

The Impact of Electoral Gender Quotas on Women's Political Participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Politics in Central Europe (ISSN 1801-3422)
Vol. 19, No. 4
DOI: 10.2478/pce-2023-0034

Abstract: *Although representing half of the world population, women remain largely excluded from political power and government structures. Various strategies have been introduced to increase women's political representation, including electoral gender quotas. This paper explores the impact of electoral gender quotas on women's quantitative participation in politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, analysing quota impact in combination with other related factors, such as the quota design, implementation and broader political context. A diversity of techniques has been used to collect a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, including academic resources collection and analysis, desk research, statistical data analysis and online questionnaire. The paper argues that electoral gender quotas have generally had a positive impact on getting women elected in BiH, though their efficacy depends on their formulation and other aspects of electoral law. Still, quantitative representation of women is not sufficient to facilitate their agency in politics. Social attitudes also continue to affect the electoral success of women once they secure a spot on the candidate list. Therefore, quotas must be implemented within a broader democratic, accountable and gender-sensitive political context to deliver qualitative representation of women in politics. Finally, the paper offers concrete recommendations to promote women's political participation in BiH.*

Keywords: *women's political participation, gender equality, electoral gender quotas, Bosnia and Herzegovina, democracy, political culture*

I. Introduction

According to the World Bank data for 2022, women represent almost half of the world's population. Therefore, the participation of women in social and political processes, in the context of human rights, should be at least approximate.¹ Although female contribution to the development of society is significant, both from the productive and reproductive aspects, throughout history women have been largely excluded from power and government structures (Connell 1987). Various social, structural and functional factors and circumstances influenced such a state of affairs, including the fact that some of the earliest and most prominent political thinkers and philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes and Hegel, believed that women were intended exclusively for roles in the household, the roles of mothers, wives and housewives, and that they have no place in politics. This patriarchal relationship and the division of society into the private, non-political sphere, reserved for women, and the public, political sphere, reserved for men, persisted until the 19th century and the emergence of liberal political philosophy (Phillips 1998; Rai 2000).

Women's participation in political processes varies from country to country. The trend of increased participation of women in politics is more pronounced in developed democratic countries compared to less developed ones. However, women's overall participation in political decision-making processes is far below satisfactory (Clayton 2021). According to UN data from January of this year, women hold positions of heads of state in only 17 countries, and in 19 they hold positions of head of government. Based on the same data, women occupy 22.8% of ministerial positions worldwide, and in only 13 countries the number of women holding ministerial positions is 50% or more. The percentage of women parliamentarians is 26.5, and in only six countries is the number of women parliamentarians higher than 50%: Rwanda 61%, Cuba 53%, Nicaragua 52%, Mexico, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates at 50% each (UN 2023).

Women's political participation is key to strong, vibrant and inclusive democracies (Hinojosa & Caul Kittilson, 2020). Yet, women remain under-represented in decision-making that affects them, their families and communities (van Heel Merdanovic 2020). Electoral gender quotas are an increasingly popular response to addressing women's under-representation in elected office, having been introduced in more than 100 countries worldwide (Dahlerup 2006). Gender quotas do aim to ensure a level playing field in politics; however, their impact – positive or negative – and their success factors are not uniformly analysed or recognised. 'Quota proponents see them primarily as a means to

1 According to the World Bank data, the number of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2021 was 50.8% out of the total population. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=BA>

improve the representation of women, while their opponents emphasise the potential threat to meritocratic selection' (Besley et al. 2017: 2005).

To address inequalities, gender quotas have also been introduced across the Western Balkans, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). However, since their introduction in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1998, gender quotas have delivered varying degrees of success in getting women into elected office (Boric 2004). After the last 2022 elections, women's representation in the lower house of parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina was at 16.7%; however, this figure has greatly varied since the quota introduction, from 28.6% women parliamentarians in 1998 to 7% in 2000, to 19.1% today (Inter-Parliamentary Union, April 2023). Various factors that may have contributed to the success or failure of electoral gender quotas in Bosnia and Herzegovina need to be explored, such as their enforcement or the broader political context.

II. Literature review

While gender quotas can take various forms, this paper addresses electoral gender quotas, namely legal quotas enacted through electoral code provisions, commonly prescribing that all political parties nominate a certain percentage of women candidates on their party lists or less commonly within the broader group of single-mandate districts, depending on the electoral system. Campa and Hauser explain that the main objective of gender quotas is to reduce gender gaps in numeric representation on electoral lists and in the targeted elected offices (Campa – Hauser 2020).

Gender quotas vary in terms of their formulation. 'Legal quotas generally call for women to form between 25 per cent and 50 per cent of all parliamentary candidates nominated by political parties. In most instances, the language of these measures is gender-neutral, speaking of women and men together or making reference to the "under-represented sex"' (Norris – Krook 2011: 29). Yet, Norris and Krook further emphasise that the legal definition of quotas is not equally precise in terms of a clear articulation of the desired goals: some countries, such as France, use the vague formulation 'facilitating access', while others offer unambiguous and concrete guidelines and instructions regarding the selection and placement of female candidates. The latter situation exists in countries such as Belgium, Argentina and Costa Rica. Since these issues are clearly defined by law, they are at the same time subject to supervision and control by external bodies such as electoral commissions, as in the case of Mexico and Portugal. In addition, any non-compliance with legal provisions related to gender quotas entails appropriate sanctions (2011).

