Effects of Iraq's Parliamentary Gender Quota on Women's Political Mobilization and Legitimacy Post-2003

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Abstract

Parliamentary gender quotas have become increasingly prevalent since the 1990s, yet in-depth research illuminating their effects on women's political agency remains scarce. Iraq's political evolution since the 2003 US and allied invasion offers a unique perspective on feminist, democratization, and gender quota scholarship as related to Middle Eastern women in politics. Throughout Iraq's modern history, Iraqi women's ability to pursue legitimate political agency has fluctuated with changes in the country's political climate. The 2003 invasion set in motion sweeping reforms to the judicial, legislative, and executive governing powers. Women's potential role in the emerging polity was enhanced by enactment of an electoral gender quota stipulating no less than 25 percent of seats in the Iraq Parliament to be filled by women. This paper presents research that sought to elucidate the impact of that quota on women's political mobilization since 2003. Data collected included televised interviews, reports, and media articles that were qualitatively analyzed using a critical literary theory approach. Analysis was aided by the NVivo qualitative analysis software. The findings indicate that, although the gender quota has nominally increased descriptive representation, it has proven insufficient to support women's substantive and symbolic representation. Issues of women's socioeconomic position, lack of cooperation among female MPs, and ongoing security threats must be addressed for women to achieve full political legitimacy.

Introduction

Parliamentary gender quotas are a relatively new phenomenon whose consequences and sustainability remain unclear. Advocated as a means of addressing the under-representation of women in global politics, the majority of quotas have been instituted since 1991 (Baldez 2006). Between 2006 and 2015, 34 countries newly adopted either candidate-based or reserved seat gender quotas for their legislative bodies (Dahlerup et al. 2014; Hughes, Paxton, and Krook 2017). As of 2018, 132 countries worldwide had some type of constitutional, electoral, or political party quotas designed to elect female candidates to political office (Gender Quotas Database 2018); the majority of these quotas have been adopted within the past 15 years (Krook, O'Brien, and Swip 2010).

In 2015, women took nearly one-quarter of available parliamentary seats in countries where quotas were in effect, whereas only 13.6% of seats were won by women in countries without quotas (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016). In 2017, women won 30% of seats in 24 chambers (across 21 countries) where quotas were applied, as opposed to 15.4% of seats in 19 chambers (across 16 countries) where no quotas were in effect; and the world average of women in national parliaments was 23.4% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2018a).

Iraq represented the first country in the Middle East and North Africa to implement a gender quota of 10% or greater, which was followed by a wave of quota adoption across the region in the ensuing decade (Paxton and Hughes 2017). However, some suggest that quota adoption in the Arab world is less a victory for women than an “easy fix” to stave off international pressures to increase women’s rights (Paxton and Hughes 2017, 352).

Scholars specializing in the study of gender quota electoral systems have called for rigorous empirical research examining their effects on women’s political mobilization across three dimensions: descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation. These three concepts were first introduced by political theorist Hanna Fenichel Pitkin in her seminal work *The*

Concept of Representation (Pitkin 1967). Pitkin conceived of *descriptive* representation as legislative bodies “standing for” the populations they represent: i.e. the composition of the legislature mirrors – in miniature – the various divisions in the electorate. Embedded in this definition is the notion that representatives generally are expected to act and behave according to the opinions and values of the publics they represent, that is, *substantively* represent their constituencies. Pitkin conceptualized *symbolic* representation as the extent to which a legislator’s constituents believe in, identify with, and accept him/her as a symbol of the nation – i.e. the representative “stands for” his/her constituents via the use of symbols.

These definitions have evolved over time to reflect the complexities of adopting and implementing gender quota systems and evaluating their impact. An analysis of descriptive representation must not only quantify the numbers of women elected to parliaments, but also go beyond sheer numbers to explore attributes of elected women other than sex such as education, socioeconomic status, connections with powerful men, and political experience (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012). Analysis of substantive representation should assess whether female legislators behave differently from their male counterparts in terms of policy priorities and styles, and evaluate the attention they pay to women’s interests in policy-making (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012). Symbolic representation has come to encompass the cultural meanings and ramifications of the representative process as reflected by public opinion and mass mobilization (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012). Further, these three facets of representation are interlinked; the impact of the quota on one aspect may actually be a result of how it affects another aspect (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012).

Viewed through this lens, the case of Iraq offers an interesting example by which to evaluate how parliamentary quotas may contribute to formal gender equality in the Middle East. Throughout contemporary history, Iraq’s political landscape has shifted through monarchies, autocracies, armed conflict, international sanctions, and civil unrest. Against this

backdrop the ability of women to influence the polity through formal election to public office has remained minimal until recently. The 2003 US invasion spurred reconstruction and political transition of the nation-state with diverse effects on the situation and political efficacy of women. Reforms to judicial, legislative, and executive bodies have at least nominally aimed to establish more liberal discourses related to women's role in governance. Notably, the 2005 Iraqi Constitution embedded a quota within the Elections Law legislating that women should occupy not less than one-quarter of parliamentary seats.

