

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Competent legislators or mere pawns? Experimental evidence of attitudes toward gender quota politicians

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Abstract

Do citizens evaluate quota and non-quota politicians similarly? Do voters perceive quota-elected politicians as less competent and autonomous? Despite the proliferation of gender quotas, it remains unclear how citizens view female quota politicians compared to their non-quota male and female counterparts. This is particularly important in electoral systems where competitive and reserved seats both exist. We conducted a vignette experiment in Morocco where we randomized information about how politicians were elected and their legislative behavior. We find no evidence that voters evaluate quota women as less competent than non-quota male and female politicians. Our data demonstrate partial support for the argument that quota women are perceived as pawns of their parties, although information about legislative behavior can mitigate this perception.

Keywords: experimental research; gender and politics; Middle East politics; representation and electoral systems

1. Introduction

I experienced it personally. I remember our first meeting when we were all around the table and were supposed to be equal, and we [quota women] immediately felt it in the way men talked to us. It's like we are second-class MPs.

— Interview with a former female legislator elected through a quota seat in Morocco's 2016 legislature, Rabat, Morocco.

In the last 30 years, gender quotas have proliferated worldwide, with more than 120 countries adopting some form of gender quota. Notably, many countries with quota systems employ reserved seats for women in addition to non-quota seats open to female candidates. While gender quotas have led to a significant increase in women's numerical presence in legislatures in both democracies and autocracies, they may cause a backlash among political elites who view women's increased presence in politics as a threat (Krook, 2015). Backlash manifests as bias and negative perceptions of quota women as less competent, unqualified to serve in office, and benefiting from nepotism, especially among male politicians (Grey, 2002; Baldez, 2006; Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008; Lloren, 2014). This bias is evident in the quote above and in other interviews with quota women in Morocco who often struggle to convince male peers of their competence and that their seats were not “gifted” to them.¹

¹Personal interview with a former female legislator elected through quota in Morocco's 2016 legislature, Rabat, Morocco.

This paper explores citizens' perceptions of quota-elected women in autocracies. We investigate whether the bias documented among male elites also exists among the public. Extant research has focused on how increases in female representation may influence women's political participation and views of women in leadership (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008; Beaman *et al.*, 2009; O'Brien and Rickne, 2016; Clayton, 2018) as well as countries' international reputations (Bush and Zetterberg, 2021) and the qualifications of elected officials (Baltrunaite *et al.*, 2014; Besley *et al.*, 2017). Yet, work examining citizens' perceptions of quota and non-quota female politicians is limited. Our study bridges this gap and seeks to identify the causal effect of being a "quota woman" on voters' perceptions of their competence and autonomy.

In addition to examining voters' general bias against quota-elected women, our study sheds light on how political parties' recruitment procedures may influence voters' evaluations of quota-elected women. In party-centered electoral systems, gender quotas may stir backlash against quota women when they are implemented by political parties that rely on nepotism and patronage to fill quota seats. We thus expect that voters will view quota-elected women as lacking autonomy (or being "pawn-like") due to their likely recruitment through personal connections. By "pawn-like," we mean that voters will view these politicians negatively as "pawns" of the political parties that nominate them. We elaborate on this concept and word choice in the experimental design section.

Relatedly, if how party elites select quota women affects voters' perceptions of the quota-elected women's autonomy and competence, we test whether providing voters with information about women's legislative behavior can alter these perceptions. Specifically, we examine whether quota women may benefit from signaling their autonomy and competence by working with members of parliament (MPs) from other political parties (i.e., cross-party collaboration [CPC]). While both types of collaboration (within and cross-party) may improve voters' perceptions of women's influence and competency, we argue that CPC may counter beliefs that politicians, especially quota women, are less competent and are more beholden to the party elites' interests.

