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The Impact of Party Quotas on Women's Political Ambition

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Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, gender quotas in politics have spread at an impressive rate, with 130 countries having implemented some type of quota to date (Hughes, Paxton, and Krook 2017, 335; IDEA 2020). Although parity in parliament has rarely been achieved as a result of this measure (e.g., Hughes and Paxton 2019, 43), it is undisputed that quotas have significantly increased the proportion of women in legislatures (Caul 2001; Paxton and Hughes 2015).

Women have also been traditionally underrepresented among party members: a key deviation from the population that causes observers to question whether parties effectively fulfill their linkage function (Heidar and Wauters 2019a, 2). The current trend toward expanding intraparty democracy exacerbates the impact of this problem. When the predominantly male party membership is involved in “selecting the party leader or candidates, approving coalition agreements, or deciding party policy on controversial issues” (Achury et al. 2020, 56), there is a high risk that women's interests will not be adequately considered.

Crucially, in most European democracies, party membership is virtually a necessary condition for a political career. A parties' candidate pool is a subset of its active members. It is reasonable to assume that improving women's descriptive representation in parliament would also help boosting the descriptive representation among rank-and-file members and potential candidates. However, despite the introduction of quotas, there is no such trend toward reduced gender disparities (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010; Heidar and Wauters 2019b. Ponce, Scarrow, and Achury (2020) recently confirmed in an international study that quotas have at best a minor effect on the gender composition of party membership.

Notwithstanding these discouraging findings, it is essential to examine this “first step toward a political career” (Davidson-Schmich 2008, 5) in more detail. Quotas' seeming failure to close the gender gap among party members does not necessarily mean that women do not consider them when joining a political party. We investigate whether quotas increase the probability that women more often cite the prospect of a political office as their motive for joining a party. This is in line with classical research on individuals' decisions to run for

political office showing that potential candidates consider their chances of success and that those chances are influenced by the institutional setting (Black 1972).

Women who decide to join should be more often politically ambitious because of the beneficial opportunity structure offered by quotas. But since the benefit quotas provide to female aspirants is highly dependent on the circumstances in a given political party, we think that it is more accurate to expect a conditional quota effect. In particular, if there is a large gap in a party between the posts to be filled by women and women in the recruitment pool, i.e. the proportion of women in party membership, a motivating effect of quotas should be observable.

The effect of quotas on political ambition is still considered a research gap (O'Brien and Piscopo 2019, 60), with the lack of longitudinal research being especially problematic (Hughes, Paxton, and Krook 2017, 345). The pooled German Party Membership Studies of 1998, 2009, and 2017, a new longitudinal data set, allows us to investigate if quotas favor women joining a political party as a first step of a political career. In Germany, the six major parties differ on whether they have implemented quotas and on the specific level of the quotas. Although most changes happened before 1998, we can use our data to investigate the years prior to the introduction and possible increases of quotas, since many of our respondents joined long before.

Using multilevel models, our empirical analysis shows that quotas generally only marginally increase the political ambitions of new female members. However, if parties have a comparatively small recruitment pool for the positions to be filled by women in line with the quota, more women with political ambitions join the party in question. This can be explained by the fact that women's individual chances of success and the party's need to recruit qualified women are particularly high when there is such a divergence. Our analysis ties in with (recent) research that sheds light on the conditional nature of the effects of gender quotas on people's behavior in the political sphere (e.g., Norris 2004, 197; Paxton and Hughes 2015).

A debated potential risk of gender quotas is that female parliamentarians could be less likely to advocate for women's interests when quotas are implemented to avoid being labeled a "quota woman." However, as competition for party and public offices increases, such accusations should be less effective, and women competing for the same position are expected to hold each other accountable regarding their efforts to secure substantive representation (Davidson-Schmich 2016, 6–7, 113–114). In this respect, that women utilize a favorable

opportunity structure when deciding to join a party because it mitigates the lack of competition over time is a positive finding.

In the following, we first discuss the state of research regarding the effect of quotas on the proportion of women in political parties and on the political ambitions of party members. We then proceed to theoretically derive our hypotheses on the (conditional) effect of quotas on political ambitions. After describing our data, operationalization of key concepts, and the empirical models, we explain our empirical findings. The article concludes with a summary and a discussion of the limitations of our analysis.

Current state of research

Though the gender gap in political participation has been widely studied, there is little research on underrepresentation of women in political parties' memberships. At the individual level, known explanatory factors have been transferred from other forms of political participation to party membership. Using international data, Coffé and Bolzendahl (2010) have partially attributed the gender effect to differences in political interest and efficacy.¹ The origins of these differences are themselves a much-researched issue (most recently by Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores 2020). For our research, however, these findings are relevant because quotas are expected to have a positive influence on these beneficial factors for political participation (Zetterberg 2009b).

At the contextual level, quotas have been studied as an instrument to boost women's participation in political parties (Ponce, Scarrow, and Achury 2020; Zetterberg 2009b). Zetterberg (2009b) analyzed survey data from Latin America where candidate quotas are widespread. A candidate quota "requires all political parties in a country to field a certain percentage of women (or men) candidates" (Hughes, Paxton, and Krook 2017, 333). Zetterberg looked at seven countries without quotas and 10 countries with candidate quotas. Unfortunately, in this survey, respondents' membership status has not directly been measured. Instead, the frequency of an individual working for a party or a candidate is used as a dependent variable. Since there might be a selection bias – in countries with more women in key political positions there is a higher chance of establishing a quota (with a high threshold)—Zetterberg controls for the share of women in national parliament before quotas

¹ Previous research has examined not only whether factors conducive to participation are less pronounced among women, but also if there are differences in determinants of party membership between women and men. However, the classical models of political participation seem to be similarly useful to understand party membership of both gender groups (Wauters et al. 2017).

have been implemented. Against expectations, neither the share of women in parliament nor quotas had an impact on women's propensity to work for a party.

