

Female Political Representation: A Global Analysis and a Domestic Proposal

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements..... 2

Abstract..... 3

Introduction..... 4

A Global Analysis..... 6

Why Can't We? 14

Quotas..... 29

Conclusion..... 36

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Abstract

This paper explores the underrepresentation of women in government. I will examine the global percentages of women in national governments, and the benefits of striving towards equal representation. Understanding the benefits that female politicians bring to society leads to conversations about why nations everywhere should aim for parity and how to achieve it. I will then focus on the situation in the United States, the inadequate female political representation, and reasons behind it. I will largely be looking at those reasons behind low percentages and conclude with the theoretical proposal of a quota system in the U.S. and whether or not it might be a step in the right direction. Readers can hope to gain a better understanding of the adversities women in politics face and the cruciality of increasing the percentages of female politicians in the United States.

Female Political Representation:
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Introduction

Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister of the U.K. once said, “If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman,” (Belme, 2017). In 2019’s political climate, in both the United States and elsewhere, we are seeing more and more female politicians taking initiative and effecting change. The presence of female-identifying politicians in houses of national government across the world have shown to have positive impacts in policy areas like healthcare and education, and the simple presence of female politicians increases interest in politics and encourages potential future candidates. I will examine those impacts as observed through the lens of countries like Canada, Sweden, Rwanda, and other notable cases in different regions across the globe.

After the monumental midterm elections in the United States in November of 2018 it is crucial to examine this phenomenon of a sudden influx of women being voted into office, as well as the potential that the increase in female political representation has for our country. Might this just be another step in the right direction toward equal representation in Congress? Or was it just another anomaly? To propose the next steps towards equality we must understand the trends in representation and what makes the difference. Are things fine the way that they are? Should we simply wait until we eventually elect half women and half men to Congress? Or can something more be done? What far too many Americans fail to consider when understanding why our female representation is so low, is the way in which society treats female politicians. From media outlets to their opposing candidates, they are faced with irrelevant attacks on their appearance, sexist insults, and the like. The publicization of this treatment is observed by women across the country, and when compounded with an already low level of self-confidence in political abilities, there are obvious

explanations for the disparity we see in our government. I will focus mainly on stereotypes unfairly applied to female candidates/politicians, media bias against them, the lack of encouragement women receive, and how these things have an impact. Given the poor treatment, and low numbers, is there a feasible, proactive path we could take to raise representation and reach parity? Countries like Rwanda, Sweden, Mexico, and many more have taken a legislative step to reach parity by implementing gender quotas at the national level. This means that there is a specific number of parliament seats set aside for women.

That being said, could a gender quota, either nationally legislated, or implemented party-by-party, possibly exist as a reasonable option for the United States? I will examine the theoretical possibilities surrounding the implementation of gender quotas in the United States' federal government. Dozens upon dozens of countries globally have gender quotas in some capacity in their government, so why not us? If we want a way to supersede our current stagnant percentages, a gender quota, in my opinion, could be a step in the right direction. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018), the United States' global ranking for female representation percentage is tied for 78th with Montenegro, with lower houses that are 23.5 percent female. Given that bleak statistic, surely we can afford to make a drastic change.

The purpose of this paper is three-fold. First, I intend to convey a general understanding of women's political representation globally. Understanding the United States' situation in the context of the rest of the world requires a global comparison. Observing those nations who have successfully raised their percentage of women in government, and more importantly the benefits that they have reaped as a result, will help to exemplify why we must raise our own percentages. Next, I will present an analysis of why specifically we, as such a developed nation, are lacking so severely in the realm of women's political representation. This extensive look at the treatment of women in politics in the United States will aid in our comprehension of the intersection of obstacles

for women in our government. Contemporary examples like Hillary Clinton's 2016 Presidential campaign and Sarah Palin's 2008 Vice Presidential candidacy will clarify the ways in which women face adversity in the pursuit of political office. Lastly, given the difficulties in reaching parity in gender representation, what can we do? I believe that voluntary gender quotas within the major political parties in the United States might be the solution we've been searching for. With the aid of peer-edited research articles, research-based books, credible news sources, and political statistics, I argue that every country worldwide should aim for gender equality in their national governments due to benefits reaped, and that the best path to equality in the United States – in the face of obstacles in the way of female politicians – might just be the creation of a quota system.

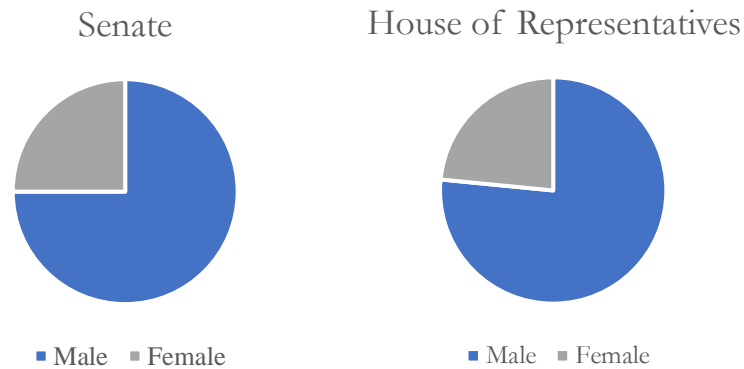
A Global Analysis

After the 2018 midterm elections, the United States reached its highest percentage of women in government in history, inducting over 120 women into Congress. According to a ranking of percentages of women in government by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018), the United States is tied with Montenegro for 78th out of 193 nations in the archive. Both nations have a percentage of 23.5 in their lower houses. For all intents and purposes, I examine the following nations' percentages in order to analyze some of the nations who have the highest percentages globally alongside the United States: Canada, Sweden, Finland, Rwanda, Mexico, and Spain. These allow us to observe a variety of nations who have made advances in women's political representation, that can be juxtaposed with the situation in the United States.

The United States

Between the House of Representatives and the Senate, the United States has a Congress that is 24.7 percent female. This is the highest it has ever been, yet it is still far too low. The United States is one of the most developed nations in the world, yet it boasts a dismal percentage of women in its

congress. For a nation that is so well-developed, and so globally involved, why are women so far from parity? Our current percentages are not only socially but statistically problematic.



Later I go into extensive detail as to why the United States cannot compete with the percentages of female political representation with some of its global allies. For a preview of just why our percentages look like this, we can look to Jennifer Lawless (2014), a Brookings senior fellow who has published numerous articles and a book about the underrepresentation of women in our government. Lawless (2014) tells us that one of the largest obstacles to women entering our government is a lack of encouragement, as well as the fact that coverage of female candidates far too frequently focuses on their family. This focus on women's families, Lawless (2014) argues, leads to the common assumption that women won't run because they **have** to take care of their family, but there are far more pressing matters at play.

An important distinction that will be made here is what the United States is missing out on because of the low percentages of women in our government. While we struggle with issues such as maternal mortality, child poverty, and educational disparities, the following exemplifiers are leading the pack in terms of success and solutions. Nations like Sweden, Rwanda, and Canada have made strides politically, and more importantly, socially, that serves as evidence as to why we need to improve our status.