Morocco is a valuable case for our study for many reasons. First, it is an autocracy that has held multiparty elections since independence from France. Nonetheless, citizens continue to express low trust in political parties (Arab Barometer, 2022). Second, the regime in Morocco has implemented gender quotas since 2002. The country uses a reserved seat system where female candidates can run for national reserved seats for women or non-quota seats alongside male candidates at the district level. Yet, party leaders control the candidate selection process, which often lacks fairness and transparency (Lloren, 2014). Parties' candidate selection processes for women on the reserved lists, in particular, have come under scrutiny and have been criticized for their lack of fairness and nepotism. Bennani-Chraïbi (2008) maintains that "the selection of candidates for the women's national list does not reward activism but rather follows a clientelistic logic" (213). Finally, despite the high visibility of Moroccan women in politics and existing research showing that quota-elected women provide services to female constituents (Benstead, 2016), citizens continue to express gender inequalitarian attitudes. It is unclear, however, to what extent these attitudes are against female politicians overall versus against women elected via the quota system.

To study the impact of quotas on perceptions of female politicians, we employ a vignette experiment embedded in a nationally-representative survey in Morocco ($N = 927$).² We experimentally manipulate the gender of the politician, their mode of election, and their legislative behavior. We then ask respondents to evaluate their competence and whether they are "pawns" of party elites.

Contrary to our expectations, we find no evidence of general bias against women elected via quota seats. Indeed, voters view women elected via quota as equally competent as non-quota women and men. However, our study finds partial support for our pre-registered hypothesis

²This survey included 1800 respondents, half of whom were randomly assigned to view this survey experiment.

that women elected through quota seats are more likely to be perceived as pawns of their political parties compared to women elected in non-quota seats. Finally, we find modest evidence that working across party lines improves public perceptions of quota women.

Our study makes three main contributions. First, it investigates the impact of quotas “beyond numbers” (Krook and Zetterberg, 2014) and extends existing work on public perceptions of quota women (Clayton, 2015; Kim and Fallon, 2023) to non-democratic settings. It also contributes to the literature on quota implementation and the extent to which quota policies may transform popular attitudes toward women in politics. Our study is the first to examine citizens’ perceptions of quota and non-quota politicians in an autocracy.

Second, this research contributes to the burgeoning literature on the correlates of popular attitudes toward gender quotas. Consistent with previous work (Bush and Prather, 2021; Barnett *et al.*, 2024; Kao *et al.*, 2024), our findings demonstrate the absence of backlash against female politicians. We find no evidence that gender quota policies have a direct negative impact on the public’s perceptions of quota women’s abilities and qualifications—even in a conservative, autocratic context, such as Morocco. However, the results highlight the importance of voters’ perceptions of political parties and how they recruit candidates. Our results suggest that citizens are not questioning the competency of the quota women *per se*, but they are skeptical of the recruitment processes and political networks that bring them to power.

Finally, our study sheds important light on the gendered effects of CPC on voters’ perceptions of women politicians’ competence and autonomy. Although research focusing on the costs and benefits of party discipline and intra-party collaboration has proliferated over the past few decades (Barnes, 2016; Clayton and Zetterberg, 2021), CPC and its gendered effects remain understudied (Lausberg, 2016). This research provides some of the first evidence on the positive link between CPC and voters’ evaluations of quota women, especially in contexts where negative perceptions of parties’ candidate selection prevail.

2. Gender quotas and evaluations of female politicians

Recent research has shown that quota women are often perceived by their male peers as unqualified (i.e., the label effect) (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008, 395), lacking autonomy, and as more beholden to their party elites (O’Brien and Rickne, 2016). This view of quota women is not limited to male peers. Belgian feminist Hedwige Peemans-Poullet [as quoted in Weeks (2022, 3)] asks pointedly: “A woman who is placed on the list because of the quota—does she represent women’s interests or the political party?”

But what about voters’ attitudes toward quota women: Do citizens evaluate quota and non-quota politicians similarly? Do voters perceive non-quota female politicians as more competent than those elected via quotas? How does women’s CPC affect voters’ perceptions of their competence and autonomy? The following sections outline our theoretical framework and pre-registered hypotheses to answer these questions.

