



# Why Are Gender Quota Laws Adopted by Men? The Role of Inter- and Intraparty Competition

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## Abstract

In nearly every case of quota law adoption, the support of party elites is critical. But this raises a puzzle: What can motivate predominantly male elites to put these policies in place? This article uses a comparison of two sets of matched pair countries—similar on background characteristics except for quota adoption—to explore the motivations and role of male party elites in quota reform. The cases of Belgium and Austria, and Portugal and Italy highlight two key explanations. First, quota laws are likely to be supported and passed by parties threatened by a new, more progressive competitor on the left, as a way of claiming women voters back from the encroaching party (interparty competition). Second, quotas can be employed as a mechanism for party elites to gain power over candidate selection within their own parties in the face of entrenched local party monopolies (intraparty competition).

## Keywords

political parties, representation and electoral systems, gender, sexuality and politics, gender quotas

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Gender quota laws are the electoral reform of our generation, and they have now been adopted in over 50 countries (Hughes, Paxton, Clayton, & Zetterberg, 2017; Weeks, 2016). Quota laws require all political parties to include a minimum percentage of women on their candidate lists.<sup>1</sup> Although we are seeing more and more states adopt quotas, they remain contentious for two main reasons. First, quotas seem to run counter to the rational self-interest of the political ruling class—that is, men. In the vast majority of cases, male elites are ultimately responsible for adopting quota laws. Why would male party leaders and majority-male Parliaments choose to institute a policy that necessitates some of them losing their seats? Second, and more broadly, the conventional wisdom is that institutions like electoral rules are “sticky.” Change is thought to be slow-moving and path-dependent (Pierson, 2004). The remarkable spread of quota reforms in recent years challenges this notion, but has been largely overlooked in the mainstream “new institutionalism” literature (Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010). What makes quotas different?

As quotas have spread, a large body of work has explored why quota laws are adopted (Anderson & Swiss, 2014; Araújo & Garca, 2006; Bauer & Burnet, 2013; Baum & Esprito-Santo, 2012; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2014; Bush, 2011; Htun & Jones, 2002; Hughes, Krook, & Paxton, 2015; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Krook, 2009; Krook, Lovenduski, & Squires, 2009; Meier, 2012; Murray, 2012; Palici di Suni, 2012; Verge, 2012), and increasingly authors are beginning to study the effects of quotas on women’s political engagement and power (Barnes & Burchard, 2013; Clayton, 2015; O’Brien & Rickne, 2016). Yet, only a few studies focus on the incentives of men to adopt a quota law. Although several authors argue that electoral competition is a crucial incentive for male elites (Baldez, 2004; Driscoll & Krook, 2012; Fréchette, Maniquet, & Morelli, 2008; Murray, Krook, & Opello, 2012), they do not identify and test the conditions under which electoral incentives become salient. These studies also cannot explain why a leader would support imposing a quota on all parties (giving up ownership of the quota issue) or why quotas are sometimes adopted by parties facing little electoral uncertainty. Furthermore, the predominant focus in the literature on single-case studies of quota adoption limits the broader applicability of existing findings. Indeed, Murray et al. (2012) conclude their study of France by calling for more cross-national analysis of quota adoption “through more detailed case studies of party decision making in other instances of quota reform” (p. 541).

Building on insights from the literature on gender and politics and endogenous institutions, I propose two hypotheses to explain why male party leaders adopt a quota law. First, *interparty competition* can spur party leaders to support and pass a quota to distinguish their party from emerging parties on

the left and (as a secondary reason) to put parties on the right at a disadvantage. In other words, not just any electoral uncertainty will do; quota adoption is especially likely in the context of a rising left-wing party that spurs gender equality “contagion.” Imposing a law on all parties, rather than passing an internal party quota, has the added advantage of assuaging any fears that the quota will lead to an electoral disadvantage because of the need to find new candidates. Second, even when parties are not facing electoral threats *intra-party competition*—specifically, conflicts between local parties and national leadership—can cause male party leaders to pass a quota to gain more control over candidate selection in their own party. In the context of decentralized selection processes, which apply to many parties and countries, it can be easier for party leaders to pass a law than to shift powerful local party monopolies’ decision-making processes.

To test this argument, I use qualitative evidence from two matched pair case studies selected using statistical matching—countries similar except for quota adoption. Detailed narratives of quota adoption or failure in Belgium and Austria, and Portugal and Italy provide new insights into the conditions under which quota laws are passed. I conducted over 60 interviews with politicians and activists in all four countries in 2013 and 2014, and supplement this data with parliamentary proceedings and newspaper coverage of quota debates. Elite interviews make particularly good evidence for this type of parallel process tracing because they allow the researcher to gather rich detail about the thoughts and attitudes of key political actors, providing data to reconstruct “the hidden elements of political action” (Tansey, 2007, p. 767). Finally, these cases provide evidence from advanced democracies, where quota laws are on the rise, when so far much of the literature has focused on developing countries.

The article proceeds as follows. I first discuss the puzzle of quota law adoption, highlighting the contributions and limitations of the current literature. I focus on the conditions under which male elites would support such reforms. In the next section, I introduce the mechanisms of intra- and interparty competition, suggesting that conditions of decentralized candidate selection and a rising far-left party, respectively, should incentivize male leaders to adopt quota laws. I then discuss methods and case selection before testing my argument through case studies of Belgium and Austria, and Portugal and Italy. I find strong support for intraparty competition in Belgium, where entrenched local parties were unresponsive to internal party quotas, whereas in the case of Portugal interparty competition played the largest role. The paired countries of Austria and Italy (2005) were characterized by neither inter- nor intraparty incentives; in these cases, adopting a quota law over a party quota offered leaders no strategic gain. A second, successful attempt

at quota adoption in Italy (2015) occurred only after the rise of a new far-left party, giving mainstream party leaders new interparty incentives. I conclude with reflections on what this study offers for understanding quota adoption and other policy reforms in parties and countries worldwide.

## **The Puzzle of Quota Law Adoption**

Over the past few decades, take-up of gender quotas has increased dramatically. In this article, I limit the scope to the adoption of national-level quota laws for two reasons. First, as “parchment” institutions, quota laws involve a more permanent commitment from party leaders than an internal party rule (which is not always written into statutes, and can be ignored or changed more easily). Second, passing a quota law constrains the selection and nomination processes of all political parties in a country, not just those that support the law. By passing a law, parties give up any distinction (and hence potential electoral advantage) gained by having their own party quota. The incentives to pass a party quota versus a national quota law thus seem likely to be different. The adoption of party-level quotas is an interesting puzzle in its own right, but it is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>2</sup>

Quota laws began emerging in the 1990s and were enacted through reforms to electoral laws and sometimes constitutions, as in the case of France. They now exist in over 50 countries worldwide. Within advanced democracies, Italy, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland have all passed gender quota laws, and more are considering them. Most of the countries that pass quota laws are characterized by low levels of women’s representation before the law is passed. The public explanation for passing the law in the first place is overwhelmingly to increase women’s representation. Within advanced democracies, quotas tend to be passed by countries with a strong tradition of Catholicism, a factor which is also linked to traditional family policies and lower labor market outcomes for women (Castles, 1994; Esping-Andersen, 1990)—all of which are plausible underlying reasons for women’s underrepresentation in office. Finally, quota laws are most often found in countries with proportional representation, where they are much easier to implement than in single member districts (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2011; Matland, 2006).

Existing literature suggests several explanations for quota law adoption, and I focus on four here—women’s movements, international influence, cross-partisan support, and party quota “contagion.” First, women’s movements have been at the forefront of many quota reforms, particularly in Latin America (Dahlerup, 2006; Htun, 2016; Krook, 2009). When women mobilize for change, their campaigns can be successful. For example, Poland’s recent

quota law (2011) originated from the Congress of Women, a meeting of more than 4,000 women from across Poland that turned into a social movement. The group spearheaded a petition for gender parity, which was eventually signed by over 150,000 Poles (Kroliczek, 2012). A second explanation focuses on the role of international influence and transnational sharing. Quotas have spread rapidly over a relatively short period of time, and scholars point to the exchange of information across national borders as a key reason (Hughes et al., 2015; Krook, 2006, 2008). Third, scholars suggest that it is only when women work together across parties that quota reforms are successful—as in the cases of Argentina and Mexico (Baldez, 2004; Htun, 2016; Jones, 1996). Finally, previous research suggests that party quotas can pave the way for legal quotas in a “mutual contagion effect” whereby quotas beget quotas as parties try to outdo each other (Meier, 2004).