Canada

In 2015, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that his Cabinet ministers would be half female (Alter, 2015). Even in 2015, this news garnered international coverage and praise. Alter (2015) told us that when asked about the decision, Trudeau's response was, "it's 2015," which was apparently self-explanatory. While according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018), Canada ranks just 62nd out of 193, with a lower house that is just 26.9 percent female, their upper house sits at 46.7 percent female. In a close examination of Canada's record of women in government alongside their policy changes, Ng and Muntaner (2019) first point out that as the percentage of women in government increases, mortality rates decrease: "Between 1976 and 2009, the percentage of women in provincial government increased six-fold from 4.2 per cent to 25.9 per cent, while mortality from all causes declined by 37.5 per cent" (para. 8). They do not assert complete causality, but suggest a definite connection. Ng and Muntaner (2019) also found that women spend more on health and education, and because of that, "women in government do in fact advance population health" (para. 5). Further, the authors say their findings support the idea that female politicians have a tendency to work more collaboratively and more frequently in bipartisan ways than male politicians in the same position (Ng & Muntaner, 2019). Using the Canadian example, Ng and Muntaner conclude that, "We believe that electing more women in government not only promotes gender equality and strengthens democratic institutions but also makes real and substantive contributions to government spending and population health" (para. 20). If this is true, shouldn't all nations globally who value democracy and gender equality be striving for gender parity in their governments?

Sweden

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018) archive has Sweden ranked as 5th out of 193 countries, with a lower house containing 47.3 percent women. Alter (2015) discusses some of the impressively progressive social policy in Sweden, and says that because of their high percentages, "it shouldn't be

any surprise that Sweden is regularly held up as an example of a paradise for working women” (para. 4). Furthermore, Sweden boasts one of the highest female employment rates in the European Union, and very low rates of child poverty (Alter, 2015). In Sweden, Alter (2015) tells us that not only is there maternity leave, but “paid family leave,” which allots 16 months of paid leave to be divided between both parents, 13 of those months are paid at 80 percent of their income, with the last 3 months having a flat rate (para. 4). Given this fact, it is almost embarrassing to think about the fact that the United States has no federally legislated maternity leave policies let alone paid family leave.

With a simple Google search regarding social policy and women in Swedish government, links to the website for the Swedish government appear – but with a surprising twist – a focus on the word “feminist.” The Government Offices of Sweden have an entire webpage dedicated to the feminist aspects of their government. It tells us that “Sweden has the first feminist government in the world....Women and men must have the same power to shape society and their own lives. This is a human right and a matter of democracy and justice” (A feminist government, n.d., para. 1). The Swedish Government (n.d.), also states that gender equality plays a large part in solving society’s problems, assisting in economic development, and more. This is by far the most progressive government document that I have studied. Sweden shows integrity through both the social policy that makes life better for all of its citizens, and through the integration of feminism and gender equality so extensively throughout their government. It is a model to be followed by all those who would hope to make society a better, more equitable place for all of its residents.

Finland

Finland holds the 12th spot out of 193 according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018), with a lower house that is 41.5 percent female. Alter (2015) points out that historically, Finland has been a leading force for women in government. One of the most impressive aspects of life in

Finland is their educational system. Alter (2015) reports that Finnish children outperform American, Russian, and U.K. students in all academic areas. But here's the catch: "Finnish schools rarely have standardized tests, emphasize play over homework, pay their teachers well, and everyone goes to public schools" (Alter, 2015, para. 8). This is far from the underfunded programs, test-scores-determine-success, public-versus-private, and underpaid-teacher atmosphere of the U.S. educational system. Moreover, Alter (2015) says that Finland not only has an outstanding educational system, but also "generous paid maternity leave and heavily subsidized child care" as constants in their society (para. 9). As these are constants in their society, so women have been constants in their government. There appears to be a pattern among those countries with high percentages of women in their government.

Rwanda

This seems to be the country that is at the forefront of discussions on women in government. Rwanda boasts the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (2018) number one rank out of 193 countries, with a lower house that is 61.3 percent female. However, the road to this high percentage was not a happy one. Alter (2015) reminds us that by 1994, the bloodshed between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups left Rwanda with a population that was 70 percent female. Only 20 of the 780 Rwandan judges survived the genocide, and "Before the genocide, women held only 10% to 15% of Parliament seats" (Alter, 2015, para. 5). Regardless of its origins, the high percentage of women in Rwandan Parliament has allowed the women of their country to reap many benefits. New legislators passed laws which allowed women to open bank accounts and own land, and in 2003 they introduced a quota requiring 30 percent of all government positions to be reserved for women, voted for by women (Alter, 2015). Alter (2015) states that "Fittingly, it's women who have felt the benefits" of all of this change: "Rwanda now has a lower maternal mortality rate than other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 87% of women are in the labor force;" the United States only

sees about 57 percent of women in our labor force (para. 6). It is a shame that such tragedy had to occur in order for so many women to enter the government, but it certainly is an interesting example for juxtaposition, whether that be with developed or underdeveloped counterparts. We do not hope to use this example as a model, but rather a case study in which we can clearly see the almost immediate benefits of large influxes of women into a government.

Mexico

In 4th place out of 193 according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018), we find Mexico, with a lower house that is 48.2 percent female, and an upper house that is 49.2 percent female, both impressive numbers. Mexico celebrated historic elections in 2018 that boosted them into the 4th place spot globally. Magda Hinojosa and Jennifer Piscopo (2018) wrote for *The Washington Post* regarding these elections. Alongside Canada, Sweden, and Rwanda, Mexico has a gender quota in place in its government. According to the International IDEA (2019), Mexico not only has legislated quotas for both the upper and lower houses of their government, but there are also legislated quotas at the sub-national level, and political parties have adopted their own voluntary quotas. Hinojosa and Piscopo (2018) tell us that:

Gender quotas work because parties control access to the ballot. Unlike in the United States, candidates in most parts of the world cannot simply run on their own initiative. Rather parties select and register their candidates. Quota laws essentially regulate parties' candidate selection processes (para. 8).

Clearly things are working well in Mexico. Hinojosa and Piscopo (2018) tell us that the quota started with requiring 30 percent of candidates to be female in the 2003 elections, and the country raised that to 40 percent in the 2009 elections. But now that these quotas have raised the number of women in Mexico's government, will it make a difference?

Hinojosa and Piscopo (2018) tell us that the answer to that question is yes. Not only do women in Mexican congress pay more attention to social issues and issues of rights and equality than their male counterparts, but “Women from parties on the right are more progressive than men from those parties. And women are just as effective as men at passing legislation” (Hinojosa & Piscopo, 2018, para. 20). Mexico’s President also created a gender parity cabinet, which put female politicians in the top offices for energy, labor and social welfare, and the economy; he also named a woman Minister of Government, “the most influential position in the administration” (Hinojosa & Piscopo, 2018, para. 21).