Ponce, Scarrow, and Achury (2020) examine the gender gap in party membership in 11 European countries. Again, according to the empirical analyses, quotas are not particularly important for the representation of women among rank-and-file members. As opposed to Latin America, party quotas are the dominant type of gender quota used in Europe (Hughes et al. 2019). That is, parties voluntarily impose a certain threshold for female candidates on themselves (Hughes, Paxton, and Krook 2017). For the party quotas, the coefficient does not reach statistical significance. Only for candidate quotas, used in Belgium, France, Poland, and Spain (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2011), there is a small statistically significant effect on women's decisions to join a party. As can be seen in the supplementary material of this article, the effect does not change significantly whether the models control for the proportion of women in parliament. This is important to recognize as women's representation in the legislature could very well be a mediator for the effect of quotas on the decision to join a political party.

Neither study can confirm that quotas contribute to closing the gender gap in political parties. However, the empirical evidence is not yet conclusive, as the analyses are subject to the limitations of available international survey data. Since only a small percentage of the eligible voters are party members and party members are not overrepresented in the samples of these international surveys, the analyses mentioned are based on only a few cases per country. For Ponce, Scarrow, and Achury (2020), this problem is intensified because the study operates on the party level. In about 40 of the 60 parties studied, there are less than five surveyed female party members (see table A3 and C1 of Ponce, Scarrow, and Achury supplemental material for this descriptive statistic and a robustness check). Another drawback compared to some national party membership studies is that they are not verified party members (see Ponce and Scarrow (2016) for potential problems). Finally, these are cross-sectional datasets which makes it impossible to compare women's representation in a given country before and after implementing a quota (for a thorough discussion see Zetterberg 2009a).

Given the state of research, it is hard to tell if quotas have the potential to benefit women's representation among party members. Yet, the impact of gender quotas on political ambition of female party members is an even less researched subject. Only Davidson-Schmich (2008) has surveyed German party members for that matter. However, just the highest-ranking

women and men in parties' lowest local organizations (Ortsvorstände) were considered.² Her findings about Germany's party quotas are quite surprising: "The higher the quota, the more of a depressing effect it has on male and female political ambition" (Davidson-Schmich 2008, 23). These results may be spurious, especially since women in parties without quotas have greater difficulty even obtaining local party office, making political ambition more of a necessary condition. At the very least, the results indicate that cross-sectional analysis is even more problematic when national data is being used, as it is hard to distinguish a quota effect from the impact of other party characteristics.

Why is there a lack of research on political ambition of female rank-and-file party members? The research gap is more general, as political ambition as a reason for joining a political party has rarely been examined for either gender.³ At first glance, this is surprising because the most well-known conceptualization of motives for joining – the General Incentives Model (Seyd and Whiteley 1992)—already includes such incentives. These so-called selective outcome incentives "refer to motives concerned with achieving certain goals in the political process, but goals that are private rather than collective" (Whiteley and Seyd 2002, 52). Said private goals are typically reduced to gaining political office (and sometimes acquiring business contacts). Although many party membership studies are influenced by the General Incentives Model, there is little useful data on the subject. In most of these surveys, respondents are only asked about the most important motive for joining a party. In this scenario, however, instrumental motives are mentioned so rarely that no analyses of the determinants of political ambition are possible. For example, just zero to two percent of British (Bennie 2015, 176) and Norwegian party members (Heidar 2015, 159) were primarily motivated by "material incentives" like pursuing a political career. This is most likely due to social desirability (Gauja and van Haute 2015, 193–194).⁴

² Davidson-Schmich (2008, 5) addresses this issue: "Ideally, to determine whether there is a gendered political ambition gap in Germany I would have taken a random sample of all rank-and-file party members from all major parties in Germany and assessed their levels of ambition."

³ The distinction between expressed and nascent political ambition has become widely accepted. A person is ambitious in the former sense if he or she actually runs for office, while nascent ambition is the "inclination to consider a candidacy" (Fox and Lawless 2005, 644). Obviously, both concepts are intertwined: Fox and Lawless (2005, 644) consider nascent political ambition "a critical precursor to expressive ambition." Investigating instrumental motives for joining the party primarily yields insights into nascent political ambition. While joining a party is indeed a first act on the way to running for office, it remains to be seen whether this will actually happen in the course of the membership. It would be desirable for a deeper understanding of gender inequalities in political participation to identify the conditions that influence how often the rather abstract desire for political office ultimately translates into candidacy. In the absence of panel data for party members, however, this remains a research gap for the time being. In addition, it is important to note that ambitions may develop over the years of membership. This could in turn depend on quotas.

⁴ When measuring political ambition, reduction of social desirability is always a challenge. For women, this might especially be true as even successful women tend to understate their ambition (Geißel 1999).

Asking respondents about their most important reason for joining a party focuses their answer on the reason for joining a particular party rather than their motivation for joining a party in general and thus offers respondents an easy opportunity to avoid appearing selfishly motivated. This problem can be slightly mitigated by asking about multiple reasons for joining (for Danish party members, see Kosiara-Pedersen 2015, 66). The best solution appears to be letting respondents rate every incentive separately so that respondents cannot avoid at least addressing the relevance of political ambition for their decision to join. Since this is seldomly done – in fact just in Germany (Spier and Klein 2015, 93) and the Netherlands (den Ridder, van Holsteyn, and Koole 2015, 143)—we do not yet know what determines women’s propensity to join a political party given their goal of pursuing a political career.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Although the relevant empirical research is not conclusive, there are several reasons why gender quotas should have a positive effect on the share of female party members and on their political ambitions. These arguments are either based on demand (parties) or supply (potential female members; Ponce, Scarrow, and Achury 2020, 869).