These accounts often do not fit cases in Western Europe very well. With the exception of France (Murray, 2012; Murray et al., 2012), there is little evidence that strong women’s movements have been driving quota reforms. Quotas have been pushed through several Parliaments in Europe without cross-partisan support of women; in Spain and Portugal, for example, women on the right voted against quotas (Baum & Esprito-Santo, 2012; Valiente, 2005; Verge, 2012). Although transnational sharing and influence does occur, at both regional (e.g., the European Commission, the European Women’s Lobby) and global levels (the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW] and the Beijing Platform for Action), this explanation is not able to distinguish why international influence leads to quota reforms in some countries but not others. Quotas have not spread to most of the countries influenced by these bodies, unlike in Latin America where they have been adopted in nearly every country. Similarly, some countries without previous party quotas have adopted quota laws (Ireland), and some countries with party quotas have never adopted quota laws (Sweden, Germany). In fact, party quotas are so common in advanced democracies that some argue this is a reason why newer quota laws are less popular in the region—they are not needed (the opposite of the contagion argument; for example, Krook et al., 2009).

Although an important part of the causal story, accounts based on women’s movements, international influence, cross-partisan support, and party quota “contagion” alone cannot explain what drives quota reforms across advanced democracies. Importantly, existing research also cannot explain the puzzle of what motivates male elites to put these policies in place. In particular, the low levels of women’s representation in most “quota countries” before a quota law is passed suggest that party elites had previously been indifferent to the problem. Their embrace of controversial quota laws therefore should be explained rather than assumed.

Only a few studies have focused specifically on the incentives of male party elites to adopt a quota law. Accounts from Argentina, the first country to pass a quota law, suggest that President Menem supported it to gain women's votes and "close a gender gap suffered by the Peronists in relation to the opposition UCR party" (Htun, 2016, p. 56), while shoring up his legacy on women's rights (see also Driscoll & Krook, 2012; Jones, 1996; Krook, 2009). In Mexico, Baldez (2004) also finds a strong electoral motivation for quotas, but in this case not so much to claim credit from female voters as to avoid backlash for failing to support it. Interviews with party leaders on the right reveal that fear of public retribution at the polls drove support even when male politicians were ideologically opposed. Furthermore, she suggests that quotas offer other strategic advantages, namely, helping party leaders consolidate control over the nomination process. Quotas can be a mechanism for party leaders to protect their own interests, and Baldez proposes that leaders are most likely to resort to them in contexts of electoral uncertainty (Baldez, 2004, p. 234).

In France, Fréchet et al. (2008) argue that male deputies voted to pass a quota law because they anticipated a male bias in the electorate. Passing a gender quota law would thus give them an increased advantage in the (short term) future, when they would be more likely to come up against a female newcomer. Contesting this interpretation, Murray et al. (2012) highlight the role of party elites rather than deputies. They argue that individual legislators had little power to change the policy; instead, party discipline is strong and leaders were able to compel the parliamentary party to vote together. Focusing on the motivations of party leaders, they find that several different factors—ideology, electoral incentives, and strategic gain—can lead to support for a quota law. For example, the leader of the mainstream right, Chirac, exerted considerable pressure on his male-dominated party to vote for the law despite their ideological opposition because he had publicly committed to the principle of parity in a debate sponsored by women's groups. The growing media profile of the issue meant that voting against it would have "embarrassed Chirac and reinforced the image of the RPR as old-fashioned and sexist" (Murray et al., 2012, p. 11). Again, electoral considerations are paramount.

These studies make valuable contributions to our knowledge of the process of quota reform within Argentina, Mexico, and France, strongly pointing to the importance of electoral incentives. However, they do not identify the general conditions under which electoral incentives compel male party leaders to back quota reforms. For example, are positive electoral incentives (credit claiming) more powerful than negative ones (fear of retribution), and doesn't the nature of the electoral challenge matter? Existing studies also cannot tell us much about why parties facing little electoral uncertainty

sometimes push through quota laws. Finally, because they restrict their attention to single cases in which quota reform occurs, these studies are unable to make inferences about the extent to which the causal processes they describe apply more broadly (Gerring, 2006b; Seawright & Gerring, 2008). This article uses a comparison of “most similar” cases—similar on background characteristics except for quota adoption—to explore the motivations and role of male party elites in quota reform. In the next section, I build on these studies from gender and politics, as well as the literature on endogenous institutions, to propose an explanation that is later tested in case study analysis.

### **Intra- and Interparty Competition**

Why would male party leaders support national quota legislation? One reason might be ideology—they think it’s the right thing to do. Just as female gender does not guarantee support for feminism, male gender does not preclude it. Commitment to gender equality has been a long-standing element of socialist and other left party ideology (Duverger, 1955; Kittilson, 2006). Yet, if parties are ideologically committed to women’s representation, why not choose the same number of women candidates directly, or by passing a party quota? Passing a law imposes the quota on all parties. Although this implies greater potential policy impact—more women are likely to be elected overall—it also poses some risks. Namely, the party is likely to lose ownership of the issue if all parties implement a quota and thus a unique electoral selling point.

One explanation, adapted from the literature on endogenous institutions, is that for a quota to be necessary in the first place there must be some resistance inside the party organization to nominating women. In particular, local-level opposition to a party quota might render it ineffective even if party leadership is genuinely committed to equality. I call this explanation *intra-party competition*. The idea of national party leaders using institutional change to quash intraparty conflict has parallels in the literature on early democratization. In the case of Britain, Lizzeri and Persico (2004) argue that national political elites wanted more spending on public goods, but corrupt local party opposition made it difficult to implement. National-level politicians expanded the suffrage to shift power at the local level because particularistic politics became less feasible with larger constituencies. Iversen and Soskice (2007) expand on their argument, suggesting that extending the franchise, as opposed to simply having a legislative majority, offers elites a long-term solution to the collective action problem posed by the political entrenchment of local elites.

Another example comes from the literature on primary adoption, where the puzzle is again why party leaders would pass a law that involves giving away power. One of the most powerful tools of party leaders is the ability to appoint candidates, so why would they relinquish this willingly? Here, too, literature suggests that intraparty competition is a key mechanism for reform. Specifically, party leaders will pass primaries to avoid costly internal conflicts or splits (Aragón, 2014; Hortala-Vallve & Mueller, 2015; Kemahlioglu, Weitz-Shapiro, & Hirano, 2009). Because they are public and more inclusive than other candidate selection methods, primaries can limit ongoing challenges to nominees and potentially prevent factions from breaking away (Kemahlioglu et al., 2009). While the focus here is not specifically on local-national party conflict, the same general theme of using an institutional reform to resolve internal party power struggles applies.

Similarly, quota laws could provide national political elites with strategic advantages in the context of intraparty competition. Quota laws give party leaders a way to shift power at the local level, toward the more diverse demographics they value (either for ideological reasons, or to appease vocal women in the party/end internal party conflict). Previous studies from gender and politics have also identified the issue of local-national party conflict, noting that national leaders are more concerned with women's representation and equality than local or regional party branches (Hinojosa, 2012; Matland & Studlar, 1996). In her work, Hinojosa (2012) shows that the dominance of local party monopolies, which elect to preserve their own power rather than advance national party goals, are one of the biggest barriers for women's selection as candidates in Mexico and Chile. Adopting quotas is one of the strategies she recommends for overcoming local power monopolies. Similarly, Bruhn's analysis of the case of Mexico suggests that male elites who care little about a quota can be motivated by the desire to enforce party decisions (Bruhn, 2003). Finally, in her model of motivations for quota implementation, Murray (2007) also highlights the importance of maintaining internal party unity in strategic decision making.

A quota law forces the hands of local party leaders who can have significant power over candidate nominations. This is likely especially in the context of decentralized candidate selection. Thus, I expect the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** Quota laws are likely to be supported and passed by parties characterized by decentralized candidate selection processes and national-local conflicts over candidate selection.



Building on the previous literature (Baldez, 2004; Murray et al., 2012), another reason male leaders might pass a quota law is electoral incentives—to gain votes from women, or to put competitors at a disadvantage. Although parties might lose the distinction of being the only one/s to have a quota, they gain the distinction of being the one/s to pass legislation on the issue. This can help distinguish them from parties further to the left, while putting parties on the right at a competitive disadvantage.

