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Are Women Winning? Does Descriptive Representation of Women in Parliament Lead to Woman-Friendly Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Molly Willeford
Illinois Wesleyan University, mwillefo@iwu.edu

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Abstract

Under what conditions will women's presence in elective office promote woman-friendly policies? The research outlined here will examine this question through a comparison of six Sub-Saharan African democracies (Benin, Botswana, Lesotho, Senegal, South Africa and Tanzania). Women have been elected into sub-Saharan African parliaments in record numbers, but is this leading to increased substantive representation, or the enactment of policies that focus on benefitting women? Following a Most Similar Systems design, this research develops an original composite scale to measure woman-friendly policy and finds that there is no clear relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. The remainder of the analysis seeks to identify the factors that lead to the breakdown between women's presence and womanfriendly policy. While no relationship between descriptive and substantive representation exists, different institutional and cultural perspectives influence woman-friendly policy in this region.

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***Abstract:** Under what conditions will women's presence in elective office promote woman-friendly policies? The research outlined here will examine this question through a comparison of six Sub-Saharan African democracies (Benin, Botswana, Lesotho, Senegal, South Africa and Tanzania). Women have been elected into sub-Saharan African parliaments in record numbers, but is this leading to increased substantive representation, or the enactment of policies that focus on benefitting women? Following a Most Similar Systems design, this research develops an original composite scale to measure woman-friendly policy and finds that there is no clear relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. The remainder of the analysis seeks to identify the factors that lead to the breakdown between women's presence and woman-friendly policy. While no relationship between descriptive and substantive representation exists, different institutional and cultural perspectives influence woman-friendly policy in this region.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, women have been elected as Members of Parliament (MPs) in dramatically increasing numbers. Of the top ten nations in the world for gender parity in parliaments, four are Sub-Saharan African nations (IPU 2015). In fact, in 2008, Rwanda became the first country in the world to have more women than men in its lower chamber of parliament (Barnes and Burchard 2013). Yet, in that same country, 56% of women reported experiencing some kind of gender-based violence in 2014 (SIGI 2014). The region remains one of the worst in the world for gender-based violence: 40% of women living in Sub-Saharan Africa report that they have been victims of gender-based violence, and 54% believe that domestic abuse is an acceptable practice (SIGI 2014). The Social Institutions and Gender Index 2014 report states that “seven countries have no laws on rape, 17 have no laws on domestic violence, and 11 have no laws on sexual harassment” (SIGI 2014). As of last year, the region also reported high levels of discrimination regarding socio-economic rights; 18% of women living in the region do not have access to land titles, and discrimination in inheritance titles persists in 12 countries, making it difficult for women to have control over land and assets (SIGI 2014).

This raises several inter-related questions: under what conditions does women's presence in elected office lead to woman-friendly policy? Specifically, do women elected to national parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa work to pass legislation surrounding

violence against women? One of the main arguments regarding increased descriptive representation (presence in elected office) is that it will lead to substantive policies that benefit and are of concern to women (Bauer 2012; Stockemer 2011; Conner 2009; Krook 2009; Bauer 2008; Bauer & Britton 2006). Do sub-Saharan African countries with higher levels of female legislative representation have less discriminatory policies than sub-Saharan African countries with lower levels of female descriptive representation? If not, then what may help to explain why presence does not result in concrete policy or status improvements for women?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is much debate on the link between women's descriptive representation and substantive representation. Many believe that women involved in parliaments will bring increased attention to women's interests and, therefore will bring about more woman-friendly policies (Barnes & Burchard 2013; Stockemer 2011; Tripp & Kang 2008). However, much of the literature suggests that no clear link exists between increased numbers in parliaments and woman-friendly policy being passed in the legislatures (Bauer & Burnet 2013; Conner 2008; Waylen 2008; Bauer 2008). If electing more women to parliament does not produce positive policy outcomes in areas like domestic abuse and rape, then what explains that discrepancy? The literature suggests that other kinds of institutional and cultural factors may promote or inhibit woman-friendly policy making.

Arguably, democracies are the better type of government for achieving substantive representation. Women are more likely to have their positions heard in a democracy as opposed to an authoritarian regime (Bauer 2012; Stockemer 2011; Tripp & Kang 2008; Yoon 2004). Legislators in authoritarian regimes may not have much policy-making power, due to power being vested elsewhere, in the executive (Stockemer 2011). Newer democratic constitutions, on the contrary, often play a role in shaping progressive policy regarding women, reflecting the "changing of times" (Bauer 2012).

