brien 2012; O'Brien and Rickne 2016; Murray 2010). Taken together, this research suggests that although quotas offer distinct pathways to power for women and men, as compared to all-male political bodies, both quota-elected women and non-quota-elected women should, on average, confer greater legitimacy to political decision-making processes.

H1a: Across countries, citizens will view political decision-making processes as more legitimate when women make up an equal share of decision-makers relative to when decision-making bodies consist only of men.

Though we expect women – regardless of how they are elected – to confer legitimacy to political decision-making (again, relative to all-male groups), we also expect that women who are elected through quotas may not have as great a legitimizing effect as women elected without quotas. As we detail below, this effect may be particularly true among some citizens and in some country contexts. This expectation is borne out of empirical work that suggests quota-elected women may not convey the same meaning to citizens as women elected without the aid of quotas. If some citizens perceive quotas as democratically unfair, or that quota recipients are somehow less qualified than non-quota-elected women, then women elected through quotas may not have the same positive effect on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs as non-quota-elected women. Support for quotas is diminished, for instance, among those who believe government intervention to solve problems is inappropriate (Barnes and Córdova 2016; Möhring and Teney 2019). Indeed, quota-elected women themselves report being derided by their fellow legislators (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). Further, quota adoption processes may lead some citizens to view quota-elected women as less legitimate: in Lesotho, for instance, the presence of quota-elected women reduced women citizens’ political engagement, because the quota law was seen as imposed by outside actors rather than emerging from domestic demand (Clayton 2015).

Consequently, we expect H1a to hold both when women are elected through quotas and when they are not, but we do not anticipate that the effects of quota-elected women and non-quota-elected women are of the same magnitude. Women’s presence is preferred to women’s absence, irrespective of how those women are selected. Yet, we expect the legitimacy-conferring effects of the presence of non-quota-elected-women (relative to all men) to be greater than the legitimacy-conferring effects of the presence of quota-elected women (relative to all men).

H1b: Across countries, citizens will view political decision-making processes as more legitimate when women decision-makers are not elected via quotas, as compared to when they are quota-elected.

H1a and H1b speak to the general pattern we expect to observe across countries. At the same time, we also expect citizens’ perceptions of quota-elected women to vary by country, depending on the country’s quota experience. Consequently, we expect that the extent to which quota-elected women will have the same legitimacy-conferring effects as non-quota-elected women will depend on the presence and strength of the country’s quota laws. The legitimizing effects of quota-elected women will be most like those of non-quota-elected women in countries with strong quota policies; they will be least like those of non-quota-elected women in countries with weak or non-existent quota laws.

Here, we follow the quota literature in defining strong quotas as those that elect substantial numbers of women to political office. Scholars have shown that what matters for gender quotas’ numeric effectiveness is not simply the presence of the quota, but the design, including the threshold set for women candidates (Schwindt-Bayer 2009; Hughes et al. 2019). Yet political elites often prefer weak quota laws, which let them preserve more seats for men. Winning stronger quotas often requires the concerted work of feminist activists to push quota reforms through legislatures and electoral management bodies (Piscopo 2015). To win strong quotas, activists rely on discourses that emphasize the importance of women’s descriptive representation and that tie women’s descriptive representation to democratic quality (Townes 2012; Piscopo 2016). Indeed,

experimental research has linked quota support to recognition that men's overrepresentation is undemocratic (Espírito-Santo 2016). Citizens in countries with strong quotas may thus have greater exposure to—and belief in—these arguments, which are made visible as part of the quota adoption and reform process. Stronger quotas should therefore result in greater legitimacy-conferring effects of quota-elected women.

In countries with strong quota policies, we thus expect that there will be very little difference between the legitimizing effects of quota-elected and non-quota-elected women. That is, in general, both “types” of women decision-makers will have very similar effects on citizens' perception of procedural legitimacy relative to all-male groups of decision-makers. In countries with nonexistent or weak quota policies, quota-elected women will still confer more legitimacy than all-male decision-making bodies, but may not confer as much legitimacy as a gender-balanced group with non-quota-elected women. This leads to our second set of hypotheses:

H2a: In countries with weak or non-existent quotas, citizens will view political decision-making processes as more legitimate when decision-making bodies are comprised of non-quota-elected women relative to quota-elected women. The gap in the legitimizing effects of quota-elected v. non-quota-elected women will be smaller in countries with strong quota policies.

H2b: Even in countries with weak or non-existent quotas, citizens will view political decision-making processes as more legitimate when decision-making bodies include quota-elected women relative to only men.

Additionally, there are several citizen-level variables that might moderate our results within countries.

Gender. COP 2019 found that men and those with generally weaker feelings about sexual harassment prevention found women's presence to be especially legitimizing. We expect the same to hold here when comparing the all-male decision-making body to the gender-balanced decision-making body without a quota.