The broader concept of contagion theory is relevant here. Contagion theory suggests that political parties can feel pressured to nominate more women if others begin doing so (whether these parties have voluntary quotas or not). Recent work points out that it is important to consider the conditions and context in which contagion occurs (Cowell-Meyers, 2011). I argue that contagion leading to a quota law is facilitated by the condition of electoral threat from the left. As Matland and Studlar note, “parties will feel pressured to nominate more women if one of their political rivals, usually a smaller party farther to the left, starts to promote representation of women” (Matland & Studlar, 1996, p. 707). Heightened competition renders ruling groups vulnerable, making somewhat risky or uncertain policy reforms, like a quota law, more attractive. For instance, Teele (2018) finds that high political competition increases the probability of a state passing equal suffrage for women.

There are also strategic advantages to be gained vis-à-vis the right. By forcing parties with few women in their ranks (typically, those on the right) to promote female candidates, they place these parties at a competitive disadvantage because they will have to scramble to find more new candidates. The flip side of this logic is that it alleviates any concerns parties considering internal party quotas might have that they will put themselves at a disadvantage (at least initially). As an example, party officials in France openly speculated that having to field unknown women candidates would certainly result in losses (Murray, 2007, p. 571). In one stroke, a mainstream left party can claim women voters back from the encroaching party on their left and also put right-wing competitors at a disadvantage. I thus expect the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** Quota laws are likely to be supported and passed by parties characterized by declining vote share relative to a new, more progressive (especially in terms of women’s representation) competitor.

Figure 1 presents a visual depiction of the main argument, using a table of scenarios and predictions for each situation. The top row of Figure 1 considers the outcome when a party faces a threat from the left. It shows that a quota law is more effective at stopping electoral losses than a party quota because

		Party Response	
		Party Quota	Quota Law
Competition Context	Threat from Left	Stop loss to Left, but potential loss to Right	Stop loss to Left and Right <i>(Hypothesis 2)</i>
	No threat from Left	Weak party: Ineffective	Weak party: Effective <i>(Hypothesis 1)</i>
		Strong party: Effective	Strong party: Effective

**Figure 1.** Party incentives to adopt a quota law.

it also requires right-wing parties to comply (Hypothesis 2). This equalizes the costs of finding new candidates across all parties. This scenario is applicable mainly to the mainstream left, as the party most likely to lose voters to the left on gender issues. These far-left challengers are likely to be “New Left” parties (e.g., radical left or Green parties), which have been trailblazers with regard to gender equality promotion and equality guarantees (Keith & Verge, 2016). The middle and bottom rows consider the situation when there is no threat from the left, and this applies to both left- and right-wing parties. In this scenario, the impetus for a quota law is not directly tied to current electoral incentives, but the desire to shift demographics within the party. This might be due to ideological reasons, or pressure from women’s sections in the party, which are causing internal party conflict. Here, a quota law is only likely if parties are weak, making an internal party quota ineffective. For weak parties, a law provides the only effective way to implement a quota (Hypothesis 1).

The remainder of this article tests this argument by tracing the evolution of quota reforms in two countries that passed a quota law, Belgium and Portugal, and two paired countries that did not, Austria and Italy. The next section explains case selection and methodology.

### Case Selection and Methods

I use matched pair case studies to test my argument for two main reasons. First, “most similar” cases can serve as mutual counterfactuals. They provide a framework for thinking about what would have happened, all else

equal, if a key treatment variable had not occurred (Tarrow, 2010). Second, matched pairs also unpack the process by which outcomes came about in each case (George & Bennett, 2005; Tarrow, 2010). This parallel process tracing provides important leverage for exploring causal mechanisms, which are often complex. Elite incentives are a case in point—It would be very difficult to quantify and operationalize such a variable for quantitative analysis. One potential problem with using interview data is that interviewees might not report accurate information, perhaps because they would like to portray their actions in a more positive light (Mosley, 2013). Although this misgiving can never be totally overcome, I note that it biases findings against my main arguments (which are related to strategic motivations) in favor of ideological motivations. The fact that interviewees are often willing to make claims about the strategic motivations of their own parties is good evidence that they are speaking frankly. I further control for this “measurement error” by being careful to convey any divergences in opinion and checking for confirmation of claims across segments of the sample frame (e.g., different parties).

I selected the “quota countries” of Belgium and Portugal because these countries are of particular interest; in both a quota law was adopted, but in very different contexts and time periods. Belgium was one of the first countries in Europe to pass a quota law and Portugal one of the most recent. In Belgium, the law was passed with support from the mainstream left and right, while in Portugal the law was supported only by the mainstream left. I then used statistical matching to select pairs for Belgium and Portugal. These pairs are similar in most respects, especially with regard to observable determinants of adopting a quota law, except no quota law was adopted. I use statistical matching because it offers a transparent and principled way to select cases when there are many relevant variables (Nielsen, 2016). Matching ensures that the cases are really the most similar cases available. Many methodologists advocate matching as a viable way of selecting paired cases (Gerring, 2006a; Nielsen, 2016; Seawright & Gerring, 2008; Tarrow, 2010) and although it is a relatively new technique, a growing number of studies employ it (Genovese, Wassmann, & Schneider, 2016; Glynn & Ichino, 2016; Lyall, 2014; Madrigal, Alpizar, & Schlüter, 2011).

I match on six variables identified as potential determinants of quota adoption: percentage of women in Parliament, proportional representation, economic development, women’s labor force participation, percentage of parties with voluntary quotas (weighted by seat share in Parliament), and percentage of population Catholic (1980). The matching procedure successfully identifies Austria as a pair for Belgium and Italy as a pair for Portugal. Appendix A provides further details about the matching procedure, including

a discussion of the selection of matching variables, similarities and differences between the countries, and a table showing the data used.

I have extra confidence in the matches because in both cases a quota law was proposed in the shadow country around the same time as in country with which it was paired. In Austria, a quota law was proposed by the national Parliament in 1996, not long after Belgium's quota was adopted in 1994, but it failed to pass (Köpl, 2005). Italy was on the verge of passing a national quota law in 2005, right before Portugal passed its quota law in 2006, but it failed. Italy has since passed a quota law (in 2015, after I carried out interviews in the country), which came into force in 2018. This suggests that the covariates I match on should be considered appropriate determinants of quota adoption and lends extra confidence to the general matching procedure. Another benefit of analyzing these four cases in particular is that they are comparatively understudied in the literature, which tends to focus on developing countries.

I conducted fieldwork in each of the four countries in 2013 and 2014. These interviews focused on why quota laws were adopted, or why quota proposals had not been successful. I used a nonrandom strategy to select interviewees, deliberately choosing subjects who could offer the best evidence about the politics of the quota debate and adoption. This includes party leaders, cabinet members, politicians from all major parties, and women's movement activists. I interviewed 61 individuals, representing a response rate of just under 50%; 12 men and 49 women were interviewed, a gender imbalance that reflects women's disproportionate interest and involvement in quota legislation. I was able to speak to male party leaders in both "treated" countries, Belgium and Portugal. The majority of interviews were semistructured, focusing on the reasons for party support/opposition to quota legislation. Following best practice for interview research in political science (Bleich & Pekkanen, 2013), full details about the sampling procedure and interview research methods, including a table of all interviews sought, obtained, and declined, are included in Appendix B. In the following sections, I test my argument first in the cases of Belgium and Austria, where quota proposals emerged in the 1990s, and then in Portugal and Italy, where quotas came on the agenda in the 2000s.

### *Belgium and Austria: Subverting Local Party Monopolies*

Gender quotas in Belgium started within political parties. Belgian parties were among the first to adopt voluntary quotas for women in their internal rules. The Flemish Liberals (Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD)) had quota provisions in place from 1985 until the party's disbandment in 1993,

and the Flemish Christian Democrats had them from 1975, although not at the federal level. The Greens and Social Democrats also had quotas in place from the early 1990s, among others. In most of these parties, however, quotas were not popular. Getting internal provisions passed involved long, difficult debates. The Secretary-General of the Flemish Social Democrat's women's section (Zij-kant) Vera Claes explains, "There was a lot of opposition from the men. They didn't recognize the use of it, or the democratic need."<sup>3</sup> Even when internal provisions were successfully passed, women within the party noted that the changes made were not enough, and that they didn't work well (in terms of electing women).

