



Legislative Quotas and Political Representation in Serbia

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2020 marked the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, the establishment of multi-party elections, and the subsequent reinstatement of parliamentarism.¹ During the arduous process of establishing representative democratic institutions, women have come a long way from being systematically marginalized in political life, to making up almost 40% of the Serbian Parliament and 50% of the executive branch by 2020. Moreover, the issue of gender equality has gradually entered Serbian political discourse, and gender issues have been included on the agendas of several center-left political parties. At the same time, the participation of women in Serbian political institutions has steadily increased, especially in the last two decades, in the light of legislative

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changes and the introduction of gender quotas on national, provincial and local levels. After the 2020 elections, women held 39% of the seats in the Parliament. Within the Balkan region, Serbia has the highest proportion of women representatives and features above many European Union member states (IPU, 2020). With a focus on the implementation and effectiveness of legislative gender quotas, this study analyzes why, and how, Serbia has succeeded in increasing women's parliamentary representation over the past two decades.

A large body of scholarship has explored the effectiveness of quotas to increase women's presence in legislatures and their influence on the representation of women's interests (Antić & Lokar, 2013; Dahlerup, 2006; Franceschet et al., 2012; Krook, 2009, 2014; Krook & Norris, 2014). Comparative research worldwide indicates that quotas for political representation do not exist in a vacuum; they have been shown to encourage debates about gender equality in recruitment, candidate selection and also political representation more broadly (Dahlerup & Antić, 2017; Krook & Zetterberg, 2017; Rashkova & Zankina, 2017). In the Serbian case, a period of over 30 years of political and economic transition, has seen contextual factors have a particularly significant influence on quota implementation and effectiveness.

The first two sections of this chapter are dedicated to Serbian quota regulations and how they are implemented by different parties. They also provide an overview of women's representation in parliamentary life over the past two decades. The third section highlights the influence of contextual factors on quota regulations and their administration, considering the obstacles to their implementation. The chapter also employs data related to the gender structure of the Parliament available on the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia's website, official statistical gender-sensitive data on elections from 2003 to 2020, and secondary literature on the implementation of electoral quotas.

In the 1980s, the political participation of women in the parliaments of the countries of Socialist Europe was around 27%, exceeding that of women in Western Europe (roughly 12.5%) (Markov, 2001: 46). The political systems of the individual republics within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia applied a kind of positive discrimination to women and members of national minorities, although there was no official quota policy. In the last Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia in 1986, women constituted 23.5%. After the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia began to disintegrate in 1989, the share of women in the

Serbian parliament dropped to 8.4%. The first multi-party elections in 1990 saw a significant decline in the representation of women in the National Assembly of the new Republic of Serbia: 4.9% of candidates were women; 1.6% women were elected. In 1996, 2.8% of women entered the Serbian parliament (Čičkarić, 2016: 103). The small proportion of women led to increased mobilization by women's organizations and party networks.

Three factors have contributed to Serbia employing strong legislative gender quotas. First is the history of women's political organizations in post-Socialist Serbia, who worked to increase political participation and the representation of women. These included the Women's Party (ŽEST), formed after the first multi-party elections in 1990, and the Women's Political Network formed in 2000 (Čičkarić, 2010: 151). The national women's movement and the international organizations (EU, UN, OSCE) also played a pivotal role in the process of demanding quotas—as well as their implementation—in Serbia. Various women's political and civic initiatives, such as “Women's Right to Vote,” “Women Can Do It,” “Group for Promotion of Women's Political Rights,” “Palić Conference,” and “Women's Platform for Development of Serbia,” prepared the ground for both gender equality and anti-discrimination policy measures in Serbia. Secondly, elite political actors adopted quotas to further strategies related to the preservation of their political power. A broad coalition of opposition parties that had been formed in 2000 to overthrow the Milošević regime brought together a wide range of different actors that supported gender quotas in politics. Thirdly, quotas were accepted as an integral part of EU accession discourse, which in fact served to legitimate domestic demands to implement quotas.

