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# Women's mobilisation for legislative political representation in Africa

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This article argues that women's movements advocating for political representation in African legislatures are a key factor in explaining how rates of female legislative representation have tripled between 1990 and 2015. Coalitional efforts to introduce electoral quotas challenge key claims in the literature on developing countries that suggest that culture, a lack of economic growth, and oil revenues serve as impediments to increases in women's legislative representation. Case studies of Senegal, Mauritania and Algeria illustrate some of the problems with these arguments and show the significance of collective women's mobilisation.

**Keywords:** women; politics; Africa; quotas; women's movement

[La mobilisation des femmes pour une représentation politique législative en Afrique.] Cet article soutient que les mouvements des femmes qui se sont battues pour une représentation politique dans les législatures africaines sont un facteur clé pour expliquer comment la représentation législative des femmes a triplé entre 1990 et 2015. Les efforts de la coalition pour introduire des quotas électoraux sont un défi pour ceux qui affirment dans la littérature sur les pays en développement que la culture, un manque de croissance économique et les recettes du pétrole empêchent l'augmentation de la représentation législative des femmes. Des études de cas au Sénégal, en Mauritanie et en Algérie illustrent certains des problèmes liés à ces arguments et montrent l'importance de la mobilisation collective des femmes.

**Mots-clés :** femmes ; la politique ; Afrique ; quotas ; mouvements des femmes

Women's legislative representation in Africa almost tripled between 1990 and 2015, jumping from 7.78% in 1990 to 22.2% in 2015. This contributed to the fact that today 12 African countries have women speakers of the house and there are also proportionately more women in the cabinet (20%) than other parts of the world (18%). These trends in national legislatures have often been accompanied by an increase in women's representation in local government as well as in the executive, judiciary and in the bureaucracy. Most of the theories regarding female legislative representation have drawn on cross-national data to explain these trends. Because of a gap in available data, they have neglected to account for one of the most important factors influencing women's representation, namely the role of women's movements and coalitions, which act in concert with other actors. Moreover, some of the conventional explanations that have been identified as constraints on female representation in developing countries, particularly claims about the role of oil economies, culture and religion, and the lack of economic growth, turn out to be less

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of a concern when women's movements are taken into consideration. These three explanations – oil, culture and economic growth – are explored in greater detail below in the context of case studies of Senegal, Mauritania and Algeria, which illustrate some of the problems with the focus on these factors. The study is also informed by the creation and analysis of a database of African countries with Alice Kang that looks at the particular role of coalitions in pressing for quotas (Kang and Tripp 2015).

Obviously a case study cannot disprove a claim, but taken in the context of broader patterns, it can show why the hypothesis might be limited. The case of predominantly Muslim Senegal, where 43% of the legislative seats are held by women, is examined to explore the impact of religiosity on women's political leadership. The role of the women's movement in pressing for a quota in Mauritania is also explored. Mauritania, which is ranked as a low human development country, adopted a quota in 2012 and in the subsequent election, the rates of women in parliament doubled to 25%. Women's efforts to implement a quota in Algeria, which is an oil producer, serve as a case that explores the validity of the claim that oil rents impede women's representation in parliaments. Women hold 32% of the legislative seats in Algeria, the highest rate in the region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The adoption of quotas is foremost among the factors influencing women's legislative representation in Africa. Over 65% of African countries have adopted some form of quota to increase the representation of women in parliament, and these countries have an average of 25% female representation compared with 14% for those countries without quotas (Table 1). Numerous studies have looked at the role of quotas in influencing women's representation in Africa (Bauer and Britton 2006; Geisler 2004; Goetz and Hassim 2003; Tamale 1999; Tripp 2000; Tripp et al. 2009) and beyond (Dahlerup 2006; Krook 2009). Some of these early writings showed that women's movements were an essential aspect of quota adoption in countries like Uganda, which was the first country in Africa where women's rights activists pressed for representation as a group (Tripp 2000), but also in Namibia (Bauer 2004), South Africa (Geisler 2004) and elsewhere. The paper builds on this earlier work to show how the lack of attention to movements in cross-national studies misses this key explanation, which subsequently reduces the importance of the other explanations. Thus, in order to understand how quotas came to influence women's legislative representation, one has to understand the role of women's coalitions and why they have pressed for quotas. The key actors generally include a combination of women's organisations and women party leaders, in coalition with UN agencies, donors and governmental policymakers.

There have been three types of quotas introduced to influence the candidacy of women running in elections and thus the representation of women: (1) Parties themselves may have

Table 1. Women's legislative representation and the adoption of quotas in African countries, 2015.

| | Countries (%) | Average levels of female legislative representation (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Quotas | 35 (65) | 25 |
| No quotas | 19 (35) | 14 |
| Total | 54 (100) | 21 |

Source: Freedom House, https://www.freedomhouse.org; Global Database of Quotas for Women, http://www.quotaproject.org.
Note: Freedom House is one of the main sources of statistical data on democratisation, which is divided into civil liberties and political rights.