The first parliamentary bill proposing a national gender quota law was introduced in 1980 (for local lists only) and it was rejected by the courts due to concerns about discrimination. It was followed by another unsuccessful bill in 1991, which would have applied to all elections. This time, elections were called before the bill came up. Both were introduced by female Christian Democrats—Paula D'Hondt and Trees Merckx, respectively (Meier, 2012). The quota law finally passed in 1994, supported by a coalition of Flemish- and French-speaking Christian and Social Democrats. The law requires that no more than two thirds of an electoral list may consist of candidates of the same sex (since increased to 50%) and lists that do not comply are not accepted.<sup>4</sup> The legislation was opposed by the Greens, who felt that it was too weak, and the liberals and far right, who argued that it was artificial protectionism and prioritized sex over merit.<sup>5</sup> Most parties voted together, but there were some abstentions on the right. Notably, the majority of the Flemish nationalist party VU abstained.<sup>6</sup>

For the Christian Democrats, support for the bill originated from women's frustrated attempts to create change within their party. Even when internal provisions were successfully passed, women within the party noted that the quotas were minimal and ineffective at increasing the number of women. Flemish Christian Democrat Senator Sabine de Bethune recalled that in the early 1990s she campaigned, with the women's section of her party, to increase the size of the quota within the party statutes. At the time, one fifth of local party list positions were reserved for women, and de Bethune pushed for this to be increased to one third. She recounts giving a speech to the party Congress in 1993 in support of this amendment and facing vocal opposition from male local party leaders who controlled list selection and made up the majority of voters in the party Congress. Her amendment was rejected. De Bethune describes,

Then we [the women] all stood up and left the Congress, and they had to stop and the Congress was finished. It was on all the news, the main points of

political news of the year—the great Congress for renewal of the party was broken, finished, because the women walked out. Many men left also, hundreds left the place. It was a very dramatic moment. The women then thought, if we cannot change the party, we will change it in the law.<sup>7</sup>

An article from *Le Soir* dated June 7, 1993, confirms the “revolt of women” at the party Congress. Women only returned after talks with the president of the party, who expressed support for the quota proposal.<sup>8</sup> De Bethune went on to help draft the text of the quota bill that became law in 1994, working in the Cabinet of then Minister of Labor, Employment, and Equal Opportunities Miet Smet, who cosponsored the legislation. Smet is quoted in the *Le Soir* article:

Men always say that they are for the principle of granting places to women. They would even offer 50% of the positions! But when it comes to voting . . . Following this incident [at the party Congress], it was decided to submit the problem to a working group and to find a solution . . .

Support from male party leaders was crucial. The other cosponsor of the law was Louis Tobback, a Flemish Social Democrat and then Minister of the Interior, and it was also backed by the Prime Minister, Flemish Christian Democrat Jean-Luc Dehaene. Dehaene personally met with relevant party presidents (those in the majority) to ask them to push the bill through Parliament.<sup>9</sup> Male support can be explained partially by women within the party lobbying them for change. Within the Flemish Christian Democrats, Smet was considered the driving force—“her engagement and her absolute combativeness” pushing the legislation forward through many obstacles.<sup>10</sup> Smet was very close to male party leaders, notably Prime Ministers Martens (whom she later married) and Dehaene, because they all came from the youth group of the party at the same time and because her father was a Senator. According to women’s activists, this strong party “heritage” gave her a very good negotiating position.<sup>11</sup> Majority-male backbenchers went along not only because of party discipline but also because the law stipulated a gradual implementation, moving from a 25% threshold in the first election to 33% thereafter.

Still, the question remains: Why would male party leaders (and not only Flemish Christian Democrats) favor quota legislation, given it could put their own political positions at risk? Ideology played a role, but so did strategic concerns. Party leaders saw the quota as a way to bring the party more in line with ideals of democracy and increase their control over candidate selection at the same time. Tobback likened the legislation to women’s suffrage, noting his party had “committed the stupidity” of voting against the women’s vote in

the 1940s and should not make the same mistake twice. He notes, “There’s one thing that you can’t deny: if you don’t consider that women are more stupid than men or less qualified than men, and so on, then one has to conclude that there is something wrong.”<sup>12</sup>

Flemish Social Democrat Member of Parliament (MP) Renaat Landuyt explained that the law was part of a wider movement to strengthen democracy in Belgium given the rise of extremist parties in the early 1990s. He says,

the atmosphere in these years was that there was an upcoming extremist party and there were difficulties in our democracy, and the reaction was that we have to get farther on with gender and race. And that’s the structural reason that we have had this legislation at that time.<sup>13</sup>

Other interviewees also placed the impetus on democracy, noting that gender balance is very much in line with broader democratic ideals in Belgium, a country with a rich history of legislation requiring representation for different language groups.<sup>14</sup>

The law also gave national party leaders an excuse to exercise more control over candidate selection, shaping the party to their preferred—most electable—demographic makeup. Candidate selection in most parties in Belgium (including those that supported a quota law) was (and is) largely controlled by subnational party organizations, subject to national party approval (Bille, 2001). Landuyt explains that party leaders used the law as “an argument to rearrange their own parties” in the face of a perceived democratic deficit and local party organizations unwilling to change. “The party leaders want to have a certain influence and they have more influence to make a law than to make the lists for the elections. So, they used the law to have more power to make better lists.”<sup>15</sup> The same sentiment was expressed by Flemish Social Democrat Vera Claes, who suggested that this legislation was interesting for party leaders because “they could easily say you [men] should be replaced now because there’s the law.”<sup>16</sup> The candidate selection procedures did not change in Belgium, but leaders *were* able to influence (“regenerate”<sup>17</sup>) the composition of lists.

The other side of this argument is that imposing the law on all parties mitigated concerns that it would result in electoral losses for the supporting parties, at least initially. De Bethune explains,

they [men who opposed the law] said we would have a handicap compared with other parties, and at least for one election this would be a problem, candidates need some time to get strong. The party was a little bit afraid of this forced renewal. We said OK, then we would force everyone to do it. . . . it is a question of democracy, we will force everyone to do it.<sup>18</sup>

French Social Democrat Yvan Mayeur concurs that this was a motivation for his party to support a quota law, rather than only internal party quotas:

OK [if] we do that [implement a gender quota] but the other parties don't do that, we can be in difficulty in one region or another because the popularity of the man is the result of the history of that region. So if we change that man for a woman, it is not only a question of experience, it is a question of known or unknown by the people. . . . So we said, OK, that means that maybe through the law we can impose that to all the parties. That means that everybody will be in the same situation.<sup>19</sup>

The Belgian case offers little support for the hypothesis that parties adopted quota legislation to win over female voters from a growing left-wing party. The Christian Democrats were the largest party in the early 1990s, followed by the Social Democrats. Vote shares for both parties were slightly down on the previous election (1987-1991), but this was largely the result of a rising far right, not the left. The Greens gained only marginally in this time period. When asked whether the Christian Democrats might have had electoral motives for the quota legislation, interviewees from across parties disagreed with the notion. Many volunteered that they were comfortably in power at this time, and that they were particularly strong on the women's vote.<sup>20</sup>

Table 1 summarizes key variables related to intra- and interparty competition and quota support in Belgium and Austria: for interparty competition, each party's vote share and change in vote share in the previous election, and for intraparty competition, each party's candidate selection procedure. The share of women in each party and use of party quotas are also noted, along with whether the party supported quota legislation. Table 1 shows that the coalition of parties backing a quota law (Flemish and French Christian and Social Democrats) all had decentralized candidate selection procedures. They were either completely decentralized, meaning national party leaders have no control over the lists, or decentralized subject to national party approval, meaning that lists are composed by local leaders but national leaders can occasionally exert influence over them. Table 1 also shows that parties supporting a quota won the largest share of votes in the previous election (1991) and did not face a serious challenge from the two parties on the far left (Ecolo and Agalav), which grew an average of 1.5% in vote share from 1987 to 1991. Instead, the far right posed a more serious threat, with a growth of nearly 5% in the same period. The widespread use of decentralized candidate selection procedures in Belgium provided a compelling incentive for male party leaders to adopt a quota law to make intraparty gains.



