The Consequences of Gender Quotas for the Women of the European Parliament
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Abstract
This project explores the effect of the introduction of gender quotas on the distribution of legislators’ professional and political qualifications for the European Parliament (EP). The EP is a unique institution with respect to gender quotas because only seven of 28 member states have adopted the use quotas over the last several years. This means roughly one-third of all legislators are elected in quota systems. This project leverages this unique configuration to examine these legislators’ professional and political backgrounds both before and after the introduction of simple quotas and placement mandates and compares them to patterns in member states that have never used quotas. While previous studies have shown that quotas can eliminate gendered differences in descriptive representation, we seek to test whether the use of quotas has a causal effect on the qualifications and career trajectories of legislators, whether male or female, that serve in the legislature. In doing so, we can assess the overall impact of quotas on the institution in terms of both gender equality and overall legislator competence.

Data
- 4,803 MEPs from serving from 1979-2019
  - 7 waves of Parliament-5 year terms
  - Unit of analysis is MEP per wave
  - Data on previous political experience, previous employment by sector, education, and age
  - Data on leadership within the EP and national political parties
- 28 European Union Countries with differential quota adoption
  - 1999: Belgium
  - 2004: France
  - 2009: Portugal, Spain, Slovenia
  - 2014: Poland and Greece
- 222 National European parties with variance across ideology, size, history, gender equality, percentage of women in the EP delegation, etc.
- Unique Data set combining individual, country and party data over time

Stage One: Descriptive Analysis
A Snapshot of the 2014-2019 Session

Stage two: Exploring a Causal Effect
Analysis from 1979-2019
We are now examining changes in national party delegations because we assume that the introduction of quotas will have an unequal effect on parties within the adopting country. We will use a difference in difference approach to measure changes in:
- average competence in party delegations and across genders within parties (Besley et al, 2016)
- Assignment of leadership positions within parties in aggregate and across genders
- Overall legislative diversity in each parliamentary session (Barnes and Holman, Forthcoming)

Conclusions
Thus far we have found a correlation between quotas and both the number of women elected to the EP and the career trajectories that bring women into the parliament. Overall, it also appears that the level of competence, measured in terms of previous experience increased in states that use quotas. We expect to find patterns of career development converge between men and women as quotas proliferate and get stronger (i.e. requiring placement mandates or plausible punishment for non-compliance).

References

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