Do Women Represent Women’s Interest? An Examination of Gender Mainstreaming in Electoral Politics

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Abstract:

This paper investigates whether more women in the electoral arena leads to better representation of women’s interests. Based on a systematic quantitative coding of female senators’ performance in the Sixteenth Congress, this paper assesses whether female senators necessarily file women-friendly bills and promote gender and development-related programs. The paper concludes by revising theoretical and practical debates on gender quotas in enhancing representation of women in the electoral politics.
Introduction

The limited female presence in leadership positions leads to a consideration of whether and how public policy should respond. In connection with this concern, gender quotas have been established as a way to increase women’s representation particularly in legislative positions. However, a question that needs to be asked is whether, indeed an increase in the number of women in leadership positions guarantees increased representation of women’s interests. One way to gain an understanding of this is to evaluate the impact of direct policy interventions such as gender quotas. This paper presents findings from the present experience with quotas for female representation in the Senate, and discusses how existing evidence can inform our understanding of the implications of gender quotas on equity and efficiency.

For this paper, I discuss the assumptions involving gender quotas, beginning with the rise of a global need for gender equality and gender mainstreaming as the tool for achieving this equality. I then delve into the theoretical foundation of the gender quota by revisiting critical mass as the driving concept for this and the pertinent literature regarding it. I then give a brief discussion of the research design. Lastly, the results of the study are discussed and the next steps this research will take in the future.

A Need for a Gender Fair Society

Women’s involvement in the political process is nowhere in the world proportionate to the 50% of the population which they represent approximately or to their input to society. (CAPWIP in Balili-Gener and Urbiztondo 2002) This is due to the fact that issues on women’s political participation and empowerment have long been neglected and even set aside by certain perceived priorities such as economic meltdown, inter-country feuds, natural and human made disasters and several other problems.

As Balili-Gener and Urbiztondo(2002) suggest, in a gender fair society, people become aware of the following: (1) that goods should be equally shared between men and women; (2) the exclusion of women in politics is indicative of the failure of democracy; (3) that in general, the society accepts women’s right to vote, to be elected and to hold political and leadership positions; (4) that men are now more open to the idea of the participation and involvement of women in the political arena and (5) that more women are now aware of their rights and privileges as equals of men. It is in this connection that there is an emergent demand for an
advocacy with both men and women; to involve both men and women in upholding and promoting women’s political participation and empowerment; and for change to come from the women themselves through continuous organized discussions, networking and other related activities.

Contextualizing this to the political arena, the Philippines appears to be ahead of its neighboring countries by having 2 women presidents already. However, major challenges are still in place for women to gain a firmer foothold in politics. It is still basically an elite-male dominated political landscape. While there is a perceptible increase in the number of women elected into government posts, assumption to institutional leadership does not necessarily translate into the expected degree of political clout (Hega, 2003).

**Gender Mainstreaming**

A major solution to this global issues faced today is advocating the eradication of gender-bias in the different sectors of society and mainstreaming of gender equality. Gender mainstreaming is a progressive process undertaken not to simply include a “woman’s component” nor to just add a “gender equality component” to an agenda or activity. The main purpose of mainstreaming involves bringing the experience, knowledge, and interests of women and men to bear on the development agenda.

This was clearly established as the global strategy for promoting gender equality through the *Platform for Action at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women* in Beijing in September 1995. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 1997 defined the concept of gender mainstreaming as follows:

“*Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels, and as a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.*” (ECOSOC 1997/2)

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1 Drawn from a compilation of UN definitions by FAO-ILO’s *Pathways out of Poverty.*
In the context of political systems, the concept of gender mainstreaming aims for a revolutionary change in the international and domestic policy process, wherein gender issues become a core consideration across a range of issue-areas and at all stages in the policy process from conception and legislation to implementation and evaluation. Only when institutions are democratic and representative of all groups in society are stability, peace and national prosperity likely to be achieved. Thus, in the context of gender and development, gender equality in institutions, particularly those with a primary objective of democratizing access to resources and opportunities should have a concrete measurement of success.