**Table 1.** Political Parties and Quota Reform in Belgium and Austria.

Mechanism	Party quota		Interparty competition		Intraparty competition		Vote for quota law
	Party	% women	% vote	$\Delta$ % vote	Candidate selection		
Belgium, 1994			(1991)	(1991-1987)			
Flemish Christian Democrats (CVP)	Yes (X%) <sup>a</sup>	12	16.8	-2.7	Decentralized, subject to national party approval	Yes	Yes
French Social Democrats (PS)	No	11	13.5	-2.2	Completely decentralized	Yes	Yes
Flemish Liberals (PVV)	Yes (20%)	12	12.0	+0.4	Completely decentralized	No	No
Flemish Social Democrats (SP)	Yes (25%)	0	12.0	-2.9	Completely decentralized	Yes	Yes
French Liberals (PRL)	No	17	8.1	-1.3	Completely decentralized	No	No
French Christian Democrats (PSC)	Yes (33%)	11	7.7	-0.3	Decentralized, subject to national party approval	Yes	Yes
Flemish Bloc (VB)	No	8	6.6	+4.7	National party decides with subnational input	No	No
Flemish Regionalists (VU)	No	10	5.9	-2.2	Decentralized, subject to national party approval	Abstain	Abstain

(continued)

Table 1.(continued)

Mechanism	Party quota		% women	Interparty competition		Intraparty competition		Vote for quota law
	Party quota	Yes (50%) <sup>b</sup>		% vote	$\Delta$ % vote	Candidate selection	Vote for quota law	
French Greens (Ecolo)	Yes (50%) <sup>b</sup>	Yes (50%) <sup>b</sup>	0	5.1	+2.5	Completely decentralized	No	
Flemish Greens (Agalev)	Yes (50%)	Yes (50%)	33	4.9	+0.4	National party decides with subnational input	No	
Austria, 1995				(1994)	(1994-1990)			
Social Democratic Party (SPÖ)	Yes (40%)	Yes (40%)	25	34.9	-7.9	National party decides with subnational input	No	
Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)	Yes (30%)	Yes (30%)	15	27.7	-4.4	Decentralized, subject to national party approval	No	
Freedom Party (FPÖ)	No	No	21	22.5	+5.9	Decentralized, subject to national party approval	No	
Liberal Forum	No	No		6.0	+6.0	Unknown	No	
The Greens	Yes (50%)	Yes (50%)	46	7.3	+2.5	Completely decentralized	Yes	

Voting data come from the Comparative Manifesto Project. Candidate selection data come from Bille (2001), De Winter (1988), and interview data. a. The CVP's quota followed the formula:  $X\% + (50\% - X\%) / 2$ , where X is the percentage of women on the lists at the previous election. b. Ecolo's quota applied to only the top two positions on the list.

Like Belgium, parties in Austria are familiar with internal gender quota provisions. The Greens and the Social Democrats (SPÖ) have had voluntary quotas since 1986 and the mainstream right (ÖVP) has had an informal quota (not in party statutes) since 1995. While the Greens often have over 50% women in Parliament, the SPÖ and ÖVP typically do not meet their own targets. A quota law was proposed in the national Parliament in 1996, which would have made part of the public funding for political parties contingent on an equal share of men and women in the parliamentary party. After considerable debate, the bill was finally rejected in 1999. The bill was sponsored by the Greens, and initially supported by women across the mainstream left (SPÖ) and right (ÖVP). However, in the final debate, women in both mainstream parties spoke out against the bill and voted along with their parties to reject it (Köpl, 2005).

Since then, the issue of legislated gender quotas for politics has come up in public debate several times, typically instigated by the Green party. Notably, a 2009 parliamentary inquiry on the state of women in politics in Austria featured many arguments in favor of a quota law.<sup>21</sup> At the time of this inquiry, the president of the Parliament, Barbara Prammer (SPÖ) came out in favor of a 50% quota for women in Parliament. Other women within the Socialist party have also joined the Greens in openly supporting quota legislation in recent years. Yet, quota legislation remains off the table in Austria. Can the role of intra- and interparty competition help us make sense of why quota legislation failed in Austria?

Taking intraparty competition first, the argument suggests that male party elites would support national quota legislation if it helps them to take control over candidate selection within their own party. In Austria, this is unlikely to be a strong motivator for party leaders. This is because the proportional electoral system requires parties to present three separate candidate lists for national Parliament: a list for the district, the region, and a nationwide list. Seats are allocated according to votes first at the district level, and then remainders are used to assign seats according to the regional and national lists. While the local party typically has considerable decision-making power at the district level (Bille, 2001), the central party still maintains ability to compose the national lists. As Table 1 shows, national leaders maintain more control over candidate selection procedures in Austria than in Belgium. In the three largest parties, candidate lists are either composed by national party leaders (SPÖ) or subject to national party approval (ÖVP and FPÖ).

In the SPÖ, the result is that the party can use the national lists to ensure (near) compliance with the internal gender quota. According to the head of the SPÖ women's section Andrea Brunner, many of the women come from the national-level list: "So if the bottom two levels [of candidate lists] have

more men normally, the national level has to take more women into the Parliament from the national list. So most of them come from there.”<sup>22</sup> For example, of the 18 SPÖ women elected in 2013, 50% came from district lists, 33% from regional lists, and 16% from the national list. The same figures for SPÖ men are 68% district lists, 21% regional lists, and 11% the national list.<sup>23</sup> Parties in Austria are able to overcome local-level opposition to candidate diversification without resorting to legislation.

Turning to interparty competition, there is little evidence that a growing far left posed a challenge to the SPÖ. As Table 1 shows, in the election preceding the quota law proposal (1995), the SPÖ was the largest party in Parliament, winning the plurality of votes, although not a majority. As in Belgium, the Green party was not particularly strong at the time but the far right (FPÖ) was growing quickly. The SPÖ thus continued its “grand coalition” with the ÖVP, a partnership that has governed Austria together for the majority of the postwar period. The ÖVP are ideologically opposed to quotas, and for this reason the SPÖ also voted against the bill. According to longtime SPÖ politician Irmtraut Karlsson, the SPÖ voted against the quota bill “Because they are in coalition with the conservatives, and this issue is not important enough for that. They are not going to break the coalition for that.”<sup>24</sup> “Free votes” (votes of conscience) were not permitted, according to Karlsson.

The constraints of coalition government still bind the SPÖ today. In 2014, the spokesperson for the the Minister for Women, Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek, said of a quota for women in politics, “My minister thinks that all these ideas are worth considering, but the problem is again that the ÖVP just doesn’t really have an interest in doing that.”<sup>25</sup> While some women within the ÖVP have come out in favor of a quota law, “large parts [of the party] are against it and will keep the debate down.”<sup>26</sup> In the absence of compelling incentives for male party leaders to gain further control over candidate selection, or to compete with a rising left-wing party, the quota law in Austria was rejected. Yet the Greens have been growing in popularity since the 1990s, gaining 12% of the vote in the last parliamentary election (2013) and winning the presidential election for the first time in 2016. If the success of the Greens continues, it could well push the SPÖ to prioritize a quota to compete for women voters.

An interesting question is, “What if the SPÖ had not been in government with the Conservatives—would party leaders have supported a quota law?” Even absent a challenge on the left, the gains to be made by putting the right at a temporary disadvantage in having to find and field new candidates could be compelling. In theory, interparty motivation could come from competition with either the left or the right. In the case of Austria, the presence of a strong

and rising far-right party makes this unlikely. The SPÖ needed to keep its voters away from the FPÖ and has attempted to do so by, for example, stressing its restrictive immigration policy (Müller, 2000). FPÖ voters are predominantly male and the party has many times spoken out against gender quotas as antidemocratic and a distraction from real problems (Givens, 2004).<sup>27</sup> In the context of the electorate's overall swing to the right, the SPÖ would be unlikely to pass a quota even if it were not constrained by coalition government. This brief thought experiment suggests that party strategy toward gender quotas depends on the location of its competitors across the spectrum. I note that additional case studies would be necessary to explore cases where parties might be motivated by competition with the mainstream right, absent a strong far-right party.

In summary, the main incentives for male elites to support a quota law in Belgium were (a) to overcome *intraparty competition* about candidate selection and (b) to ensure that a quota would not put their own parties at an initial disadvantage by imposing the law on all parties. The strong role of women in the parties (the impetus for the quota law in the first place) was thus complemented by conditions—decentralized candidate selection and entrenched local party monopolies—that gave male party leaders strategic reasons to support the law. In Austria, where the tiered electoral system gives central party leaders considerable control over candidate selection, and electoral competition on the left has been muted, a quota reform was rejected.

