

Electoral Gender Quotas in Autocratic Regimes: devil in disguise for women's political representation?

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New research into the impact of electoral gender quotas in sub-Saharan Africa finds they may curtail women's substantive political representation in autocratic settings.

Applying a feminist theoretical lens to the case studies of Rwanda and Uganda, the research studies both the incorporation and inclusion of women (examining drivers of reform and de facto implementation of policy), and the substantive effects of the quota system on women's political representation in these two countries.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the essay finds that quotas in Uganda have participated in opening political space for women, whereas in Rwanda, the tightening of the political space has constrained inclusive and meaningful gender reforms.

The research posits that the women's caucus in Uganda's parliament has created a channel for women activists to shape the parliamentary agenda in ways that have been impossible in Rwanda.

The findings go against the broader literature, which usually finds electoral gender quotas to be either beneficial or benign, chiefly because studies are overall concerned with quotas adopted within democratic settings.

The findings provide an avenue for rethinking the way in which we assess women's political representation, and an opportunity for refining good governance and development programmes' indicators, shifting focus away from numerical representation and towards substantive representation.