Review of Related Literature

In my review of the literature on gender quotas, I discuss the theoretical foundation which is the concept of “critical mass”. I then discuss the purpose of gender quotas and the variety of claims on their effectiveness—its advantages and disadvantages. Here, I focus on empirical studies that problematize on the implementation and impact of quotas. While this focus causes us to limit attention to certain countries, the literature is enough to allows us to identify generalizable lessons.

Critical Mass in the Form of Gender Quota

A central concept on women’s political representation is the notion of ‘critical mass’. It is frequently invoked to explain why women do not always appear to represent women once they are in political office. Gender and politics scholars and activists suggest that this pattern is due not to the inclinations of female office holders, but rather to the fact that there are fewer women than men in almost all elected assemblies (Interparliamentary-Union in Childs and Krook 2008). They argue that women are not likely to have a major impact on legislative outcomes until they grow from a few token individuals into a considerable minority of all legislators: only as their numbers increase will women be able to work more effectively together to promote women-friendly policy change and to influence their male colleagues to accept and approve legislation promoting women’s concerns (Childs and Krook 2008:725). However, the concept of critical mass in increasing opportunities and representation of interests for women has been met with optimistic and critical views.
Gender Quotas for Effective Democracy

Democracy requires constant evaluation and reassessment (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2012). In the 20th century, one of the greatest changes to democracy around the world was the inclusion of increasing numbers of women, both as voters and as members of government office. A gender-sensitive institution is one in which there are no substantive, structural or cultural barriers to women’s full participation and to equality between its men and women members and staff. It is a place where women can work and want to work and contribute. A gender-sensitive institution sets a positive example by promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment among society both nationally and internationally.

Given the slow speed by which the number of women in politics is growing, there are increased calls for more efficient methods to reach a gender balance in political institutions. The roots of this demand extend back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, which enshrines the equal rights of men and women, including the right to participate in government. A series of other documents signed by United Nations (UN) member states over the years – including the World Plan of Action in Mexico City in 1975, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979 and the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies in 1985 – resulted in a landmark commitment in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, signed by all member states at the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women, to a specific target of 30 per cent women in decision-making positions (Krook and Norris 2014).

The introduction of quota systems for women represents a qualitative jump into a policy of exact goals and means. Because of its relative efficiency, the hope for a dramatic increase in women’s representation by using this system is strong. At the same time quotas raise serious questions and, in some cases, strong resistance (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2009):

- What are quotas and in what way can quotas contribute to the political empowerment of women?
- Are electoral gender quotas a violation of the principles of liberal democracy?
- Or are gender quotas in fact a contribution to processes of democratization, since quotas ensure the inclusion of women into political assemblies, and furthermore, because electoral gender quotas at best open up "the secret garden of nominations" by making the recruitment process more transparent and formalized.
Most quotas aim at increasing women’s representation, because the problem to be addressed usually is the under-representation of women - this is particularly relevant since women usually constitute 50% of the population in any given country (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2009). A gender quota may, for example, require that at least 30% of the incumbent legislators are women. A minimum requirement for women implies a maximum set for the representation of men. Since women are the underrepresented group in political institutions everywhere, most regulations aim at securing women a minimum of seats.

In the Philippines, there are several codes and laws on the inclusion of women. Women’s representation in parliament has improved from 17% in 2004 to 22% in the elections 2007 for all electoral seats². Presently, several bills are pending for women’s empowerment and increased opportunities. In the field of politics, among them is House Bill 2100 filed by Representatives Walden Bello and Kaka Bag-ao which demands a 30% of appointive and elective positions allocated to women. The proposed bill stresses that the goal is not simply to give flesh to the country’s commitments to various women and human rights-related international agreements, but more importantly, to have critical mass of women in political decision-making institutions that will significantly strengthen the push for women’s agenda.

**Advantages of Quotas**

Electoral quotas have been proven to be the most effective way to achieve a better gender balance. Today we see quotas being introduced where women historically have been almost totally excluded from politics, as in Jordan or Afghanistan. In such cases, gender quotas represent a kick-start for women to gain entry to politics. In other cases, quotas are introduced to consolidate and further strengthen the gains women have made in accessing decision-making positions—or to prevent a backlash (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2009).