### *Portugal and Italy: The Influence of a Growing Far Left*

In Portugal, the debate about a quota law was a partisan issue. The two main parties on the left, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Left Bloc (BE) had both instituted quotas for women within their own parties from the late 1990s. The new left party the Left Bloc had quotas from its founding, with no great debate about it.<sup>28</sup> In the PS, conversely, women within the party struggled for many years to get a quota passed. Eventually, in 1995, then party leader António Guterres imposed an internal quota against the will of most of the party according to MP and former president of the PS women's section Sónia Fertuzinhos. Fertuzinhos recalls that Guterres believed in this agenda: "he was influenced by women's groups, and he gave them strength, supported them."<sup>29</sup> Although the internal quota proved difficult to implement at first ("it had not really worked," claimed PS Member of the European Parliament [MEP] Ana Gomes<sup>30</sup>), by the mid-2000s things had changed. Fertuzinhos says that although the party was still patriarchal, the leadership—notably, then party leader José Sócrates—continued to push the issue as a question of democratic legitimacy.

By 2005, 29% of the PS party's MPs were women, slightly above the self-imposed 25% party quota, and 50% of the Left Bloc's MPs were women. The two main parties on the right, the Social Democrats (PSD) and Democratic and Social Center–People's Party (CDS-PP) boasted a less-impressive 8% female MPs each at the time (Comissão para a Cidadania e a Igualdade de Género, 2007). The two left parties joined together in proposing a law. As in the case of Belgium, this was not the first time a quota law had been proposed in Parliament. Bills for a quota law were introduced in 1998, 2000, and 2003 by Socialist party members, and in 2001 and 2003 by the Left Bloc. All of these bills were rejected due to the opposition of the (majority) right-wing parties, the PSD, and the CDS-PP.

The 2006 bill initially required a minimum of 33% representation of both genders on party lists, candidates must alternate by gender (no more than two of the same sex in consecutive order), and parties that do not comply cannot submit lists. The PS and BE jointly supported this bill, which was published as a decree in 2006. The decree was then vetoed by the president, who objected to the strict sanctions for noncompliance. A revised bill, which changed the penalties to financial sanctions, was proposed. At this point, the BE declined to support the bill, claiming the sanctions were too weak. The PS used its majority in Parliament to push through the legislation without additional support (Baum & Espírito-Santo, 2012).<sup>31</sup>

Why would these parties support national quota legislation, given their internal party quotas seemed to be relatively effective? Candidate selection in Portugal, as in Belgium, is influenced by subnational party organizations. Again, problems for women are seen to loom largest at the local level, where lists are prone to being “hijacked by local party leaders,” in the words of PS MEP Ana Gomes.<sup>32</sup> Yet, the PS party statutes state that the National Political Commission (the central party leadership) can nominate candidates for 30% of winnable positions in each district, including their rank order (Verge & Espírito-Santo, 2016). This explains why the PS' internal party quota had been effective at achieving its target of 25%, and also why PS male backbenchers had no problem voting for the law (they were no longer at risk). Table 2, which presents key variables related to intra- and interparty competition in Portugal and Italy, shows that the majority of parties in Portugal are characterized by centralized control over party lists. Thus, the main motivation for male party leaders to pass a quota in Portugal was unlikely related to intraparty competition.

Male and female quota supporters in Portugal framed their case in terms of advancing democracy, in particular after the dictatorship when women's roles in public life were severely restricted. The law was originally packaged as part of a broader set of reforms to increase political participation and

**Table 2.** Political Parties and Quota Reform in Portugal and Italy.

Mechanism		Interparty competition			Intraparty competition		Vote for
Party	Party quota	% Women	% vote	$\Delta$ % vote	Candidate selection	quota law	
Portugal, 2006							
Socialist Party (PS)	Yes (25%)	(2005) 29	(2005-2002) 46.4	+7.8	National party decides with subnational input	Yes	
Social Democratic Party (PSD)	No	8	29.6	-11.4	Decentralized, subject to national party approval	No	
Social Democratic Center-Popular Party (CDS-PP)	No	8	7.5	-1.4	National party decides with subnational input	No	
Left Bloc (BE)	Yes (33%)	50	6.5	+3.7	National party decides with subnational input	No	
Communist Party (PCP)	No	17	6.5	+0.7	National party decides with subnational input	No	
Italy, 2005							
Democrats of the Left (PDS/DS)	Yes (40%)	(2001) 24	(2001-1996) 16.6	-4.4	National party decides with subnational input	NA <sup>a</sup>	
Forza Italia (FI)	No	8	29.4	+8.8	National party decides	NA	
National Alliance (AN)	No	4	12.0	-3.7	National party decides	NA	
Daisy-Democracy Is Freedom (M-DL)	No	5	14.5	+3.4 <sup>b</sup>	Unknown	NA	
Communist Refoundation Party (PRC)	Yes (40%)	33	5.0	-3.6	National party decides	NA	

(continued)

Table 2.(continued)

Mechanism	Party	Party quota	% Women	Interparty competition		Intraparty competition		Vote for quota law
				(2013)	(2013-2008)	% vote	Δ % vote	
Italy, 2015	Star Movement (M5S)	No	31	(2013-2008)	25.6	NA <sup>c</sup>	Primaries	No
	Democratic Party (PD)	Yes (50%)	38		25.4	-7.7	Primaries	Yes
	People of Freedom (Pdl)	No	27		21.6	-15.6	National party decides	No
	Civic Choice (SC)	Yes (30%)	21		8.3	NA <sup>d</sup>	Unknown	Yes
	Northern League (LN)	No	0		3.9	-4.2	National party decides	No
	Ecology Party (SEL)	Yes (40%)	27		3.2	+3.2	Primaries	No

In the 2015 Italy case, minor parties with fewer than 3% of the vote are excluded. Election data come from the Comparative Manifesto Project. Candidate selection data from Leston-Bandeira and Freire (2003), Verge and Esprito-Santo (2016), Ferrara (2004), Hazan and Rahat (2010), and interviews.

a. The bill did not come to a vote because it was blocked by the majority, and the legislative session then elapsed. b. The Italian party M-DL's change in vote share was calculated by comparing the M-DL with the combined vote share of the Italian Popular Party and Italian Renewal parties in 1996 (the parties that combined to make up the M-DL, along with the Democrats, formed in 1998). c. 2013 was the first election for the M5S. d. 2013 was the first election for Civic Choice.



democracy, including a term limit measure for mayors.<sup>33</sup> The government pushed forward a plan to “modernize” the state, including not only political participation but also bureaucracy and infrastructure (Lisi, 2010). Male party leaders of the PS also viewed the quota legislation as a way to distinguish the party from competitors, gaining an electoral advantage. PS minister Augusto Santos Silva says of the quota bill:

On one hand we could differentiate more the Socialist party from the center-right party PSD that is very akin to the PS in terms of financial issues, European issues, defense, foreign affairs. . . . so there, we could have a rather clear differentiation between left and right in Portugal. And on the other hand we could conquer some electorate, more urban and younger electorate, and of course the new professionals, more educated, young women, we could steal them from the new extreme left party that is called the Left Bloc (BE).<sup>34</sup>

The Socialist party in fact gained significant ground in the election just prior to the quota law, increasing its vote share from 38% in 2002% to 46% in 2005 (see Table 2). However, this was entirely at the expense of the outgoing right-wing government (PSD and CDS-PP), which was blamed for poor economic performance. The year 2005 marked increased success for the new far-left party the Left Bloc, which won 6% of the vote and eight seats in Parliament (up from 2% and two seats in 2002). The growing success of this new party posed a threat, particularly as the party captured a predominantly young, urban vote (Lobo, 2001). Previous research suggests that the PS competed with the BE on gender equality issues: “. . . [the PS] implemented its own voluntary gender quota in 1999 in part to keep up with the BE, which appeared more progressive on this and other equality issues at the time.” (Baum & Esprito-Santo, 2012, p. 335). In addition, the distance between the two main parties in Portugal (the PS and PSD) is small relative to other Western European countries (Freire, 2006), and clarity about the policy alternatives presented by parties is low (Freire, 2008; Freire & Belchior, 2013). Both are considered “catch-all” parties, finding support in many social groups, including farmers, industrial workers, and rural and urban middle class (Veiga & Veiga, 2004). In a study of the 2005 election, Freire and Lobo (2006) state that the PS “had problems differentiating itself from the PSD in many policy areas” (p. 585).

