Women's Political Leadership & Women's Wellbeing

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Thinking globally, what are effective policies aimed at improving the wellbeing, economic security, and life satisfaction of women and girls?
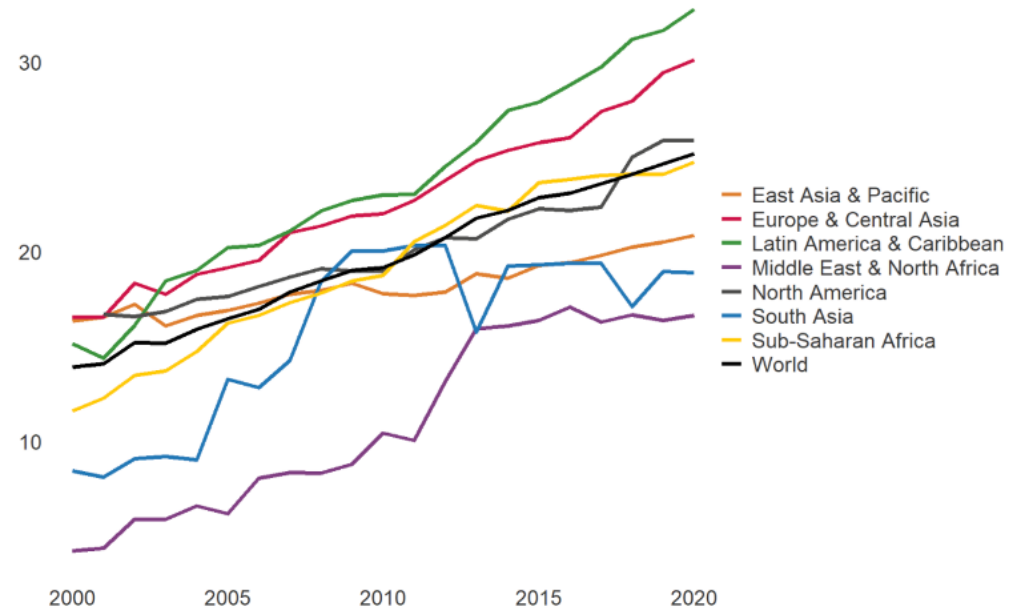
Women in positions of political power.

Women's representation in politics is increasing worldwide

Globally, representation of women in the national parliament has doubled

Over the past 20 years, women's share in the national parliaments (SDG target 5.5) has been increasing steadily in every region. Many countries have introduced quotas to ensure that women constitute a "critical minority" (at least 30 percent) in their legislative bodies. Only two regions, Latin American & Caribbean (33 percent) and Europe and Central Asia (30 percent) have crossed this threshold.

Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)

- East Asia & Pacific
- Europe & Central Asia
- Latin America & Caribbean
- Middle East & North Africa
- North America
- South Asia
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- World