2.1 Bias against quota women

Previous work on citizens’ attitudes toward female politicians elected in quota seats has yielded mixed results. On the one hand, studies have shown that quotas may lead to backlash and the surfacing of negative stereotypes against quota women (Grey, 2002; Beaman *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, Clayton (2015) finds that citizens’ evaluations of quota and non-quota women in Lesotho are comparable. Moreover, in their study of the 1997 British elections, Allen *et al.* (2016) find that voters do not punish quota women electorally. What may account for these inconsistencies? As outlined below, we posit that variations in voters’ views of political parties and their recruitment procedures may condition attitudes toward quota-elected politicians.

How quota women obtain office can be a significant source of voters' bias against them (Barnes and Córdova, 2016). According to Franceschet and Piscopo, "how women achieve office shapes perceptions about their capabilities" (2008, 403). Quota women are more likely to face negative perceptions of their capacity, especially where reserved seats are used (Baldez, 2006). Voters may perceive quota-elected women as incompetent, tokens, or under-qualified (with an "easy" path to office, compared to those elected via competitive channels). These negative perceptions may be more pronounced in conservative societies where traditional gender roles dominate. Thus, we hypothesize that *Voters will view women elected via quota as less competent than either non-quota women or men (Hypothesis 1.1).*

The political context in which gender quotas are implemented may also be crucial in shaping voters' evaluations of quota women (Baldez, 2006). In most party-centered electoral systems, such as closed-list proportional representation (PR) systems, gender quotas may stir negative sentiments when associated with political parties that rely on patronage and nepotism to implement them. Extant studies have shown that male-dominated party leaderships have strategically used gender quotas, even where they initially rejected them (Ben Shitrit, 2016; Clark *et al.*, 2024). For party elites, reserved seats are viewed as a mechanism to sustain patronage politics (Lloren, 2014) and legitimize the electoral process (Burnet, 2011). The extent to which citizens hold negative perceptions of the selection process of quota women may, in turn, impact their evaluations of them as politicians (Clayton, 2015).

While the selection process of non-quota women may also take place under tight party control and unfair practices, the fact that non-quota female candidates rely on local support to access these seats may signal their autonomy, legitimize their presence, and mitigate the negative perceptions often associated with gender quota seats. For these reasons, we hypothesize that *Voters will view women elected via quota as more pawn-like than non-quota women and men (Hypothesis 1.2).*

2.2 Legislative collaboration and evaluations of quota women

If voters' perceptions of quota women are tainted by their views about how party elites select women to fill these seats and use quotas to extend their patronage networks, our second set of pre-registered hypotheses examines the effect of legislative collaboration on shaping citizens' attitudes toward quota women. Specifically, we test whether quota women may benefit from signaling their autonomy and competence by working with MPs from other parties.

Existing research demonstrates that female legislators often exhibit more party discipline than their male counterparts, which limits their ability to act autonomously (Cowley and Childs, 2003) and represent women's interests (Franceschet and Krook, 2012). Party discipline may be especially relevant to female politicians in contexts where women rely less on clientelism to garner voters' support (Clayton and Zetterberg, 2021). To achieve their policy goals and overcome marginalization, female legislators are more likely to collaborate, within and across party lines (Barnes, 2016).

Despite the proliferation of research investigating the costs and benefits of intra-party collaboration and party discipline, CPC (and its gendered effects) is a relatively understudied process. CPC involves party members from different political parties working together publicly in formal settings (Lausberg, 2016). It includes a variety of activities, such as co-sponsoring bills, coordinating votes on the floor, and/or co-submitting parliamentary queries. Barnes (2016) shows that female legislators often collaborate across party lines in parliaments worldwide. These collaborations are strategic and often pursued to enhance female legislators' influence and broaden their coalitions of support within the legislature (Barnes, 2016, 30).

Although both types of collaboration (i.e., within and across parties) may promote women's influence within the legislature and, in turn, improve voters' perceptions of their competency, we posit that CPC may counter beliefs that politicians, especially quota women, are less

competent or are more beholden to the interests of their party. Given the negative perceptions associated with quota women's pathways to power, learning that a politician engages in CPC may lead voters to conclude that they are autonomous and valued enough that members of other parties seek them out as collaborators. Thus, we hypothesize that *Among quota-elected women, voters view those portrayed as working across party lines as more competent (Hypothesis 2.1) and less pawn-like (Hypothesis 2.2) than those portrayed as working just with their own party members.*

In addition to the main hypotheses above, we include several sub-group hypotheses regarding heterogeneous effects in Appendix 8. We test whether bias against quota women is more prominent among male respondents (Appendix 8.1) and those who hold hostile sexist (Appendix 8.2) or patriarchal (Appendix 8.3) attitudes.