Gender quotas have become a common solution for the problem of low descriptive representation of women, but while a gender quota may increase women's presence in the halls of power, that does not necessarily lead to improved policy sway (Bauer 2012; Bauer 2008; Conner 2008). This can often happen when a government

adopts reserved seats or legislated party quotas (Adams 2011; Conner 2008; Tripp & Kang 2008).

Research suggests that voluntary party quotas empower women and reduce tokenism, the idea that only a symbolic effort is being made like recruiting more women into political office. Often, the push for an adoption of gender quotas comes through pressure from international organizations or governments to increase female representation (Barnes & Burchard 2013; Waylen 2008). In 1995, a Conference on Women in Beijing, hosted by the UN, made a call for gender parity in bodies of government by the year 2015 (Krook 2009). This was made in hopes of not only including more women in political decision-making bodies, but to hopefully see more woman-friendly policy being passed in countries where women are marginalized, like sub-Saharan Africa (Amoateng, *et al* 2014).

Adoption of voluntary quotas, however, probably relies on some level of cultural support for gender equality. One of the most influential cultural factors is religion (Norris & Inglehart 2001). Studies have found that Catholic countries adhere to more hierarchal and authoritarian cultural values (Norris & Inglehart 2001). However, even more studies have shown that Catholicism does not matter – if a country is Catholic or Protestant, or even predominantly Christian, they will have more women friendly policies and practices than states with other religious practices (Norris & Inglehart 2001). Countries that tend to practice indigenous religions will have a harder time accepting pro-woman policies. Catholic, Islamic, and indigenous religions doctrines take a more traditional view of women's roles in society, encouraging larger families, and restrict women's bodily autonomy, placing women in subordinate positions to men in society, economy, and family. In such societies, which may often be agrarian, it is less likely to find societal support (or demand) for woman-friendly policies, such as laws against rape or child marriage laws. It will also be likely for traditional societies to adopt voluntary gender quotas that promote women's presence in policy-effective ways.

The literature reviewed here suggests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Sub-Saharan African countries with higher numbers of women in parliaments will pass more woman-friendly policies.

Hypothesis 2: Favoring institutional factors will contribute to more woman-friendly policies in place.

Hypothesis 2a: Voluntary political party quotas will lead to more woman-friendly policies.

Hypothesis 2b: Proportional representation voting systems will favor more woman-friendly policies.

Hypothesis 3: Favoring cultural factors, like religions and birth rates, will contribute to more woman-friendly policies.

Hypothesis 3a: Countries that are Christian will favor more woman-friendly policies.

Hypothesis 3b: Countries with lower fertility rates will favor more woman-friendly policies.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND MEASUREMENT

The current research employs a small-N comparative cases design involving six sub-Saharan African democracies that vary substantially in terms of the main hypothesis variable: women's descriptive representation. The cases are all considered free democracies by the Freedom House 2015 report (scoring 1 to 3). See Table 1. Twelve sub-Saharan African countries meet that criterion. From those, six were selected for their variation on the main hypothesis variable, women's share of the lower or only house in the legislature. Female representation in the sample ranges from a low of 7.2% in Benin to a high of 42.7% in Senegal. If Hypothesis 1 is valid, then Benin should have the least woman-friendly policies and Senegal should have much stronger legal protections of women's bodily safety and autonomy.

Dependent Variable Measure

Woman-friendly policy, as defined in the literature review, can be an all-encompassing term. The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI 2014) database created a score for 160 countries around the world, measuring policy relating to women's rights. The index measures the legality of discriminatory family codes; restricted physical integrity; son bias; restricted resources and assets; and restricted civil liberties (SIGI 2014). For the purposes of this study, only the subcategories of discriminatory family codes, restricted physical integrity, and restricted civil liberties will be examined.

Table 1: Case Selection

Country:	Freedom House Score:	Percentage (from IPU):
Benin	2	7.2%
Botswana	2.5	9.5%
Lesotho	2.5	25%
Tanzania	3	36%
S. Africa	2	41.9%
Senegal	2	42.7%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) "Women in National Parliaments" database from September 2015.