*voluntarily adopted a quota*, regardless of whether there was a constitutional or legal mandate. These types of quotas, which are found in nine African countries, typically originate within the party itself, often with a push from women activists within the party. The party quotas may exist alongside reserved seat or compulsory quota arrangements. (2) *Reserved seats* or *women's lists* (found in 11 countries) are mandated by constitutions, legislation or both and these too are often advocated for by the ruling party and women in the ruling party, as was the case in Uganda. These are seats that only women can compete for. Generally, a percentage of seats, for example 30%, are set aside for which only women candidates can compete. Increasingly, these goals have been set at 50%. (3) *Compulsory legislated quotas* require that all parties include a certain percentage of women on their candidate lists. Some arrangements mandate where or how they should be placed on the list, which is crucial to the success of such a provision (Dalerup et al. 2013).

Today the largest proportion of countries in Africa (16) have a *legislated quota system*. Although the literature mentions women's movements as a factor in quota adoption (e.g. Krook 2009), in fact, specific configurations of coalitions are driving the adoption of quotas in Africa. Moreover, these coalitions tend to cut across ethnicity, religious identity, party affiliation and other differences. They generally include women's organisations, a multiparty caucus of parliamentarians, an organisation of women leaders from different parties, the women's ministry, and other human rights organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They are generally supported by a United Nations agency like UN Women, United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Population Fund, which received funds from foreign donors. They are also often supported by international NGOs like the National Democratic Institute, Oxfam, Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and other such groups (Kang and Tripp 2015).

## Other relevant factors in women's representation

Alongside oil, culture and economic growth, other factors like executive agendas, external actors including the UN and donors, conflict, electoral systems and democratisation are also considered to be important and in some cases central to the process. This paper argues that the way women's movements interact with these other explanations is essential to explaining quota adoption.

While most efforts to implement quotas involved UN actors and other donors, their activities would not have had any impact without local actors. Very often, the efforts of these international actors were mediated and amplified by regional-level actors, especially the African Union through its Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as the Economic Community of West African States, and the Economic Community of Central African States. SADC, for example, set a series of targets for the adoption of quotas. In some countries like Uganda, quotas were adopted without any external pressures.

Cross-national studies have also linked women's representation in Africa to major conflict since 1990 (Hughes and Tripp 2015). On average, these post-conflict countries have higher rates of female representation (29%) compared with countries that have not gone through conflict (16%). However, in almost all these post-conflict countries that increased representation, particularly in countries adopting legislated quotas, women's coalitions were the key actors in pressing for these changes. Algeria is a case in point, having experienced mass conflict between 1992 and 2002, which was followed by the adoption of quotas and sharp increases in female legislative representation as well as women's entry into other

positions of leadership. Women's rights activists took advantage of changing opportunity structures relating to peace negotiations and constitutional reforms in order to advance their common agenda. Post-conflict countries that did not have active women's movements tended to have more uneven outcomes for women's rights, including in the political arena (e.g. Angola, Chad, Eritrea) (Tripp 2015).

The findings of cross-national global studies of the role of democracy are mixed, partly because of the selection of countries in different studies and the time period they examine. Some studies uncover correlations between democracy and women's representation (Inglehart and Norris 2003; Inglehart, Norris, and Welzel 2002; Viterna, Fallon, and Beckfield 2008), while others find an inverse relationship (Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Paxton 1997; Tripp and Kang 2008) or no relationship (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Reynolds 1999). Some find a correlation over time (Fallon, Swiss, and Viterna 2012; Paxton, Hughes, and Painter 2010).

Some studies on women and political representation in Africa argue that women's representation is correlated with democratisation (Lindberg 2004; Yoon 2004). If one looks at levels of average female representation by regime type in Africa (using Freedom House classifications), only small differences are evident (see Table 2). Longitudinal studies, however, suggest that democratisation, rather than democracy per se, does influence female representation. Paxton, Hughes, and Painter (2010) found in a longitudinal study that democracy does not influence *levels* of women's political representation at the start of political liberalisation, but it does affect the *growth* of women's representation over time by creating conditions under which women can mobilise to improve their status by increasing representation. Hughes and Tripp similarly found in Africa that political opening early on was important to later increases in female representation, allowing sufficient space for women to mobilise to allow for quotas and for political empowerment (Hughes and Tripp 2015).

To the extent that women's mobilisation has been included in cross-national studies, it has focused primarily on international women's movements (Anderson and Swiss 2014; Fallon, Swiss, and Viterna 2012; Paxton, Hughes, and Green 2006). Anderson and Swiss, for example, take country-level membership in women's international NGOs as a crude proxy for the ties between local groups and international women's groups. However, this focus on the international level does not directly measure regional and domestic women's movement pressures and the ways in which all three levels interact.

While women's movements interact in important ways with these aforementioned factors, three other common explanations (culture, Gross Domestic Product [GDP] and oil rents) that have been used to explain women's representation diminish in relevance when women's movements are accounted for in the African context. These factors are explored with a particular focus on Senegal, Mauritania and Algeria.

Table 2. Regime type and female legislative representation in Africa, 2015.

| Regime type | Average levels of female representation % | Number of countries |
|---|---|---|
| Democracy | 24 | 11 |
| Hybrid | 19 | 20 |
| Authoritarian | 21 | 23 |

Source: Freedom House, https://www.freedomhouse.org; Inter-Parliamentary Union, http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm.