When they need to pass a certain threshold defined by a quota, parties are dependent on having enough qualified women in their candidate pool (Zetterberg 2013, 317). Hence, on the demand side, parties have an increased incentive to recruit women as members. Especially women in positions of power within the party – who are more numerous due to the quota – tend to ensure that this incentive is followed up on (see Davidson-Schmich 2016, 173–174 on the relevance of female gatekeepers for promoting women within the party).

On the supply side, quotas increase, *ceteris paribus*, an individual female member’s probability of obtaining a position within the party and/or becoming an electoral candidate. This is the case as most parties are far from having a percentage of female members that meets the quota target for candidates (for Germany see Davidson-Schmich 2016, 98).

It has long been argued that the share of women in parliament determines the extent to which “issues that affect women’s lives disproportionate to men’s” (Kittilson 2005, 642) will be considered in the policy-making process. Several empirical studies support this idea (e.g., Schwindt-Bayer 2006). When an improved descriptive representation increases women’s substantive representation, it should in turn motivate women to become a party member, possibly with the ambition of being a candidate themselves in the future.

Finally, by improving women’s representation in parliament, quotas also improve symbolic representation. This means that women in key political positions can act as role models for

other women and might strengthen their political efficacy (Hughes and Paxton 2019, 37). A high sense of political efficacy undoubtedly increases one's willingness to join a party and become an active member (Whiteley 2011, 34). Taken together, these mechanisms should motivate women to join a party and take the first step toward a political career:

H1: Party quotas lead to stronger career ambitions of female members at the time of joining the party.

The magnitude of these expected effects should partially depend on how many of a party's members are women and could potentially be candidates. First, while the expected improvements in substantive and symbolic representation are independent of the proportion of women among party members, this should not be the case for the party's recruitment efforts. Parties need well-suited candidates for party and public offices. When quotas require a substantial portion of the office holders to be female, having few women in the recruitment pool (i.e., a low proportion of female party members) forces parties to intensify and diversify their search (Davidson-Schmich 2016, 158–159). If they are successful, this leads to more women joining with a political career in mind.

Second, the extent to which a quota improves a woman's chance to gain party or public office depends on the difference between the share of women needed for office and the proportion of female party members. It is common practice to conceptualize the decision for or against a candidacy as resulting from a rational calculation of costs and benefits, taking into account the chances of electoral success (Black 1972). *Ceteris paribus*, such calculations turn out more favorably for female aspirants when they face less competition for political offices within a political party of interest. Considering rational political calculations in general, Fulton et al. (2006, 245) even stated that women are "somewhat more 'strategic' with respect to their run decisions than men;" They found that female state legislators consider their chances of success more carefully when thinking about a candidacy for the US House of Representatives.

We do not know whether women already act more strategically than men regarding the first step in a political career, i.e. joining a political party, but we can reasonably assume that a significant proportion of women consider their chances of success. Generally, these chances increase when a party's demand for politically ambitious women exceeds the available supply. Considering both arguments outlined above, the quota effect should be conditional on the intra-party competition women encounter.

H2: The greater the discrepancy between the proportion of women in a party and the level of the quota, the more likely it is that women should join the party due to political ambitions.

These hypotheses are not predicated on the assumption that every woman joining a political party knows the exact percentage of female party members. It is sufficient that a substantial portion of those women joining who are potentially interested in holding a political office are well enough informed to make a rough estimation. For different reasons, this is highly plausible: It is common practice for people to attend party meetings before becoming members themselves. This is an opportunity to assess whether it is a group of people one would like to belong to, and if so, for what reasons and with what objectives in mind.

Besides this personal experience, there are different sources for secondhand information. Before becoming a party member, people tend to already know other members of the party they join. Oftentimes, these are close contacts. For instance, in Belgian political parties in 2012 and 2013, about every third member had at least one parent who was a member of the same party (Wauters and van Liefferinge 2015). Thus, many aspirants have easy access to detailed information about the internal structure of a party. Finally, at least in recent years, the media informs about the social structure of political party memberships more regularly (for Germany see, e.g., Rinaldi 2020).

Case selection, database, and analytical strategy

We study the impact of quotas on the membership of Germany's political parties. As in most European countries (see Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2011, 16), there is no candidate quota imposed by law, but quotas are voluntarily implemented by parties. They apply to party offices and to electoral lists at all levels of the political system. To become a professional politician in Germany, an aspirant must work for many years within a party and has to acquire different low-level party offices (Ochsentour). According to Davidson-Schmich (2016, 13), party quotas work best in systems where "party loyalists" are fostered. German parties indeed adhere relatively well to the quotas they impose on themselves (Davidson-Schmich 2006, 2010). Consequently, women's representation in local elections and especially on higher level offices has increased after most parliamentary parties adopted a quota (Davidson-Schmich 2016, 36–42; but also see Kroeber et al. 2019 who identify a glass ceiling for women's representation well below parity). Regarding the gender gap in party membership, Germany has about average values for a European country (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010, 831). Finally, Davidson-Schmich (2016, 97) considers quotas to have had a small positive effect on the share of women among German party members. As these are two key variables for testing our hypotheses, we also visualized the development in Figures 1 and 2 as will be discussed in more detail below.

[Figure 1] & [Figure 2]

The empirical analyses reported below are mainly based on data from the German Party Membership Studies of 1998, 2009, and 2017, which are representative surveys among the members of the six most important German parties (CDU, CSU, SPD, FDP, Bündnis90/Die Grünen, and Die Linke). The samples were each drawn from the membership registers of these parties. The interviews were conducted using a paper questionnaire sent out by mail. Fieldwork was conducted based on the Total Design Method (TDM). For further details on data collection see Klein et al. (2019) and Lüdecke et al. (2023).