3. Why Morocco?

Morocco is a monarchical autocracy ruled by King Mohammad VI since 1999 that has consistently been rated as “partly free” (Freedom House, 2022). The monarchy has held multiparty elections since 1963. Currently, about 40 parties are competing in the elections; however, eight parties reap most of the votes at the local and national levels. As of the 2021 election, of the 395 MPs, 305 are elected to represent 92 multi-member districts, while the remaining 90 seats are reserved for women. Female candidates running for these reserved seats compete in one national-level constituency on closed, PR electoral lists, while non-quota male and female candidates are elected through a closed-list, PR system at the district level (Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013; De Paredes and Desrues, 2021).

Morocco is a fitting case for our study for several reasons. First, the Moroccan regime has increased its efforts to promote female political representation over the past two decades. The monarchy first adopted gender quotas that set aside a certain number of seats for female candidates in 2002. Following the 2011 popular uprisings, the number of reserved seats for women increased to 60 seats from the 30 reserved seats in the 2002 and 2007 legislative elections. In 2021, the government further expanded the number of reserved seats for women to 90 seats (out of 395).³

In addition to the reserved seats, women can be elected through the non-quota/district lists. However, women face challenges winning these highly competitive seats, and party leaders are often unwilling to place female candidates in winnable positions on party lists. Re-election to a quota seat is not permitted, and, of women who win competitive office, roughly half previously served in quota-elected seats. In 2011, three of the seven women who won non-quota seats had previously won quota seats. In 2016, five of the ten women in non-quota seats were previously elected through the quota. Three of the six women who won non-quota seats in 2021 occupied quota seats in the 2016 legislature. To be nominated to non-quota seats, women must demonstrate exceptional qualities and receive mass support from constituents in the local districts. Azzoha al-Arrak, who was nominated by the Justice and Development Party in 2016 for a non-quota seat, gained soaring support and popularity in her district as a quota woman in 2011, which led to her nomination to a non-quota/district list. Fatima Ezzahra El Mansouri, nominated in 2021 for a non-quota seat by the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), was previously the mayor of Marrakesh and won a quota seat in 2011. Her popularity and stellar performance as a mayor were significant factors for her re-nomination for a non-quota seat.

Second, Moroccans hold negative views of political parties. In recent surveys, more than 75 percent of Moroccan citizens expressed no or low trust in parties (Arab Barometer, 2018). The

³Various types of reserved seat systems are currently used at the national level in 26 countries. Many are in the Middle East and Africa (MENA) region, including Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan (Welborne and Buttorff, 2022).

selection process of political candidates remains highly centralized and tightly controlled by party leadership. It often lacks transparency and is marred by patronage and nepotism (Lloren, 2014). Parties' selection processes of female candidates for the reserved lists, in particular, have been a controversial issue in the media and policy circles (Drif, 2022). Unlike the selection process of non-quota seats for which local support is more crucial, party leaders use the women's reserved seats to bring female family members and allies into the political sphere to broaden their patronage and power networks (Sater, 2012).

Finally, Morocco is a conservative society, where citizens hold gender inegalitarian attitudes despite institutional reforms to bring more women into the public sphere. In 2022, nearly 50 percent of Moroccans either strongly agreed or agreed that men are better political leaders (Arab Barometer, 2022). It is unclear, however, to what extent this bias is against women elected via the quota system in particular. Moreover, the codification and subsequent expansion of the gender quota has not facilitated an increase in women competing and winning on the non-quota district lists as anticipated. This suggests that quota women may be perceived in a (negative) way that distinguishes them from their non-quota counterparts (Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013).