Franceschet and Krook (2009:3) further elaborates on this with their study of the impact of gender quotas. They point out that advocates around the world have suggested that such measures increase diversity among the types of women elected, raise attention to women’s

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² “Women’s Quotas: How to introduce and implement them better?” A Seminar and Workshop for Southeast Asia Organised by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Gender Development Research Institute (GDRI) Bangkok, Thailand; 6 – 7 June 2007
issues in policy-making processes, change the gendered nature of the public sphere, and inspire female voters to get more politically involved.

However, Dahlerup (2003:7) on her study of gender quota in Latin America says that quotas also touch on the present philosophical dilemma within feminist theory concerning ‘the category women’ and point to the old problem, so well known by the feminist movement, that not all women identify with the group ‘women’. This translates to the possibility that an increased number of women in the legislative body does not guarantee an increase in legislations that tackle societal issues specific to women.

Franceschet and Krook also suggests that while quotas may facilitate political renewal, and thereby improve the caliber of candidates, beliefs that they undermine merit as a criteria of candidate selection lead to the expectation that the women who benefit from quotas may be less ‘qualified’ than their non-quota counterparts. Being elected through quotas may have contradictory effects on the perceived need among ‘quota women’ to represent women’s interests in policy-making: women elected under quotas may feel a particular obligation to speak on behalf of women as a group, or may seek to avoid the stigma of quotas by disavowing women’s issues entirely (2009: 18).

Disadvantages of Quotas

Kang (2013), in her study of the effect of a gender quota law on the election of women and the appointment of women to the cabinet in the Republic of Niger, suggests that the effect of the gender quota law on the election and appointment of women hinged on a combination of three factors: the design of the law, the institutional context, and the agency of women’s activists who monitored the quota’s implementation. Furthermore, Kang delves into the disadvantage of quotas in that quotas help elect so-called elite women and does not assist female domestic servants, market women, or women farmers into public office. Democratic representation, however, may not be truly democratic if people of lower socioeconomic standing are systematically excluded from holding office.

Ensuring Effectiveness of Quotas

The use of quotas is increasingly influenced by international recommendations and from cross-country inspiration. However, Dahlerup (2009) suggests that quotas should not be just imposed from above, but should rest on grass root mobilization of women and the active
participation of women’s organizations. Since the relationship between democratization and gender quota laws is multifaceted and dynamic, identifying the relationships between design, existing institutions, and activism is important to advancing women’s representation (Kang 2013). Quotas in themselves do not remove all the other barriers for women’s full citizenship. But under certain conditions, electoral gender quotas can lead to historical leaps in women’s political representation.

Adding to Dahlerup’s suggestion, Somani (2012) suggest that to broaden the range of experiences represented in the legislature and enhance the legitimacy of governing institutions, additional hurdles beyond the use of quotas and the process of being elected to the legislative body have to be addressed. To achieve maximum impact, women must also be viewed as professional and effective. Whether or not they succeed often depends on the availability of mentoring systems, the relative importance of their subcommittee appointments and their positions within these subcommittees.

**Alternatives to Quotas**

In connection with Dahlerup’s suggestion, Krook and Norris (2014) look into non-quota strategies used globally, developing an analytic framework for theorizing potential interventions into candidate selection and election processes. Whether used in conjunction with, or as an alternative to, quotas, the diversity of these measures points to a wide array of creative solutions, engaging a variety of actors, which might be pursued to enhance women’s political representation.

Quotas alone may not suffice to achieve gender equality in office (p.2). They emphasize that there is a need to overcoming perceptions that women do not belong in politics. Additional strategies such as other career planning, tracking, mentoring, coaching, training, and retraining’ for women and ‘public debate on the new roles of men and women in society and in the family may serve as an important complement, expanding the pool of potential candidates and promoting a broader transformation in public views towards women in politics.