For the German Party Membership Studies carried out in 1998, 2009, and 2017, 10,373, 9,413, and 9,748 interviews respectively were conducted. The primary researchers combined data from the three party membership studies into a single cumulative data set. However, since we want to analyze the political ambitions of female party members, we limit our analysis for the most part to women. Therefore, we are left with a total of 8,598 cases. Still, in the Appendix, we supplement our analyses with models considering the 20,541 surveyed male party members.

To examine the impact of a women's quota on the political ambitions of female party members, we must compare a situation with and a situation without such a quota. This poses a problem for our analysis as most German parties had already introduced a gender quota before the first German Party Membership Study was conducted. Only the CSU implemented a quota after the field time of the first German party member study. The FDP has not yet introduced a quota at all (see Figure 1). Thus, if one were to examine the current political ambitions of female party members based on our data, the effect of the women's quota and party-specific differences would be indistinguishably mixed up. Moreover, the analysis would be based on a very small number of cases. Since we consider the members of six parties at three points in time, only 18 cases are available for an analysis of the influence of party characteristics such as the women's quota.

One way to avoid these problems is an analysis related to the time of party entry. In our data, the participants are asked about the year they joined the party as well as about their motives for joining. This offers the possibility to analyze the effect of a women's quota existing at the time of party entry on the motives for joining. In the context of such an analysis, the data must be considered as being hierarchically structured. The motives reported by a person for joining the party can be clearly assigned to the specific incentive structure provided by their respective party in the year of joining. Thus, while the units of investigation at the first level

are the respondents, the second level is constituted by the combinations of the six parties and the entry years reported by the respondents, and the units of investigation at the third level are the parties. By incorporating parties as third-level entities in our multilevel models, we control for any differences between parties beyond the existence of a quota and the proportion of women, e.g., ideological party positions.

Since our data are structured hierarchically, we use multilevel analyses to test our hypotheses. The dependent variable is political ambition at the time of party entry. In the German Party Membership Study, political ambition is captured by two questions.⁵ On the one hand, members were asked how important it had been for them at the time of joining the party “to gain public office.” On the other hand, they were asked how important it was for them at that time “to gain a party office.” The answer categories for each were “very important,” “important,” “partly important,” “less important,” and “not important at all.” Since the responses are collected using a five-level response scale, we consider these variables to be metric. A higher numerical value indicates a higher importance. As stated before, this measurement is most useful for obtaining valid data on the political ambitions of respondents in the context of social desirability. For our analyses, we subtract the value for the interest in public or party office from the respondent’s mean score across all items regarding the incentives for party entry. This allows us to focus on how important the motive for a specific respondent is in relation to the other potential reasons for joining a party. At the same time, we correct for differences in the anchoring of different respondents’ answers on the scale used.

In our analysis, the characteristics of second-level units which are most important as independent variables are the existence and the level of a women’s quota as well as the share of women within the composition of the membership. The development of these two variables is shown in Figures 1 and 2 for the six parties we examined for the period 1946 to 2017.

The SPD has had a women’s quota since 1988, initially 33% and then 40% from 1994 onwards. The CDU introduced a quota of 33% in 1996, the CSU followed in 2010 with a quota of 40%. The Greens have had a quota of 50% since their foundation in the year 1980. Die Linke and its predecessor have had a quota of the same level since 1990. The FDP has not introduced a quota to date. While every party quota has voluntarily been adopted, it varies in principle between parties whether the fulfillment of the self-imposed targets is binding.

⁵ “Why did you join [name of the respective party]? Please indicate for each of the following reasons, how important this was for you at that time.”

However, neither for Figure 2 nor for our analyses, do we differentiate between mandatory and non-mandatory quotas, as only the CDU fully relies on non-binding quotas.

Unfortunately, the proportion of women among members is not available for all German parties for the entire period of their existence. In Figure 2 we have documented the available data. They are taken from Niedermayer (2017). The time series always start with the first available number. If there were any gaps in the data, we closed them by simple linear interpolation.

Empirical analyses

In the following, we explain the varying relevance political ambition had for women's decision to join a political party. We present the results of our linear multilevel regression analyses for the desire to obtain party office (Table 1) and the interest in public office (Table 2) separately. In general, the results are similar. The minor differences are discussed below. Our first model is needed to calculate intraclass correlations. We see that the hierarchical structure indeed needs to be considered. Regarding ambition for party office, 4.5% of the variance of our dependent variable has to be explained on level 2 but only 0.5% on level 3. For the interest in a public office, the respective values are four percent and one percent.

[Table 1] & [Table 2]

Our models are quite parsimonious, which is partly due to data limitations. Since we do not know a respondent's political attitudes and cognitions back when they joined the party, we cannot control for predictors of membership like political efficacy or political interest. If we set out to discern which of the already described mechanisms are responsible for the quota effect, this would present an insurmountable obstacle. As we are interested in the composite effect, it would have been a sensible decision anyway not to strip the coefficient of its indirect effects by controlling for mediating factors.

At the individual level, with a respondent's educational attainment⁶ and her age in the year of becoming a party member, we consider sociodemographic variables that should be relevant

⁶ As a proxy for a respondent's educational degree at the time of joining the party, we use the educational level at the time of the survey. In some cases, we certainly overestimate individuals' educational attainment because they have acquired a higher degree in the meantime. This should especially be true for those two percent of our respondents who joined while being underage. It might also be fairly common for the 15% of our respondents who were under 25 years old at the time of joining. Considering the latter, however, our operationalization mitigates the problem. Since we already assign respondents to the highest educational category when they achieve the university entrance qualification, we would not categorize respondents any differently after they completed their studies between the time they joined the party and the time they were

for political ambition (Model 2): Aspirants have to be active within their party for a long time to obtain public office on a regional or nation level. In Germany, the average female member of the national parliament has been a party member for 14 years before achieving this position. For male politicians it is 17 years (Davidson-Schmich 2016, 175). Besides this, most young people have not established a professional career for themselves outside politics yet (Bruter and Harrison 2009, 1265). Against this backdrop, people who were already older when they joined a party are less likely to have strong career ambitions. Age at the time of joining should therefore have a negative effect on career ambitions which is confirmed in our analysis for both dependent variables, regardless of the specific model composition.