4. Experimental design

To test our pre-registered hypotheses, we implemented a face-to-face, nationally representative survey in Morocco between August and October 2023 ($N = 927$).⁴ We implemented a gender quota so that there was an even number of male and female enumerator-led interviews.⁵

We manipulated three pieces of information: (1) the politician's gender; (2) whether the politician was elected via quota or not; and (3) whether the politician worked across party lines or with their co-partisans. The first manipulation was allocated with uneven probabilities: 50 percent of respondents were assigned to see a vignette about a quota-elected woman, while 25 percent each were assigned to see a vignette about a non-quota woman or man, respectively.⁶ Whether the politician was described as working with their own party or other parties was randomly assigned with equal probability. Each manipulation was randomized independently of the others.⁷ The text of the vignette is as follows:

A [man elected as an MP in the district elections]/[woman elected as an MP in the district elections]/[woman elected as an MP through the gender quota] during the 2021 elections, has been successful in getting a new proposal approved to create new jobs in Morocco. [He/She worked on this proposal with other members of his/her party.]/[He/She worked on this proposal with members of other parties.] In a recent television interview, [he/she] stressed the importance of the development of work prospects in the field of the economy of care, within the framework of the global policy of employment and support for families.⁸

We analyze two main outcome measures on a scale of 1–10: (1) a competency rating of the politician and (2) a rating of the extent to which the politician is a pawn of party elites.⁹ We also use

⁴See Appendix 1 for more details on sampling, recruitment, and ethics.

⁵We conducted several data quality checks, such as comparing our sample to recent public opinion surveys conducted in Morocco, and checked for duplicates and near duplicates in our data. See Appendixes 1.3 and 2 for more details.

⁶We do this for reasons related to statistical power. See Appendix 3 for further details.

⁷Note that there is not a quota man treatment.

⁸The topic for the vignette was motivated by the Moroccan government's recent focus on the care economy. In a recent article, Aawatif Hayar, the Moroccan Minister of Solidarity, Social Integration and the Family, stressed the importance of improving jobs within the care economy sector, including care of the elderly, people with disabilities, and children, as part of an effort to improve employment and support families (Ayyad, 2023).

⁹We use the Moroccan dialectal term, *بيدق*, when asking respondents about whether a politician is pawn-like. This word translates as "pion" in French or "pawn" in English. This phrase has a negative connotation.

a third outcome, a rating of the politician's cooperativeness, as a robustness check (see Appendix 5 for more details). In addition to these outcome measures, we include questions that measure respondent gender, hostile sexism, patriarchal attitudes, attitudes toward elections and the government, and voting behavior.

A few points relating to our design are worth noting. First, we consulted with Moroccans on the most appropriate and context-specific term commonly used in the Moroccan dialect that conveys the negative connotation of quota women being "pawns" of their parties. We believe that our measure captures the theorized negative perception of politicians as lacking autonomy and as beholden to their parties' leadership. To assess whether respondents view being a "pawn" as a negative characteristic, we analyze the correlation of our outcome measures in Appendix 6. In all treatment groups, the competence and cooperative outcomes are strongly positively correlated ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that respondents consider being "cooperative" a positive politician trait. In contrast, the correlation between the pawn-like rating and each of the other two outcomes is either negative (for respondents in the non-quota woman treatment), or there is no correlation (for respondents in the quota woman and non-quota man treatments).

Additionally, we believe that our CPC treatment is realistic and, thus, valuable for testing our hypothesis that portraying quota women as collaborating across party lines may improve citizens' perceptions. CPC is common in Morocco. Parties must work together after every election to form a coalition government based on their share of popular votes in the national elections. After the conclusion of the 2021 elections, the Istiqlal, the National Rally for Independence, and the PAM parties agreed to form a coalition government despite their ideological differences and varying stances toward the regime. Within the legislature, deputies from different parties often collaborate on legislation and submit parliamentary queries to the cabinet and/or the prime minister (Shalaby and Aydogan, 2020).

One may wonder whether the issue area in the vignette, related to the feminine-coded "economy of care," may have affected respondents' attitudes by making it more likely they would approve of the female politicians' performance. This is possible, but we did not manipulate this information across treatment groups. We do this for two reasons. First, we base our vignette on a news story about current Moroccan politics (Ayyad, 2023) that discusses the "economy of care" as an important issue. This issue, notably, incorporates both economic and social issues, speaking to areas traditionally associated with male (e.g., economy and jobs) and female (e.g., health care and family) politicians. Second, we had concerns about statistical power if we created another dimension of experimental manipulation. If anything, using this issue area may have limited variation in our outcome measures by improving overall perceptions of female politicians, thus making null effects more likely.