The database measures the legal framework from 0, meaning the law guarantees this right, to 1, meaning there are no laws in place at this time for this right. So if a country has a 0 for laws addressing domestic abuse, this country would have adequate laws in place and would have no problems with the implementation of said law (SIGI 2014). However, if a country were to have a score of 1, then there would be no adequate laws in place addressing domestic abuse in this country. While this score is an accurate measure of laws in each country, the coding for this research has been flipped to produce more intuitive findings. A score of 1 means that there are adequate laws in place and no problems of implementation, and 0 means no laws are in place. A weight of 0.50 was given to laws addressing domestic violence, rape, and sexual harassment, because those issues are of obvious urgency for women. Table 2 shows how each of the composite scores were assigned to each case, given the SIGI Index score of legislation in place to address issues of legal ages of marriage, parental authority in divorce, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, and access to public spaces. The numbers were added together and weighted to produce the scores shown in Table 2. The values range from least friendly (Tanzania, 4.25) to most friendly (South Africa, 7.5).

Table 2: Dependent Variable Composition

	Tanzania	Senegal	Botswana	Lesotho	Benin	S. Africa
Legal Age of Marriage	0	0.25	0.5	0.5	1	1
Parental Authority in Divorce	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	1	1
Inheritance Rights for Daughters	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1
Laws Addressing Domestic Violence	1	1	1.25	0	1.25	1.25
Laws Addressing Rape	1.25	1	1	1.25	1	1.25
Laws Addressing Sexual Harassment	1	1.25	1	1	1.25	1
Access to Public Space	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	1
TOTALS	4.5	5	5.25	5.25	6.5	7.5

Source: Social Institution and Gender Index (SIGI) Data from 2014.

Independent Variables

Independent variable measures come from a range of standard data sources. Years of independence were obtained from the Country Profiles from the CIA World Factbook. Gender Gap Index scores were taken from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report from 2014. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) presence was taken from their About Africa page. Gender Inequality Index scores and Human Development Index ranks were obtained through the Human Development reports issued by the UNDP. Gross Domestic Product purchasing power parity (GDP PPP) per capita was gathered through the World Bank's GDP per capita PPP measure. Fragile States Index rankings were gathered from the Fund For Peace's Fragile States Index report from

2015. The years that constitutions were enacted were found from the Country Profiles from the CIA World Factbook. Voting systems information was acquired from the Parline Database from the IPU. Information about different quotas was retrieved from the Quota Project's Global Database of Quotas for Women, part of the IPU's research. Majority religious beliefs were also taken from the CIA World Factbook. Fertility rates were taken from the World Bank's fertility rates totals.

ANALYSIS

Hypothesis 1 posits that there will be a positive relationship between descriptive and substantive representation of women. Table 3 shows the final composite scores for each of the cases in comparison to their percentages of women in parliament. South Africa scores the highest on the dependent variable scale, with the second highest percentage of women of the countries examined. Tanzania, however, scores the lowest, even with the third highest percentage of women in parliament. Indeed, there appears to be no clear covariation between the main hypotheses variable and the dependent variable. The overall hypothesis that higher descriptive representation will lead to more substantive representation is not upheld based on the results in Table 3. What, then, can explain the variation in woman-friendly policy in the sample?

Table 3: *Descriptive Representation and Substantive Representation*

Country:	Tanzania	Senegal	Botswana	Lesotho	Benin	S. Africa
Percent:	36% (medium)	42.7% (high)	9.5% (low)	25% (medium)	7.2% (low)	41.9% (high)
Composite Score:	4.5	5	5.25	5.25	6.5	7.5

In a Most Similar Systems Design, cases are compared by controlling variables to account for the variance with the dependent variable, woman-friendly policy. By controlling for these similar variables, the potential independent variable, or variables, causing the variance will emerge. Why is Benin outscoring four other countries? Why is Tanzania with women constituting 36% of its legislature so unfriendly to women in the policy arena? Table 4 allows us to eliminate several possible answers and hone in on the

factors that can explain the disconnect between women's legislative presence and woman-friendly policy on the most basic women's issue: bodily autonomy.

In broad terms, all of the countries in the sample are post-colonial, with a UNDP presence, and substantial gender gaps. Those similarities cannot explain the wide dispersion on the dependent variable. With the exception of South Africa and Botswana, all of the cases have low HDI rankings, low GDP per capita, high state fragility, and sharp gender inequality. In South Africa, relative strength in those areas seems to correlate with better outcomes as one would expect; but that is not the case in Botswana. This leaves a set of institutional and cultural variables summarized in Table 5.