In terms of gender quota impact, political scientists such as Dahlerup and Krook argue that the presence of gender quotas as special measures can have a positive impact on women's representation and democracy overall, provided

such measures are effectively designed and enforced (Dahlerup 2006; Krook 2006). In accordance with this thinking, Camp and Hauser point out that ‘Quotas increase women’s representation in electoral lists, but only when they are binding and appropriately enforced (i.e. the cost for parties for not complying with the quota must be high enough)’ (2020: 4). On the other hand, the same authors emphasise that when quotas are used only for the purpose of creating electoral lists with female names being deliberately and strategically placed in ‘not-winning’ positions and from which there is a very low probability that they will be elected, this kind of tactic using electoral quotas has the potential to seriously undermine the effect of the principle of electoral quotas on the election of women. (2020)

Quota critics, on the other hand, perceive gender quotas as undemocratic, violating voter’s rights, imposing a concluded order of candidates or placing women in positions of no influence, hence not contributing to women’s actual agency in politics (Tuffy 2011). Tuffy further highlights the discriminatory nature of gender quotas as they are used to discriminate against both women and men. Namely, the proposed gender quotas mean that candidates will be excluded from the voting lists solely on the basis of gender quotas, which makes such a discriminatory procedure legally mandatory (2011). Bittner argues that forced parity would result in forced representation: ‘It would question voter judgment and pre-engineer a certain result. It would impair the freedom of parties to nominate their best candidates. It would install a discriminatory principle that could eventually swing back at the very group it aims to emancipate. Nor will quotas, in the immediate term, do anything to overturn the root causes of gender disparity in political representation’ (Bittner 2019).

Finally, some researchers go as far as claiming that gender quotas improve the overall quality of politicians and have broader benefits to societies. Besley et al. argue that a gender quota improved the quality of politicians in Sweden, particularly men. By giving special impetus to meritocracy, gender quotas have influenced the strengthening of the competences of politicians where the representation of women has increased the most. They argue that: ‘the resignation of mediocre male leaders was a key driver of this effect’ (Besley et al. 2017: 2204). Similarly, Baltrunaite et al. find that a gender quota improved the average education of elected politicians in Italy (2014).

Gender quotas in Bosnia and Herzegovina were first introduced after the war in 1998 by the Provisional Election Council, as a result of an active women’s campaign, requiring at least 30 percent women on every party list and prescribing that at least three women be included among the first ten candidates on electoral lists. Implemented within the framework of closed electoral lists, the quotas delivered 30 percent women MPs, namely 13 out of 42 officials elected to the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly. Still, application of the quota regulation was not without difficulties, with some parties ignoring the provisions, others filling the women positions on the lists with in experi-

enced peon women or so-called alibi women relatives, to be easily controlled or replaced (Boric 2004). In 2013 the gender quota threshold was raised to 40%.

In 2020, Article 4.19 was included in the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, originally ‘stipulating one-third representation of women... applied to all party lists’, to be implemented in the 2000 election within the framework of an open-list proportional representation system. The gender quota requirements ‘passed in Bosnia in 2000 were made more precise in 2001 to specify the positions on party lists where female candidates had to be placed: at least one woman among the first two candidates, two among the first five, and three among the first eight’ (Krook 2009: 49).

Today, Article 4. 19. (3) of the Election Code prescribes that ‘every candidate list shall include candidates of male and female gender, who are equally represented. Equal representation of the genders shall exist in case when one of the genders is represented with minimum of 40% of the total number of candidates on the list. The minority gender candidates shall be distributed on the candidates list in the following manner: at least one minority gender candidate amongst the first two candidates, two minority gender candidates amongst the first five candidates, and three minority gender candidates amongst the first eight candidates, et seq’ (International IDEA, QuotaProject, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018).

However, to what extent electoral gender quotas have ensured women’s place and influence in the politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina is to be further explored. Without understanding the broader electoral and political context, an isolated analysis of gender quotas may deliver inaccurate conclusions and possibly ill-informed policy decisions.

III. Research design and methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research paper explores the impact of electoral gender quotas on women’s quantitative participation in politics of BiH, analysing the impact of quotas in combination with other related factors, such as their actual design and implementation, and the broader political culture and context they are part of.

More specifically, the following research questions will be examined:

1. What impact do electoral gender quotas have on women’s quantitative representation in politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina?
2. Does quota formulation have a significant influence on its success?
3. What additional factors, such as the broader political culture and context, contribute to women’s political representation?
4. What conclusions and recommendations can be made about the broader quota and policy framework most conducive to advancing women to politics?

The research is based on one dependent variable, women's political representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a set of independent variables, namely electoral gender quotas, quota design and enforcement, political situation and context.

Based on research objectives and research questions, the following hypotheses will be tested in the paper:

- H1:** An electoral gender quota with a higher threshold, strict placement order and effective sanctions for non-compliance has broadly contributed to higher women's political representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- H2:** Women's quantitative representation has not automatically translated into women's qualitative representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, demonstrating the limitations of the impact of electoral gender quotas.
- H3:** Progress in women's political representation is not necessarily linear in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but is rather influenced by a complex web of related factors, such as political and cultural context, ethnic tensions and the activity of women's movements.