1 ELECTORAL GENDER QUOTAS AND WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION FROM 2003 TO 2011

After the collapse of the Milošević regime, the elections in 2000 brought with them a small increase in the representation of women in the Serbian Parliament, from 5.6 to 10.8% (Markov, 2001: 35). An extremely high voter turnout (74.4%), also resulted in a high turnout of women. Of the 250 candidates nominated by the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) coalition, which consisted of almost all opposition parties (17 in total), 14%—or 35—of those elected were women (Markov, 2001:

36). Since the election law did not oblige political parties to nominate a certain number of female candidates on their lists, a political agreement was prepared with DOS leaders, with twelve of the 17 parties signing a 30% gender quota agreement. However, only three center-left parties complied with this contract: Socijaldemokratska—SDPS (Social Democratic Party of Serbia), *Liberalnodemokratska partija*—LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) and *Demokratska stranka*—DS (Democratic Party).

The rules for the election of councilors and deputies to the Serbian Parliament directly affected the impact of quotas on candidate lists. Councilors and deputies were elected according to the proportional electoral system with open candidate lists. This method of distributing mandates was used as an instrument to undermine the 30% quota criterion, as women were disproportionately listed toward the bottom of electoral lists. The situation in local-level municipal parliaments was even worse, with the share of women ranging between two and eleven percent. The issue of gender equality was declarative, mentioned in the programs of just three center-left political parties: DS, *Liga Socijaldemokrata Vojvodine*—LSDV (League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina) and *Socijaldemokratska unija*—SDU (Social Democratic Union), who invoked international and EU standards to convince their colleagues in the DOS coalition of the value of gender quotas.

Women politicians, trade unionists, journalists and NGO activists all took part in the campaign for women's participation in the electoral process. The key issue for further activity was the change to electoral legislation, and the legal definition of positive discrimination measures that would ensure equal representation of women in assemblies. The most important step toward formalizing gender quotas occurred in 2002, with the introduction of a gender quota of at least 30% of candidates of the underrepresented gender on the electoral list, which came into force with the "Law on Local Elections". To counteract women being collectively grouped toward the bottom of lists, one in every four candidates had to be a woman. However, parties reserved the right to send whichever delegate they wanted to parliament (after an election), regardless of the order in which the electoral list was initially submitted. Not all parties respected the quotas, but non-compliance did not result in sanctions.

The 2003 parliamentary elections occurred without a legislative quota. Of the 225 women nominated on party electoral lists, only 31 (or 12.4%) won seats (Women and Men in Serbia, 2005). Finally, the 2004 "Law on

Election of Deputies” (Official Gazette of the RS 18/2004) prescribed a 30% quota of underrepresented gender candidates on the electoral list, and one in every four list positions. This call for a national legislated quota was proposed by the center-left Democratic Party. In 2003, the Committee on Gender Equality was established as a permanent working body of the National Assembly, with its competencies determined as follows: considering the draft law; other regulations and general acts from the point of view of achieving gender equality; the state of policymaking; execution of laws; other legal regulations and general acts by the Government of the Republic of Serbia and other bodies responsible to the National Assembly concerning gender equality policy.

This proposal did not go unchallenged. At that point, Serbian electoral law allowed parties to choose whomsoever they wished to enter Parliament from their electoral lists, in the context of an open list proportional system where voters were able to choose candidates from lower places on the list. Political organizations were not obliged to respect the order of the voted-on party list, and party leaderships were able to void the majority vote for candidates. With only 20% of women elected as MPs, this ultimately had the effect of subverting the implementation of the quota legislation. Additionally, the “Law on Political Parties” was—and still is—completely gender insensitive, lacking any provision for the prohibition of discrimination (Official Gazette of the RS 48/1994; 101/2005; 36/2009; 61/2015), and rendering incompatible the 2004 “Law on the Election of Deputies” and the “Law on Political Parties”.