**Cultural influences**

Some cross-national studies have shown that cultural attitudes influence gender equity (Inglehart and Norris 2003; Kenworthy and Malami 1999). However, women's movements in Africa have mobilised to introduce quotas specifically to override problematic cultural factors. Thus, it is unlikely that cultural arguments can fully account for the rate of change we have seen in Africa in women's political representation. Some of this argument against the importance of culture is reflected in a few cross-national studies that account for regional variation (Tripp and Kang 2008; Viterna, Fallon, and Beckfield 2008).

If one looks at cultural values in Africa based on 29 countries surveyed in the Afrobarometer survey Round 5 (2011–13) and Round 6 (2014–15) in answering the question 'Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men,' there does not appear to be any correlation between attitudes and rates of female representation. The countries with the highest support for the statement like Cape Verde, Togo, Botswana, Swaziland and Liberia do not have high rates of female representation, while countries like Algeria, Tunisia and Senegal, with higher rates of female representation, have relatively low support for the statement. The average percentage of female legislative representation is identical for the top and bottom halves of the table if one lists them according to support for the statement. This is because quotas have overridden such attitudinal biases. Moreover, the countries with the highest and lowest approval ratings do not reflect religious affiliations, colonial legacy, levels of female education, post-conflict affects or other factors that might influence such attitudes.

The most striking and discernable variance in the table has to do with the gender gap. The gender gap was the highest for Algeria (36% difference between women and men), Zimbabwe (22%), Morocco (20%), Lesotho (20%), Tanzania (19%) and Mauritius (19%), with women uniformly agreeing more with the statement than men. There was almost no gender gap in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Madagascar, while Malawi had more men than women supporting the statement.

Religiosity is often thought of as a constraint on women's political leadership. Chingewete and colleagues (Chingwete, Richmond, and Alpin 2014) draw on the Afrobarometer survey to suggest that countries with predominantly Muslim populations have more conservative attitudes toward women as leaders. However, as with cultural values more generally, the introduction of institutional innovations such as quotas override such attitudinal considerations. Predominantly Muslim countries in Africa, including those in the Maghreb, have on average only slightly lower rates of female legislative representation (20%) compared with non-Muslim countries (22%). This is because many of the countries with significant Muslim populations in Africa, such as Tanzania, Senegal and Sudan, have adopted quotas. One of the reasons women's movements press for the adoption of quotas in such countries is because there is a concern that other cultural factors might hinder female representation. This was evident in an earlier cross-national study I conducted with Alice Kang in which we found that region and the adoption of quotas overrode religiosity. Muslim countries in the Middle East, for example, were less inclined to promote women's representation than Muslim countries in Asia and Africa. Thus, it was not the presence of a predominantly Muslim population that mattered when the regional dimension was considered (Tripp and Kang 2008).

Senegal is a case in point. Because of weak general support for women politicians, the Senegalese women's movement pressed for quotas. Women's organisations and women party leaders, with the support of the UN and other donors, sought legislative parity in Senegal starting in the mid 1990s and finally won it in 2012. Already more women than

men were voting in the Senegalese elections, according to a 2008 Afrobarometer survey. However, as a result of the introduction of a parity law, the number of female parliamentary representatives nearly doubled, jumping from 23% to 43% of the seats with the 2012 elections.

As Fatou Kiné Diop explained, 'Two converging factors contributed favourably to the emergence of the law: women's political activism and political will. African women have been fighting for decades.' In Senegal, the *Conseil Sénégalais des Femmes* (the Senegalese Council of Women, or COSEF) spearheaded the campaign for gender parity. COSEF was formed in 1994 to advocate for women's increased political participation. It was made up of women's associations, political parties and NGOs. COSEF held a constituent assembly of 400 women on 11 March 1995, at the Chamber of Commerce in Dakar, to discuss the new initiative. The assembly was chaired by representatives of the Minister of Women, Children and the Family, the United Nations Development Programme and the African Institute for Democracy. The leaders, like Aminata Diaw, saw the formation of COSEF as the introduction of an alternative female ethics into politics (Diaw and Touré 1998; cited in Sy 2009).

COSEF pressed the political parties to adopt quotas, and the parties pledged their moral commitment to do so. But after the 1998 elections it was evident that their moral commitment was insufficient, and COSEF decided it needed a legal means to bring about parity. Meanwhile, Abdoulaye Wade, who became president of Senegal in 2000, had made campaign promises regarding gender parity, and COSEF seized on this moment to advance the issue. Again in Durban in 2002, when a group of African activists under the NGO *Femme Africa Solidarité* led by Bineta Diop asked him to support the 30% quota of women in the African Union, President Wade offered to advocate for a 50% quota (COSEF 2011). In 2004 under Wade, Senegal signed the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol, which includes a provision around gender parity. Senegal also added the Maputo Protocol to its constitution.