3.2 Research Methodology

The methodology was carried out in four phases, preparatory phase, literature review, data collection and drafting phase, as per the timeline below. A diversity of techniques has been used to collect a combination of *quantitative* and *qualitative* data, including academic resources collection and analysis, desk research, statistical data analysis and online questionnaire. The preparatory phase defined the research methodology, identifying the specifics of electoral quota measures introduced in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1998, administering an online questionnaire to the wider public in BiH on their perception of the impact of the gender quota. The literature review phase collected and analysed academic resources, including books, articles and journal editorials. Collection and analysis of relevant quota legislation, practitioner's guidebooks and relevant reports has also been undertaken.

The data collection phase commenced with a quantitative analysis of women's numeric representation levels before and after introduction of electoral gender quota in BiH, and measure of change, conducted through historic and statistical data collection and analysis, using the IPU Database on Women in Parliaments. A qualitative analysis of quota impact on women's substantive representation levels was conducted through the primary data collected from a questionnaire administered online and targeting the wider public in BiH. Specific attention was paid to ensure diversity among the research objects, including questionnaire respondents and interviewees, focusing on diversity in demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, professional affiliation

and place of residence. The drafting phase summarised the findings, preparing a draft report for review, with comments and suggestions taken into account in the preparation of the final draft.

Table 1: Research timeline

Research phase	Task
Preparatory phase	Preparation of research methodology, including target audience for the questionnaire and individual interviews.
	Design of data collection tools, such as the online questionnaire form and interview questions.
Literature review phase	Collection and analysis of academic resources for the literature review, including books, articles, columns.
	Collection and analysis of relevant quota legislation, practitioner’s guidebooks and reports.
Data collection phase	Quantitative analysis of women’s numeric representation levels before and after introduction of electoral gender quota, and measure of change, conducted through historic and statistical data collection, using the IPU Database on Women in Parliaments.
	Analysis of quota impact on women’s representation levels, conducted through survey results
Drafting phase	Preparation of draft paper for review
	Finalisation of paper

3.3 Research limitations

While the present research seeks to address a multitude of aspects that affect the success of quotas, it is not without shortcomings. Two main limitations to the present methodology have been identified. The first one is that it does not look at the quantitative representation of women at the canton’s level or in the upper house of BiH’s parliament. Considering the complex federal structure of BiH, additional research would be worth exploring whether the quota, or lack thereof, has different outcomes at different levels of government. This would have contributed to a more well-rounded understanding of the political participation of women. Secondly, the qualitative or substantive representation of women in the House of Representatives has not been considered in-depth.

While this research provides an overview of the quantitative representation of women as perceived in the attitudes of the public, it does not inquire into how women exercise influence in politics, how women in parliament address issues that might affect women, and to what extent women in politics represent the interests of women as a group in society. Such an inquiry would be important for understanding whether women's quantitative representation translates into qualitative representation. At the same time, it is difficult to research qualitative representation, as it requires a strong theoretical underpinning on what is to be considered a woman's issue in societies, as well as lengthy data analysis. As such, it was not feasible to include this aspect in the current research design. Even though the qualitative aspects have not been considered in their entirety, the survey offers an insight into whether the public, namely potential voter, perceives women's representation in parliament to be symbolic or substantive, which could be a starting point for a more in-depth analysis of qualitative representation to be tackled by future research.

IV. Quotas and the quantitative representation of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In order to test H1, this section will provide an overview of women's quantitative representation in the lower chambers of the parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina over time, starting with the first election in 1996 until the most recent election in 2022. The changes perceived over time in the number of women elected will be divided into three periods: 1) before the gender quota of 1998, 2) after the gender quota of 1998 and 3) after the amendment to the gender quota in 2013. This would allow for an analysis of how the political representation of women has changed before and after the quota was instituted, and how the modifications in the formulation of the quota have affected representation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a federal state, with 13 parliaments and a complex multi-level system of governance. The gender quota was instituted in BiH in 1998 for the first time as a result of women's advocacy for political participation, the peer impact of other countries in the region introducing gender quotas, and the heavy presence of the international community in the post-war period (Aganović et al. 2015). According to the quota, 30% of the candidates on each party list needed to be from the less-represented gender (Borić 2004). The quota today is stricter, with clear placement rules and a threshold of 40%. The following section explores to what extent the introduction of the quota, and its subsequent modifications in the formulation have affected the quantitative representation of women in BiH's House of Representatives.

4.1 Gender quota in 1998

The first parliamentary election of 1996 was the only election in BiH that was conducted without a gender quota in place. Out of the 42 elected members, only one was a woman, meaning that women's representation before a gender quota was instituted was 2.4% (see Figure 1). This shows that the starting point of women's participation in politics, without a quota in place, was almost inexistent. The barriers, be they institutional or social, were addressed with the first quota of 30% instituted in 1998. Therefore, the following elections of 1998 produced a different outcome. The implementation of the quota on candidate lists, with a target of 30%, led to a significant increase in the representation of women in the House of Representatives. In fact, to date, no subsequent parliamentary election has achieved as high a percentage. The explanatory factor for the record number of women in parliament lies in the interaction between the gender quota provision and the closed ballot system. The 1998 election was the only election with a closed list system, which also applied a gender quota on candidate lists. Voters could not cast a preferential vote for a specific candidate, and so women were elected based on the previously decided candidate list order (Hogić 2021: 9).