The US invasion and heavy influence on reconstruction of the Iraqi government were met with vehement opposition from some quarters, and hope for a democratic future from others. Achieving gender parity in the long-term depends upon several elements including the progress of a democratic political culture, mobilization of women in a viable civil society, and clarity and reliability of democratic establishments (Ballington and Dahlerup 2006). Longstanding Iraqi traditions of patriarchy and sectarianism, and the politicization of Islam in the 2005 Constitution, created ideological schisms unlikely to support the mobilization of women as full actors in the emerging polity. Population growth, urbanization, the global economy, and the expansion of education and labor also profoundly influence Iraqi women's agency in public office. It has been argued that true democracy cannot be achieved until women become full participants in a country's political processes, and that women's political presence is a key marker of a country's democratic progress (Walby 2000; Parween 2018). For Arab women, democracy is a measure of modernity that offers opportunity to build alternatives to conservative traditions; yet in the face of Iraq's socio-political clashes, gender equality in political engagement remains largely unrealized.

Many variables have contributed to fluctuations in women's rights, position, and political contributions in Iraq across history including tribalism, patriarchy, religiosity, conflict, political and party ideologies, socio-economics, globalization, and international

pressures. At the time of the 2003 invasion, Iraq was already experiencing societal rifts between secular versus religious factions, among separatist Islamic sects, and between proponents and opponents of US intervention. Negotiations for drafting the new constitution were further complicated by US pressures to build a state conducive to American interests (Basham 2004). Rather than beginning reconstruction and development, the US-sponsored Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) instead launched the extensive de-Ba'athification campaign that complicated and exacerbated Iraq's already deep sectarian divides. Apparently taking the view that simply removing the Saddam Hussein regime and re-establishing key state institutions would preclude the need for a protracted state-building process, the US spent millions on post-conflict reconstruction projects such as privatizing the oil sector and sweeping reforms to the national fiscal system (Dodge 2012; Hassin and Isakhan 2016). These efforts were instigated with little or no consideration for the Iraqi sociopolitical, cultural, or economic contexts, and decisions were handed down without consulting Iraq's regional leaders, civil society, or other key stakeholders.

The constitutional drafting process was placed on a strict and hasty timetable driven by US objectives, and therefore the new constitution served to exacerbate, rather than eliminate, sectarianism (Dodge 2012; Kamp 2009). For example, little representation of Sunnis and women was present on the drafting committee. Further, a central role was given in the constitution to shari'a (Islamic law). Although constitutionalizing Islamic law may not automatically erode women's participation in government, it does reinforce sectarian identities, with damaging consequences for women's ability to succeed in political roles. Sectarian strife has fostered unending conflicts which place female politicians under nearly constant threats to security, circumventing their ability to undertake legitimate political action (Dodge 2012; Zuhur 2006).

Since ratification of the 2005 Constitution, parliamentary elections have been held in 2005, 2010, 2014, and 2018, yielding 31.5%, 26.1%, 25.3%, and 25.5% of female MPs, respectively. These figures contrast with previous elections since Iraqi women gained suffrage in 1980, wherein the highest proportion of parliamentary seats awarded to women was 13.2% in 1984. Although these statistics imply great advancement of women's representation in the country, no analysis to date has explored the degree to which Iraqi female politicians have achieved actual empowerment as political agents. Simply gaining more parliamentary seats is not an end in itself, but a means by which women in public office may mobilize toward greater decision-making and legitimacy (Ballington and Dahlerup 2006).

This paper analyzes the evolution of Iraqi women's civil and political voice since the 2003 invasion, examining impact of the gender quota on levels of descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation for women. The aims were to analyze the primary barriers and supportive factors women encounter while standing for election and attempting to introduce, enact, and implement public policy.

Method

During the main research period, case studies were constructed of twelve women who have been formally active in public office and/or civil society in Iraq since 2003. The primary data source was a series of in-depth televised interviews which aired during the month-long observance of Ramadan in 2012 and 2013 on the Iraqi television channels *al-Baghdadia* and *al-Iraqiyya*. *Al-Baghdadia* Television is Iraqi-owned, privately funded, and Cairo-based; it is often considered a channel representing moderate Sunni Islamic views. The *al-Iraqiyya* Television network is government-owned, set up by the US Coalitional Provisional Authority

after Saddam Hussein's fall to serve as a governmental mouthpiece. *Al-Iraqiyya* is watched by about 40% of the Iraqi population and generally considered to represent views of the Shi'a Islamic majority.