The United Nations (2018) made a statement regarding the historic elections in Mexico. The statement was given by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and also the United Nations Women Executive Director. Mlambo-Ngcuka (2018) said that, “This momentous increase in women’s political participation in Mexico clearly demonstrates that measures to promote parity in political representation – when applied with determination and consistency – can effectively lead to women having an equal say in decision-making at all levels” (para. 3). She then went on to say that “The full participation of women in political life is not only a guarantee of their human rights, but an essential requirement to reach peaceful and prosperous societies (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2018, para. 4). These words are not only praise for Mexico’s advancements, but a lesson to be heard by all nations who are striving for equality within their government. Referencing women’s equal representation in government as a human rights topic shines a bright light on its importance, and the U.N. is an expected ally in the marathon towards parity.

Spain

Spain holds the 13th place of 193 on the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018) archive list, with a lower house that is 41.1 percent female, and a lower house that is 36.8 percent female. This is significant, but what is even more important is the cabinet percentage after Spain’s most recent

Prime Minister was appointed. Katrina Pirner (2018) tells us that June of 2018 brought about a new government after a no-confidence vote removed the ruling People's Party from leadership. Pedro Sánchez, the leader of Spain's Socialist Party, became the country's newest Prime Minister. Pirner (2018) reminds us that historically, women have been given "soft" cabinet positions, usually related to health or education. Under Sánchez, Pirner (2018) reports that not only would the majority of the 18 cabinet positions be women, but he appointed a female politician to the role of Defense Minister; and the justice, finance, and economy minister positions have all been delegated to women as well. Just months before this change, Spain saw a Women's Day strike where millions of women abstained from work and stayed home, while thousands more took to the streets to protest gender inequality (Pirner, 2018). According to *The Independent* (2018), Sánchez "has described his government as feminist, progressive, pro-European and 'a loyal reflection of the best in the society that it aspires to serve'" (para. 6).

Why is Spain's quick rise to notoriety so important? In a piece for the World Economic Forum, Susan Franceschet and Karen Beckwith (2018) tell us why, writing that, "when leaders use their powers of appointment to increase the number of women in cabinet, they are never punished electorally and are often applauded globally for doing so," and also that "Each gender-equal cabinet appears to create expectations of similar or greater women's inclusion in the next" (para. 3). I mention the example of Spain because they show the critical factor of **leading by example**. When leaders – male or female – include women at the same rates as men, the positive feedback encourages leaders elsewhere to do the same. On the same topic, Beckwith and Franceschet (2018) note that successors tend to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors regarding gender percentages. Research has shown that "Leaders who appoint significantly fewer women than their predecessors...risk heavy criticism from the media and political opponents" that can in turn weaken their support from constituents (Beckwith & Franceschet, 2018, para. 3). As leaders step up to the

plate and appoint more women, and as other leaders follow precedents that have been set, Beckwith and Franceschet (2018) make an apt conclusion: “Women make up half the world’s population. Now, increasingly and evidently irreversibly, democratic governments are starting to show it” (para 5).

Necessity vs. Nature

Given what we know about the governments of the United States, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Rwanda, Mexico, and Spain, we are pretty clearly able to see which one is not like the others. However, I would argue that the United States **needs** to be like the others. As one of the most developed nations in the world, there is no reason for our percentage to be where it is today. The real question that needs to be asked pertaining to percentages in the U.S. is, are we going to make gender parity in government a necessity, or let things run their course and see how close to equality we can get with no actual intervention? The situation is this: women in U.S. politics are **not** treated equally to male politicians. They are not encouraged at the same rate, they doubt their abilities, and they are stereotyped, criticized, and sexualized simply because of their gender. Patriarchal implications are prevalent in voter perceptions of female politicians, and those perceptions are further perpetuated by the media. In order to fully understand this problem, and eventually what we can do to solve it and bring our percentages up, I look at several research articles and books by the likes of Jennifer Lawless (2016), Kathleen Dolan (2014), and Susan J. Carroll (2013), in order to further define the complexity of the negative treatment of women in U.S. politics and the implications of said treatment. Why can’t we, as a developed nation, lead the fight for gender parity? Are we too stuck in our ways? Could legislation help? This is what the rest of this paper explores.

Why Can’t We?

Given what we know about percentages globally, and the positive impact that having female politicians brings, why does the United States have such a dismal ranking? What is it about the U.S.

that prevents women from reaching higher percentages in such a developed country? It is clear to see that the political sphere in the United States is not entirely welcoming to women and has not been for most of its existence. In order to understand why we have a low standing globally for women's political representation, there are four crucial factors to look at. First, women in the United States are not encouraged to run at the same rate as men, and there is a clear disparity in experience levels. Second, because of the very pervasive socialization of the gender binary throughout American history, women entering politics are constantly faced with stereotypes and double standards being applied to them by society. Third, the discussion of women's appearances and the sexualization of female candidates is degrading and insulting. Lastly, the way that the media covers male and female politicians during campaigns and afterwards is very different and very disadvantageous for women. All of these things culminate to create a government that feels unwelcoming to any woman who may wish to enter it. Through the analysis of research and a plethora of examples from previous campaigns, I convey just how unwelcome women really feel.

Encouragement

When it comes to making the decision of whether or not to run for office, there is clear precedent for women needing more encouragement than men. In their book More Women Can Run: Gender and Pathways to the State Legislatures, Susan J. Carroll and Kira Sanbonmatsu (2013) explore obstacles female politicians often face when deciding to run. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) point out that, "Politics traditionally has been and is still a masculinized domain. In turn, women more often seek support and encouragement before they enter what is far from gender-neutral territory" (p. 61). It is important that we acknowledge the inherent gendering of politics in the United States because our patriarchal foundation has set up a society that has always favored men. The authors (2013) place an emphasis on the fact that politics in the U.S. are very masculinized, and importantly that:

Because of the masculine nature of mainstream politics and women's history of marginalization in the electoral arena, one might well expect women to be less likely than men to view elective office holding as an appropriate career choice or even a realistic aspiration. As a result, women more often than men might need encouragement to toss their hats into the ring and run for office (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, p. 48).

The reinforcement of politics as an inappropriate career choice is visible in the stereotypes that are applied to women considering running, and the overall mistreatment in this nation. When women feel unsure that this is the right career path, it quite obviously might require more encouragement to get them to take that crucial step. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) also argue that running for office, for women, is a "relationally embedded decision," by which they mean that the decision to run for/hold office is likely influenced by "beliefs and reactions, both real and perceived, of other people," as well as "considerations of how candidacy and office holding would affect the lives of others with whom the potential candidate has close relationships" (p. 45). Clearly, women are burdened with the considerations of many outside factors when deciding to run, whereas men have the privilege of worrying far less about their decision's impact on others. The arena of politics is male-dominated, and very heavily gendered. The white, male politician is the automatic assumption, the "norm." It is not unclear why feelings of trepidation may stand in the way of a woman stepping into the spotlight of candidacy on her own. Furthermore, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) reference research done by Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell (2001) suggesting that men are far more likely than women to be what they called "self-starters," who decide on their own to run for office (p. 44). According to Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell (2001), women are more likely to be "persuaded" candidates who decided to run for the legislature after receiving the suggestion to run from someone else," and are also likely to be "encouraged" candidates, who reported a mix of their own thinking and the suggestion of someone else" (as cited in Carrol & Sanbonmatsu, 2013, p. 44). With women

needing so much encouragement and persuasion, it is no wonder that our representative percentage is so low. We have created an environment toxic to women in our government and it is only to our own detriment.