COSEF, together with the Monitoring Committee for the Implementation of Gender, then launched the ('*Avec la parité, consolidons la démocratie!* ') ('Let's consolidate democracy with gender parity!') campaign in 2005, which marked a turning point in the struggle for parity (Sane 2010). It received input from various legal and constitutional experts and worked together with the Ministry of Women and involved a coalition of organisations, including the *Association de Juristes Sénégalaises* (Association of Senegalese Jurists), the *Association des Professionnelles Africaines de la Communication* (Association of African Professionals in Communication), *Le Forum Civil* (Civil Forum) and the *Réseau Siggil Jigéen* (Siggil Jigeen Network). Leaders of the movement, like COSEF President Fatou Kiné Diop, claimed that their independence from the ministry gave them added leverage (Bissonnette 2013). Their goals were (1) to publicise the parity debate and (2) to take legal action to establish parity in the deliberative assemblies, and find ways to penalise non-compliance with such measures by invalidating candidate lists that did not comply with the parity provision. They held meetings to engage political parties and parliamentarians, signed petitions, did trainings, worked with the media to publicise the campaign and sought international support from organisations like Women's Environment and Development, which has been promoting parity internationally. They also brought their campaign to the attention of participants at the 52nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York in February 2006. They built a coalition which included women's organisations within political parties, civil society organisations and the media along with support from international NGOs like the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Early on they gained support from socialist-leaning parties like *Union pour le Renouveau Démocratique* (Union for Democratic Renewal), *Parti socialiste du Sénégal* (the Socialist Party) and *And-Jëf/Parti Africain pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme* (And-Jëf/African Party for Democracy and Socialism). They worked with women from the parties and on 27 March 2007 held a demonstration in which women dressed in white and got the parties to support their campaign. Soon thereafter, the gender parity law was adopted in May 2012, mandating the alternation of candidate lists between male and female candidates. Moreover, the Senegalese Electoral Code also decreed that political parties and coalitions of political parties must enforce the Parity Act. Since Senegal has a parallel electoral system, these provisions would apply to proportional representation party lists and the seats contested through the plurality system in multi-member constituencies. Thus, in a constituency with five seats, two would have to be filled by women. An *Observatoire National pour la Parité* (National Observatory on Gender Parity), established by presidential decree, monitored the implementation of the parity law in the elections (*Ibid.*).

After the law was adopted, COSEF and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Children and Female Entrepreneurship, supported by the UN, launched a public awareness campaign in 14 regions in Senegal and trained about three hundred women on the electoral lists (UN Women 2012). Thus while the impetus for the gender parity law came from women's organisations within Senegal, external actors like UN Women played an important role in supporting the domestic actors, in providing both financial but also technical support.

Islam has had varied influences in different parts of Africa as well as within countries. Senegal is no exception, as a country where women have been active as religious teachers, scholars and in the Muslim Sufi Brotherhoods. Even though the Sufi influence in Senegal has protected it from some of the Salafist influences, surveys cited above show that attitudes towards women's political leadership are among the most negative in Africa (Mbow 2001). Nevertheless, women's coalitions have fought to override potential cultural and religious impediments to women's political leadership and were able to sway parties and the president to uphold their commitments to gender equality. It also shows how women's organisations found space in democratisation processes to press their demands.

## Economic growth and related measures

Economic growth is often said to be correlated with women's rights and political representation (Kenworthy and Malami 1999). Viterna, Fallon, and Beckfield (2008) have shown that it matters more for women's representation in developing countries than for developed countries, as does women's labour force participation and educational attainment (as measured by the female share of secondary school enrolment). However, Hughes and Tripp (2015) did not find economic development (measured by logged GDP per capita) nor female labour force participation to have significant effects over time on women's legislative outcomes in Africa. Labour force participation is higher in Africa than in other parts of the world, yet women are not mostly employed in the formal sector as they are in other parts of the world. The mechanisms that might link labour force participation to quota adoption simply do not exist and one has to look for other explanations. Rates of female secondary education in Africa are the lowest in the world yet rates of female representation are higher than in Asia and the Middle East. Hughes and Tripp (2015) found girls' secondary education enrolment to have only marginally significant effects (see Table 3).

In Africa, countries like Mauritania have adopted quotas, yet have very low rates of economic growth. Mauritania's GDP per capita for 2014 is 1270, which is considerably below the 1796 average per capita rate for sub-Saharan Africa overall and only slightly above the rate for the least developed countries globally (944), based on World Bank data. Mauritania has low rates of female labour force participation (29% in 2013), whereas for Africa overall it is 64% for the same year. Most Mauritanian women are engaged in agriculture, pastoralism, trade and small-scale artisanal production. Mauritania has a ratio of 102% of girls to boys in secondary school compared with Africa's overall ratio of 90.9%. This high rate of school attendance for girls tells us little about women's role in the economy or in parliament. For this reason we need to look at other factors that have influenced women's representation and, in particular, the role of women's mobilisation. It should be mentioned that the two dominant Mauritanian tribes, the Sanhaja Berbers and Hilalian Arabs, are matriarchal societies, which means that women enjoy considerable freedom within society and have historically been held in particular esteem as leaders and authorities. Moroccan geographer and traveller Ibn Battuta observed these patterns in the account of his journey, *Rihla*, as far back as 1332 during his travels in the region (El Kettab 2014).

Mauritanian women took advantage of political opening in the early 2000s to advance their concerns and began to mobilise in earnest. In 2001, Mauritanians voted in fairly open competitive elections at the national and municipal level for the first time. Prior presidential elections in 1992 and 1997 and the 1996 legislative elections were regarded as flawed.