These regularly scheduled news programs presented interviews with prominent Iraqi figures including Ministers, MPs, and tribal leaders, and were broadcast both nationally and internationally. The interviews with female MPs and civil leaders were extracted for this study. A portion of each interview offered quantitative descriptive data including demographics, party affiliation, religious background, and political career. However, the majority of the data are qualitative, expressing these women's personal, political, and life experiences and how those experiences have changed since 2003. The interviewees discuss their motives, backers, resources, supports and barriers to standing for office; their successes and failures as political agents. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated into English, then compiled into first-person account case study files.

The interview data were supplemented by personal interviews with two scholars studying gender relations in Iraq (Guy 2016; Sutton 2015), and with extensive secondary research to uncover media coverage and press statements related to and/or generated by the women selected as the case studies. A relationship was established with the Iraq Foundation, a non-profit organization which promotes human rights and civil society in Iraq. At the time of data collection, the Iraq Foundation had offered several training programs to prepare female parliamentary candidates for their public roles, and had gathered survey data from women MPs at four time points to quantify and qualify their legislative experiences. The Iraq Foundation is no longer in operation, and therefore the raw data were unavailable for quantitative analysis. However, a detailed report was published that summarized the findings and offered select quotes and perspectives of the respondents. This report was included in the qualitative analysis.

Collected data consisted of 19 transcribed televised interviews, 10 reports, and 280 news articles/press releases. All data were selected because they contained specific reports of the performance of Iraqi women in political roles and/or quotations or mentions of political activities involving the 12 case studies. Critical literary theory informed analysis of the discourse (Bryman and Burgess 1994; Potter and Wetherell 1994; Thomas 2006). Using an inductive approach, the raw data were subjected to detailed reading and interpretation to identify emerging concepts and themes (Thomas 2006). All data were entered and analyzed using the NVivo qualitative analysis software (NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software (version 11) 2014). Initial interpretation revealed multiple themes that were then applied to query, filter, and organize the data according to relevant topics. Using these topics, NVivo “nodes” were generated, and the data were carefully coded into their relevant nodes. In most cases, an individual data source was coded into multiple nodes. Nodes into which no data were coded were discarded.

Three related and intersecting bodies of scholarship provided conceptual guidance. First, the study of gender quotas offers the investigative lens through which political events and governmental evolution in Iraq since 2003 were viewed. Gender quota scholarship and political theory posit the three dimensions of women’s representation – descriptive, substantive, and symbolic – that build the framework for examining quota effects. Democratization theory complements this analysis by establishing benchmarks to judge a country’s strides toward democracy: humanitarian and developmental aid, legal reform, independent media, civil and political rights (Morlino 2002). Free, credible elections that give all citizens opportunity to participate in the polity and contribute to decisions that affect their lives lie at the center of democracy (Carothers 1999). Instituting rule of law, a civil society, governmental checks and balances, and fostering public attitudes that support democratic culture also form cornerstones of democratization. Class and gender differences must be

transcended in order for democracy to become fully functional (Morlino 2002). Finally, feminist theory was consulted: feminist scholars posit that a country's level of democratization contributes to women's ability to succeed as political agents, and that conversely women's full participation in political processes is necessary to achieve democracy (Caprioli and Douglass 2008). Feminist or gender theory explores women's social roles, experiences, and political activities in context of their condition within the societal structure. Women's status is shaped by gender systems, class, economic development, and state policy; and political gender parity requires women's involvement in democratization.

Basic analysis of descriptive representation involved comparing percentages of parliamentary seats gained by women before and after quota enactment. Deeper analysis placed those numbers within the relevant historical and socio-political context. As suggested by Franceschet et al. (2012), the attributes of women elected were quantified: their backgrounds, motivations, life achievements, and individual experiences as politicians. The analysis included review and documentation of the case studies' lives prior to election, their educational, religious and ethnic backgrounds, family lives, why they entered politics, and their affiliations with male political figures. The analysis of substantive representation by women in Iraq's parliament evaluated supports and obstacles to election and policy-making. Levels of symbolic representation were analyzed in terms of public opinion regarding the gender quota, the legitimacy of female parliamentarians, and the degree to which constituents felt represented. The analysis examined media coverage, imagery, debates, and discourses related to women in politics across time.

Results

This section explores changes in Iraqi women's descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation since adoption of the gender quota, as suggested by the qualitative analysis of the case studies included in this study.