To make matters more complex, not only do women frequently require encouragement to run for office, but they are also constantly bolstering their own resume with extensive experience. But is that experience necessary? Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) cited Lawless and Fox's work (2005) stating that because of the lack of women in our government and lack of encouragement, "women potential candidates are less likely than men to view themselves as qualified for holding public office" (p. 48). Because they are not confident in their political qualifications, they overcompensate by becoming what many would call overqualified. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) posit the question of whether or not women **need** the experience they obtain in order to reach public office. They state that, "It may be that women acquire more experience in order to bolster their confidence and feel sufficiently qualified while men more often feel qualified without a great deal of experience" (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013, p. 35). In their work, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) interviewed a number of female legislators, and according to one, women want more experience than men because they "want 'to feel solid about their credentials before they put themselves out there'" and a different legislator posited that it "was 'an act of self protection'" that made women feel more confident (p. 35). But Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) tell us that perhaps, "it may not just be that women are not as confident about their qualifications as men; the flip side is that men may be overconfident" (p. 35). Even with the excess experience, women still feel inadequate when compared to average men. Our society has a nasty habit of throwing mediocre men into the political spotlight while undervaluing and disregarding over-qualified women. This idea was proven through and through when in 2016, the electoral college elected what is perhaps – in my opinion – the least qualified president in our nation's history. This, despite the fact that the man who

won faced a competitor who might have been the most qualified woman in the country. We, as a society, have given women a million reasons to believe that they are unworthy.

A third and very interesting aspect of the ways in which we do and do not encourage women in U.S. politics revolves around the impact that having women in office can have on girls. In 2015, Mariani, Marshall, and Mathews-Schultz published research on the role model effect in young women. It was studied through the lens of Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, and Sarah Palin's influential positions and specifically the offices of governor and senator. Though the results were specific and not overwhelmingly widespread, their research (2015) found that, "For young women, living in a state with viable female Democratic candidates is associated with greater anticipated political involvement relative to states without such candidates" (Mariani et al., p. 726). Mariani et al. (2015) discuss that the role model effect has an impact mainly on liberal women observing democratic women in office, and that "the different effects may be driven, at least in part, by the candidates themselves, the substantive issues they emphasize (especially as they relate to women's interests), and the environment in which political campaigns take place" (p. 728). As women inch their way closer to parity in government, the women watching them, identifying with them, and supporting them are more likely to be politically involved in the future, because they see themselves being represented. More recently in 2018, Ladam, Harden, and Windett published similar research concluding that women in prominent political positions serve as role models for politically inclined women, which leads to more candidates for public office. Ladam et. al (2018) tell us that:

The presence of female politicians leads to greater interest in politics, especially among adolescent women....In general, when women see someone who looks like them in office, they feel more connected to the political system and are more likely to participate in it (p. 372).

More specifically, Ladam et. al (2018) tell us that high profile female role models in government cause an increase in proportion of female candidates: 2.7 percentage points for a senator and 2.6 percentage points for a governor. So, having women in government – or in this case, female senators or governors – has a significant impact on potential political involvement in young women. Therefore, once we give women the encouragement they need to run for office, having them in office sparks a chain reaction of more women running for public office. This is why it is so important that we work to increase the number of women in government, because it is a self-watering flower. Women ascend to public office despite the obstacles, young women see those women as role models, those young women grow up to run for office, and the cycle repeats. In the end, Mariani et. al (2015) tell us, “Do female role models matter in a polarized age? Our answer is a tentative yes” (p. 728). In my observations, a tentative yes in 2015 has transformed into a convincing yes in 2019.

Stereotypes & Double Standards

Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) in their book point out one of the most common stereotypes I have come across regarding women in politics. They reference (2013) past social-psychological research that tells us that “men are viewed as more agentic (e.g., assertive, ambitious, confident, and competitive), while women are viewed as more communal (e.g., nurturant, sensitive to the needs of others, helpful, and supportive)” (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, p. 45). In her book, When Does Gender Matter? Women Candidates & Gender Stereotypes in American Elections, Kathleen Dolan (2014) dives deeper into that stereotype. Dolan (2014) shows that beyond assertive and ambitious, or nurturant and helpful, “Women are assumed to be more interested in, and more effective in dealing with, issues such as child care, poverty, education, health care, women’s issues, and the environment,” while men are given assumed competence in areas like “economic development, the military, trade, taxes, and agriculture” (p. 20). She (2014) argues that political

science as a whole has produced an “impressive” amount of research that “confirms that voters look at women candidates and women officeholders from a gendered perspective, ascribing certain stereotyped issue position competencies and personality characteristics to them” (Dolan, p. 19). The idea of this gendered perspective is also observed in the familial stereotypes often applied to female politicians. Dolan (2014) exemplifies the lose-lose situation of women running for office:

In 2010, Kelly Ayotte, the attorney general of New Hampshire and a candidate for an open U.S. Senate seat, had to respond to concerns that being elected to the Senate would leave her with little time to be a good mother to her two young children. In running for governor of her state that same year, Oklahoma Lt. Governor Jari Askins was asked whether, as a single, childless woman, she had enough life experience to understand the concerns of the average Oklahoma family (p. 2).

The juxtaposition of the response to both a woman who is married with children and a single, childless woman is concerning. The expectation of familial obligations is a continuation of the stereotype that women are inherently intended to be nurturing and sensitive to the needs of the others, but both with and without motherhood, the system works against them. The 2008 presidential election was a prime example of the stereotyping of women as mothers and only mothers. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) point out that “Whether it was a heckler calling on Clinton to ‘Iron my shirt’ or a public debate about whether a mother of young children had the time to be vice president,” that election cycle was full of individuals questioning women’s ability to hold office at a national level (p. 1). Women are second guessed at every level and despite the fact that many would say they would have no issue with a woman being president, our political atmosphere says otherwise.

Beyond the idea that there are certain characteristics that individuals believe are universally applicable to either men **or** women, in response to female politicians, society frequently turns to the

idea of women being overemotional. Dolan (2014) tells us that “One of the long-standing arguments against women having a role in political life was that they were too emotional and did not possess the reason or dispassion to adequately provide political leadership” (p. 61). Long standing indeed, and the perpetuation of this stereotype comes from the mouths of not only male politicians, or news outlets, but celebrities and average Joes alike. In 2016, Dittmar wrote for the American Political Science Association about the 2016 election through the lens of gender. Dittmar (2016) quoted rapper T.I.’s distasteful words from 2015:

It’s kinda like, I just know that women make rash decisions emotionally. They make very permanent, cemented decisions – and then later, it’s kind of like it didn’t happen, or they didn’t mean for it to happen. And I sure would hate to just set off a nuke. [Other world leaders won’t be able to negotiate] foreign policy; the world ain’t ready yet. I think you might be able to [get] the Loch Ness Monster elected before you could [get a woman elected] (p. 808).