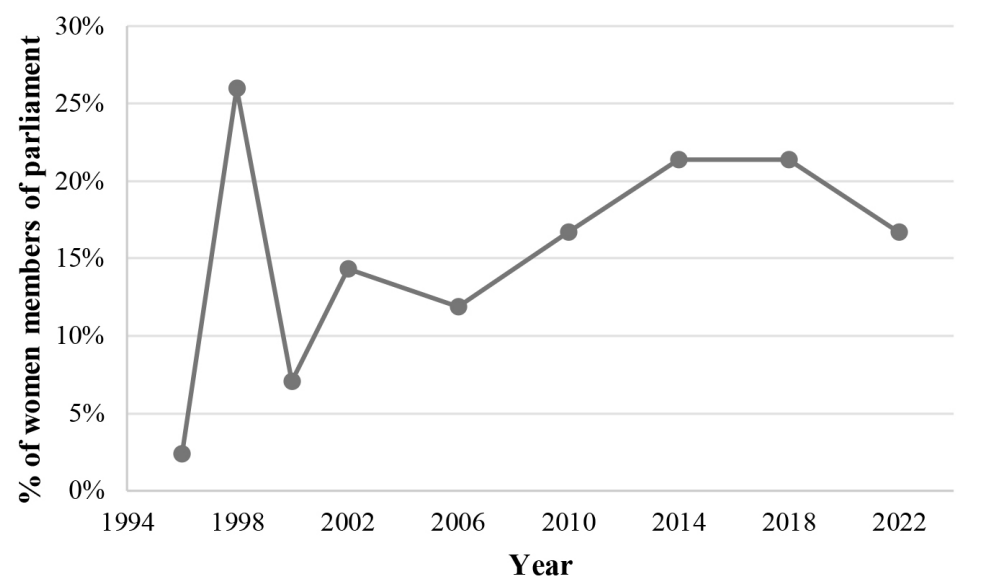
From 2000 onwards, the electoral law was modified and an open ballot system was adopted. This explains why all elections after 1998 have led to a lower quantitative representation of women. Namely, the following four elections in 2000, 2002, 2006 and 2010, which were all conducted under the electoral gender quota of 30% on candidate lists, show that the electoral representation of women was not stable. The elections of 2000 saw a significant drop, from 26% to 7.1% (see Figure 1), due to the introduction of preferential voting (Hogić 2021: 9). The following three elections in 2002, 2006 and 2010 saw some increase; however, the representation of women remained well below 20% (see Figure 1).

4.2 Gender quota of 2013

In 2013, the gender quota was reformed. A higher threshold of 40% was instituted, as well as a strict placement order and effective sanctions for non-compliance. Candidate lists that did not adhere to the quota cannot be accepted by the electoral administration. The modified quota increased the quantitative representation of women in parliament. In the elections of 2014 and 2018, the representation of women was stable at 21.4%, followed by a decrease to 17% in the most recent election in 2022. This shows that undoubtedly a higher quota threshold leads to better outcomes in terms of women's representation. Still, the open ballot system remained an obstacle and even the elections with a 40% threshold could not reach the 26% of 1998. It is puzzling why such a strict gender quota has not resulted in a more significant representation of women in

BiH's House of Representatives. The continued underrepresentation of women may be explained both by the interaction between quotas and other aspects of electoral law such as the previously noted open list system, and the low district magnitude. Oftentimes, a candidate list will only get one seat per district, which goes to the carrier of the list. The leader of the list is rarely a woman, as the quota provisions do not require gender balance in this aspect.

Figure 1: Changes in women's representation in BiH national parliament over time



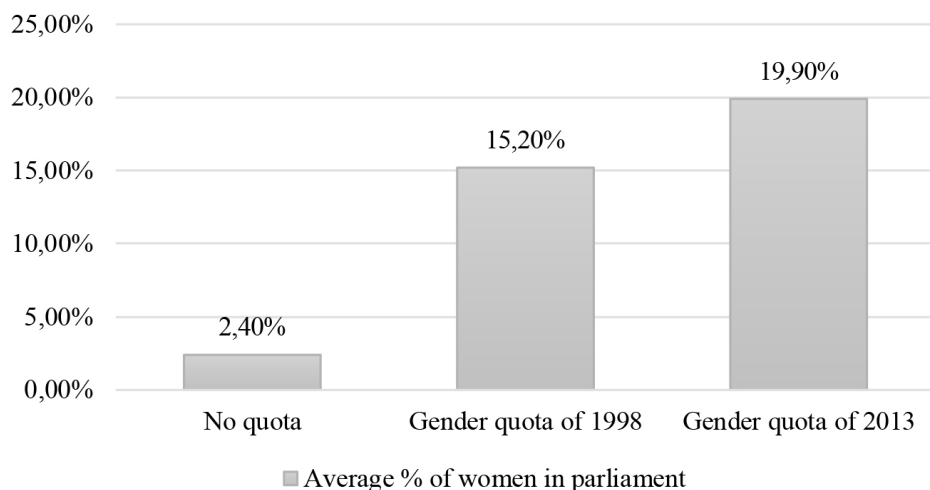
Note: data retrieved from IPU Statistical Database on Women in national Parliaments, <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.htm> and IPU Parline Global Data on National Parliaments, https://data.ipu.org/content/bosnia-and-herzegovina?chamber_id=13346

V. Statistical analysis and findings

Using a simple statistical analysis, it was found that gender quotas are strongly positively correlated with the representation of women in parliament. The increase of women in parliament between 1996 and 1998 is 23.6%, which is significant, and shows that the introduction of a gender quota did make a difference in BiH (see Figure 2). In terms of the formulation of the quota, the average representation of women under the first quota formulation of 30% and the modified quota formulation of 40% can be compared. Under the electoral quota introduced in 1998, the average representation of women was 15.2%,

taking into account the elections of 1998, 2000, 2002, 2006 and 2010. Since the introduction of a higher threshold in 2013, the average representation of women has risen to 19.9%. This means that there has been a 4.7% increase in the average overall representation of women, showing that there is a strong positive correlation between the higher threshold quota and the representation of women in the lower house of the parliament.