Descriptive Representation

Since the mid-1990s, global quota legislation has fostered a breakthrough pattern in women's representation. Upon adopting gender quotas, more than twenty countries have made historic leaps in descriptive representation for women, with an average increase of 16% in women's parliamentary seats (Alexander 2015). The Iraqi Council of Representatives currently comprises 25.5% females, compared with 16.8% of women serving in the US House of Representatives. Iraqi female representation exceeds both the world average of 23.4% and levels found in all of Iraq's neighboring countries (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2018a).

Historical context. Governing is an authoritative behavior that historically has operated to the exclusion of women in Iraq, as in other traditionally patriarchal societies. For this reason, scholars of women and politics have focused attention on the importance of increasing female role models in political leadership (Mansbridge 1999). An increase in descriptive representation can create 'a social meaning of "ability to rule" for members of a group in historical contexts where that ability has been seriously questioned' (Mansbridge 1999, 628). Political inclusion is necessary for reversing previous histories of exclusion and assumptions that certain people are less suited to govern than others (Phillips 1998). Women's historical exclusion from positions of political representation make them and their male counterparts, in all parts of the world, susceptible to belief in women's inferiority at governing (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012; Norris 2007).

Another issue instrumental to women's representation in Iraq is religion and sectarianism – primary agents of gender role socialization (Norris 2007). Religious organizations across all faiths support traditional and subordinate roles for women (Alexander and Welzel 2011). Cross-national studies link religious beliefs to fewer women in parliaments (Paxton and Hughes 2017). Religiosity is relevant to descriptive representation inasmuch as religion is politicized and religious sects and organizations gain political influence. Iraq indeed institutionalized Islam into the 2005 Constitution, and some effects can be seen in the election results since then (Al-Ali and Pratt 2006; Bakri 2010).

The effects of war in Iraq have been particularly striking. Evidence suggests that civil conflict politicizes women and mobilizes them to support more women in leadership positions (Hughes 2009). Conflict played a significant role in mobilizing women's groups in support of the quota policy (Dahlerup 2006). Women's descriptive representation in Iraqi politics since they gained suffrage in 1980 affirms the view that any national gains made during wartime rarely extend post-conflict. Iraq as a modern nation-state has made few political, economic, cultural, or societal gains – and has in fact sustained significant losses – since the 1980 Iran-Iraq War. Although war and the shortage of manpower it engenders often serve to empower women, the Iraq situation has been mixed. While labor participation increased in the short-term, widows and abandoned women have been thrown further into poverty, become displaced, and found it difficult to return to their former homes. Formal peace negotiations between conflicting powers define basic power relations in emerging reconstructed states. Yet there has been little or no peace in Iraq since the Iran-Iraq war, and internal strife has been continuous since the US occupation. The relatively small number of Iraqi women who have achieved political expression since 2003 may be less a result of Iraq's lack of democratization than of persistent security threats. Decades of war and sanctions have ripped apart the fabric of Iraqi society, bolstering traditional structures that shelter women

from widespread crime and corruption and reinforce prejudicial norms that prevent them from freely and actively participating in public life.

Post-quota election results. The initial dramatic change in women's parliamentary representation in Iraq happened over a single election cycle. In 2000, the last election before the US invasion, just 7.2% of women were elected to the Council of Representatives. The next election in January 2005 established the Transitional National Assembly in which women captured eighty-seven (31%) of seats. From the Transitional National Assembly (January 2005) to the Council of Representatives (December 2005), the percentage of women parliamentarians dropped slightly to 25% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2014). Thus across one election cycle, there was a gain of 18% of women in Iraq's parliament (Paxton and Hughes 2017).

In 2009 the Presidential Council called to increase the number of MPs to 325. While the revised Electoral Law maintained the 25% gender quota, the provision was amended from a proportional to an open list system, meaning that for each winning list the candidates with the highest number of votes would be elected rather than the candidates listed first. Ensuring that each third candidate on a list was female did not necessarily ensure that one-third of electees would be women; a corrective mechanism would be applied only if fewer than 25% of elected candidates were women (Lejeune 2010). This complex mathematical formula for assigning seats under the quota was difficult to understand even for the political parties and candidates.

Threats to security plagued citizens attempting to register and vote in 2010, spurring special security measures (Santana 2010). Just 82 women (25.23%) were elected to the Council of Representatives, the minimum number required by the quota. Fairly consistent with the Iraqi population, 92.65% of women MPs elected in 2010 were Muslim and 49.5%

were Shi'a Muslim. Most of them were educated with a Bachelor's degree or higher, and many held PhD or MD degrees (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2014).