Legal inconsistencies and shortcomings had major repercussions for the representation of women. First, the requirement that the list must include at least 30% of the underrepresented gender, combined with the necessity for the same to be included in every fourth position on the list, allowed female candidates to be placed at the bottom of the list. Secondly, the rules for the distribution of seats won by a list allowed for non-compliance with the rule related to the first reserved place on the candidate list. Thirdly, the provisions on the termination of the mandate, and the manner of filling the vacant position for a member of parliament, led, in practice, to the de facto elimination of women in representative positions (Pajvančić, 2008: 11).

Members of the Parliament were elected by a single nationwide constituency using a list proportional representation system with a five percent threshold. However, there was no formal threshold for parties representing ethnic minorities. Parliamentary seats were allocated using

the d'Hondt method. Vacancies arising between general elections were filled by a candidate from the same party list.

Thanks to the new “Law on Elections” in 2007, and the introduction of a 30% underrepresented gender quota on the lists, women MPs constituted 21.6% of those entering the Serbian Parliament (Official Gazette of the RS 129/2007) (Women and Men in Serbia, 2008). There are several indicators showing how much this election differed from the previous contests. In particular, political parties successfully recognized the importance of women voters. The desire to win the votes of abstainers, the majority of whom were women, had incentivized parties to direct a clear set of messages toward a specific group of women that parties identified as potential voters. Special party campaigns aimed at women were launched by several political parties, by female members of political parties, women’s forums and women candidates on the party lists.

Several left-wing parties, namely *Građanski savez Srbije*—GSS (Citizen’s Alliance of Serbia), SDU and LSDV, were pressured by women’s forums to sign an agreement to allocate 30% of the candidacies to the underrepresented gender. After the election lists were submitted to the Central Election Committee and the mandates in the National Assembly verified, the effects of the campaign to achieve a 30% representation of women in Parliament were striking. Serbia became a regional leader in terms of women’s political representation in national parliaments. This adds evidence to the notion that strong and well-designed gender quotas generate more women MPs, albeit without securing leading positions.

Parliamentary statistics indicated a significant imbalance among parties with regard to the number of women MPs. In the election of 2007, two political parties provided 30% of their parliamentary seats to women: *G 17+* with 36.48% (seven out of 19 seats) and *Savez Vojvođanskih Mađara*—SVM (Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians) with 33.33% (one out of three seats). It was the parties’ choice to move more women into parliament. The following center-left parties delegated more than 20% of their seats, which is still above average, to women candidates: the coalition of LDP, GSS, SDU and LSDV, with 26.66% mandates delegated to women (four out of 15) and the DS, with 23.43% women deputies (15 out of 64). The parties that fell below the 20.4% average were generally right-oriented: the coalition of the DSS, *Nova Srbija*—NS (New Serbia), *Ujedinjena Srbija*—US (United Serbia) and *Srpski demokratski pokret*—SDP (Serbian Democratic Movement), with 19.4% women deputies (nine out of 47 seats), and the far-right *Srpska radikalna*

stranka—SRS (Serbian Radical Party), with 16.04% deputies (13 out of 81 seats). The minority political parties won only one, *Ujedinjeni Romi Srbije* (Union of Serbian Roma), *Romska partija* (Roma Party) and *Koalicija Albanaca Preševske doline* (Coalition of the Albanians of the Preševo Valley) or two, *Udružena lista za Sandžak* (Coalition List for Sandžak) seats (Pajvančić, 2008: 13).

Hence, in the period between 2003 and 2011, women in Serbia grew increasingly frustrated with parties' non-compliance with the legislative quota. Their main points of critique were: first, parties that had centered their campaigns around "European values", and had encouraged women to go to the polls, had failed to implement European standards of representation of women in the Parliament; secondly, that the Constitution of The Republic of Serbia, which had been adopted unanimously in 2006, had been insufficiently adhered to. The Constitution includes legal provisions for gender equality, both legally obliging the state to develop an equal opportunity policy, and explicitly stipulating equal representation of women in the parliament (Articles 15 and 100 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia) (Official Gazette of the RS 98/2006). These provisions are legally binding for all participants in the election process. Faced with adverse reactions from the public for non-compliance, parties responded by shunning responsibility and finding excuses for not awarding 30% of mandates to women candidates. Some referred to the open list election system that apparently did not adequately incorporate the principle that demanded "one in every four candidates in consecutive ranking being a woman".