Educated people have better chances of gaining party or public office. This is the same in Germany (Spier 2010) as in other democracies (Borchert and Zeiss 2003). New party members might consider this when joining a party. Moreover, it is an essential control variable, as the educational level in society improved over the last decades. Not taking this development into account could distort the other coefficients. In our models, the positive effect of educational attainment just vanishes regarding ambitions for party office when all predictors are included.

In Models 3 to 5, contextual information is added. As a control variable, we take into account whether at least one of a given party's national leaders is a woman. Female leaders can improve the symbolic representation of women (see above) and they might help to advance a more female-friendly culture within the party. However, its positive effect on women's political ambition disappears when quotas are introduced into our analysis (Models 3 to 5).⁷

This brings us to our hypotheses. For both dependent variables, ambition to gain party or public office, quotas have a positive and statistically significant effect when used as the only contextual predictor (Model 3). This is in line with our first hypothesis. Models 4 and 5 add the share of women among party members as another regressor. Unfortunately, this information is not available for every second level case (party * year), reducing our dataset considerably (see Figure 2). Introducing the gender gap among party members as a determinant of political ambition lowers the coefficients for quotas for both our dependent

surveyed about it. As a robustness check, we additionally estimated our models without considering a respondent's educational level. The coefficients used to test our hypotheses hardly change at all.

⁷ Bündnis90/Die Grünen apply their quota rules to the national party leaders as well, resulting in a mixed-gender leadership duo. Still, there are different cases in which women became party leaders without such a gender quota (most prominently Angela Merkel from 2000 onwards). It allows us to disentangle the leadership from the quota effects, revealing that quotas are more important for the political ambition of new female party members.

variables and the effects are not statistically significant anymore. This is probably not due to the reduced dataset, as the coefficient of the quota variable and its significance do not change for either of our dependent variables when we estimate Model 3 with this smaller sample.

Our second hypothesis is about the dependency of the quota effect on the share of female party members (Model 5). Corresponding interaction effects are statistically significant for the ambition for party and public office revealing that it is not appropriate to assume a uniform quota effect across parties at different points in time. To visualize this connection, we plot the effect of the quota for a low (10%) and a high (40%) share of female members while the level-1-variables are held constant at their mean values (Figures 3 and 4).⁸ As expected, women's political ambition increases with an increasing threshold set by a quota in the scenario with a pronounced gender gap among party members. Based on Models 3 and 4, quotas seem to be more influential on the interest in a party office as a motivator for joining the party as opposed to ambition for a public office. However, if the conditionality of the quota effect is properly considered, quotas are of similar importance in both cases. Nonetheless, moderation by the share of female party members is more pronounced for the interest in party office.

[Figure 3] & [Figure 4]

For the most part, women and men do not compete for the same party and public offices when quotas exist. We have therefore so far focused only on women's political ambitions. However, there are different reasons to also shed light on men's career aspirations. For example, one common position in the literature is that quotas should only be applied until they have leveled the playing field (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2011, 187). In our case, that would be a convergence of political ambitions. Hence, in order to assess the potential of gender quotas for narrowing the ambition gap between women and men, we also examine quotas' impact on men's motives for joining. Adding male party members to our Model 1 in Table A1 in the Appendix, we show that the positive quota effect is somewhat more pronounced for women. While quotas thus indeed (slightly) reduce the gap, the fact that there is a positive effect for men at all needs to be explained.

⁸ Why are the predicted values in Figures 3 and 4 always negative? As stated before, our dependent variables indicate how political ambition as a reason for joining is assessed relative to the other potential motives to become a party member. The provided statements about these instrumental motives are among the incentives with the lowest agreement among respondents. Even under favoring conditions, the average assessment of an item in this item battery is more positive.

It is not an entirely new observation that men can be motivated by quotas. Ponce, Scarrow, and Achury (2020, 879) documented that candidate quotas increased the likelihood of joining a party similarly for women and men. Findings along those lines might be due to the potential effects of quotas on the way candidates are selected: “[Quotas] may sometimes transform established procedures for selecting candidates by increasing the rule-boundedness, or bureaucratization (or formalization or institutionalization), of the candidate selection process” (Zetterberg 2013, 317). This is relevant because it might be beneficial for men as well when there is “less room for improvisation” (Zetterberg 2013, 317). Men (and women) can more reliably work toward a political career with selection criteria being more transparent.

Another explanation is that the intensified competitive situation for men in the context of a quota might lead to the development of stronger career orientations – possibly in a kind of “act of defiance”. Niederle and Vesterlund (2008, 457) conclude with regard to their experimental research: “While women seem to shy away from competition, men appear to embrace it.” This increased affinity for competition is accompanied by a higher prevalence of overconfidence among men (Niederle and Vesterlund 2008, 456). The fact that that the interaction effects exist – to a lesser degree – for men, too (see Model 2 in Table A1 as well as Figures A1 and A2 in the Appendix), is compatible with this explanation.

Conclusion

We investigated if quotas motivate women to join political parties with the ambition to obtain party and public offices. To use Duverger’s (1954) famous terminology freely, in anticipation of the mechanical effect of gender quotas, i.e., reserving a certain percentage on electoral lists for women, political parties and female aspirants might modify their behavior. In a system with strong parties, a first psychological effect might be for women to incorporate the quota effect into their decision-making process about joining a party. However, initial research showed limited potential of quotas to minimize the gender gap in party membership (Ponce et al. 2020). Because little research has been done to date and existing analyses suffer from some data limitations, one has to state that the findings are not yet conclusive. Even if gender quotas do not actually increase the share of women among party members, women who join a party could still consider a quota’s potential.