The 2014 parliamentary elections were the first held since US troops withdrew from Iraq in 2011, and the first since 2003 to be run entirely by Iraqis. Approximately 50% of the population voted and 40% of voters were women. Electoral law had been revised again to raise the number of parliamentary seats to 328 and to instate a modified Saint-Lagüe (highest quotient) method for allocating seats in party-list proportional representation. The latter change was expected to increase the chances of smaller political parties to win representation, however, the amendment did little to address a growing lack of faith in the existing government. As Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition took ninety-five parliamentary seats, charges of corruption and kleptocracy were leveled at the government and electoral process from quarters both within Iraq and globally (Haddad 2014).

Before the 2014 elections, UN Women and the Iraq Foundation collaborated to train more than 300 potential female candidates in aspects of governance and campaigning (UN Women 2014). Eighty-three women (25.3%) were elected to parliament.

Iraq's most recent elections were held May 12, 2018 (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2018b). These elections, originally scheduled for September 2017, were delayed due to the civil war with the Islamic State (or Daesh) which ended in December 2017. The bloc led by the populist Shi'a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr won the highest number of seats, positioning Sadr to exert substantial influence in the legislature and formation of government (GlobalSecurity.org 2018). Votes were manually recounted following a number of allegations of vote-rigging and electoral fraud, but the recount showed little change from the original results. A total 84 women (25.5%) took parliamentary positions among the 329 available seats.

The level of descriptive representation achieved and maintained by Iraqi women since 2003 suggests an important first step toward political mobility. Even the impartial institutionalization of political liberties and civil rights establishes norms that support human autonomy and tolerance of social diversity. This, in turn, is likely to create a political climate conducive to egalitarian gender attitudes and women's formal representation. This finding is consistent with cross-national studies highlighting links between women's representation and level of democracy (Norris and Krook 2009; Parween 2018).

Case study descriptors. As Franceschet et al. (2012) have posed, female legislators face a double bind wherein they are expected to be more representative of society and of women's interests, while at the same time meeting the professional and educational criteria established by the male elite as qualifying them for public office. Analyzing descriptive representation must consider which attributes of legislators are important in terms of gauging their "merit" or whether they sufficiently represent their constituencies (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012). For this research, the case study women's demographics, party affiliations, religious backgrounds, and political experience were extracted as descriptive data.

The 12 case study MPs give various reasons for their decision to run for Parliament. Several cite their husbands' support as being instrumental; others say they were entreated by their potential constituents to stand for election. One MP mentions the backing of her former employees, saying in her televised interview, "I never made them feel that I was their boss. I used to iron and fold the clothes with them in the store. I was like a sister, not a boss to them." She elaborated further on her commitment to remaining humble and non-authoritarian, stating, "Honestly, Iraqis are not used to this style; the person with authority is always tyrannical. I am known when I visit a place not to sit at the desks used by people with authority."

The case studies derive from diverse backgrounds and affiliations. Four represent al-Iraqiya Coalition (secular opposition to former PM Maliki's State of Law Coalition); three are in al-Hal Bloc and the fourth in al-Hurra. Three represent the State of Law Coalition. Two represent Kurdistan (the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party). One represents the al-Ahrar (Sadrist) Bloc, one is politically Independent, and one sponsored her own eponymous party under the Iraqi Union Coalition in 2010 (although unelected).

Of the eleven case studies who have served as MPs, three have served a single parliamentary term; six have been re-elected once; two have been re-elected twice. Six of the women are Shi'a Muslims; two are Sunni Muslims; one identifies as Sufi Muslim; and three are secular. Most report having been active in civic organizations prior to standing for office, which offered them some degree of training and preparation to function in parliamentary roles. The women are highly educated; with one exception, all are educated at the Bachelor's level or higher; two have Master's Degrees; and three have PhD- or MD-level education.

Summary. Global theoretical discourses on women in politics in recent years emphasize the need for women's full participation in development and democratization (Dahlerup 2007). Underrepresentation of women in a country's polity is a product of mechanisms that exclude women from political institutions and prevent them from obtaining an equal share of political positions. The theory of the 'politics of presence' (Phillips 1998) suggests a link between descriptive and substantive representation (Wängnerud 2009). Thus analysis and discussion should investigate the extent to which descriptive representation gained via the gender quota has helped or hindered Iraqi women to achieve real political voice.

Substantive Representation

After collapse of the Saddam regime, post-intervention Iraq was faced with renegotiating the terms of its polity in the absence of a shared vision between societal and

political groups (Sadiki, Wimmen, and Al-Zubaidi 2013). Establishing the foundations of democracy depended upon transcending class and gender differences in public policy processes (Mehdi 2012). The laws of governance established by the CPA and carried over into the 2005 constitution focused primarily on establishing freedoms from authoritarianism, failing to foster inclusive roles for all segments of society toward democratizing politics, culture, and the media (Dodge 2012; Hassin and Isakhan 2016; Ryan 2010). Iraq's progress toward democracy may both support and impede substantive representation for women. The quota, too, may heighten both the opportunities and the challenges women face in the political arena (Childs and Krook 2012). As Larson (2012) proposes, substantive representation refers to both the *means* through which women's gender interests are put forth in a legislature, and the *outcomes* of such promotion. Substantive representation must result in tangible gains for women as a whole (Larson 2012).