Our society’s opinions and ideas about women entering the political sphere in the United States is just as pervasive as any other patriarchal concept that we are seemingly unwilling to shed. Who is the over-emotional, rash-decision-making gender if all wars in history have been started by men? I fervently believe that this stereotype is a symptom of the greater issue that is the socialization of the gender binary in the United States. Gender roles are encouraged and enforced from the moment we refuse to let toddler boys play with dolls or take away the toy trucks from that little girl. And many do not see how this plays a part, but it is simply the beginning of the years of socialization. To continue, Dittmar (2016) reminds us of the ways in which women’s emotions are frequently the center of attention if they choose to raise their voices in moments of passionate speech or discussion. This brings us to the topic of double standards for women in politics.

Concerning double standards, Dittmar (2016) uses the example of Hillary Clinton's restraint during 2015 Benghazi hearings, where she was praised for remaining calm, because "a response deemed too emotional or aggressive would easily be labeled unstable and irrational" (p. 808). She includes research by Dr. Jessica Salerno that found "in the context of debate, men tend to gain influence as they become angry, while angry women tend to lose influence" (p. 808). We value the commanding attitudes of male politicians but with women it all comes back to our society's idea of women remaining quiet and complacent. There are also considerable examples beyond Dittmar's (2016) previously stated research regarding influence in relation to anger. The first one is in regards to a previously discussed issue, women's overcompensation in the area of experience. Many assume – and are often correct in believing – that women bolster their resumes with more experience so that they can reassure themselves of their qualifications and gain confidence. But Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) posit an alternative explanation for the higher amounts of experience in female politicians: "there may be a double standard in which more is expected of women candidates. Women may need more experience than men in order to be viewed as equally qualified" (p. 36). In their book, they asked female legislators about this issue. They echoed the sentiments of the double standards, one of them told the authors that, "party leaders 'won't even look at a woman unless she's got some experience, but they will look at a man without the same qualifications if he is a warm body and he can work hard and raise the money,'" another said that because women in politics are a minority, "we have to appear a little smarter and have a little more experience to better our male opponents" (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013, p. 36).

In an experiment done in the United Kingdom, Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner (2017) explore the idea that women might be held to higher standards than men in politics. They used a wide spread survey to gauge opinions on corruption between male and female politicians. Their original thought was that among voters, corrupt female politicians are treated much more

severely/negatively than male politicians. While Eggers et al. (2017) eventually concluded that “voters on average punish misconduct similarly among male and female politicians,” they also point out that “female respondents particularly like a female incumbent who is not corrupt and particularly dislike a female incumbent who is corrupt” (p. 324-325). The most important takeaway here is that while misconduct is punished similarly, it appears that in the eyes of female voters, women are held to higher standards than men. Eggers et al. (2017) also suggest that women are more “responsive” to corrupt women in politics than they are to corrupt men, claiming that their evidence proves that men and women differ in the ways in which they hold politicians accountable. There is a double standard here that might not be inherently misogynistic, but shows that men and women in politics are held to different standards. Because women expect more of women – because society has taught us to expect less of men – those female politicians are held to higher standards. One of the lowest forms of treatment against women in politics in the U.S. is the sexualization of female politicians. Beyond the double standards, the stereotypes, and the expectations, is the discussion of women’s bodies, appearance, and sexuality.

Sexualization & Disrespect

Women in the United States are not unfamiliar with the commodification of our bodies, and female politicians’ level of exposure to the world through media and campaigns is unforgiving. In their article, *Sexualizing Sarah Palin*, Heldman and Wade (2011) conduct a series of experiments and eventually find that throughout the campaign, “focus on Palin’s appearance ‘led people to perceive Palin as less competent, warm and moral’” (p. 156). Heldman and Wade (2011) stress the fact that “the sexual objectification of female candidates” is yet another major barrier faced by women in politics (p. 161). In 1984 when Geraldine Ferraro ran as the vice-presidential candidate, Heldman and Wade (2011) document that she received more coverage and attention regarding her appearance than any male candidates who have ran since, with media frequently commenting on her “slender”

figure, and her appealing facial characteristics (p. 161). As for Sarah Palin, Heldman and Wade (2011) reported that “Fourteen percent of Palin’s coverage mentioned her appearance,” and it was riddled with misogyny (p. 162). From VPILF (Vice President I’d Like to Fuck), to Caribou Barbie, to Cheerleader, the comments were ruthless; Hugh Hefner asked her if she wanted to pose for Playboy, the reason being, “because right now she’s posing as a vice presidential candidate” (Heldman & Wade, 2011, p. 162). The disrespect placed upon women in politics based upon their appearance is a symptom of the greater patriarchal system that we are all living in. Dittmar (2016) echoes Heldman and Wade’s (2011) sentiments by detailing sexualization and disrespect that was evident throughout the 2016 election cycle. Dittmar (2016) explains how a journalist described Hillary Clinton as “shrill, whiny, or unnecessarily angry or nagging,” and Donald Trump said of Carly Fiorina, “I just realized that if you listen to Carly Fiorina for more than ten minutes straight, you develop a massive headache” (p. 808). When a person of influence outwardly disrespects a female candidate, it is intended to undermine her reputation and authority. Dittmar (2016) also points out a *Guardian* article that insults Fiorina’s speaking, calling it, “Grinchy soft-talking,” (p. 808). Further, Dittmar (2016) infers that, “The policing of political women’s voices reflects another way in which gender shapes treatment and perceptions of presidential candidates” (p. 808). Appearance and presentation is a tumultuous arena of voter perception of female candidates, and it is made more problematic by the constant public vilification of said candidates.

Clinton and Fiorina have also faced attacks on their physical appearance. A *Slate* columnist reported that, “Hillary Clinton isn’t a lesbian, but she dresses like one,” and of Fiorina, Trump said, “Look at that face! Would anyone vote for that? Can you imagine that, the face of our next president?!” (Heldman & Wade, 2016, p. 809). Despite the constant attacks on not only their policy platforms, but their physical appearance and self-presentation as well, women in politics are as resilient as ever. Heldman and Wade (2016), wrote that after the comments were made about

Fiorina's appearance, she responded with, "This is the face of a 61-year-old woman. I am proud of every year and every wrinkle" (p. 809). Further, she later told *People*,

The point is, whether a man thinks you're homely or a man thinks you're beautiful, it's not a topic of conversation when a woman is trying to do a job – whether it's President of the United States or secretary or anything else (Heldman & Wade, 2016, p. 809).