We tested this proposition with an original data set for German party members that allows us to examine the issue longitudinally and on the basis of a high number of respondents. Our analyses showed effects of party quotas on women’s political ambition, but, more importantly, we found that this effect is highly conditional on the share of women among party members:

Women who entered the party in a year in which the quota's level was well above the percentage of women among its members had a significantly increased tendency to state that they joined the party with the intention to gain a party or public office. This is reasonable, as the number of women within the party per seat or party office is comparatively low in this scenario. These results suggest that women consider the intra-party competition when making their decision to join.

However, we must consider the limitations of our own analysis. Even with our longitudinal dataset, we have to rely on a retrospective measurement of the motives for joining a political party. In many cases, respondents are required to remember the reasons for a decision made years or even decades ago. Unfortunately, there is no way to avoid this problem, as comprehensive representative surveys of party members are rarely carried out, especially during the period when most parties had not yet adopted gender quotas. On the positive side, our analyses show that the intra-party competition moderates the effect of the quota even with this less than ideal measurement. It can be considered a conservative test of our hypothesis on the context-specific effects of gender quotas.

Our analysis deals with a topic that has hardly been systematically studied so far. Only recently, Piscopo (2019, 821) stated that “the link between gender quotas and ambition remains untested” (for an exception, see Davidson-Schmich 2016). When the breadth of the subject is considered, it is necessarily the case that after our article, there is still a great need for research on this important issue. A logical extension of our investigation would be to track how new party members' political ambitions develop over time. Quotas can be expected to help ambitious women to actually realize their initial plans to run for office. Going beyond motives for joining also takes into account that the path of (female) party members into (local) politics is often not planned in advance, as Geißel (1999, 141–142) showed for Germany. This is particularly the case in parties with quotas. So, while quotas only modestly increase the proportion of women joining with political ambitions in mind, they might help women with other motives for joining to become more ambitious. This could be via “motivational and training programs for women” (Davidson-Schmich 2016, 184) as part of the respective party's intensified recruitment efforts to meet the quota target.