Iraqi women filling parliamentary seats have been important contributors to some political processes and enacted policies. However, the data offer little evidence to indicate whether their contributions have been more or less effective than those of their male colleagues. All parliamentarians – male or female – face significant obstacles to establishing and exercising true political efficacy in a highly divided and conflicted society.

Still, women in parliaments encounter a unique dilemma: on one hand, people have expectations about their distinct contributions to policy-making (e.g. paying greater attention to social and gender issues); on the other hand, conformity to these expectations may undermine women's ability to reach leadership positions (Miguel 2012). Indeed, evidence does suggest that women in legislatures lean more toward championing issues related to social affairs than those involving control of state resources and power distribution. This fact holds true in Iraq, where quantitatively Iraqi male MPs have contributed to many more public policies at the broader national level than have women, whose contributions tend to be

marginalized and relegated to those issues related to women, children, and family institutions. Yet the stigma associated with quotas – e.g. the idea that quota adoption tends to place unqualified women in office – may erode over time, and the incumbency of women in parliament may play a role in this erosion (Childs and Krook 2012).

Specific policy legislation promoted by the case study MPs. Since adoption of the electoral gender quota, the case study women have attempted to introduce policy change by serving on parliamentary committees and seeking to influence the legislative agenda, social and political attitudes, and constituent opinions. The case studies appear well-placed on legislative committees, choosing or being assigned to committees closely aligned with their backgrounds and expertise. Policies promoted by these women reflect the goals of their parliamentary committees and the platforms of their political parties.

Specific policy promotion undertaken by the case studies includes efforts to rebuild infrastructure and restore essential services to Iraqi citizens in this still conflict-ridden nation. The analysis supports the notion that Iraqi female MPs are likely to champion policy directly related to social and women's issues. Initiatives they support have included suggested modifications to the gender quota system, both to increase women's representative proportion and to extend the quota to other areas of government. Others have advocated for laws that would allocate a percentage of jobs in Iraq's public and private sectors to be granted to qualified widows, divorced women and their relatives. Several of the case studies have worked toward legislation related to governmental aid to the disadvantaged, including social security, the national retirement law, care for the disabled, and support for widows and orphans.

As one MP was quoted in the Iraq Foundation report, the following represent the main accomplishments made by women in the Iraqi Parliament to date: "Drafting and amending priority laws serving Iraqis and meeting their basic needs, such as the Social Security and

Health Insurance law, the retirement law, and the fundamental rights related to public and private freedoms, women being the main beneficiary...Monitoring the work of all public institutions and ensuring women's participation with a reasonable percentage, compared to women's proportion in the community, their efficiency and their maturity...The law of political parties and women's share in that law at the level of leadership not less than 25% [i.e. the quota]; [and] the law to establish the Independent Women[']s Commission" (Free Iraq Foundation 2013).

Three case study MPs have advocated for legislation aimed at equitable distribution of Iraq's oil revenues, and all have expressed official opinions regarding allocation of governmental budget funds. To date, however, most of these social services and budget initiatives remain under negotiation and controversial, and are likely to require reductions in administrative corruption and structural reforms to enact (United Nations 2012).

Security remains a key and plaguing issue, and some case study MPs have pushed to introduce punitive justice for those engaging in sectarian violence, even to the point of suggesting constitutional amendment. One MP stated to *All Iraqi News* in January 2012, "The Iraqi constitution needs many amendments. The most important amendment is to include in the constitution an article over incriminating sectarianism, especially by the politicians." Others have called for electoral reform to restrict the potential for dictatorial tendencies.

Supports and barriers to substantive representation. The data analyzed for this study indicate that women serving in Iraq's parliament since 2005 have encountered some supports, but more substantial barriers to achieving a true voice in the emerging polity. Factors found in the data to support women's substantive representation include constituent backing; support from NGOs, both within Iraq and internationally; economic resources; connections with high-profile male figures; education; and the electoral quota. Major obstacles to their substantive contributions include the prevailing lack of security; infighting

between political blocs; economic challenges; electoral barriers; international intervention; exclusion from party leadership and parliamentary decision-making (which often occurs among male MPs in secret behind closed doors); governmental corruption; and the persistence of patriarchal traditions.