2 ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFORM AND QUOTA IMPLEMENTATION FROM 2012 TO 2020

As a result of Serbia agreeing to implement a series of recommendations put forward by the Council of Europe, the electoral system was reformed in 2011. Prior to this, open lists permitted voters to push candidates out of the "four place packages", a phenomenon that was particularly detrimental to women. When there were closed electoral lists for voters, fixing the order of candidates upon the lists, as well as closed lists for parties, required them to respect the order of the lists, and in essence the will of the voters, when distributing parliamentary mandates. The quality of gender quotas steadily increased in certain contexts, but not without a sustained and deliberate effort. While a few parties continued to refrain

from adhering to the Law, Serbian political elites became more receptive to the pressure of women's groups and experts, who had worked for a decade to ensure women's equal representation in politics. Notwithstanding this, certain features of the Serbian electoral system remained less than conducive to making the national gender quota work as intended. Voters voted for closed political lists with fixed rankings at the voting booth, but once a political party secured a certain number of parliamentary seats, party officials essentially selected whomever they wanted, regardless of the order of the list. Suffice to say, the effectiveness of the gender quota was emasculated.

Finally, the proposed reforms to the "Law on the Elections of National Ministers of Parliament" in 2011 introduced "truly" closed lists (Official Gazette of the RS 54/2011). It mandated that parties would have to accept the rank order stipulated in the original electoral lists. This Law had the effect of substantially enhancing the gender quota, because it guaranteed the percentage of women as stipulated in the quota to be given parliamentary mandates. In the election of 2012, the proportion of women in parliamentary seats increased substantially, with 33.3%. The largest parties, the Serbian Progressive Party, the Socialist Party of Serbia and the Democratic Party, fully met the quota requirement in their mandates. Similar advances for women occurred in local-level elections.

Thus quota adoption and implementation were aided by European pressures and constitutional change in tandem with mobilization from women's groups. This "sandwich effect", i.e., the combination of top-down and bottom-up factors, contributed to the adoption of robust local and national quotas. Serbian women's groups advocated for a reformed electoral law and succeeded in convincing elites to introduce more robust quota measures. In the early election of 2014, in accordance with the statutory quotas for the underrepresented gender, one-third of the nominated candidates were women and 34% entered the National Assembly, advancing Serbia to 23rd place in the world in terms of the number of female MPs. The eleventh convocation of the National Assembly in 2016 had 85 women MPs out of a total of 250, or 37% (Women and Men in Serbia, 2017). The percentage of women in the six parliamentary groups below 30% indicated that certain inconsistencies in the legislative framework still remained. First and foremost among these was the lack of sanctions for political parties that failed to respect the quota from the electoral lists.

Finally, in 2020, after additional external and internal pressure from women's groups and international actors, the Serbian Parliament amended its electoral laws and introduced a minimum quota of 40% of candidates on electoral lists for parliamentary and local elections. A new quota-parcel requirement prescribed that every five candidates in the list order (the first five list placements, the second five, etc.) must include at least two candidates of the underrepresented gender. The Serbian Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament and the Law on Local Elections. After the most recent elections in June 2020, the amended laws further increased gender equality in representation. In sum, as a result of stronger quota regulations, women's descriptive representation in the Serbian Parliament has tripled.

Progress due to the implementation of legislative quotas is most pronounced in right and far-right parties (Table 1). In the Socialist Party of Serbia, which had been in power with Milošević, the number of women increased from 9.1% in 2003 to 43.5% in 2020. In the Democratic Party of Serbia, which shared power with the Democratic Party after the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, women's representation rose from 13.2 to 50%. Even the far-right nationalistic Serbian Radical Party's proportion of female MPs increased from 11.1 to 31.8%. The Democratic Party, which had lost the elections in 2012, made significant progress in the 2014 elections, after which 50% of its MPs were women. The largest right-wing party, the Serbian Progressive Party, created by splitting from the Serbian Radical Party in 2008, and winner of the 2012 elections, had 40.6% of its MP representation being women in 2020. Other small political parties have proportionally larger numbers of women MPs. Unfortunately, there is a lack of data for major opposition parties: they boycotted the 2020 elections due to violations of election rules, governmental influence upon the media and non-compliance with democratic procedures.