Mauritania had experienced authoritarian rule punctuated by a series of coups in 1978, 1984 and 2005. In 1978, all independent associations and political activities were curtailed. President Maaouya Ahmed Taya introduced a multiparty system in the early 1990s without any change in levelling the playing field for the opposition. After a 2005 coup led by Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, hundreds of political prisoners were released, elections were set and an independent electoral commission was created. Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdellahi was elected president in 2007, however, shortly thereafter the head of the Presidential Guard, General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, ousted Abdellahi in a coup after firing four top generals. Abdellahi had come under growing criticism for including conservative Islamists and officials from his predecessor's regime in his cabinet. The international

Table 3. Female labour force participation and education.

| World region | Labour force participation rate (female ages 15+), % of female population, 2013 | Ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education (%) |
|---|---|---|
| North America | 57 | 100 |
| Latin America & Caribbean | 54 | 102 |
| Europe & Central Asia | 51 | 99 |
| Central Europe and the Baltics | 49 | 99 |
| East Asia & Pacific | 61 | 100 |
| South Asia | 31 | 97 |
| Middle East & North Africa | 22 | 95 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 64 | 91 |

Source: World Bank, International Labour Office, all income levels.

community condemned the coup, but domestically the reaction was mixed. Aziz won the 2009 election in a poll that was widely regarded as fraudulent.

Thus, the years 2001 to 2007 created a pocket of political liberalisation that permitted women's organisations to mobilise and press for greater political representation. In fact, 80% of civil society organisations were headed by women, according to a World Bank report (cited in Kettab 2012). In this period, women's organisations sought to improve their legal status, and a Personal Status Code was passed in 2001. It provided the legal basis for marriage and for a marriage contract. The age of marriage was raised to 18 for both men and women to address the practice of early marriage and marriage required the consent of the woman. Enforcement is still weak as is lack of awareness of these rights.

Women have been at the forefront of efforts to democratise Mauritania. Fatimetou Mint Khattri, former Minister of Women and Children, was secretary general of the ADIL party. When the coup took place against the democratically elected President Abdellahi, she made the first statement against the coup on television because she was concerned about the future of the country. But the president of her party called her and told her not to concern herself with the events. Women then went to demonstrate in front of the United Nations office in 2008. They were beaten, tear-gassed and harassed and it was only after they took action that the men in the opposition began to become united against the coup (Kettab 2012).

A *Réseau Mauritanien des Femmes Ministres et Parlementaires* (Mauritanian Women Ministers' and Parliamentarians' Network) was created in 2007 to press for woman's rights legislation. Organisations like the *Association Mauritanienne des Femmes Juristes* (Mauritanian Association of Women Lawyers), *Réseau Mauritanien pour la Promotion des Droits de la Femme* (Mauritanian Network for the Promotion of Women's Rights), Women's Learning Partnership and *Le Connectinggroup-Mauritanie* were energised in this period. Women claimed leadership in some parties and one Islamist party, *Hawwa* (Eve), headed by the Mauritanian woman activist Sehla Mint Ahmed Zayed.

Pressure from the Advocacy Group for the Involvement of Women in Decision-Making as well as other civil society organisations and international partners resulted in the 2012 adoption of a 20% quota for women on party lists in the Electoral Act of 2006. They were joined by key public figures, religious leaders, the media, various women leaders and political parties. A political dialogue between the government and opposition parties was critical in getting the quota adopted. Seniya Mint Sidi Haiba, Secretary of State for the Promotion of Women, in the Taya government (1996–97), was a key initiator of this dialogue.

The quota law stipulated that in constituencies where two members are elected to the legislature, party lists must include a man and a woman. Where three are elected, the lists must include at least one woman in the first or second place. Where more than three are elected, each group of four candidates on the list from the top down must include an equal number of male and female candidates. There cannot be more than one additional candidate of either sex on the list. The electoral commission can reject lists that do not comply with these regulations. There are financial incentives for parties that elect more women than required by the quota.

The quota resulted in women gaining 18% of the lower house legislative seats (16% in the Senate), thus more than quadrupling the percentage of women in parliament from 4%. The percentage of women represented in the lower house subsequently rose to 22% in the 2006 election and to 25% in the 2013 election. Women also claimed 30.37% of the seats in the 2007 municipal council elections (1120 out of 3688). Moreover, women now occupied 20% of government positions, including prefect, governor and ambassador positions.

However, women made up only 3 out of 27 ministers. Women leaders have vowed to seek to extend the quotas to the judiciary and civil service.

The country experienced a brief political opening that allowed for the emergence of independent women's organisations, which pressed for and were able to get the quota adopted. Elites, concerned with Mauritania's external image, supported the adoption of quotas. Women's organisations plan to expand the quota to parity and are hoping to build on gains already made in getting the support of male elites across the political and religious spectrum. Mauritania's lack of economic growth and low labour force participation of women seemed not to impede the adoption of quotas.