The efficacy of a foreign intervention at promoting democracy without taking into consideration the country's historical, religious, and/or cultural rifts or its level of economic development remains deeply questionable when viewed from the Iraq perspective. The weakness of the political domain and the institutionalization of religio-cultural values create obstacles to women's political experience, which will require major shifts in thinking and process to remove. Women's status and political empowerment may be viewed as the proving ground for democratic transition. Although the regime change and constitutional gender quota provided new space for female participation in public life, Iraqi women still face the challenge of translating this political provision into meaningful interaction within the government and into legislative action that supports women's rights. Difficult work lies ahead to support and initiate those changes.

Symbolic Representation

The final dimension examined in this research is symbolic representation. Symbolic representation refers to the degree to which women's presence in legislatures affects the perceived legitimacy of elected bodies, alters beliefs that politics are rightfully a male domain, and affects citizens' attitudes and behaviors (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012). Symbolic representation implies that a representative symbolizes his or her constituency and is designated to act on their behalf. This construct is concerned not with the representatives' personal characteristics or actions, but how they are perceived and how their constituents evaluate their political agency (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2002).

Iraq's changes in development, religiosity, democratization, and conflict have strongly affected beliefs in women's ability to govern. Societal development in Iraq is strongly linked to gender equality values, including support for women's political leadership. Gender quotas fail to promote women's symbolic representation when they do not address the larger political and cultural context and its underlying norms, processes, rules, and practices (Meier 2012). The norms of gender equality that underpin quotas must be internalized by political actors in order for the systems to provoke the cultural and attitudinal changes necessary to promote symbolic representation for women (Meier 2012). Modernizing societies can erode traditional authority structures that perpetuate women's public exclusion, and thus increase public support for women's political leadership. But in less developed democracies, with agrarian and industrial economies, level of societal development creates a cultural barrier to the development and practice of gender equality, including belief in women's ability to govern. Further, quotas' symbolic effects are mitigated by public reactions to intervening variables in the broader political context, such as insecurity or corruption (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012).

This research found indications that Iraqi female MPs have faced both supports and barriers to achieving symbolic representation. Supportive factors include positive media relationships, effective use of social media, change in voter attitudes, and NGO support. In several instances the case study women have been named as the media spokespeople of their parliamentary committees. They regularly hold press conferences and issue media statements, as evidenced by the large amount of secondary data collected for this study. In a 2016 personal interview, Frances Guy commented on the female MPs' use of social media: "Some of them were very active on Facebook and used social media a lot to communicate with constituents ... Superficially they might do this a bit more than the men" (Guy 2016).

Factors in opposition of women's symbolic representation include discrimination within parliament itself; meeting the double burden of political and family obligations; threats to security; and proliferation of negative stereotypes of female politicians promoted in the media. Frances Guy noted a marked lack of media coverage featuring female MP candidates during the 2014 election cycle:

Women were generally not covered very much on the media. Pictures in the newspaper were very few. Women in Parliament occasionally got coverage but disproportionately much less than the men. They did get some airtime on the radio. The woman who got elected with the most votes to the Parliament in 2014 [Maysoun al-Damlouji] got quite favourable coverage but then she was on the Prime Minister's list and so that helped. There were some all- female debates. But in general MPs didn't get that much coverage and as the system works on a lot of patronage, those wielding the patronage system got the most political coverage (Guy 2016).

These findings suggest that Iraqi female politicians encounter more obstacles than supports to gaining symbolic capital. The public symbols and imagery used to depict Iraqi women remain predominantly stereotypical and negative, framed in ways consistent with traditionalist patriarchal culture. Female MPs rarely appear in television news, and when they do they are often portrayed in a context wherein their contributions to politics are marginalized, their leadership and legislative capabilities placed in question, and focus is placed primarily on their appearance. CBS News reported on the posters female candidates used for their campaigns shortly before the 2010 elections, "Some are conservative religious women like [MP Maha] al-Douri, clothed from head to toe in black cloaks known as *abayas*, sometimes even with gloves to hide their hands, pictured staring solemnly or in a moment of action in Parliament...But there are just as many posters of women with their hair uncovered, sporting business suits and makeup. In the northern city of Kirkuk, police have reported traffic jams in an area where one particularly attractive candidate has posters hanging" (CBS News 2010).

The gender quota is frequently invoked by male politicians and the press as the culprit for lifting inexperienced, incapable women into public office where they are pictured as

focusing only on those issues commonly viewed as of import to women, such as childrearing and cuisine. Further, voters across all population segments are minimally engaged in the political process as they struggle to handle more immediate problems and feel disconnected from their legislative representatives. Women in public office must juggle the dual responsibilities of politics and family, a burden placed disproportionately upon them than upon their male counterparts. Although popular perceptions of male MPs in Iraq may also be negative, these factors contribute further to the specific marginalization and exclusion of female MPs from legislative knowledge and participation.