Still, Silva’s view is extreme. Most politicians interviewed were adamant that ideological factors alone were the primary impetus for PS support of the quota law, along with the history of the women’s section in the party fighting for the quota. A typical example comes from PS MP Vitalino Canas, who says, “What motivated him [Socrates] was a matter of justice. I think the

defense of a quota system has no electoral impact, i.e., generally no one wins or loses because of defending or rejecting a quota system.”<sup>35</sup> Of course, it is understandable that interviewees would want to present themselves and their parties in the best possible light, so it could be that subjects are unwilling to speak frankly about strategic incentives. Another possibility is that the political payoff for the left was more subtle. One interviewee suggested that left-wing voters expect their parties to address these issues, even if they are not the most politically salient: “We didn’t get more votes because we supported parity, but I’m sure we would have less if we didn’t.”<sup>36</sup> In conclusion, the role of *interparty competition* in Portugal—a growing far-left party and policy convergence in the middle—helped to facilitate the support and passage of a quota at this time.

Several parties on the left in Italy have had voluntary quotas for women at various points in their history: the main center-left party (Democratic Party), the Communists, and the Communist Refoundation Party (Caul, 2001; Guadagnini, 2005). Italy was also the first country in Western Europe to pass a gender quota law in 1993, but it was repealed in 1995 by the (all-male) constitutional court. In place for only one election (1994), the 50% quota applied to the 25% of the seats that were elected via proportional representation (Weeks & Baldez, 2015). Previous research suggests that one of the main reasons the quota law passed in 1993 was the general assumption that it would be repealed—which is indeed what happened (Guadagnini, 2005). In 2003, Italian legislators passed an amendment to the constitution that gives policy makers the power to adopt measures to promote equal access to elective bodies, opening the door for a quota law once more. Female political leaders from across the political spectrum came together to support the amendment.

In 2005, a quota law was proposed in Parliament as part of a bill to change the electoral system. The quota was driven forward by center-right (Forza Italia) Minister of Equal Opportunities, Stefania Prestigiacomo, in a move that surprised many of her feminist critics (Guadagnini, 2005). The minister engaged in a tense public battle against men in her own party and coalition (a partnership including Forza Italia and further right-wing parties National Alliance and Lega Nord) as she pushed for the quota.<sup>37</sup> The coalition of support for the bill included women from across the political spectrum, including those who had previously opposed quotas such as Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of the fascist leader. Silvio Berlusconi, leader of Forza Italia and prime minister at the time, claimed that he was in favor of the quota. However, it is unclear whether his support was sincere, particularly given the sexist explanation he gave that “We would like women, most of all the beautiful ones, in Parliament very much.”<sup>38</sup> Berlusconi’s coalition partners were

opposed and he was unwilling to take a stand for gender quotas at the expense of delaying the legislation to change the electoral system.

What role did intra- and interparty competition play in the Italian case of the failed 2005 quota law? First, the role of intraparty competition was likely minimal because Italian parties maintained strong, centralized control of candidate selection at this time (see Table 2). Berlusconi famously handpicked candidates and his coalition party leaders (especially *Alleanza Nazionale*) also exercised direct control over nominations, rather than giving local party branches influence (Boeri, Merlo, & Prat, 2010; Ferrara, 2004; Galasso & Nannicini, 2011). A quota law thus offered little incentive for party leaders in terms of quashing intraparty conflict. Second, interparty competition was also unlikely to have been a compelling motivator. In the general election preceding the quota law (2001), Berlusconi's right-wing coalition gained over 90 seats in the lower house, at the expense of the mainstream left coalition and the Communist Refoundation Party. There was no progressive, new left party emerging to push parties to address gender equality issues. The quota was also not even agreed upon ideologically within the mainstream left. The Democratic Party did not comply with its own internal party quota at the time, and some men within the party spoke out against the quota bill in Parliament (Guadagnini, 1998).<sup>39</sup> Absent gains to be made in either intra- or interparty competition, male elites in Italy failed to prioritize the gender quota at this time.

The case of Italy offers a second opportunity to examine incentives for a quota law. Ten years later, in 2015, a quota bill returned to the legislative agenda, again with a proposed electoral law change initiated by the government. This time, the proposal passed, but only after a protracted debate and several amendments to strengthen the law failed in secret votes. Matteo Renzi was the head of the Democratic Party and the government at the time, and he made a point of emphasizing gender equality in the party. When Renzi was elected to the head of the PD in 2013, he selected a majority of women for his new party board (*secretaria*), saying, "I selected 5 men and 7 women, on the grounds that equal opportunities are never enough."<sup>40</sup> He implemented an internal party quota once more, and also appointed Italy's first parity cabinet as prime minister in 2014. Although ideology, a commitment to egalitarianism, might have been an important incentive, intra- and interparty competition also could have played compelling roles. In contrast to 2005, the context of 2015 Italy is one in which many parties have given up centralized control of candidate selection, and—most importantly—a rising far-left party threatens the mainstream.

As Table 2 shows, the Democratic Party (PD) and others on the left now use primaries to select their candidates, signaling a move toward more

democratic, inclusive parties (Hazan & Rahat, 2010). PD primary voters are able to signal two preferences, one for a man and one for a woman. If the second preference is of the same gender, it is void. The party then composes the closed lists with 50/50 gender representation and gender alternation in list positions.<sup>41</sup> In this context, a national quota law would give the PD party no additional control over candidate selection, and indeed the party would not want this anyway.

While intraparty conflict over candidate selection is not a strong incentive for passing a quota law, interparty competition has become more fierce on the left. The 5-Star Movement (M5S) burst onto the Italian political scene in 2009, and won the largest vote share of any single party in 2013, “stealing” 19% of the PD’s 2008 votes (as quoted in Bordignon, 2014, p. 5). One PD politician remarked that M5S politicians are young and new, “and they don’t have the institutional system of [party] power to change . . . they don’t have to destroy the old ways that were built by all men.”<sup>42</sup> Nearly one third of its parliamentary party is women, and the party is also on average the most youthful in Parliament—but its voters are disproportionately male (56%). Emphasizing gender equality through passing a quota law could thus have strategic advantages for the PD, who need to retain young voters and already have an advantage with women (55% of its voters).<sup>43</sup> In the case of Italy, an absence of strategic incentives to gain power within or between parties resulted in male elites failing to support a quota in 2005; 10 years later, in 2015, a significant challenge on the left precipitated the passage of a quota in Parliament.

In summary, little evidence suggests intraparty conflicts over candidate selection motivated male party elites to adopt a quota in Portugal. Instead, the timing points to the key role of *interparty competition*—namely, the PS’ struggle to distinguish itself from a rising, socially progressive party on the left and their main opposition in the center. In Italy, conditions of strong, centralized control of party lists and a lackluster far left initially led to the rejection of a quota law (2005), but a fast-growing far-left movement threatening the mainstream likely hastened its passage in 2015.

Figure 2 replicates Figure 1, this time showing where each of the countries analyzed in this study falls in the table of scenarios and outcomes. The two failed cases of quota adoption, Austria and Italy 2005, fall in the bottom-left cell, where there is no advantage to be gained by adopting a quota law over a party quota. The cases of Portugal and Italy 2015 fall in the top-right cell. In both of these cases, the law offered a way to stop electoral losses from a rising far-left party while also equalizing the cost of finding new candidates across the left and right. Finally, the case of Belgium falls into the middle-right cell, where the law is the only way to effectively implement a quota in

		Party Response	
		Party Quota	Quota Law
Competition Context	Threat from Left	Stop loss to Left, but potential loss to Right ⇒	Stop loss to Left and Right <i>(Hypothesis 2)</i> <b>Portugal</b> <b>Italy 2015</b>
	No threat from Left	Weak party: Ineffective ⇒	Weak party: Effective <i>(Hypothesis 1)</i> <b>Belgium</b>
		Strong party: Effective <b>Austria</b> <b>Italy 2005</b>	Strong party: Effective

**Figure 2.** Party incentives to adopt a quota law in five cases.

the context of weak parties (decentralized candidate selection procedures). In this case, women in the parties and ideological reasons provided the original impetus for a quota, and male party leaders pushed the legislation through to force their own parties to comply.