However, we expect that, among men, quotas may confound the legitimacy-conferring effects of women's presence. Men dominate politics and are often reluctant to cede power. In citizen surveys, women respondents are far more likely than men to favor gender quotas (Barnes and Córdova 2016; Keenan and McElroy 2017) and similarly, among parliamentary elites, men are more opposed to quotas than are women, even after controlling for ideology (Bohigues and Piscopo, under review). We therefore expect that, among men, the legitimacy-conferring effects of quota-elected women may be less than the legitimacy-conferring effects of non-quota-elected women. This backlash against quota-elected women may be more pronounced in countries with weak or no quotas, as these are the countries where quota resistance is itself higher.

Political knowledge and political ideology. We expect any differences between quota-elected women and non-quota-elected women to be less pronounced among respondents who have more knowledge of their country's quota policies. This may be especially true in countries with stronger quotas. Citizens who are already aware that their country has

implemented a quota will not be encountering this policy for the first time in our vignettes. They will also have observed that the quota has not negatively affected politics or the political system within their country.¹ Respondents who are less knowledgeable—and thus do not know about the quota policy—have not been exposed to pro-quota arguments or been consciously aware of quota implementation. Unaware respondents thus may be more likely to perceive quota-elected women as conferring less legitimacy when compared to non-quota-elected women.

Similarly, we expect these differences in the legitimacy conferring effects of quota-elected women and non-quota elected women to be less pronounced among those on the political left and among those who hold more progressive gender attitudes. These are the groups identified as more supportive of gender quotas (Beauregard, 2018; Htun and Powers 2006) and therefore least likely to express backlash towards quota-elected women. We also note that these individual-level differences may explain some (or most) of our hypothesized country-level variation. For example, citizens in countries with stronger gender quotas may report more progressive gender attitudes (perhaps in part because of exposure to higher levels of women’s descriptive representation).

Finally, following COP 2019, we are also interested in whether women – both quota-elected and not – confer legitimacy only on issues related to gender or if this effect extends to non-gendered issues as well. We expect:

H3a: Women’s equal presence on decision-making bodies – whether elected with or without gender quotas – will confer procedural legitimacy on both gendered and non-gendered issues relative to all-male decision-making bodies.

H3b: Women’s equal presence – whether elected with or without gender quotas – will confer greater legitimacy on a gendered issue area than on a nominally non-gendered issue area.

Cases:

Our cases are all established or emerging democracies with varying levels of quota adoption and strength. Above we hypothesize that the presence and strength of quota policies will moderate our cross-country level results. The cases can be conceptualized as falling along the following scale from weakest to strongest:

Country	Quota	Women’s representation in single or lower house, July 2020
USA	None	24%

¹ Our quota-adopting case are all established or emerging democracies with strong autonomous women’s movements, and quota policies have generally been well received by citizens.

United Kingdom	Voluntary quotas by leftist parties	34%
New Zealand *	Voluntary quotas by leftist parties	41%
Ireland	30% statutory quota	23%
Peru **	30% statutory quota	26%
Portugal	33% statutory quota	40%
Spain	40% statutory quota	44%
Mexico	50% statutory quota	48%

* New Zealand has a fairly weak quota policy. Quotas are voluntarily adopted by political parties; they are not statutory. Yet, quota-elected women in New Zealand might have stronger than anticipated legitimacy-conferring effects because of the generally high level of feminization of electoral politics in the country. New Zealand was the first country to grant women the right to vote, there are currently very high levels of women’s descriptive representation (41% in the lower house), and there are many women who hold top party leadership positions in the country, including the current prime minister. Consequently, we expect New Zealand might actually be higher on this scale than the rank ordering above suggests, and in particular might be higher than the next strongest cases, Ireland and Peru. Despite having a statutory quota policy, Ireland has generally low levels of women’s descriptive representation and politics is not as feminized as in New Zealand. More broadly, these comparisons underscore the fact that gender quotas are not the only variable affecting women’s political empowerment in a given country, and perhaps not the only variable affecting disposition towards women decision-makers. We thus have stronger prior expectations about cases falling on the two ends of our scale (e.g. in the U.S. the legitimacy conferring effects of quota-elected women should be among the weakest, and in Mexico these effects should be among the highest) than we do about the specific ordering of countries with middling quota experiences in the middle of our scale.

** Last year, Peru passed a parity law and as the result of very recent legislative developments, the law will be applied in the 2021 general election. We base Peru’s placement on the scale on the quota law at the time the survey was fielded, but position Peru ahead of Ireland given that the recent legislative developments would have exposed respondents to arguments about the importance of women’s descriptive representation. Consequently, we believe the case fits well with our theory, and is properly placed on the scale.

Design, Data, and Methods:

We test our hypotheses using a survey experiment in which respondents read a short newspaper article about a city council. The experimental design varies the article on two dimensions (2x3). First, we vary the gender-composition of a hypothetical eight-member city council to either consist of i) only men, ii) four men and four women, with no information about how the women were elected, or iii) four men and four women, with information that the women were elected via a quota policy. Second, we also vary the policy area under consideration. Though all vignettes explain that the city council recently adopted a policy requiring workplace training for public employees, we

vary whether that training applies to a gendered issue (sexual harassment) or a not directly gendered issue (animal mistreatment).