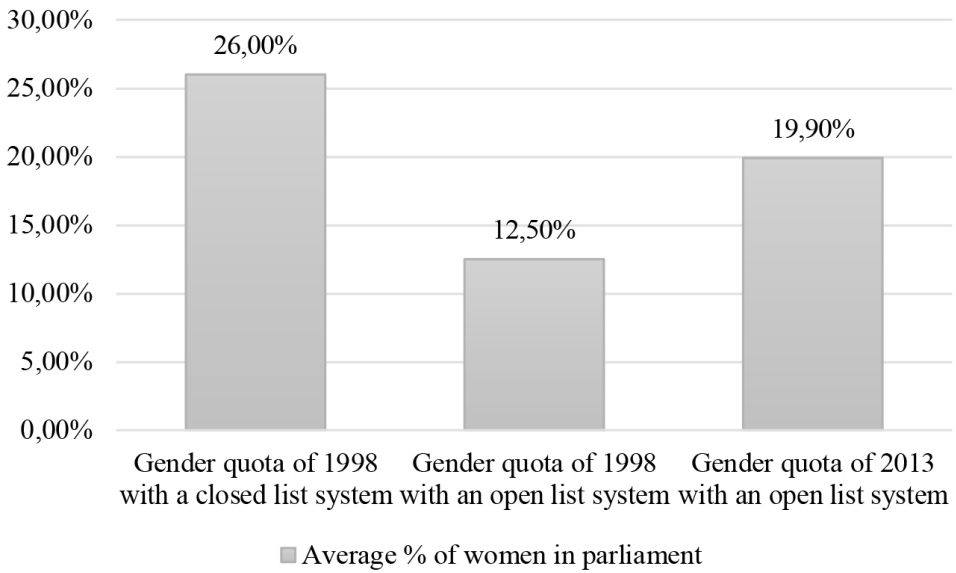
Figure 2: Average % of women in BiH national parliament based on quota existence and formulation



Source: Authors.

An additional finding that emerges from this analysis is that gender quotas can be impeded by other aspects of electoral law, such as ballot structure (Gavrić 2023). In the case of BiH, the representation of women was highest when the gender quota threshold was 30% and elections were conducted with a closed ballot system (see Figure 3). If we take into account the ballot structure, and look only at the elections of 2000, 2002, 2006 and 2010 where the 30% gender threshold applied but the elections used an open list ballot, then the average representation of women was 12.5%. This means that the modification of the threshold of the gender quota from 30 to 40%, when controlling for elections conducted with an open ballot system, led to an increase of 7.4% in the average representation of women (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Average % of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina national parliament based on quota formulation, controlling for ballot structure



Source: Authors

In the 2000–2022 elections, despite the fact that the candidate lists met the threshold, women’s representation diminished due to preferential voting. This is a notable finding as it reveals how societal attitudes as part of a complex web of factors can impact the quota’s effectiveness. According to feminist institutionalism, open lists are disadvantageous to women’s representation, as they drive women down on the candidate lists (Schwindt-Bayer 2009). As the next section discusses, voters may believe that they are neutral in their choices of candidates and that they base their choices on competence rather than gender. Yet, the results show clearly that when preferential voting was introduced in BiH, women became less likely to get elected. Gender roles affect electoral outcomes. As will be shown in the next section, men are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards women’s participation in politics. This is reflected not only in the preferential votes of voters but also in the political campaigns and choices made by political parties. Namely, the gender quota does not stipulate that there should be a gender balance in the number of women leaders on electoral lists (Lippmann 2021). Therefore, women are rarely carriers of the list, showing that parties continue to be male-dominated and impacted by gendered attitudes. Even when they are placed in higher-priority positions, women may get less visibility in party campaigns or may be subject to biased media coverage.

Therefore, the lack of exposure they receive negatively impacts their ability to get votes in an open ballot system.

In summary, the formulation of gender quotas in BiH has an impact on women's representation in parliament. A higher quota threshold is a powerful way to increase women's participation in politics. Yet, the quota cannot be seen in isolation from other institutional and social factors. The analysis showed how closed ballot systems produce better outcomes even with lower quota thresholds. Additionally, lower district magnitude can negatively impact women's representation. Finally, the impact of societal norms and attitudes cannot be understated, especially in light of BiH's preferential voting system.

VI. Attitudes towards gender quotas: A survey

To better understand the effectiveness of gender quotas in BiH, a survey examining public attitudes to electoral gender quotas was conducted. The survey consisted of 12 multiple-choice questions, and one final open-ended question, distributed to the public in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the local language. The questions varied in their nature, examining both the level of familiarity of the respondents in terms of what quotas are and the purpose they serve, as well as attitudes towards women's participation in politics and BiH's political landscape in general. The questions seek to provide a comprehensive overview of the perceptions towards quotas.