Running for political office in the United States as a female-identifying candidate is to be constantly facing unwarranted criticisms and attacks. Political powerhouses such as Hillary Clinton and Carly Fiorina are among the most adept at brushing off attacks and pushing forward with their intended course of action to be the best that they can be. In 2008, Andrew Stephen wrote for the *New Statesman* about the constant slander of Clinton throughout the 2008 election. Stephen's (2008) main claim is that, "it is quite inconceivable that any leading male presidential candidate would be treated with such hatred and scorn as Clinton has been" (para. 2). From insults like "thick ankles," to the popular heckle "iron my shirt," Stephen (2008) exemplifies the constant attacks and juxtaposes them with theoretical attacks on Obama and how they might be perceived. Stephen (2008) asks, would it be okay to ask Obama to shine your shoes, the way that it is okay to ask Clinton to iron your shirt? No. Because blatant racism is taken more seriously in the presidential arena – well – it was, until we suffered through the racial climate of the 2016 presidential election. Opposition attacks women on the basis of sex ruthlessly, and Stephen (2008) points out that despite having one of the strongest resumes in the field, Hillary "has been treated throughout the 2008 campaign as a mere appendage of her husband" (para. 13). Whether it is by means of public disrespect, sexualization, or microaggressions, women are made to feel small by those who would stand against them. When women allow themselves to be made smaller by those speaking over them, the patriarchy wins. In the United States, the unfair treatment of women in politics is a clear barrier to raising percentages of women in government. The perpetuation of the aforementioned stereotypes, double standards,

sexualization, and disrespect are all prevalent in the way the media in the United States treats female candidates. The media are a crucial source of information for many voters and their election-time knowledge.

Media Coverage

In More Women Can Run: Gender Pathways to the State Legislatures, Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless (2016) explain the major differences between men and women running for office and how the media plays a part in those differences. Hayes and Lawless (2016) tell us, “To be a woman running for office in the United States is to face bias, sexism, and discrimination at seemingly every turn” (p. 1). The effect and impact on voter perceptions of female candidates is arguably the most crucial result of media coverage. Hayes and Lawless (2016) present us with the fact that, “compared to male candidates, female candidates are treated differently – and often worse – in the press and by the public” (p. 16). This is evident in previously mentioned attacks on politicians like Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton – from VPILF to ironing shirts, the examples are not sparse. Furthermore, Hayes and Lawless (2016) mention that “unequal portrayals in the media are consistent with – and are assumed to reinforce – voters’ perceptions of politicians,” meaning that the media is a mirror; it reflects the way the public already feels about women in politics (p. 16). If this is true, how will we ever effect change and increase our representation? Society has a previously-established idea about women in politics and with the media constantly reinforcing that idea, how can we change society’s mind?

Johanna Dunaway, Regina G. Lawrence, Melody Rose, and Christopher R. Weber (2013) conducted research on trait versus issue coverage among senate and gubernatorial races in the United States. Dunaway et al. (2013) argue that “media attention to candidates’ personal traits is thought to be particularly pernicious for women candidates, because that coverage may tend to de-emphasize substantive qualifications” (p. 715). In senatorial and gubernatorial races, Dunaway et al.

(2013) saw that coverage of female candidates' personal traits was overemphasized, while their issue positions were not covered enough. Further, Dunaway et al. (2013) reference previous data showing that "female candidates received more mentions of their gender, children, and marital status" (p. 716). This coverage, as Hayes and Lawless (2016) mention, reflects voter perceptions of candidates. In general, Dunaway et al.'s (2013) conclusion makes important findings, two of which struck me: first, "Races with a female candidate lead to news that is more focused on the personal traits and characteristics of the candidates," with a strong correlation within gubernatorial races (p. 722). Second, "coverage of issues is not necessarily 'good' for a female candidate's chances if the issues covered are associated in the public's mind with stereotypical male competencies" (Dunaway et al., 2013, p. 722). This means that even when female candidates **do** receive the issue coverage they deserve, gendered expectations stand in the way regardless. A lose-lose situation that is all too common in our government and society. Female candidates' treatment by the media and society has, in a way, conditioned them to act a certain way when running. Hayes and Lawless (2016) say that because of this differential treatment, "women running for office have to be more strategic in portraying themselves to the media and the voters" (p. 17). Hayes and Lawless (2016) inform us that because female candidates today "are no less competitive or more resource-deprived than men (Burrell 2014), there are few reasons for journalists to treat equally qualified male and female candidates differently" (p. 20). Then why do they? I believe it all circles back to that reflection of public perception. Hayes and Lawless (2016) establish the criteria for further exploring this phenomenon:

Establishing the disconnect between an environment that does not systematically differ for male and female candidates and the public perception that gender bias pervades the electoral arena is more than an academic enterprise. It is fundamental for understanding the roots of

women's underrepresentation: these misperceptions likely contribute to women's self-doubts about their ability to run for office (p. 128).

Those self-doubts, as mentioned before, prevent many women from running, and therefore contribute to the perpetuation of the gender gap in politics. If public perception of candidates is the fuel for media coverage, then, Stephen (2008) reminds us that "The media, of course, are just reflecting America's would-be macho culture" (para. 7). Our government is a patriarchal system, and the media covers it accordingly. The perpetuation of the gender gap is caused by the perpetuation of the gender gap. By this confusing sentiment I mean that it fuels its own fire. Hayes and Lawless more clearly convey this idea:

...every time a journalist writes a story about gender discrimination in politics, every time a female politician highlights an episode of sexism, every time a political scientist portrays the experiences of a limited number of high-profile female candidates as typical, those perceptions are reinforced (p. 128).

So guess what? I'm a part of the problem. If you're reading this, you might now have a stronger feeling of mistreatment towards female candidates that puts them at a perpetual disadvantage, which will only keep them perpetually disadvantaged. Despite this bleak public perception and the generalization of a "limited" number of candidates being mistreated, there is hope. Change can be made in the way our society perceives female candidates and our percentage can be raised.

Can We?

Hayes and Lawless (2016) remind us of possibly the most important silver lining to our current situation in the United States: "When women run for office, they do just as well as men. They raise just as much money, received the same amount of news coverage, and win elections at equal rates" (p. 132). Given this, perhaps we just need to make female candidates just as much of a norm as male candidates. This brings us to the idea of gender quotas. According to Drude Dahlerup

at the International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) (2019), quotas are intended to recruit female candidates into political positions, and to “ensure that women are not only a few tokens in political life” (para. 1). Also according to International IDEA (2019), “Quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least a ‘critical minority’ of 30 or 40%” (para. 5). These systems range from political parties taking initiative to set aside a percentage of their own nominations for women, to nationwide laws that require a percentage of house seats be filled by women. This type of system has been implemented in a large number of countries across the world, and has been shown to have great success in some places. There are varying levels of quotas, from nationally legislated quotas requiring a certain number of parliament seats be saved for female politicians, to more casual precedent-based quotas. With our current congress at about 1/4 women, maybe it is time we take the step to implement quotas of some sort in our country’s government. Is this what we need to jump start the ascension to gender parity in government?