The manner and extent to which public discourse legitimizes Iraqi female MPs as political actors remain marginal. Most Iraqis evaluate women neither as representatives of the nation's social identity nor as legitimate players in the political sphere. The symbolic representation achieved thus far by women in Iraqi politics has fallen short of creating avenues for gaining political power and control.

Conclusions

This research has sought to elucidate strides made toward political mobilization by women in the Iraqi Parliament and the evolution of their efficacy as political actors since 2005 adoption of the gender quota. The circumstances of Iraq highlight the difficulties of mobilizing female politicians when instability and sectarian schisms have deepened as a result of international intervention, and when conservative Islam is politicized with profound influence on the emerging political order. Democratic and feminist theorists recognize the importance of elections, but these may produce only a façade of democracy. More is needed: a thriving civil society, the emergence of independent media, and women's full participation in the political process. All these factors advance the cause of democracy, yet they are also themselves

advanced by a mature democracy. Progress toward democratization builds the foundations that make free elections, civil societies, and independent media possible. Thus the stakes for women's progress as formal political agents are very high.

The political void left by the collapse of the Saddam regime had to be renegotiated among a leadership deeply divided across ethno-sectarian lines. Iraqi women were primed and enthusiastic to play a substantive role in reconstruction. However, the foundational and infrastructural preconditions needed for successful democratization were lacking. The interventionists demanded creation of a reconstructive plan and drafting of a constitution according to a strict timetable driven primarily by Western interests and objectives. The emerging laws of governance focused heavily on avoiding the possibility of future autocracies and failed to foster inclusive roles for all segments of society toward rebuilding the polity. The role of women in politics became a central topic of debate between interventionists and a host of competing factions.

Constitutionalizing the gender quota was a product mainly of women's civil activism and international influences. Yet the fact that the quota remains in force has implications for the social meanings ascribed to female politicians in a country with a long tradition of excluding women from political power.

As anticipated, the gender quota has led to a significant increase in women's descriptive representation in parliament; that is, the number of women parliamentarians has been on an upward trajectory. However, with regard to substantive and symbolic representation, this analysis suggests that the gender quota has had minimal value to support Iraqi female MPs as political agents. Women who do become elected generally rely upon sources outside the quota to support their campaigns and parliamentary functions. Although the women MPs come from diverse ethnic, religious, educational, and experiential backgrounds, they share many common challenges in their political roles.

Iraq's strides toward democratization serve as both supports and barriers to Iraqi women's substantive and symbolic representation. While female MPs have made some significant contributions to political processes and policies, the backlash against interventionist democracy has led to the institutionalization of religio-cultural values that weaken their influence in the political domain. Parliamentarians of both genders face significant obstacles to exercising true political efficacy. However, men in Iraq's parliament have influenced substantially more public policies at the national and international level than have women, whose political voice tends to be marginalized and confined to issues concerning women, children, and families.

Further, women remain far from achieving the symbolic capital requisite to attain political legitimacy. The media continue to depict Iraqi women in stereotypical traditionalist frames. Women in public office rarely appear in the press; when they do they are portrayed in a context wherein their political agency is marginalized and their capabilities questioned. The press and male politicians still accuse the gender quota of being responsible for placing inexperienced, incapable women into office. Still, Iraqi female MPs have encountered some supports to symbolic representation. The emerging social media, in particular, may have contributed to increasing women's empowerment as political actors.

The media outlets emerging since 2003 have greatly contributed to Iraq's ethno-sectarian rifts and have exacerbated and encouraged sectarian violence. Until a relatively independent media environment has been created, true symbolic representation for women cannot be achieved.

This study implies first that gender quotas, while necessary and potentially effective, are insufficient to spur full women's representation. Second, possibilities for improved women's representation are intimately linked to women's socioeconomic position in general, which remains inferior to that of men. Third, although individual women have had notable

successes and their political reputations established, interaction and cooperation among women MPs have been distinctly limited. Women's coalitions built across party lines may help minimize conflicts and magnify women's voices around critical policy. Finally, the ability of women to function as effective democratic agents is severely curtailed when there is a fundamental absence of security. Parliamentarians are hindered in their work by insurgency at worst and internal fragmentation at best. Because women's actions as parliamentarians are not generally as easy as those of men, enhanced domestic stability would enable them to move about more freely, undertake public speaking engagements, and interact more widely with their constituents without fear for their personal safety. Only when conditions of peace and stability become sustained will Iraqi women become able to realize full legitimacy, agency, and power in functioning parliamentary roles.

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