In terms of representativeness, the survey received 325 responses, of whom 64.9% were by women and 35.1% by men. The respondents varied in age, with 41.8% between 30 and 50, 37.8% under 30 and 19.7% over 50. A majority of the respondents came from Sarajevo, the capital city, and a smaller percentage from smaller cities or villages in BiH. Additionally, a variety of professional backgrounds were represented, with the biggest percentage of respondents working in public administration – 41.2%. While the survey fairly represents a variety of ages and professional backgrounds, it is worth noting that there is a gender imbalance among the respondents.

6.1 Familiarity with gender quotas

The first set of questions seeks to understand the level of familiarity respondents have with gender quotas. When asked if they vote regularly in elections, 81.2% of the respondents reported that they do and only 6.7% of the respondents said they do not vote. Despite the large percentage of regular voters, only 32.9% of the respondents reported that they understand what gender quotas are and the purpose they serve (see Table 2). Out of the men that filled out the survey, only 21.9% knew the purpose of gender quotas, whereas among the women this percentage was higher at 38.8%. Some 18.2% of all respondents said they had

never heard of gender quotas (see Table 2). The remaining respondents said that they had heard of this term but were unsure of its meaning or do not understand it. Considering that voter turnout in national elections in BiH has not exceeded 55% since 2002 (Voter Turnout Database: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022), the respondents in this survey perhaps represent a group of the electorate that is more active than the average voter. Still, a minority of respondents reported that they understand the nature and purpose of gender quotas, which may signal that the real understanding of the phenomenon among the population is even lower than the results of the survey showcase.

Table 2: Survey results to the question ‘Have you ever heard about electoral gender quotas in BiH?’

Have you ever heard about electoral gender quotas in BiH?	
I heard about quotas and am very familiar with this idea.	33%
I have never heard this term before.	18%
I have heard about quotas, but I am not sure what exactly they are.	23%
I may have heard of it.	12%
Not sure.	14%

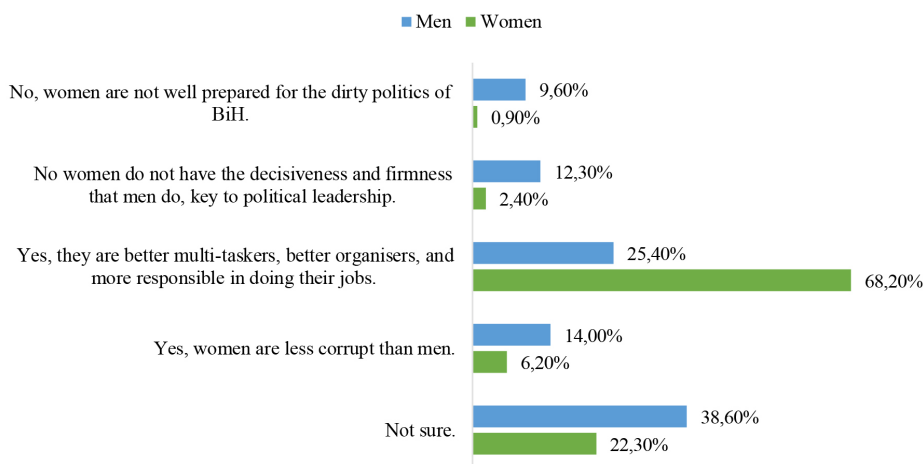
Source: Authors

6.2 Attitudes towards women in politics

The survey then proceeds to examine attitudes towards women in politics. When asked whether they believed women were adequately represented in politics in BiH, more than half of the respondents said they did not believe women are adequately represented because men dominate politics. Another 20% said they believed women are represented in terms of numbers, but that they have limited influence on politics in BiH. And 2.5% of respondents said that women are indeed not represented, but that is because politics does not interest them as much. Only 11.7% of the respondents believe that women are appropriately represented. In terms of representation, we can distinguish between symbolic and substantive representation, where symbolic refers to the quantitative representation of women, whereas substantive representation refers to the ability of the women who are part of politics to genuinely represent the interests of women. According to the survey responses, a significant majority of respondents, 71.4%, believe that either the symbolic or substantive representation of women in politics is lacking in BiH.

Additionally, the survey shows that a majority of respondents hold positive attitudes towards women in politics, seeing their representation as advantageous. More than half of the respondents said they believe women are better multi-taskers, organisers and more responsible in doing their jobs. And 8.9% of respondents said that they felt women are less corrupt than men (see Figure 5). A minority of respondents, 9.8%, held that women are not fit for politics, either because they lack the decisiveness needed for political leadership, or because they are not capable of dealing with the ‘dirty politics’ of BiH. Among these 9.8%, the majority of respondents were men (see Figure 5). This view was also more present among respondents who live in small towns, as opposed to the capital or a bigger city.²

Figure 4: Responses to the question ‘In your opinion, is there any advantage to having more women in politics?’, divided by the gender of respondents.