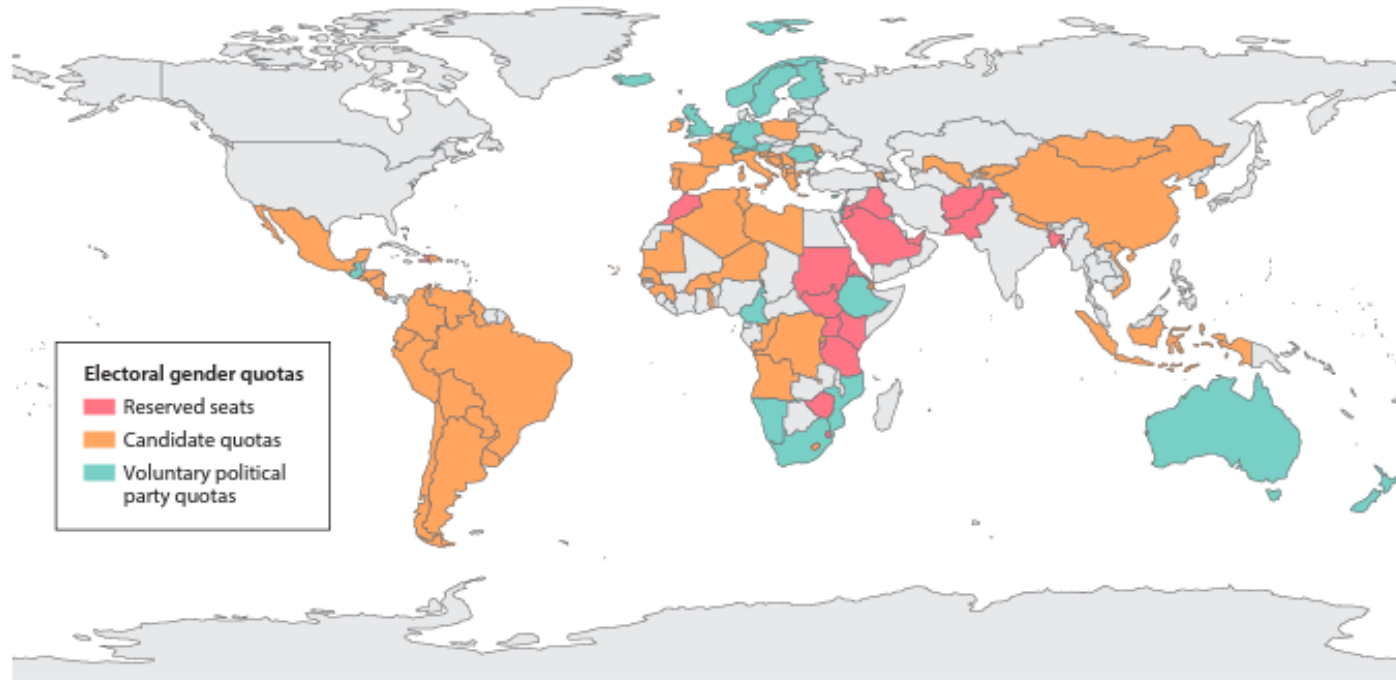# Quotas now exist in most countries around the world.

Figure 1

Map of countries that have adopted electoral gender quotas. Countries are coded as having a voluntary party quota if the total number of adopting parties amounts to at least 30% of the legislature. Two countries—Rwanda and Mauritania—have both reserved seat and candidate quotas, coded here as having the latter. Data are from Hughes et al. (2017a), Clayton & Zetterberg (2018), and International IDEA (2020).

Image from Clayton, Amanda. 2021. How Do Electoral Gender Quotas Affect Policy. *Annual Review of Political Science.*

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states:

"The concept of democracy will have real and dynamic meaning and lasting effect only when political decision-making is shared by women and men and takes equal account of the interest of both"

What are the policy impacts of including women in political decision-making?

Where do men and women differ in the political priorities?

Cross-nationally:

- Women more than men tend to prioritize: healthcare, poverty reduction, and women's rights.
- In the Global South: water
- In the Global North: climate change

Do women make a difference?

- Overwhelming, when women enter positions of power, policies change.
- Two examples:
  - Canonical study from India: village-level quota → more potable water
  - In Uganda: women MPs refused to legislate until the government dedicated more funding to maternal health

Another example: women and deforestation in Malawi

- We randomize the gender composition of groups which debate and then vote on policies to combat deforestation in nearby forest reserves

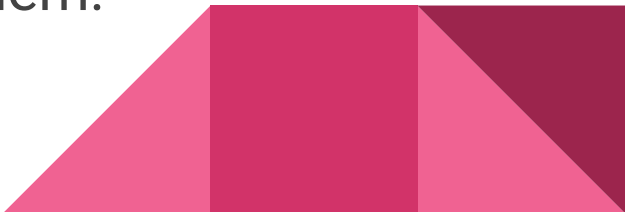- Women's relative influence in group decisions increases with their group share.

But, we can't just "add women and stir"

- Support training for women MPs / funding for women's caucuses

- Improve parliamentary culture / quality of democracy: e.g. reduce corruption

Overcoming barriers to women entering politics

- Programs to recruit and train women candidates
- Supporting women's movements
- Encouraging policies that free up women's time; e.g., access to childcare
- Punishing VAW, particularly VAW in politics
- Encouraging the adoption of gender quotas → particularly when there are local groups that support them.

Thank you.