Which of these variables can account for the variance in woman-friendly policy across six cases? To begin, the year of the latest constitutional amendment seems to correspond to the score for policy received. At the Beijing Conference, mentioned earlier, countries around the globe were called upon to increase the numbers of women in the parliaments. As past literature suggests, one of the fastest ways to increase women in parliaments is through the adoption of quotas (Krook 2009; Tripp & Kang 2008). After the call for more women was made by the UN, most constitutions after 1995 include some provision for the inclusion of more women. With the exception of Senegal, those cases with their latest constitutions amended or adjusted in the 1990s typically scored higher on the woman-friendly policy scale. Tanzania has the second oldest constitution and it has the lowest score for woman-friendly policy. Senegal, on the other hand, is the exception: with a constitution last amended in 2001, it reports high numbers of women in parliament, potentially as a direct result from the 1995 UN Conference, and yet it scored low on the policy composite scale.

Table 4: Sub-Saharan African Cases

	Tanzania	Senegal	Botswana	Lesotho	Benin	S. Africa
Year of Independence	1964	1960	1966	1966	1960	1961
Gender Gap Index	0.718	0.691	0.713	0.725	---	0.753
UNDP Presence	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender Inequality Index	0.533	0.537	0.486	0.557	0.614	0.461
HDI Rank	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Medium
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$1,656	\$2,174	\$14,454	\$2,390	\$1,643	\$12,042
Fragile States Index	High Warning	High Warning	Low Warning	Warning	Warning	Low Warning
Latest Constitution	1977	2001	1966	1993	1990	1997
Voting System	Majority	Mixed	Majority	Mixed	Proportional	Proportional
Quotas	Reserved Seats	LCQ	VPPQ	LCQ	none	VPPQ
Majority Religious Beliefs	Muslim & Indigenous beliefs	Muslim	Christian	Christian	Catholic	Christian
Percent Economy by sector	Ag - 31.5% Ind - 25% S - 43.5%	Ag - 15.8% Ind - 23.5% S - 60.7%	Ag - 2.4% Ind - 39.2% S - 58.4%	Ag - 5.4% Ind - 31.9% S - 68.1%	Ag - 23.5% Ind - 23.2% S - 53.4%	Ag - 2.5% Ind - 29.5% S - 68%
Fertility Rates	5.2	4.9	2.6	3.0	4.8	2.4
IPU Percent	36%	42.7%	935%	25%	7.2%	41.9%
Composite Score	4.25	5	5.25	5.25	6.5	7.5

Importantly, Tanzania and South Africa, the low and high poles on woman-friendly policy, appear to be polar opposites for every institutional and cultural variable. Institutionally, quotas voting systems, the literature suggests that the most effective way to including more women in parliaments is through proportional representation (PR) list electoral system: this system allows more women to enter parliament and gain positions of influence (Adams 2011; Yoon 2004). South Africa's voting system is a PR list system, allowing for the party to include more women on these lists for each political party (Bauer & Britton 2006). In direct contrast, Tanzania operates in a majoritarian electoral system, which some regard as the unfriendly "opposite" of the PR list system.

Table 5: Institutional and Cultural Differences

	Tanzania	Senegal	Botswana	Lesotho	Benin	S. Africa
Latest Constitution	1977	2001	1966	1993	1990	1997
Voting System	Majority	Mixed	Majority	Mixed	Proportional	Proportional
Quotas	Reserved Seats	LCQ	VPPQ	LCQ	none	VPPQ
Majority Religious Beliefs	Muslim & Indigenous beliefs	Muslim	Christian	Christian	Catholic	Christian
Percent Economy by sector	Ag - 31.5% Ind - 25% S - 43.5%	Ag - 15.8% Ind - 23.5% S - 60.7%	Ag - 2.4% Ind - 39.2% S - 58.4%	Ag - 5.4% Ind - 31.9% S - 68.1%	Ag - 23.5% Ind - 23.2% S - 53.4%	Ag - 2.5% Ind - 29.5% S - 68%
Fertility Rates	5.2	4.9	2.6	3.0	4.8	2.4
IPU Percent	36%	42.7%	935%	25%	7.2%	41.9%
Composite Score	4.25	5	5.25	5.25	6.5	7.5

As Tanzania votes within a majoritarian system, it is not always proportionate to the way citizens cast their votes. Elections in this system are typically more localized than PR elections, meaning they have smaller constituencies as well (Electoral Reform

Society 2010). With this kind of voting system, typically there is either a single party running for office or a two-party group. This limited number of parties does not allow for the full range of potential female candidates, as the PR system does. The number of women elected into office is directly related to the voting system within a given, and getting women into elected office is half of the battle of implementing woman-friendly policy. A woman-friendly voting system, like the PR list system, makes it easier for women to gain access into parliaments. Tanzania's majoritarian system could account for the drastically low woman-friendly policy score.