Source: Authors

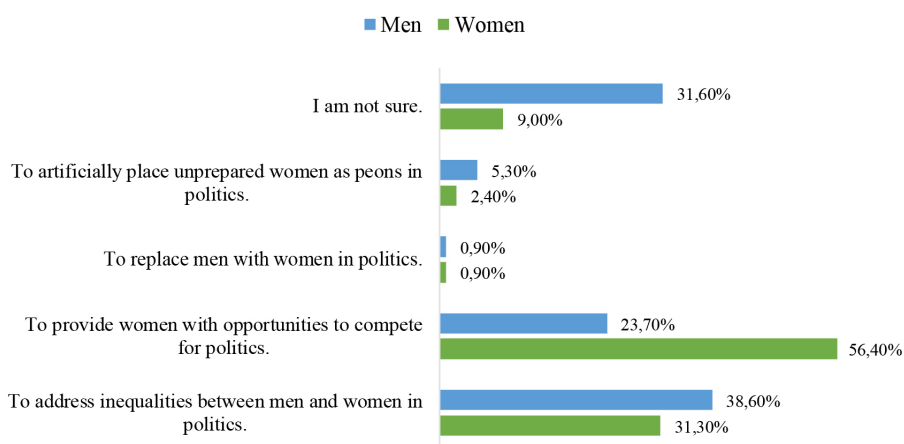
6.3 Support for gender quotas

In the survey, most respondents showcased an understanding of why gender quotas would be a valuable policy in a country like BiH. Most respondents saw the need for quotas as a means to address gender inequalities and provide a level playing field for men and women in politics (see Figure 5). Still, 16.9% of respondents were not sure why such a measure would be necessary. A minority

² 17.9% of respondents from small towns felt that women are not fit for politics, all of whom are men. Among the respondents from other large cities or the capital, only 8.2% of respondents felt that women are not fit for politics.

of respondents, 3.9%, said they believe that gender quotas serve to artificially place unprepared women as peons in politics, and 0.9% said that quotas serve to substitute men with women in politics (see Figure 5). What emerges out of these responses is that 4.8% of respondents believe that gender quotas exist for malicious purposes or to advance corrupt practices in politics. Among this 4.8% there is an equal number of male and female respondents; however, fewer men than women responded to the survey overall. This shows, once again, that the negative attitudes on the purposes of quotas are more diffused among men than women.

Figure 5: Responses to the question ‘In your opinion, why would countries like BiH introduce electoral gender quotas?’, controlling for the gender of respondents



Source: Authors

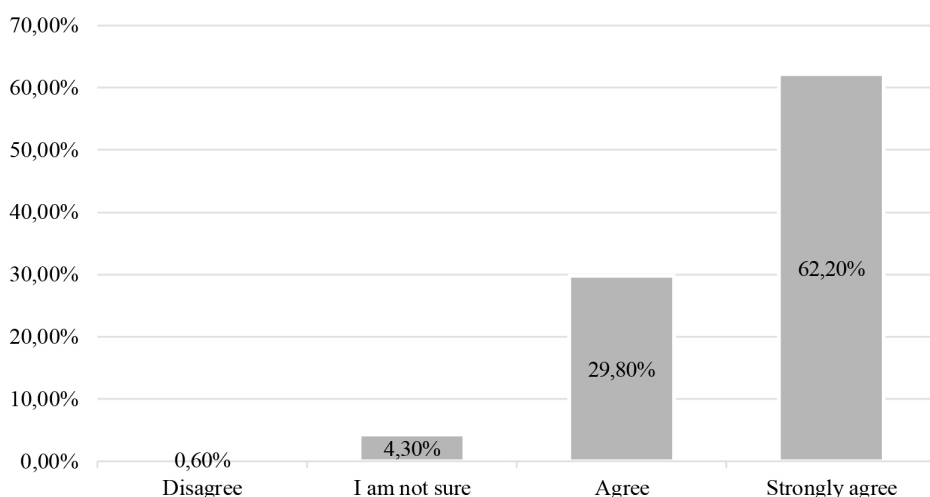
Almost 80% of respondents support or strongly support measures such as gender quotas. But 9.6% of the respondents said that they do not support the measures, either because they hold that it is an antidemocratic measure or that it discriminates against men. Out of the 31 respondents that do not support gender quotas, 27 are men and most of them work for the public administration.

The respondents were surveyed using a 5-point Likert scale on their views on five different statements. These results read together provide a valuable qualitative overview of the perceptions related to gender and politics among the public in BiH.

While most of the respondents agreed with statements such as ‘women and men are equally capable for politics in BiH’ and ‘women should be more represented in politics – it would benefit everyone’, concluding that the respondents understand and support gender quotas should be approached with

caution. Namely, the respondents were most united in their agreement with the statement that ‘capable people, regardless of whether men or women, business people, police, civil society, youth, can do much more than politicians to improve our society’ (see Figure 6). Only two out of 325 respondents did not agree with this statement. This is an important result to take into consideration because it firstly dismisses gender equality as a central priority in the bettering of society, and secondly, shows that there is little faith in politicians as agents of positive change.

Figure 6: Likert scale responses to the statement ‘Capable people, women, men, businessmen, police, civil society, youth, can do much more than politicians to improve our society’.



Source: Authors

Respondents seem to overwhelmingly agree with a statement that dismisses the logic behind quotas by focusing on ‘capable people, regardless of whether women or men’. This creates a contradiction between the results of this statement and previous statements, where respondents seem to agree that equal gender-based representation is an important aspect of politics that would bring about benefits. This is further shown in the responses to the last question of the survey, where respondents are given a choice of potential solutions to improve the quality of politics in BiH. Only 11.7% of respondents said that they see gender equality in politics as a solution. As opposed to that, 23.4% of respondents believed that youth representation is an important solution to the political reality in BiH. What emerges out of these results is that despite the previous results

in which respondents showed support for the equal representation of women, most do not see this as a central priority in politics.