## The oil factor

Michael Ross (2008) has argued that oil production negatively influences women's representation because the existence of oil rents reduces the number of women in the workforce and hence their capacity to mount pressure for change. He does not account for women's movements and coalitions that press for quotas and increased representation of women. By ignoring these actors and the quotas they have sought to implement, he missed some of the key drivers of women's representation today. In fact, oil-producing countries in Africa are increasing rates of female representation without significant changes in female labour force participation. In Africa, the top oil producers[1] have the same rate of female representation in parliament on average (20.70%) as the non-oil producers (20.61%) (Table 4). This extends beyond Africa to the Middle East more generally. MENA oil-producing countries stand at 13% with respect to average female legislative representation, whereas non-oil producers have a rate of 14%. Of the 10 countries that exceed the regional average in terms of female legislative representation in the Middle East, all have quotas and six are major oil producers. Today, women in oil-producing states like Angola hold 34% of the legislative seats, 32% in Algeria and 25% in Sudan, primarily as a result of the adoption of quotas. In fact, Alice Kang (2009) looked at the impact of oil cross-nationally and in multivariate analysis and found that when quotas are introduced into the model, the effect of oil rents on women's representation was no longer statistically significant.

The argument that links oil production to the lack of women in parliament suggests that this relationship is the result of the low percentage of women in the labour force, which

Table 4. Oil rents,[a] female legislative representation and quota adoption in Africa.

| Country | Lower or single house % women | Quota |
|---|---|---|
| Algeria | 31.60% | yes |
| Angola | 36.80 | yes |
| Cameroon | 31.10 | yes |
| Chad | 14.90 | no |
| Congo, Rep. of | 7.40 | yes |
| Equatorial Guinea | 24.00 | no |
| Gabon | 14.20 | no |
| Libya | 17.00 | yes |
| Nigeria | 6.70 | no |
| Sudan | 24.61 | yes |
| Average | 20.70 | |

Source: World Bank.
[a]In these African countries oil rents constitute over 10% of the GDP.

suppresses legislative representation. This theory ignores the pathways for women's mobilisation for quotas in Africa, which are generally not tied to labour force participation. Hughes and Tripp found in their longitudinal and multivariate study of women's legislative representation in Africa, for example, that women's labour force participation in Africa had no effect on women's legislative outcomes (Hughes and Tripp 2015), suggesting that this cannot be the causal mechanism linking oil production to female representation. Thus, when women's mobilisation and quotas are accounted for, the overall importance of oil diminishes in explaining women's legislative representation, as will become evident in the example of Algeria.

### *Algeria*

These factors are evident in the Algerian case. Algeria has one of the highest rates of female legislative representation in Africa and the Middle East, yet it is an oil producer with one of the lowest rates of formal female labour force participation in the world. In the case of Algeria, as in other oil-producing countries, the status of women in parliament has had little to do with oil production, and suppressed female labour force participation in the oil industry. Rather, it has much more to do with the role of the women's movement, the government's commitment to advancing women, as well as post-conflict repercussions. Women made up only 19% of the workforce in 2013, according to the National Statistical Office of Algeria (2013). The kinds of jobs women pursue are related to education. The percentage of women in Algerian universities today exceeds that of men by 12%, with a female-to-male ratio of 1.46. The number of women graduates in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics fields is almost the same as that of men (49% women, 51% men). Women make up 70% of the country's lawyers, 60% of judges (up from 18% in 1988) and the majority of doctors. However, most women are engaged in unpaid home-based work that is not accounted for in such statistics. They are engaged in agricultural work, tending livestock, clothing and textile production, and small-scale informal entrepreneurial activities (ILO 2014). According to the *Collectif 95 Maghreb Égalité* (Maghreb NGO network) and Moghadam (2011), the number of women in the labour force doubled between the 1980s and 1990s with economic liberalisation and as more women assumed responsibility for elder care and family care. However, the pressures for quotas have little to do with these labour force trends and are more closely related to the post-conflict dynamics after 2002 that propelled women to mobilise for changes on a number of fronts.

Efforts to push for the adoption of quotas in Algeria, which started in 2011, are shaped by the country's recent history. Women's mobilisation in contemporary Algeria dates back to the Algerian war of independence against France (1954–62) when large numbers participated as freedom fighters within the *Armée de Libération Nationale* (National Liberation Army) and as supporters of the insurgents (Daoud 1996, 138; Salhi 2010). After the war, many women were stunned to find themselves pushed out of public life into the domestic sphere by both Islamists and the government, especially after they had fought side by side with men (Ahmed 1982). In the 1970s, the Islamists grew in strength under Houari Boumedienne, who was in power as chairman of the ruling Revolutionary Council between 1965 and 1976 and then as Algeria's president between 1976 and 1978. This resulted in restrictions on women's freedoms, particularly in the areas of family planning and abortion. Boumedienne's successor President Chadli Bendjedid (1979–92) faced even greater pressures from the Islamists but also the expansion of the women's movement and the formation of organisations like the Algerian Association for the Emancipation of Women, SOS Women in Distress, and the Committee for the Legal Equality of Men and Women. Women's rights

organisations resisted and overturned the 1980 ban on women travelling without a male relative. They resisted government efforts to impose a conservative Family Code starting in 1981 and its passage in 1984 was seen by many as a betrayal of the Algerian revolution. This marked the expansion of the independent women's movement. In 1982, the younger independent feminists were joined by women war veterans who had fought in the liberation war in protesting what they felt was the betrayal of the revolution for women. In 1984, much to the horror of the women activists, the Family Code was enacted, clarifying irrefutably that the state was beholden to the Islamists (Salhi 2010). The law institutionalised polygamy, made women minors under the law, defined their role primarily as wives, children and sisters rather than as citizens. Demonstrations against the law intensified as women continued to resist efforts to roll back gains. They resisted efforts to allow spouses to vote in place of women and defended co-educational schools between 1989–91 (Lalami 2014).