Quotas

According to Dahlerup at International IDEA (2019), Canada, Sweden, Rwanda, Mexico, and Spain all have varying quota systems being used in their governments. These systems include quotas legislated at a sub-national level (seats reserved in offices of government at the sub-national level, i.e. state legislatures rather than federal), legislated quotas for the lower house (laws requiring a certain percentage of women hold office in the lower house), legislated quotas for the upper house (laws requiring a certain percentage of women hold office in the upper house), and voluntary quotas to be adopted by political parties (requiring a party to nominate/support a certain percentage of female candidates). So of the countries this paper examined in terms of female political representation, the only ones without quotas are the United States, who has poor representation, and Finland, who has had a history of high percentages of women in their government, possibly

preventing the need for a quota in the first place. The quotas that the previously mentioned countries have in place are as follows:

Canada	Voluntary party
Sweden	Voluntary party
Rwanda	Legislated lower & upper, legislated sub-national
Mexico	Legislated lower & upper, legislated sub-national, voluntary party
Spain	Legislated lower & upper, legislated sub-national, voluntary party

There is a pattern here, if you haven't noticed already. Voluntary party quotas seem to have made a difference in those countries that implement them. I would argue that Rwanda is an exception because their quotas arose from necessity after genocide in their country.

So could party quotas, or perhaps even legislated quotas, be the next step for U.S. politics? Before we look at the possibilities for that proposal, I want to acknowledge the most frequent criticism against quota systems. The biggest issue people I talk to have with quota systems is the concern that they will fill political offices with women just for the sake of filling them with women, passing up more-qualified male candidates in the name of gender equality. Paulo Júlio and José Tavares (2017) argue that this is not the case by any means. Júlio and Tavares (2017) defend their contributions, stating that by "modeling the self-selection and election of public officials," they in turn demonstrate that "quotas do not necessarily involve a cost in terms of quality" (p. 455).

Through the use of predictive models and a variety of formulas, using candidacies and quotas from a variety of places, they come to the conclusion that no, we don't have to sacrifice quality to increase equality. Júlio and Tavares (2017) discuss that:

When the rewards from public office are high, and political discrimination against women is low when compared with private labour market discrimination, a quota is able to encourage

high-ability female candidacies without discouraging high-ability male ones. In this case, a quota may translate into an increase in the quality of elected public officials (p. 471).

This implies that there are situations in which quotas can increase the number of low-quality politicians, but I would argue that, currently in the United States, rewards from public office are high when one considers the importance of the work that is being done right now. We are staring into the eyes of climate change, and we have, in my opinion, a far higher level of civil unrest than we had under past administrations. There are social issues to be dealt with, foreign policy conflicts to be resolved, and plenty of qualified women in this country to do so. So, to remedy the concern that quotas will just set aside seats to be filled by any woman, qualified or not, Júlio and Tavares say “yes, gender quotas can raise the quality of politicians” (p. 471). So say we can guarantee a supply of qualified women to fill quota seats in the United States, what would work? What wouldn't? Different types of quotas work better within different types of governments and societies, and Jennifer Rosen (2017) gives us all the detail we could possibly need when considering the implications of implementing quotas in any country.

Developmental Thresholds

In a comparative analysis of countries with gender quotas based upon their levels of development, Rosen (2017) determines that when it comes to the case of the United States, proposing a quota system involves more than just the desire to see an increase in female political representation. Rosen (2017) used a dataset containing information on 167 countries between 1992 and 2012, and analyzed the phenomena of undeveloped countries' success with legislated quotas and the patchy results in more developed nations. The results? Legislated quotas are the reason for great success in increasing representation in underdeveloped countries, however, developed nations with long-established democracies are far more resistant to the results of legislative quotas but have seen some success with voluntary party quotas. Rosen (2017) tells us:

Whereas reserved seat quotas are the most effective mechanisms to enhance women's representation in least developed countries, electoral candidate quotas that mandate a minimum threshold of at least 30% and are accompanied by sanctions for non-compliance and placement mandates are the most effective in developing and developed countries (p. 97).

First let us look at the benefits that developing and least developed countries can reap from legislated quotas.

Rosen's (2017) results show us that "In less democratic countries with low levels of socioeconomic development, there tends to be a larger payoff to political elites for supporting gender quotas than there is in stable democracies" and further, "When political systems are less stable and political power is fragile, gender quotas can provide political leaders with a tool to consolidate their power, win votes in a close election, and compete with political rivals" (p. 98).

While the use of quotas for consolidation of political powers seems like a cynical use of the system, it is productive nonetheless in the journey towards political parity. In both Tanzania and Kyrgyzstan, leaders found use for quota systems once they realized the benefits it could bring regarding strengthening their political party's hold. Rosen (2017) says that political power moves through the utilization of quotas such as these are "more likely to occur in less developed, less stable, and/or post conflict contexts" (p. 99). Another important reason that Rosen (2017) gives for the success of legislated quotas in undeveloped countries is strife, "the role of women often expands as they take on greater public responsibilities during times of hardship, and this can shift public opinion about women's political capabilities (p. 98). This is highly reminiscent of Rwanda's path towards having a majority-female lower house of Parliament. Were it not for genocide leaving their population more than two-thirds female, quotas might never have been established and they may never have made

the progress that they have. That being said, let us look at the reasons for which voluntary political party quotas have much more success in developed countries.

Rosen (2017) begins the discussion on developed countries by mentioning the type of quota that made the biggest impact: voluntary political party quotas. Rosen (2017) discovered that voluntary party quotas “led to significantly more women in parliament, on average, in developed countries but the measure is only weakly significant in developing countries and insignificant in least developed countries” (p. 97). And also that “political party quotas are quite effective in developed countries, moderately effective in developing countries, and insignificant in least developed countries” therefore they “tend to have the greatest success in countries with long established democratic institutions” (Rosen, 2017, p. 98). Rosen (2017) gives further reason for this explanation, saying that, “By contrast, political systems in developed democracies are more stable and therefore the political risk of potentially losing electoral support due to the notion that quotas grant special rights to minority groups outweighs any self-serving advantages” (p. 98). State-building such as the use of legislated quotas in undeveloped countries is unnecessary in developed democracies, and Rosen (2017) says that the consequences of showing support for policy such as quotas outweigh the potential gain in political capital.

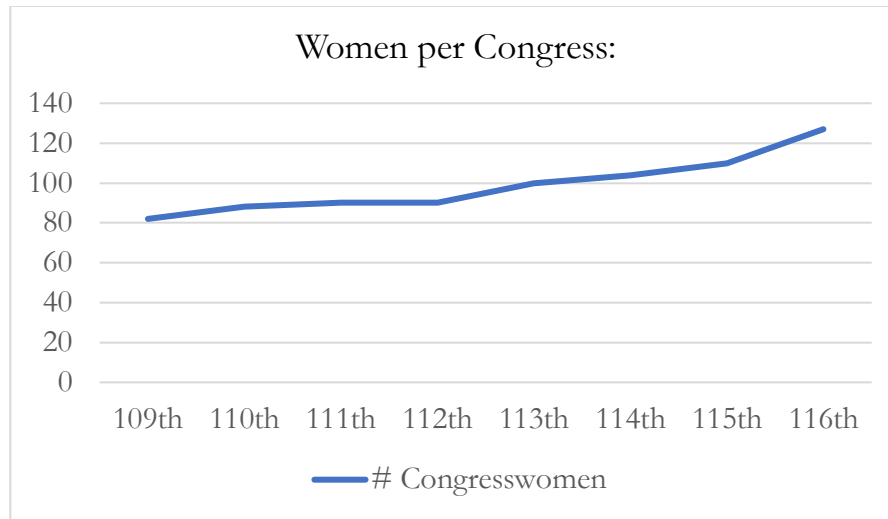
So in considering whether or not a quota would be the right step forward for the United States, we must consider the fact that Rosen’s (2017) results require that we take into account socioeconomic context. Importantly, we can take away from Rosen’s (2017) work the fact that “gender quotas can provide a ‘fast track’ to increase women’s political representation, leading to increases in a single election cycle that took many Scandinavian and Western European countries...decades to achieve” (p. 97). This begs the main question at hand... should we implement gender quotas in the United States? Yes. However, a plan for gender quotas must take Rosen’s (2017) discoveries into account.