**Research Design**

This research was conducted to determine whether proportionate or an increased representation of women in the legislative office is significant to the quantity and quality of legislation concerning women and gender or is simply suggest that the mere presence of
women in a traditionally-masculine space an important symbolic victory. It seeks to find empirical evidence that can support (or refute) the advocacy of gender quota or proportionate representation. For this research, I focused on the Gender and Development (GAD) “credentials” of the 6 women senators in the 16th Congress. The study seeks to specifically answer the following questions:

- What is the profile of female candidates that ran and won in elections?
- What is their voting record on GAD-related legislation, ordinances and policies?
- What are the achievements of female legislators in public offices to institutionalize GAD?

The current design has two parts. The first part involves the background of women senators. The second part involves all GAD related bills that were filed by both male and female senators. Lastly, the third part is the time table for the profiling of legislators from the Senate.

For the profiling of women senators, data retrieved from the Senate’s official website, the senators’ respective official websites and search engines were the legislator’s educational attainment, professional background, term/s served, political party or affiliation, whether belonging to a political dynasty, civil status, senate committees they head or belong to, and main advocacies.

After getting the necessary background information, a comprehensive inventory of all the legislations filed during the 16th Congress was done. After these bills have been determined, the bills were then tallied based on who filed these and under what topic they fall in (as determined by the primary committee that reviewed the bill). This helped in determining the type of bills the legislators push for and what proportion constitutes GAD-related bills.

This research further delved into the GAD issue by looking at the inventory of bills filed during a specific term that are gender-related. These bills are accessed in the Senate’s official website (Archives Section).

The number of GAD-related bills filed by the male and female legislators are then tallied. This helped in determining whether women legislators push for bills that address gender issues. The proportion of GAD bills filed by female to male legislators was determined to support (or refute) the assumption that all women senators file gender-related bills.
Who are the Senators?

A starting point to know a legislator’s performance is through her advocacies and the committees she heads.

To advocate for something means to actively support a cause by drawing attention to the important issue it raises and directing decision makers to a solution. An advocacy is responsible for changes in policies and legislation. It is through the senator’s advocacies that we can get an idea of who she is as a law maker.

Committees determine whether a bill will be passed into law or not. Hearings from interest groups and agency bureaucrats are held and committee members play key roles in the discussions and debates about the bills that they foster. These help in considering, shaping, and passing laws to govern the nation. As such, choosing the members is critical for the committee to function effectively. For a committee to function effectively, it needs members who are adept with its jurisdiction.

From the preliminary data gathered, the six senators all have their distinct advocacies and committees they head. The table below shows what each senator advocates and the committees wherein they are most active.

Table 1: Advocacies and Committees Headed by Women Senators in the 16th Congress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senator</th>
<th>Advocacies</th>
<th>Senate Committee Headed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Binay, Nancy</td>
<td>• Improving housing services&lt;br&gt;• Improving children’s health and education</td>
<td>• Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayetano, Pia</td>
<td>• Women Rights&lt;br&gt;• Sports and Rights of Athletes&lt;br&gt;• Access to Health Services&lt;br&gt;• Good Governance</td>
<td>• Health and Demography,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensor-Santiago, Miriam</td>
<td>• Fight against corruption&lt;br&gt;• Reproductive and women’s health opportunities&lt;br&gt;• Human rights</td>
<td>• Constitutional Amendments and Revision of Codes&lt;br&gt;• Legislative Oversight Committee on the Visiting Forces Agreement&lt;br&gt;• Foreign Relations&lt;br&gt;• Joint Congressional Oversight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The total number of bills filed for the 16th Congress is 2,424. 38% (924) of these bills was filed by female senators. Topics with the most bills filed are on women, family, gender, environment and natural resources, health, public information and mass media, education, arts and culture. The table below shows that Senator Binay’s bills are mostly designed to address issues relating to family, women and gender. Senators Legarda and Cayetano mostly file bills
concerning the preservation of the environment and natural resources. As the former chairperson of the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB), Senator Poe is consistent in her choice of professional interest by having the majority of her bills dedicated to public information and mass media. Senator Villar focuses more on the field of education, art and culture in terms of bills filed. Lastly, Senator Defensor-Santiago files almost 100 bills that tackle issues on health.