### Conclusion

The rapid growth of gender quota laws is surprising, especially because it seems to challenge the dominant paradigm of rational, self-interested politicians. As one Portuguese politician put it, “They [men] want to keep control of the power.”<sup>44</sup> The four countries treated in depth in this article give us clues into the dynamics of institutional change. When faced with increasing competition within or between parties, male party leadership will employ quotas as a mechanism to consolidate power and increase their electoral competitiveness. Strategic incentives provide an important missing link in the chain of events leading to the passage of a national quota law.

These policy changes were not made in a vacuum and, certainly, the role of women within and across parties, transnational information sharing, and ideology were also crucial. Here I focus on the role of male party elites and the conditions under which they are willing to support these reforms. My findings build on previous work in the field of gender and politics, which

highlight the role of electoral competition, suggesting that a rising far-left party in particular is a powerful incentive for male party leaders. I also provide a second strategic explanation that has not been tested in the literature until now, that national party leaders adopt quotas to gain control over local party leaders in decentralized systems. These conditions could theoretically occur at the same time, leading party leaders to support quotas for reasons of both intra- and interparty strategic gain, but my analysis suggests that either can be sufficient motivation for quota adoption on their own.

The findings are important for two main reasons. First, understanding the strategic incentives behind male support for quota laws can help quota advocates target their argument to the specific country-context likely to be relevant. In the case of Austria, for example, quota supporters would do well to emphasize the growing threat on the left to male party leaders. This matters because quotas have been shown to increase women's descriptive representation (Davidson-Schmich, 2006; Hughes, 2009, 2011; Jones, 1998, 2004; Kunovich & Paxton, 2005; McAllister & Studlar, 2002; Meier, 2004; Paxton, Hughes, & Painter, 2010; Schmidt & Saunders, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009; Tripp & Kang, 2008), and descriptive representation is linked to the substantive representation of women's interests (Carey, Niemi, & Powell, 1998; Celis, 2007; Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Dodson, 2006; Esaiasson & Heidar, 2000; Hogan, 2008; Reingold, 1992; Swers, 2002; Thomas, 1994). Increasing quota adoption thus has the potential to boost the quality of our democracies.

Second, this research has potential implications beyond gender quota laws. The politics of quota adoption could help inform and refine our understanding of the broader dynamics of institutional and policy change. Quotas are "one of the most important political developments of the modern era" (O'Brien & Rickne, 2016, p. 112). Yet the motives behind this huge change, seen in the light of intra- and interparty competition, are not so puzzling. If we consider the strategic incentives of party leaders, the adoption of quotas has much in common with other forms of seemingly irrational institutional change, such as extending the suffrage and adopting election primaries. The argument advanced through case studies here could be tested cross-nationally in future quantitative studies, particularly as we gain better data on candidate selection methods over time.

The framework of intra- and interparty competition could also help us understand variation in other policy reforms that disproportionately benefit women or minorities; for example, the extension of work-family policies. Previous work suggests that work-family policies are deployed for electoral purposes in Europe, focusing mainly on interparty competition (electoral defeat driving parties to target women; Morgan, 2013). Considering intraparty

competition as well, such as the degree of factionalism within parties and the strategic motivations for incorporating women's demands, could help us make sense of reforms driven by strong parties (e.g., the case of Sweden under Social Democratic dominance).

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### **Notes**

1. Voluntary party provisions ("party quotas") are also common in advanced democracies and are often included in party statutes. Another policy, political reservations, requires women to be elected to certain positions rather than only nominated. Political reservations for women are not common in advanced democracies.
2. For literature on party quota adoption, please see Bruhn (2003), Caul (2001), Kittilson (2006), Kolinsky (1991), Krook (2009), Matland and Studlar (1996), and Meier (2004).
3. V. Claes (personal interview, October 10, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
4. Law of May 24, 1994 "on promoting balanced distribution of men and women on the lists of candidates for the elections." *Belgisch Staatsblad*. July 1, 1994; Law of December 13, 2002, "on various changes to the electoral law." *Belgisch Staatsblad*. January 10, 2003.
5. Report of the Committee of the Interior, *Chambre des Représentants de Belgique*. Session Ordinaire 1993 to 1994, Mars 24, 1994.
6. *Chambre des Représentants de Belgique*. Seance Plenièrè, Mars 31, 1994. PLEN 31.03.94.
7. S. de Bethune (personal interview, September 5, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
8. Dubuisson, Martine. "Parti macho? Les femmes en colère. . ." *Le Soir*, June 7, 1993.

9. S. de Bethune (personal interview, September 5, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
10. E. Cortier and K. Roggeman (personal interview, October 3, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
11. E. Cortier and K. Roggeman (personal interview, October 3, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
12. L. Tobback (personal interview, September 20, 2013), Leuven, Belgium.
13. R. Landuyt (personal interview, September 23, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
14. S. de Bethune (personal interview, September 5, 2013), Brussels, Belgium; see also Lijphart (2012) and Meier (2004).
15. R. Landuyt (personal interview, September 23, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
16. V. Claes (personal interview, October 10, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
17. R. Landuyt (personal interview, September 23, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
18. S. de Bethune (personal interview, September 5, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
19. Y. Mayeur (personal interview, October 17, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
20. G. Annemans (personal interview, October 9, 2013), Brussels, Belgium; Y. Mayeur (personal interview, October 17, 2013), Brussels, Belgium; S. de Bethune (personal interview, September 5, 2013), Brussels, Belgium; V. Claes (personal interview, October 10, 2013), Brussels, Belgium.
21. "Frauen in der Politik mehr Frauen in die Politik!" Parlamentarische Enquete des Nationalrates Mittwoch. October 7, 2009. 1/VER XXIV. GP—Stenographisches Protokoll.
22. A. Brunner (personal interview, April 22, 2014), Vienna, Austria.
23. Figures calculated from national Parliament website, [www.parlament.gv.at](http://www.parlament.gv.at).
24. I. Karlsson (personal interview, May 12, 2014), Vienna, Austria.
25. J. Valsky (personal interview, May 5, 2014), Vienna, Austria.
26. Anonymous (SPÖ minister's aide; personal interview, April 18, 2014), Vienna, Austria.
27. See, for example, "Verzicht auf Quoten wäre Rückschritt in der Demokratie," *Der Standard*, November 5, 2008.
28. L. Fazenda (personal interview, November 5, 2013), Lisbon, Portugal.
29. S. Fertuzinhos (personal interview, November 22, 2013), Lisbon, Portugal.
30. A. Gomes (personal interview, December 6, 2013), Lisbon, Portugal.
31. Organic Law 3/2006 "Lei da paridade," DR I serie No.160/X/1 2006.08.21, August 21, 2006.
32. A. Gomes (personal interview, December 6 2013), Lisbon, Portugal.
33. A. S. Silva (personal interview, November 12, 2013), Lisbon, Portugal.
34. A. S. Silva (personal interview, November 12, 2013), Lisbon, Portugal.
35. V. Canas (email correspondence, October 17, 2013).
36. L. Fazenda (personal interview, November 5, 2013), Lisbon, Portugal.
37. "Berlusconi-Prestigiacomo, scontro in Cdm." *La Corriere della Sera*, November 11, 2005.
38. "Anna, Aida e le altre: Silvio playboy per ragioni di Stato." *Il Corriere della Sera*, October 20, 2005. Author translation.
39. Information about Democratic Party internal quotas from author's interviews with Democratic Party politicians: V. Valente (personal interview, April 9, 2014), Rome, Italy, and C. Guerra (personal interview, April 9, 2014), Rome, Italy.



40. Renzi annuncia la nuova segreteria Pd: '5 uomini e 7 donne. C'è anche Serracchiani'," *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, December 9, 2013. Author translation.
41. "Il regolamento delle primarie per i parlamentari del PD," *Il Post*, December 18, 2012; V. Fedeli (email interview, May 14, 2014).
42. V. Valente (personal interview, April 9, 2014), Rome, Italy.
43. "Il Pd di Renzi, partito trasversale: i dati EMG," *YouTrend.it*, May 28, 2014.
44. Anonymous (PS member of Parliament [MP]); personal interview, November 26, 2013), Lisbon, Portugal.

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