The Proposal

From what has been presented so far, it is clear that legislated quotas are unlikely to have any success in the United States, given our socioeconomic development. In fact, in an article written for *The American Prospect*, Ann Friedman (2008) argued that “We’re never going to successfully implement quotas as other countries have, and it takes time to change the traditional views about a woman’s proper place in society that persist in certain U.S. regions” (p. 13). Friedman (2008) continues on to say that our efforts simply need to be put into promoting female candidacy and encouraging women to run and supporting them until we reach a critical mass of women in our federal government. I believe the solution is a different one.

If each political party were to voluntarily adopt gender quotas for candidates in their primaries, it could make all the difference in the world regarding increasing female political representation in the United States. Dahlerup (2019) writes that “if the leading party in a country uses a quota, such as the ANC in South Africa, this may have a significant impact on the overall rate of female representation” (para. 11). What I am proposing would be what Dahlerup (2019) calls the “second stage” of party quotas. This means that each party would adopt a quota system in which a certain percentage of the candidates that a party puts on ballots must be female. I would suggest, just for the sake of this being such unfamiliar territory in the United States, that the quotas start at 30 percent, not straying too drastically from our current 24.7 percent. Once the Democratic and Republican parties adopt this system it would become the norm, and the proactive addition of women to our government would become the norm along with it. As we reach 30 percent representation, the quotas should be increased to 40 percent, and if the system works within our government, the threshold could eventually be increased to 50 percent. I believe that if we are able to efficiently use this system and reach that 50 percent stage, the quotas will become unnecessary as gender parity in government becomes deeply ingrained in our society. Once we reach that critical

mass that Friedman (2008) discussed, I believe it will be irreversible. According to “History of Women in the U.S. Congress,” the 109th Congress began in 2005, and contained 82 female members of Congress. We are currently in the 116th Congress, with 127 female members of Congress, the highest ever. The graph below shows the current rate of increase from 2005-2019.



It is a slow, slow climb. But the adoption of voluntary quotas by political parties in this country could change that. It is evident how divisive politics are in the United States, not only to citizens, but to the world. Considering the fact that we know the two main parties are at odds with one another more than ever before, if they could come to an agreement regarding gender quotas, things could improve. I truly believe that when you take into consideration the quality of life in countries like Canada, Sweden, Mexico, and the others, why wouldn't we want to do everything in our power to increase our female political representation? There are no drawbacks, unless you are a man who is benefitting from the crushing patriarchal atmosphere we currently live within. While we know that the reasons for underrepresentation and for this slow increase in our country are vast, and heavily driven by patriarchy, the future is as bright as we make it. Rosen (2017) concludes her paper by reminding us that:

Gender quotas, in particular, are important interventions to understand because it is far easier and more realistic in the short term to implement a quota than it is to dramatically change a country's cultural view of women. While quotas will not produce instant changes to the patriarchal political system, they can be one of the fastest ways to increase women's numeric representation and give them the opportunity to make their voices heard (p. 99).

We need this. We need to do whatever it takes to reach parity, because without it, half of our population will never be properly represented by the government that is supposed to protect it. At the end of the day, the United States is such a long-established democracy that we will never be able to climb out of this hole on our own. Women in government need to have opportunities afforded to them as frequently as men do.

Conclusion

From what we have seen through the examples of nations like Rwanda and Mexico in comparison with the United States, the male-dominated systems of power like the U.S. government are not working to their full potential. In so many countries that are working towards raising their female political representation, we are seeing a paradigm shift in the way governments lead. With more women in government, spending is more heavily distributed towards social areas such as education and healthcare, whereas majority-male governments often overwhelmingly spend on defense. This juxtaposition is sadly representative of the ways in which women invest in initiatives that seek to develop and build, while men invest in initiatives to arm and defend which often dismantles.

Canada, Sweden, Finland, Rwanda, Mexico, and Spain all show us what increased representation percentages can do for a nation's infrastructure and social policy. From voluntary party quotas to nationally legislated upper and lower house quotas, there are a range of systems that are helping these countries maintain their upward trends in percentages. These systems have allowed

them to excel in the areas of education, healthcare, women's rights, and quality of life for all of their citizens in general. More women are ascending to important positions like secretary of defense and other cabinet posts. The example of Rwanda is especially potent because it shows how effective and necessary women were in the success of rebuilding their country from the ground up. Because of tragedy, they were given the opportunity to step into the leadership positions that they had previously been denied, and they proved that they belong there. They also proved to the world that women lead differently than men; differently and effectively. The quota systems in all of these places are allowing women access to political positions that they've been prevented from entering due to gatekeeping and bias, and along with that comes advances in the removal of inequalities and systematic issues that have been a result of the male dominance in government leadership.

That being said, perhaps with the implementation of my proposed voluntary party quota system we could start to see improvements in the way female politicians are treated in our country as they are offered the opportunity to fill leadership positions previously denied to them. Encouraging and allowing more women to take the lead and to exemplify their strengths by way of a quota system could make all the difference. By this I mean that by using quotas to increase our percentage, it may alleviate some of the negative stereotyping and media coverage, therefore making society more open to electing female politicians. The use of a quota system in the United States could be the jump start we need to change the patriarchal culture of our government and our society. If we use quotas to increase female political representation, it may change our society in a way that eradicates the need to have quotas in the first place. Eliminating the stereotyping, sexualization, and mistreatment of women in politics in the United States should be a main priority. If we can achieve this, and make our government more welcoming and accessible to women, we can begin to effect the change that we need to improve our social policy. We can also begin to mend the gender divide that is currently so destructive in this country.

The addition of women to our federal government would bring with it benefits in all areas of life: social, economic, military, and elsewhere. Women have shown to be more cooperative and more socially-conscious leaders, which is what we could use at this point in time. Young (2016) told us that female politicians invest more into families and communities, and are less hierarchical and more collaborative than male politicians. That being said, quotas may not be the end-all be-all for improving female political representation in our country, but it certainly could be a great starting point for the United States. I truly believe that if our major political parties took it upon themselves to maintain a percentage of women in their leadership positions and candidacies, we can spark the change necessary to achieve parity in our federal government. And that change would revolutionize the way we treat women in this country and the way we embrace their leadership.

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