**Table 2: Topics with Most Bills Filed by Women Senators in the 16th Congress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senator</th>
<th>Topic with Most Bills Filed</th>
<th>Proportion to Total Bills of Each Senator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Binay, Nancy</td>
<td>Women, Family Relations and Gender Equality</td>
<td>14 out of 89 =16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayetano, Pia</td>
<td>Environment and Natural Resources</td>
<td>13 out of 52 =25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensor-Santiago, Miriam</td>
<td>Health and Demography</td>
<td>98 out of 478 =21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legarda, Loren</td>
<td>Environment and Natural Resources</td>
<td>20 out of 123 =16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poe, Grace</td>
<td>Public Information and Mass Media</td>
<td>9 out of 50 =18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villar, Cynthia</td>
<td>Education, Arts and Culture</td>
<td>28 out of 132 =21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Who Files Gender-Related Bills?**

The data for this study also involves all Senate Bills filed in the 16th Congress related to women and gender. In searching for these, the key words used were “sex”, "gender" and "women". A total of 62 bills were retrieved from the Senate’s online database.

4 male senators filed gender related bills. These were Aquino, Ejercito, Ejercito-Estrada, Lapid and Revilla. Out of the 6 women senators, only 5 filed bills concerning gender and women. These are Santiago, Cayetano, Legarda, Villar and Binay. Poe has not yet filed any gender related bill.

The senators with the most gender related bills filed are Defensor-Santiago (with 26 bills), Ejercito-Estrada(with 20 bills) and Binay (with 17 bills). Focusing on the bills of the two women senators, it is notable that Santiago’s filed bills are consistent with her advocacy on women’s health. 19% (17 out of 89 bills filed) of the total number of bills filed by Binay in the
present congress is for gender-related concerns. This result is consistent with her main advocacy which involves family and women. Jinggoy Estrada’s GAD-related bills make up 3.5% (20 out of 567 bills) of his total bills filed. On average, gender related bills make up approximately 4% of the total bills filed by the senators.

Table 3: Gender Related Bills Filed by Senators in the 16th Congress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senator</th>
<th>Gender related Bills Filed</th>
<th>Total Bills Filed</th>
<th>% of Gender related Bills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aquino IV, Bam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binay, Nancy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayetano, Pia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensor-Santiago, Miriam</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ejercito, JV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ejercito-Estrada, Jinggoy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapid, Lito</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legarda, Loren</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revilla Jr, Ramon</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villar Cynthia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do Women Push for Women’s Interest?

Initial data show that increasing the quantity of women in legislative positions does not assure a proportionate increase in the number of gender and women related bills filed. The study assumes that women senators will push for GAD-related policies. However, not all of the female senators have filed at least 1 GAD-related bill. Estrada being second to Santiago in filing said bills, shows that pushing for gender mainstreaming may also be advocated by male senators.

It is also noticeable that the gender-related bills filed are often centered on family relations and maternal benefits (such as the bills filed by Senator Binay) and women’s health and protection from harrassment (such as those filed by Senator Defensor Santiago). It is interesting to note that in terms of labor and employment and politics male senators such as JV Ejercito and Jinggoy Estrada filed for those.
The preliminary findings of the study support the idea that gender quotas increase representation of women. However, the type of representation present is more descriptive than substantive (as reflected by the rejection of the assumption that for every female legislator there is at least one gender-related bill to be filed).

**Direction for Future Research**

Due to limited time and resources, the study on gender quotas in Philippine electoral politics only made use of quantitative descriptive methods in answering the problem of the study. This research plans to continue with profiling of legislators in the previous congresses and the House of Representatives to get a much clearer picture of social patterns that would reflect the nature of electoral politics in the Philippines.

The consequences of quotas should also be studied in qualitative terms, looking into the intended and unintended ramifications (for instance, stigma glass ceilings preventing the percentage of women from rising above the quota requirement, or unintended splits between different groups of women). (Dahlerup 2003) Thus, this study plans to include interviews to get more substantive information on the constraints to female leadership and the discourse on gender and critical mass in politics.
References