Respondents agree that it is indeed other actors in society, who are distinct from politicians both by profession and capability, who could bring positive change in BiH. Therefore, measures such as gender quotas that regulate the gender representation of politicians are seen as less effective in bringing about change because they are still directed towards politicians. This is a fundamental point of contestation on the effectiveness of gender quotas in BiH and is further developed through the responses to the last statement: 'Quotas, or any other laws, can only have limited impact in the corrupt politics of BiH.' The majority of respondents agreed with this statement. In the last question of the survey, 50.5% of respondents said they believe the best solution to improve the quality of politics in BiH is to 'get rid of today's corrupt political elite, men or women'. This shows that the public in BiH has little faith in measures that aim to improve the representativeness of a system that they see as deeply corrupt. This sheds some light on the views of the public on the effectiveness of measures such as gender quotas, regardless of whether they find them ethically and morally agreeable.

The final section of the survey was left open for any additional comments. These are useful to add context to some of the results seen throughout the survey. Out of 36 comments, six make reference to the corruption in the system as a key issue that makes gender quotas ineffective or irrelevant in BiH.

'It is nice that there are gender quotas, but they do not have a big effect on the reality in which we live.'

'Previous experiences have shown that the small number of women in politics are corrupt.'

Some comments expressed support for gender quotas in theory but underlined their flawed implementation in practice.

'The gender quota in Bosnia and Herzegovina was introduced only formally in order to "satisfy" the expectations of European or international organizations that seek to implement reforms, but in reality, the quota does not exist.'

Seven out of 36 comments expressed that gender should not be important when electing politicians, but that qualifications and competence should be decisive.

'Whatever position it is about, it is very important that people who are capable of doing it are chosen, and not look at their gender, orientation, nationality, religion, etc.'

This comment makes a potentially relevant point about gender quotas in the context of a society plagued by other politically salient divisions, such as ethnicity and religion. The risk of gender quotas being seen as yet another affirmative action that exacerbates the differences between groups in a society is an important aspect to be analysed in the context of BiH. Another comment also made reference to BiH as a ‘divided society’, but held that gender quotas are a positive measure in this context:

‘Any kind of measure of equality between people is a positive milestone in our divided state politics.’

6.4 Findings

The survey shows that for most respondents, quantitative representation of women is not sufficient, but importantly that it cannot be translated into qualitative representation. The effects of quotas, according to some respondents, are stifled by corruption and structural political issues. What also emerges from the survey’s questions examining attitudes, is that gendered attitudes towards women still affect their respective representation. In terms of the statistical analysis, this further shows how attitudes lead to electoral results which exclude women especially in the context of open ballot systems. These findings confirm the limited impact of electoral gender quotas on qualitative representation, as set out by H2. Equally, the findings point to the complexity surrounding women’s political representation in BiH which cannot be fully addressed by quotas. Instead, societal attitudes towards women, but also to affirmative action measures in general, interfere with the efficacy of the measure. Therefore, the substantive representation of women in BiH has to be addressed comprehensively, which includes the quota alongside a set of other efforts that address the complex dynamics at play. For that reason, this paper will conclude with a set of reflections and recommendations.

VII. Paying it forward: Conclusions and recommendations for improving women’s representation

This research aimed to address women’s political participation in BiH, using a mixed-method approach to understand both the quantitative and substantive representation of women. In the quantitative section, the focus was mainly placed on women’s representation in the lower house of BiH’s parliament which has been subject to a gender quota since 1998. The qualitative section relied on a survey to examine the attitudes towards and familiarity with quotas and women’s representation in the country. What emerged from the analysis is that gender quotas are indeed an effective tool for advancing women’s numeric

representation. Over time, with some fluctuation, gender quotas have made a meaningful difference in the number of women sitting in BiH's parliament, showing that gender quotas work, but are only as effective as their formulation. Higher quota thresholds guarantee better outcomes, considering the increase in women after the 2013 modification to the quota. At the same time, gender quotas interact with other aspects of electoral law such as ballot structures. The quantitative analysis accounts for changes in representation on the basis of whether ballots are closed or open. This shows that the effectiveness of gender quotas depends on a complex set of legal, political and social circumstances.

The interaction between social attitudes towards women and the effectiveness of quotas is an important aspect which emerges out of the qualitative analysis of the survey results. Negative attitudes towards women's participation in politics are diffused to an extent, especially among male respondents. This affects the efficacy of gender quotas, which cannot change the voting patterns of voters who hold such attitudes. Similarly, for many respondents, gender should not matter when choosing who to elect. Therefore, while some respondents feel that they are neutral towards gender, the data in the quantitative section shows that this is not the case as the representation of women fell after the electoral law was modified in a way that allowed preferential voting. When voters can choose candidates specifically, they tend not to choose women, showing that choices are not gender-blind. The broader social context is related to the effective impact on quotas.

Finally, other aspects of the political landscape influence the effectiveness of quotas. Wider issues of democracy, accountability, transparency and political culture affect the perception of effectiveness. The seats occupied by women in parliament does not imply a political improvement in the eyes of many respondents, seeing, as they perceive, the political reality to be too corrupt for quotas to make a difference. Therefore, advancing women's participation in politics must go hand in hand with broader objectives of improving democratic governance in the country.

The recommendations that emerge out of these findings are as follows:

1. Increasing the thresholds for gender quotas in BiH to obtain better outcomes in women's quantitative representation.
2. Awareness raising on quotas, and the importance of women's representation among political parties in order to ensure that parties themselves advance women's participation, quantitatively and qualitatively.
3. Continuing efforts to improve attitudes surrounding women's participation in politics and gender roles in BiH.
4. Addressing wider issues of democracy, accountability, transparency and political culture hand-in-hand with promoting women's participation in politics.

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