Figure 1: Gender Quotas in German Parties 1946-2017

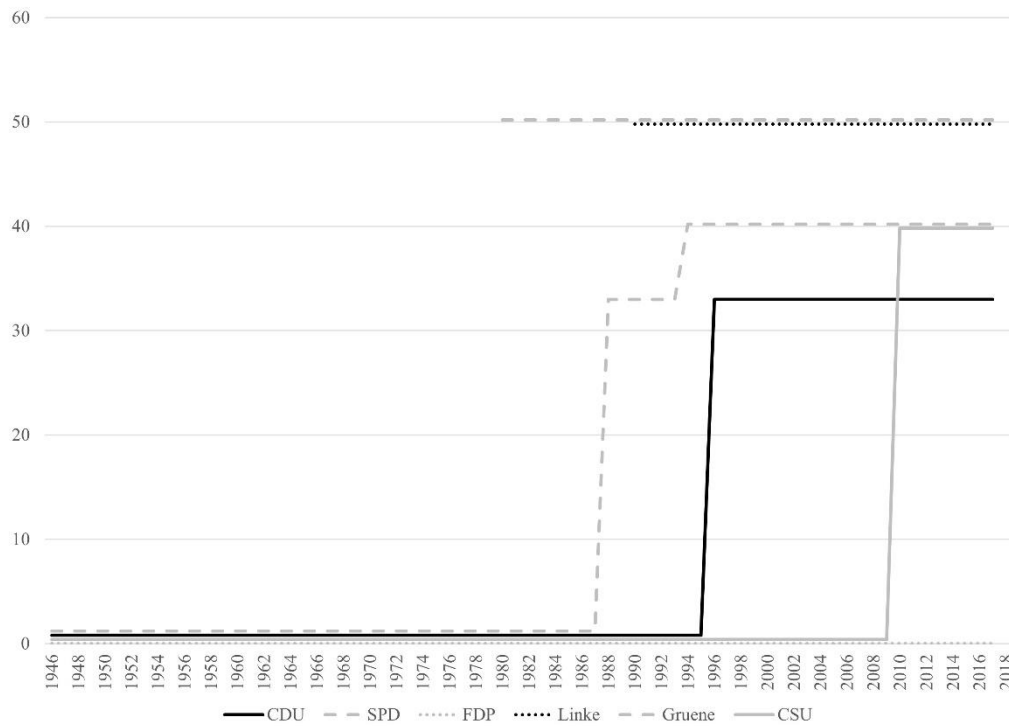


Figure 2: The proportion of women among the members of German parties 1946-2017

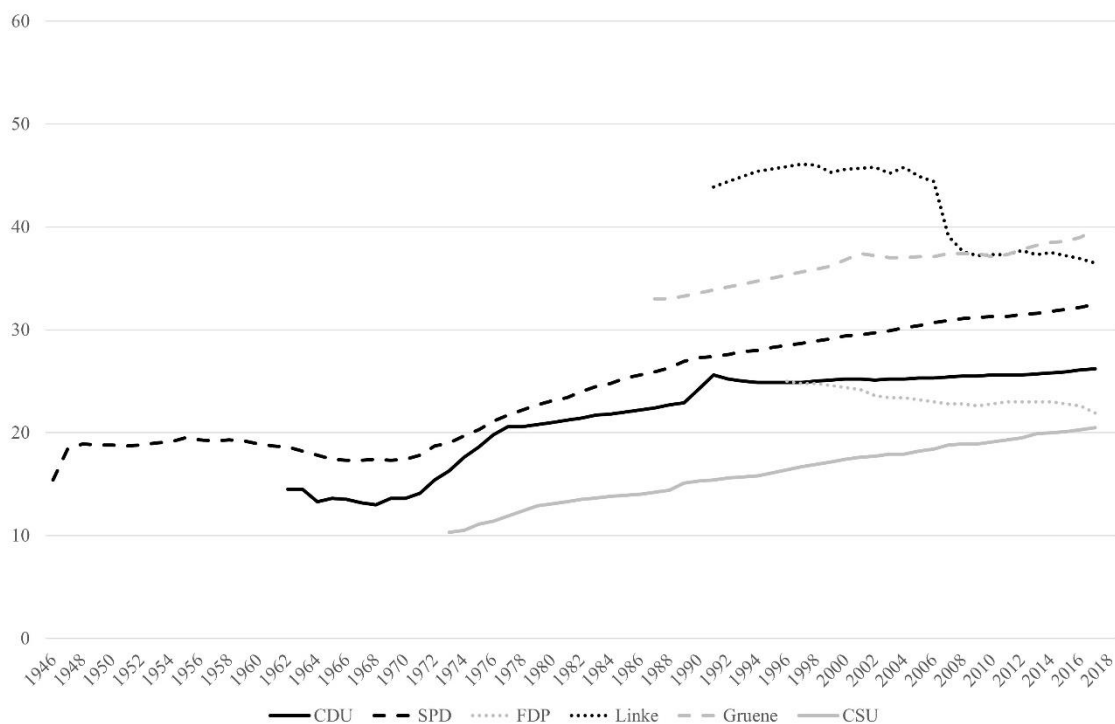


Table 1: Explaining women's ambition to gain a party office as a motive for joining

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|-------------------------------------|----------|---------|---------|----------|----------|
| Age when joining (*10) | | -.10*** | -.11*** | -.13*** | -.13*** |
| Education (Ref.: low) | | | | | |
| Middle | | .02 | .01 | -.02 | -.02 |
| High | | .10** | .07* | .03 | .03 |
| Female party leader(s) (y/n) | | | .08 | .12 | .07 |
| Quota (*10) | | | .09*** | .03 | .19** |
| Share female members (*10) | | | | .33*** | .45*** |
| Quota * Share female members (*100) | | | | | -.07** |
| Constant | -1.07*** | -.76*** | -.91*** | -1.51*** | -1.66*** |
| Variance residual | .71*** | .69*** | .68*** | .74*** | .73*** |
| Variance constant party * year | .03*** | .04*** | .03*** | .01** | .01** |
| Variance constant party | .01 | .00 | .04 | .15 | .08 |
| N (respondent) | 6459 | 6459 | 6459 | 4935 | 4935 |
| N (party * year) | 333 | 333 | 333 | 253 | 253 |
| N (party) | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2: Explaining women's ambition to gain a public office as a motive for joining

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Age when joining (*10) | | -.05*** | -.06*** | -.07*** | -.07*** |
| Education (Ref.: low) | | | | | |
| Middle | | .10** | .08* | .08 | .08 |
| High | | .24*** | .22*** | .21*** | .21*** |
| Female party leader(s) (y/n) | | | .12 | .13 | .10 |
| Quota (*10) | | | .05*** | .01 | .16** |
| Share female members (*10) | | | | .24*** | .35*** |
| Quota * Share female members (*100) | | | | | -.06** |
| Constant | -1.13*** | -1.10*** | -1.19*** | -1.67*** | -1.80*** |
| Variance residual | .81*** | .79*** | .79*** | .87*** | .94*** |
| Variance constant party * year | .03*** | .03*** | .02*** | .01 | .01 |
| Variance constant party | .01 | .01 | .02 | .09 | .04 |
| N (respondent) | 6459 | 6459 | 6459 | 4935 | 4935 |
| N (party * year) | 333 | 333 | 333 | 253 | 253 |
| N (party) | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Figure 3: Impact of women's share among party members on the quota effect on women's ambition to gain a party office as a motive for joining (shaded area 95% confidence interval)