In sum, the mobilization of domestic women, combined with international, primarily EU-level, pressures forced parties to adopt stricter legislative measures over time and to adhere to quota rules and regulations. Regardless of their ideological profile, all political parties were obliged to accept quotas in the recruitment and selection of candidates, and were, in addition, forced to combine ad hoc and structural measures to meet demands, albeit with significant levels of resistance. The first step forward was the recognition by political elites of the strategic advantages afforded by their support for gender quotas. In practice, this manifested

Table 1 Elected women per election year per political party (%) in Serbia (Legislated Quotas)

<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Orientation</i>	2003	2007	2008	2012	2014	2016	2020
For a European Serbia	Center-Left	–	–	29.4	–	–	–	–
Democratic Party	Center-Left	16.2	26.6	–	32.6	50.0	31.25	–
Boris Tadić Coalition	Center-Left	–	–	–	–	20.0	–	–
Social Democratic Party of Serbia	Center-Left	–	–	–	33.3	40.0	40.0	62.5
League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina	Center-Left	–	–	–	20.0	33.3	33.3	–
Green Party	Center-Left	–	–	–	–	–	60.0	–
Socialist Party of Serbia	Center	9.1	25.0	10.0	40.0	30.7	41.7	43.5
Party of United Pensioners	Center	–	–	–	33.3	41.7	55.5	22.2
Liberal Democratic Party	Center	–	26.7	30.1	41.7	–	14.9	–
GI17 Plus	Center-Right	29.4	36.8	–	–	–	–	–
Enough is Enough	Center-Right	–	–	–	–	–	43.7	–
Serbian Renewal Movement	Center-Right	9.1	–	–	20.0	33.3	–	–
New Serbia	Center-Right	9.1	–	–	37.5	33.3	–	–
United Serbia	Center-Right	–	–	–	14.3	28.6	33.3	25.0
Serbian Progressive Party	Center-Right	–	–	–	35.9	33.8	34.8	40.6
Serbian Patriotic Alliance	Right	–	–	–	–	–	–	50.0
Democratic Party of Serbia	Right	13.2	23.4	20.0	38.1	–	50.0	–
Serbian Radical Party	Far Right	11.1	21.0	21.8	–	–	36.4	–
Dveri	Far Right	–	–	–	–	–	16.6	–
United Regions of Serbia	Ethnic/Regional	–	–	–	46.7	–	–	–
Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians	Ethnic/Regional	–	–	25.0	20.0	33.3	20.0	33.3

<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Orientation</i>	2003	2007	2008	2012	2014	2016	2020
Party for Democratic Action of Sandžak	Ethnic/Regional	-	-	-	-	20.0	14.3	33.3
Straight Ahead—Justice and Reconciliation Party	Ethnic/Regional	-	-	-	-	-	-	20.0
Albanian Democratic Alternative—United Valley Parliament (total)	Ethnic/Regional	-	-	-	-	-	-	33.3
		14.4	24.4	24.4	33.6	33.6	37.2	39.6

Source: National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (2020); National Assembly in Numbers (Author's compilation)

itself through several phenomena. In the post-2000 period, inter-party competition played a role with political elites demonstrating a tendency to embrace quota reforms after they were adopted by one of their electoral rivals. Later, after 2007, parties sought to overcome a long period in opposition, or a dramatic decrease in popularity, by gaining support among women voters in an attempt to close the gap on rival parties. Finally, applying quotas was also seen as a means to consolidate control over party representatives. Female MPs were seen to be more adherent to party guidelines, and it was this, rather than their role in protecting women's interests in Parliament, that was persuasive.