Going hand-in-hand with voting system, the types of quotas, if any, can be another significant factor for determining woman-friendly policies. Once again, Tanzania and South Africa appear to be on the opposite ends of the spectrum. South Africa has a voluntary political party quota in place. This ensures that some kind of percentage of women is given seats – these quotas are different than legislated quotas in the sense that political parties voluntarily adopt these quotas. In South Africa, paired with a PR voting system, these kinds of quotas govern where each candidate is positioned on the list. Voluntary quotas usually have women making up anywhere between 25 to 50 percent of the list (Krook 2009). South Africa's majority party, the African National Congress (ANC) is the only political party in the country with a quota provision in place – 50 percent of the seats won in any election, local or national, must go to women legislators (Quota Project 2015). Because the ANC has voluntarily established these quota provisions, it shows that the party wants more women involved. When a party and a system is friendly to women, it is likely that more will be done for women's interests as a whole.

Tanzania does have a kind of quota in place called reserved seats. These seats are guaranteed to go to women; they are different than a legislated or voluntary party in the fact that while 50 percent of the seats won will go to women, with reserved seats a predetermined number of seats in parliament will go to women no matter what (Quota Project 2015). While this method is great for ensuring that more women are involved in parliament, it does run the risk of becoming purely symbolic, leading to the problem of tokenism (Krook 2009; Conner 2008; Tripp & Kang 2008). This is what may be

happening in Tanzania; women are being represented at a higher rate, but they have little to show for it in terms of woman-friendly policy in the country.

Cultural factors also play a huge role in determining the reach of woman-friendly policies in a country, as Hypothesis 3 implies. These factors can range from the major religious beliefs of a state to fertility rates. Religion is a common theme through sub-Saharan Africa. It is hard to say whether or not religions can be “opposite” of one another, but again to contrast the highest scoring and lowest scoring cases, South Africa and Tanzania, looking at each case’s major religious beliefs have shed some light on these differences.

Hypothesis 3a regarding religion can be accepted. The major religious belief of Tanzania is that of the Islamic faith. The Western world holds a stereotype that the Islamic faith is one that is not favorable towards women. While in some cases this may be true, religion is a difficult area since most religions are not “one-size-fits-all” – meaning that one version of Islam does not necessarily apply to all parts of the Islamic world. With Tanzania, however, another major religious belief is those indigenous beliefs, or the beliefs of the local tribes in the country. The numerous indigenous tribes in this country and perhaps in many of the other cases mentioned, may hold patriarchal beliefs that prohibit women from holding positions of power. While the region of sub-Saharan Africa is very vast and diverse, it is nearly impossible to generalize the experiences of one country to many different countries around the region. There are many Islamic countries in the region, including another case in this study, Senegal. Yet Tanzania and Senegal scored differently on the scale and have differences in the variables as well.

Fertility rates too should be noted for their variance. Hypothesis 3b can be accepted; lower fertility rates will amount for more woman-friendly policy. South Africa has a much lower fertility rate than the other cases in the study. Tanzania has the highest fertility rate of the cases and scored the worst on the composite measure of the dependent variable. When a society favors more children per woman, it seems to lack policy in place to help these women and their families. Overall, Hypothesis 3 and 3b could be accepted based on the research. Hypothesis 3a could be partially accepted, with the exception of Benin.

CONCLUSION

“Representation is a necessary condition for policy effectiveness, but it is not a sufficient condition by any means” (Hassim 2006). This quote from the book *Women in African Parliaments* rings true in the case of this study. While no relationship was found connecting women’s descriptive representation and substantive representation of woman-friendly policy, there are other instances worth exploring. Strong correlations involving voting systems and quotas imply that these systems are influential on the kinds of policy made regarding women. Institutional and cultural circumstances should be explored in all cases, and perhaps throughout the region to find connections and correlations. However, as sub-Saharan Africa is such a diverse region itself, this may prove difficult as each country may vary. Another possible factor to consider is adherence to implicit tribal laws: are there tribal laws being followed, exempted from governing bodies? Could other factors besides those cultural and institutional ones mentioned be playing into a surplus or lack of policy?

An in-depth case study examining both Tanzania and South Africa should be strived for in future studies. Cultural and institutional factors should be examined closely. While women in parliaments is an important way to include more woman-friendly policy, it is not the only factor involved in the process of including more legislation regarding women.

Inglehart and Norris remark, “Moving further toward achieving equality for women... remains one of the most important challenges facing governments in the twenty-first century.” This is especially true in sub-Saharan Africa. When women are equal in terms of the law, a country can greatly benefit. Marginalizing and excluding women from policies and politics can have disastrous consequences for a country’s progress.

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