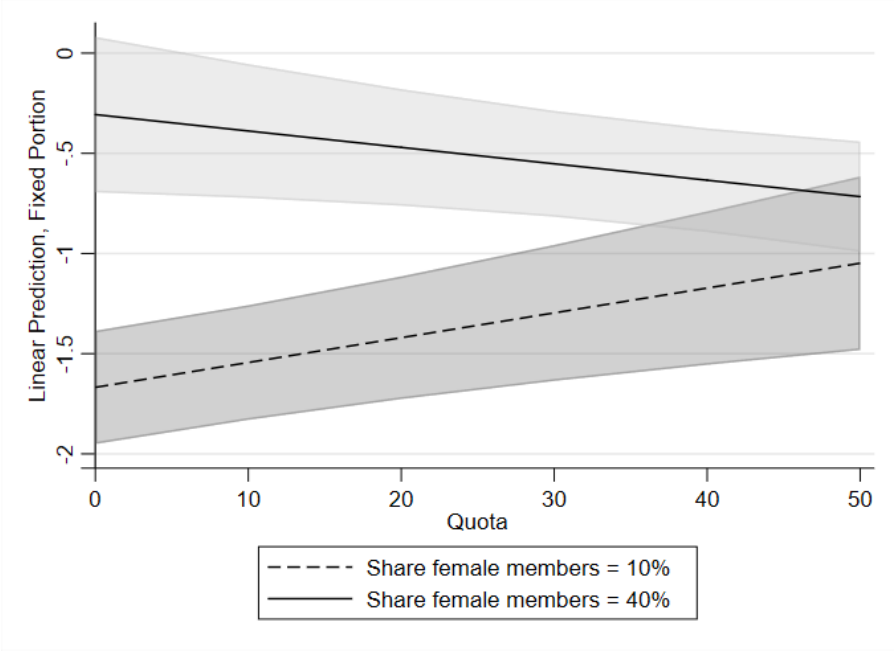
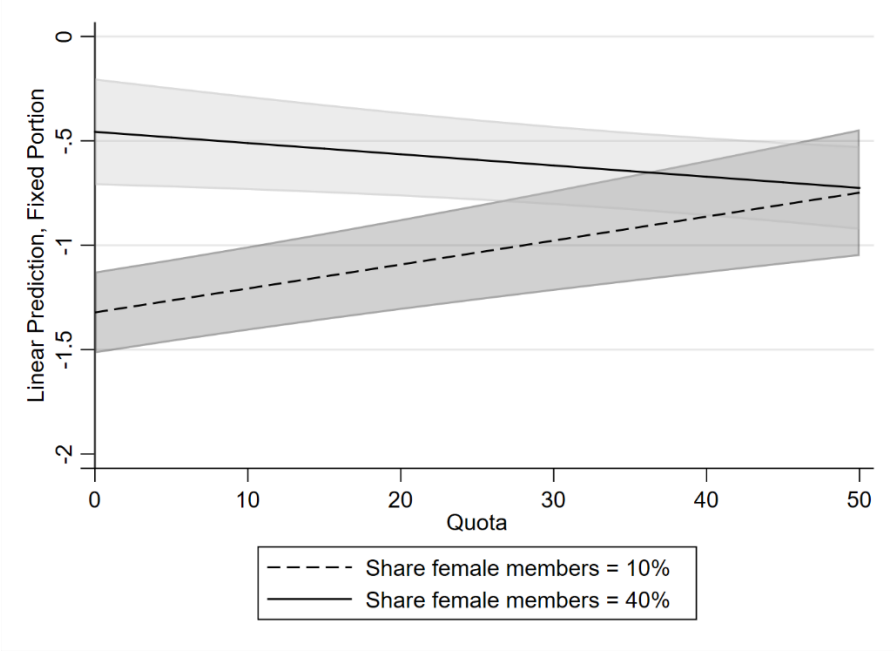


Figure 4: Impact of women's share among party members on the quota effect on women's ambition to gain a public office as a motive for joining (shaded area 95% confidence interval)



Appendix

Table 3: Explaining women's and men's selective motives for joining

| | Party office | | Public office | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|---------|---------------|---------|
| | Women & men | Men | Women & men | Men |
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 1 | Model 2 |
| Female (y/n) | -.16*** | | -.28*** | |
| Age when joining (*10) | -.12*** | -.14*** | -.06*** | -.07*** |
| Education (Ref.: low) | | | | |
| Middle | .05** | .03 | .04* | .05 |
| High | .09*** | .09*** | .12*** | .10*** |
| Female party leader(s) (y/n) | .09 | .83 | .10* | .05 |
| Quota (*10) | .11*** | .15*** | .08*** | .19*** |
| Female (y/n) * Quota (*10) | .02** | | .01* | |
| Share female members (*10) | | .03*** | | .03*** |
| Quota * Share female members (*100) | | -.00* | | -.00*** |
| Constant | -.83*** | - | -.95*** | - |
| | | 1.26*** | | 1.43*** |
| Variance residual | .69*** | .73*** | .88*** | .95*** |
| Variance constant party * year | .03*** | .01*** | .02*** | .01*** |
| Variance constant party | .07 | .11 | .05 | .04 |
| N (respondent) | 23,274 | 12,668 | 23,274 | 12,668 |
| N (party * year) | 253 | 253 | 253 | 253 |
| N (party) | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Figure 5: Impact of women's share among party members on the quota effect on men's ambition to gain a party office as a motive for joining (shaded area 95% confidence interval)

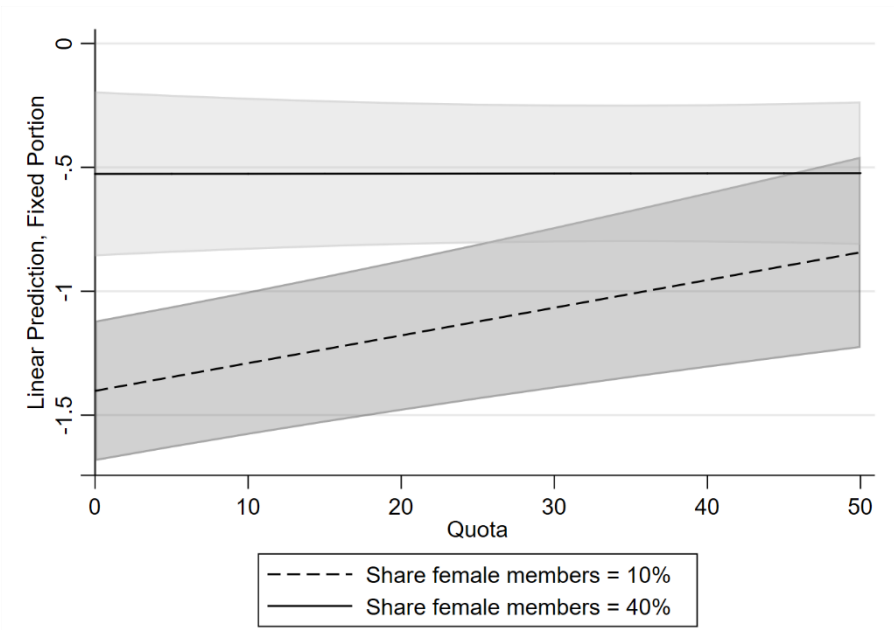


Figure 6: Impact of women's share among party members on the quota effect on men's ambition to gain a public office as a motive for joining (shaded area 95% confidence interval)