3 THE IMPACT OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND CANDIDATE QUOTA EFFECTS

Contextual factors play an important role in shaping the long-term quota implementation process in Serbia. Institutional, political and cultural factors have all emerged to challenge traditional party practices and the adoption of more stringent measures. The efforts to improve quota implementation needed to be focused on systemic barriers and constraints to female candidates' progression up the political ladder. Among such institutional factors, changes to the electoral system were the most important. Party alignment and the need to capture women's votes, combined with (external) pressures from EU institutions, were the major political determinants. Cultural factors comprised of women's groups' "outing" of parties' subversion of quota policies and fighting against their marginalization within parties are to be considered as part of a wider process in the transformation of Serbia's political culture.

A review of party documents indicates that a Women's Forum has only been established within three center-left parties: the Democratic Party; the Social Democratic Party of Serbia; and the Liberal Democratic Party. Arguably, this might have impacted upon party quota implementation, by affecting the party leaderships' acceptance of the principle underpinning the nomination of a larger number of women MPs. Since all political parties in Serbia have authoritarian leaders and traditional forms of hierarchical organization, women receive little support in fostering their ascent to high levels within parties' hierarchies. There is no female party leader in the National Assembly. The refusal to recruit women to top positions, and the lack of support provided to them in running for office, acts as a strong impediment to quota implementation, particularly in parties of

regional, ethnic and minority orientation. The re-composition of electoral lists in such a way that women candidates occupy top positions is the unique solution to this problem.

As discussed earlier, there had been progress in quota implementation among center-right parties such as the Serbian Progressive Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia, as well as by the center-left Democratic Party. However, there is a danger that when such parties accept quotas, they adapt to the new situation by co-opting women who will play along with established priorities and are deferential to the rules of the “old boys’ network” (Čičkarić, 2017: 5; Nacevska & Lokar, 2017: 409). Furthermore, center-right parties often include more women than center-left parties upon their lists, and this is particularly true for new democracies in the region (Čičkarić, 2017: 6; Rashkova & Zankina, 2017: 391). Party leaders nominate women who have a loyalty to them and their party’s agenda, not to the interests of those women who vote for them. This phenomenon occurs because internal party selection and nomination procedures are not transparent and democratic procedures and rules are able to be tactically avoided (Nacevska & Lokar, 2017: 409). As an example, the Serbian Progressive Party uses women to soften, modernize and humanize the image of the party and to recruit new female members. In the process, they create the illusion that those women really have significant power, although in practice they are acting in the shadow of their party’s leader. This produces a twisted pattern of gender equality through formal gender balance—a significant number of women MPs—combined with a very low level of participation in decision-making. Additionally, a lack of cooperation and networking with the feminist movement and academia has resulted in a kind of “ghettoization” for those women. This raises uncomfortable insights for the question: *What is the real potential for gender transformation arising from quota implementation?*

One of the factors that over time might erode the allegiance of Serbian women MPs to their party leaderships, is the presence of the Women’s Parliamentary Network (WPN). Constituting a group of female MPs from all political parties in the National Assembly, the WPN was established in 2013 with 84 women, and by 2021 it had 99 members. The WPN has managed to implement several important legislative changes, thus contributing to a greater role for women in the control functions of parliament. Their achievements to date include pressuring the National Assembly to amend several important regulations and to deal with certain

topics: domestic violence has been included as a category in the Criminal Code. The Criminal Code was amended to abolish the statute of limitations for sexual offenses against children; child abuse as a criminal offense is included in the new Law on Family. An Inquiry Committee has been established to deal with the problems of babies missing from maternity hospitals/wards; the Law on Anti-discrimination and the Law on Gender Equality have been adopted; and an important amendment has been made to the Law on In Vitro Fertilization. The activities of the WPN are inextricably linked to the influence it exerts through respective party organizations. However, party discipline remains an important challenge for women who wish to cooperate across party lines.

The WPN also assists with the recruitment of new women candidates. Organized women's groups and female MPs are engaged as selectors for political parties, to increase the pool of female aspirants. Although women MPs are still predominantly seen as numbers to fill the quota, and few of their initiatives will be fully implemented without the support of their male colleagues, they provide important links to parties' recruitment and selection processes. Thus when legislative gender quotas exist, the wider importance of gender as a selection criterion rises.

