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Title: Women’s Representation in Parliament, Gender Quotas and the Passing of Gender Sensitive Policies

Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.

World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.

Women’s participation is not simply a certain number of female representatives, but about the ability of this participation to effect meaningful policy change and improve the lives of all women and girls around the continent.
Dr. Aisha Abdulla, African Union, 2015.

The under-representation of women in leadership positions is a global phenomenon. The share of women parliamentarians in most countries is significantly lower than the global average of 24%. The UN has adopted several declarations to address this problem. For example, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolution endorsed by the UN in 1990 recommended targets for increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions to 30% by 1995 and 50% by 2000. Also, Goal 3 Target 12 of the MDGs seeks to “increase the proportion of women in national parliament” and Target 5.5 of the SDGs aims to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.”

This paper employs data from 159 developing countries to: (i) examine the effectiveness of gender quotas as a mechanism for increasing female political representation; (ii) analyze whether countries that have more women in parliament tend to pass gender-sensitive laws. We find that (i) countries that have extensive gender quota laws tend to have a higher share of women in Parliament, and the correlation is stronger in SSA countries than non-SSA countries; (ii) countries that have a higher share of women parliamentarians are more likely to pass comprehensive laws on sexual harassment, rape, divorce and domestic violence. The results hold for Ordered Probit, Ordered Logit, ordinary least squares and three sample groups: 159 developing countries, SSA countries and non-SSA countries. This is the first paper to systematically analyze the relationship between gender quotas, the passing of gender-sensitive laws and women’s representation in parliament. The data are from World Development Indicators and Social Institutions and Gender Index.