We will run a survey experiment in all eight countries with approximately $n = 1300$ respondents per country. Our experiment will have six treatment conditions (see vignette text below):

	All-male council	Gender-balanced council	Quota-elected gender-balanced council
Gendered issue (sexual harassment)	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3
Non-gendered issue (animal mistreatment)	Condition 4	Condition 5	Condition 6

Table 1: Treatment conditions

To reiterate our hypotheses above, our expectations broadly across countries is as follows:

	All-male council	Gender-balanced council	Quota-elected gender-balanced council
Gendered issue (sexual harassment)	Lowest legitimacy	Highest legitimacy	Mid-range to high legitimacy, conditional on country-context
Non-gendered issue (animal mistreatment)	Low legitimacy	High legitimacy	Mid-range to high legitimacy, conditional on country-context

Example survey instrument from UK sample:

Below is the survey instrument that we will field in the UK:

Please tell us if you disagree or agree with the following statement:

1. Preventing sexual harassment is an important issue.
 - Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree

2. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in London to do what is right?
 - Never

- Some of the time
 - Most of the time
 - Just about always
 - Don't know
3. Does the United Kingdom have mandatory electoral gender quotas for national level elections?
- No
 - No, but some parties chose to adopt them on their own
 - Yes, 10 percent of each party's candidates must be women
 - Yes, 30 percent of each party's candidates must be women
 - Yes, 50 percent of each party's candidates must be women
4. If two EQUALLY qualified candidates were running for office, one a man and the other a woman, would you be...?
- Strongly inclined to vote for the female candidate
 - Somewhat inclined to vote for the female candidate
 - Somewhat inclined to vote for the male candidate
 - Strongly inclined to vote for the male candidate

Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following:

5. In the best kind of government, about half of all elected officials would be women.
- Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree
6. How do you feel about feminists?
- Very negative
 - Somewhat negative
 - Somewhat positive
 - Very positive

We will now ask you to read about a recent election in a neighboring municipality. Afterwards you will be asked your opinion about the outcome of the election. You will also be asked to recall some basic facts about the election.

*Note: randomized text in **bold**.*

Treatment Vignettes 1 - 3:

[All-Male / Gender-Balanced] Council Adopts New Sexual Harassment Policy

A neighboring municipality recently elected a new eight-member council. The council is composed of **[all men] / [four men and four women] / [four women and four men, following a new rule that requires all parties to run equal numbers of male and female candidates]**.

The new council recently adopted a policy on sexual harassment in the workplace. It requires that public employees receive training about sexual harassment prevention.

The council defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances and remarks, as well as requests for sexual favors. The training explains which behaviors are prohibited and includes information about the remedies available to victims. Nationally, over 80% of sexual harassment suits are filed by women.

The policy was among several items approved last month by the **[all-male council] / [gender-balanced council]/ [gender- balanced council elected under the new rule]**.

Treatment Vignettes 4 - 6:

[All-Male / Gender-Balanced] Council Adopts New Animal Mistreatment Policy

A neighboring municipality recently elected a new eight-member council. The council is composed of **[all men] / [four men and four women] / [four women and four men, following a new rule that requires all parties to run equal numbers of male and female candidates]**.

The new council recently adopted a policy on animal mistreatment on commercial farms. It requires that farm employees receive training about the prevention of animal mistreatment.

The council's definition of animal mistreatment includes confined spaces and unclean pens. The training explains which behaviors are prohibited and includes information about improving practices on commercial farms. Nationwide, 80% of animals are raised on commercial farms.

The policy was among several items approved last month by the **[all-male council] / [gender-balanced council]/ [gender-balanced council elected under the new rule]**.

Now we are going to ask you some questions about how you feel about the council's decision.

Please tell us if you agree or disagree with the following statements:

7. The council made the right decision for all local citizens.
 - Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree

8. The council made the right decision for [women / the treatment of animals] .
- Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree
9. How fair was this decision [to women / for the treatment of animals]?
- Very unfair
 - Somewhat unfair
 - Somewhat fair
 - Very fair
10. Thinking for a moment about the gender composition of the council, how fair was the decision-making process?
- Very unfair
 - Somewhat unfair
 - Somewhat fair
 - Very fair

Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

11. Thinking about the gender composition of the council, the council's decision should be overturned.
- Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree
12. Thinking about the gender composition of the council, the council can be trusted to make decisions that are right for local citizens.
- Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree

Now turning to your own personal opinion about this decision, do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

13. Personally, I think the council made the right decision.
- Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree
14. In the scenario that you read previously, how many women were on the council?

- [Drop down 0 to 8]

15. What was the council's decision?

- Require sexual harassment [animal mistreatment] prevention training
- Require stricter penalties for offenders
- Require less strict penalties for offenders
- No recommendation

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