As the country sank into war after 1991, women became prime targets of the Islamist forces who threatened, raped, mutilated, beheaded and killed women, especially those who worked in government offices or as teachers or business women. Fighting between the government and Islamist groups resulted in the deaths of approximately two hundred thousand people and the disappearance of 7000 others. Fighting diminished after 1997. A former foreign minister, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who attempted to stabilise the country, won the elections in 1999, 2004 and 2009 and the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN, National Liberation Front) remained the dominant party. Problematic as his rule has been from the perspective of human rights and democracy, he appointed five women's rights activists to his cabinet in 2002, bringing the number of cabinet members to 25%, the highest in the MENA countries at the time. His 2014 cabinet has 7 women out of 34 (20%), which is still the highest percentage in the MENA countries.

It was not, however, until the political opening in 2011 that women began to make serious headway in shifting the gender balance in the legislature. Of the 25,800 candidates in the 2012 parliamentary elections, 7700 or 30% were women, yet women ended up winning almost 32% of the seats, the highest proportion for women in the Middle East and the Maghreb. There were also many young female candidates: over 62% of the female candidates were under 40 years of age, while only 44% of the men were under 40.

However, even though international observers regarded the 2012 parliamentary elections as basically free, local organisations alleged fraud. In the elections, the ruling FLN claimed 221 seats, the military-backed National Rally for Democracy won 70, while the Islamist Green Algeria Alliance claimed 47 seats. Islamists, who had expected to claim the majority of parliamentary seats, were shocked when the two main pro-government secular parties significantly increased their seats in the assembly, winning 62% of the votes (Ottaway 2012).

### *Explaining gender quota adoption in Algeria*

In 2011, the government started becoming more responsive to societal economic and political demands. It lifted restrictions on political parties, the media and associations, opening up political space for women's mobilisation. Women's organisations became active in this period such as *L'Association Indépendente pour le Triomphe des Droits des Femmes*, *L'Organisation de l'Égalité devant la Loi entre les Femmes et les Hommes* (women's organisations affiliated with the *Front des Forces Socialistes* and *le Parti Avant-garde Socialiste*), *Rassemblement contre la Hogra et pour les Droits des Algériennes*, *Réseau Wassila* and others. Women gained greater access to the media. They took on numerous concerns including reforming the Family Code.

For years, Algeria's brand of socialism had cut the country off from influences of the international women's movement and human rights discourses. This gradually changed as women's organisations linked up in 1995 with the Maghreb Égalité network, which helped them in their efforts around the Family Code. They also began to connect to the Western media and also participated in various UN and international human rights conferences and events (Salhi 2010, 122).

Algerian women's collaboration with Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) also provided important international support. According to Algerian sociologist and WLUML member Marieme Hélie-Lucas, the organisation connected Algerian activists with international activists and provided them with a platform to voice their concerns about crimes against women perpetrated by *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS, the Islamic Salvation Front) and other armed groups. WLUML helped them gain access to various international women's conferences and the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Allalou 2009).

The focus of women's mobilisation for a long time had been on violence against women and in reforming the Family Code. *Collectif 20 ans Barakat* (20 Years is Enough!) had been active in 2003 in trying to overturn the Family Law. In the summer of 2003, 20 women musicians from Algeria, France and Argentina recorded the song 'Ouek dek yal qadi' ('What Came Over You, Judge?'), demanding: 'This law must be undone and never done again!'[2] The press began to cover the Family Code around this time. In 2005, under pressure from women's organisations, Algeria amended the Family Code of 1984. Women gained more rights in marriage, divorce and citizenship. The male guardian's role became symbolic as they could no longer force women to marry against their will or oppose their choice in marriage. The legal age for marriage was changed from 21 for men and 18 for women to 19 for both sexes. The new code no longer prevents women from marrying non-Algerians and Algerian women married to foreigners can transmit their citizenship to their children. Men and women have reciprocal rights and duties, replacing an earlier clause which required the wife to obey her husband. Algerian women can transmit citizenship to their children. Many of the reforms in the Family Code appear to be a compromise between the Islamists and the women's right advocates. Algeria abolished repudiation as a form of divorce but polygamy is still legal, though subject to conditions (Marzouki 2010).

Up until 2008 there were no provisions in the Algerian Constitution specifically mentioning women's political rights. This changed with the 2008 constitution. For example, Chapter IV, Article 31bis states: 'The State shall work for the promotion of political rights of women by increasing their chances of access to representation in elected assemblies. The modalities of application of this Article shall be determined by an Institutional Act.'