The WPN are best considered as critical actors who work to increase women's political participation, recruitment and leadership. Women's civil society organizations, women's wings of political parties and women's parliamentary bodies are important actors in overcoming the impact of political, social and cultural factors in the implementation and effectiveness of quotas. A successful quota policy depends not only on the individual efforts of women parliamentarians, but also on the wider political and cultural matrix: the electoral system, party ideology, political culture, value socialization and misconceptions of gender equality.

In the Serbian case, cultural factors played a role in the tendency to block successful quota implementation. More specifically, the often extremely unfavorable attitude of female politicians toward quotas, and the strategy of denying gender stereotypes and insisting on gender neutrality, combined to have adverse effects on quota implementation. The problem with the quota system is that women elected or appointed through special, affirmative measures, such as a quota system, are not perceived in the same way that they would have been if elected in an open competition with men: the notion persists that their parliamentary seats have been "reserved" for them. Rhetorical devices, such as

enforcing loyalty to party interests over the agenda of women's representation, have legitimized the subversion of quotas. The Serbian case shows that legislative quotas generated mandates for women legislators to represent women's interests, but, in the process, they also reinforced negative stereotypes about women's capacities as politicians, epitomized in the "quota woman" label. Women MPs from all Serbian political parties encounter similar obstacles, indicating the existence of ingrained cultural legacies of discrimination. Male politicians continue to make misogynistic comments about obligatory gender quotas on electoral lists evincing that such prejudices and stereotypes do not disappear with quota regulations. One in five women MPs have been exposed to a form of political violence, experienced ridicule and unequal treatment in parliament, or have been directly discriminated against on multiple occasions (Čičkarić, 2016: 113). The marginalization of women within political parties is difficult to eradicate because it stems from the social and cultural matrix, which regards women in politics as a disturbing factor.

4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has identified four stages of the Serbian quota adoption process: the local quota adoption phase of 2002; the national quota adoption phase of 2004; the national quota reform in 2011; and finally, the strong quota adoption (40%) in 2020. However, quotas have limited influence beyond women's descriptive representation in parliament especially with regard to countering cultural norms and gender stereotypes, as the evidence presented from Serbian political parties shows. However, legislative quotas have made these parties reconsider the question of gender-related norms and practices in recruitment and selection processes, as well as diversity and intersectionality in party politics.

The application of national gender quotas has undeniably had a positive effect upon the female presence in the Serbian Parliament. The number of women MPs is higher because the existing proportional election system, with closed electoral lists, enables parties to achieve better positions in the election race, giving women a greater chance of defeating their political opponents. It is obvious that a higher electoral threshold is more appropriate for women, as this would provide a wider space for the inclusion of candidates, either on a voluntary basis or by quotas. Finally, it has been observed that in practice, closed and strictly structured lists of

candidates, as when the quota is set at a minimum of 40% for candidates of the underrepresented sex, and when MPs are replaced with the same underrepresented sex (triple quota), greater prospects were provided for women to win a parliamentary mandate in the 2020 elections. It was obvious that without systemic intervention in the electoral process, it would not have been possible to achieve a better implementation of quotas and accomplish the levels of gender equality desired.

The question remains as to whether or not the descriptive representation, embodied in the growing number of women MPs, has been accompanied by substantive representation based on true recognition, implementation and protection of women's interests. The gender quotas have neither had a transformative effect beyond numbers, nor did they reach beyond their goal of improving the gender balance among candidates in electoral politics. The larger share of women MPs did trigger a sustainable, and large, presence of women in politics but fell short of the effective mainstreaming of gender equality. Women's representation in the most powerful Serbian political institutions has been less transformative than one might have hoped, but how can this be achieved? The solution may lie in the appointment of key actors who are persistent in their feminist activism and challenge existing gender norms and values (Čičkarić, 2020: 19). Alternatively, or even concurrently, the answer may lie in pursuing greater efforts to overcome the lack of cooperation and networking between women politicians, women's organizations and the feminist movement; a feature of women's representative politics that has resulted in the hitherto ghettoization of women within Serbian political parties.

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