As a result of pressure from women's organisations supported by donors, a quota law was passed in 2012 for women in the national, regional and local assemblies. Algeria, which has a list proportional representation electoral system, has a somewhat unique quota arrangement that includes both legislated candidate quotas and reserved seats. Women must make up 20% of the candidates on party lists for the People's National Assembly when the number of seats is equal to four; a 30% rate when the number of seats is five or more; a 35% rate when the number of seats is 14 or more; a 40% rate for 32 or more seats. Finally, a 50% rate is applicable to seats reserved for nationals living abroad. The law does not specify where the women are to be positioned. A similar system is in effect for the Wilaya People's Assemblies elections. In elections for the Communal People's Assemblies, women's representation is set at 30% in areas with a population greater than 20,000. Thus, as a consequence of the quota adoption, women's proportion of legislative representation in Algeria increased from 2.4% in 1987 prior to the war to 31.6% after the May 2012 elections.

The government supported these changes, in part, as a response to international pressures and to improve its image abroad (Lalami 2012), but also in response to pressure from some women's groups and from women parliamentarians close to the government. It should be noted that the issue proved to be fairly controversial among some women's groups, who felt their priorities lay elsewhere. One of the groups pushing for a greater presence of women has been the *Centre d'Information et de Documentation sur les Droits de l'Enfant et de la Femme* (CIDDEF, the Centre for Information and Documentation on the Rights of the Child and of Women). It is a partner of the feminist peace NGO CDF, which is an international organisation that works in southeast Europe, Israel, Palestine and the Maghreb (northwest Africa) on advancing women's rights. In 2006–07 they carried out a study of the electoral law and the implications of the constitution, provided documentation of the problem and organised workshops with media activists, parties and other members of civil society.[3] The president created a commission in 2009 to prepare a draft legislation for the Ministry of Justice. They lobbied political parties and their representatives in parliament, the trade union, universities and others. There were protests in May 2012 in which women actively participated and the government seized on this moment to introduce Article 31 that requires that 'The State shall work for the promotion of political rights of women by increasing their chances of access to representation in elected assemblies.'

According to Nadia Ait Zai, founder of CIDDEF, the election results of 2012 were a major victory for women.

> The women's associations acted as pressure groups, and this pressure was effective. The information and documentation center CIDDEF, for example, has been working systematically on this issue since 2003. We participated in a Maghreb-wide study on the subject of women in politics and pushed for changes at the highest level. The President has received our suggestion favorably. (Sabra 2012)

During the elections CIDDEF provided training for women candidates on how to give a speech, approach voters, organise public events and other such campaign tools. Civil society organisations are now working with the female parliamentarians on legislation regarding family law, sexual harassment, the divorce law and the representation of women on parliamentary committees. In 2016 a law on violence against women was passed in a landmark piece of legislation.

Thus, in Algeria several factors account for the adoption of quotas and the subsequent rise in female legislative representation. While international pressures and governmental support were important, it also involved pressure from women's organisations. Algeria has by no means democratised, but the lifting of restrictions on associations in 2011 provided sufficient impetus for women's organisations to expand and press their demands. And finally, changes due to the post-conflict disruptions in gender relations and expectations created conditions for women's changing political role. The oil economy and women's low participation in the labour force did not appear to be impediments to the adoption of quotas or to women's mobilisation for electoral reforms.

## Conclusions

The three case studies of Senegal, Mauritania and Algeria have allowed us to look more closely at the factors influencing women's legislative representation in Africa. They show that key existing explanations are strengthened by accounting for women's collective

mobilisation (e.g. international pressures, commitment of top leadership, post-conflict impacts and democratisation). In all three cases, women sought to implement quotas as a means of ensuring their increased representation. Quotas are often treated in the literature as though they are an independent factor. But they do not explain much on their own since one still needs to explain why they were introduced, which generally has to do with the need to address challenges women face in getting elected. Even international actors do not appear magically on their own. In this paper I have focused on women's rights coalitions, but these actors include government leaders, political parties and international actors, who may support the adoption of quotas for their own reasons that differ from those of women's movements.

Women's coalitional mobilisation challenges numerous key claims regarding influences on women's representation. In the case of cultural factors, there would need to be a demonstrable change in attitudes for culture to influence the election of women candidates. Instead, what we have seen is the mobilisation of key women's rights activists for the adoption of quotas in ways that make popular attitudes much less relevant, as was the case in Senegal.

The causal connections between women's representation and economic growth are also not evident, nor does female education and labour force participation operate in the same way in Africa as in Western industrialised countries. Women in most African countries are concentrated in the agricultural, trade and informal sectors. Yet countries like Mauritania with low GDP, female education and labour force participation have attained relatively higher rates of representation, significantly through women's mobilisation.

Finally, the claims that oil production dampens possibilities for women's representation are questionable, particularly since they are premised on women's education and levels of participation in the labour force. However, it is very difficult in Algeria and elsewhere to draw any causal connections between female education, labour force participation and oil production, on the one hand, and women's legislative representation on the other. The case of Algeria shows how other factors relating to women's mobilisation, post-conflict impacts, executive commitment and donor influences have influenced quota adoption and that these factors have had more impact on women's political leadership than oil production. Moreover, oil production reached a peak between 2008 and 2012 in Algeria at the same time that rates of female representation increased.

## Note on contributor

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## Notes

1. The top oil producers in Africa include Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Libya, Nigeria and Sudan.
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnuHcG1GAq4
3. http://www.ciddef-dz.com/pdf/revues/revue-15/femmes-et-politique-en-algerie.pdf

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