5. Results

Our analyses focus on the differences in means across our two outcome measures: perceived competency and being perceived as a "pawn" of party elites. We test our first hypothesis on the effect of the politicians' gender and mode of election (quota versus non-quota) on citizens' perceptions of their competence and autonomy (being pawn-like). Figure 1 and Table 1 show that, overall, politician gender and mode of election have no notable effect on perceptions of competence. Thus, there is no support for H1.1. Respondents' consistent evaluations of politicians' competence is in line with empirical findings showing that quotas do not lead to the election of politicians with fewer qualifications (Baltrunaite *et al.*, 2014; Besley *et al.*, 2017).

However, politician gender and mode of election have a significant effect on the perception of politicians as a pawn of parties. Non-quota women are perceived as the least pawn-like, while quota women are perceived as the most pawn-like (the difference between quota and non-quota women is 0.35 and a p -value of 0.051). Interestingly, we do not find significant differences between quota women and non-quota men in terms of the view of them as pawn-like. Thus, H1.2 is partially supported.

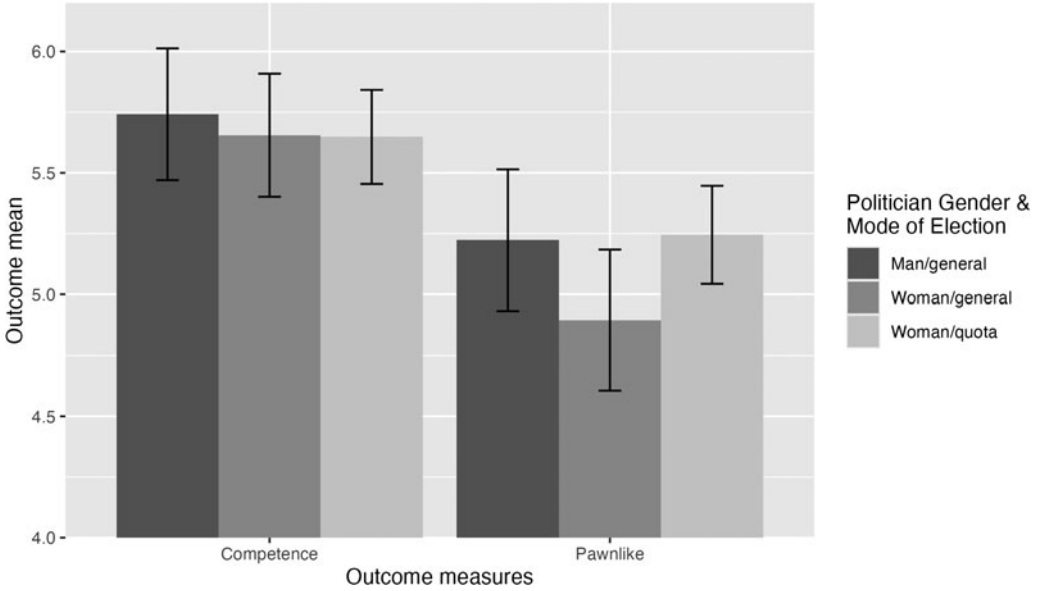


Figure 1. Effect of politician gender and mode of election on competency and pawn-like measures. Includes respondents randomized into this vignette experiment, $N = 927$.

Next, we test our second hypothesis on whether working across party lines may reduce the perception of quota women as pawns of party elites (Figure 2). We find that, among quota women, working across party lines (relative to just working with one’s own party) reduces the perception of quota women as pawns of their party (the difference between working across party lines and working with co-partisans is 0.377, $p = 0.066$). Quota women who work across party lines are also viewed as more competent, but this effect is statistically insignificant (Table 2). Thus, we find partial support for H2. In Appendix 4, we include results showing the effect of working across party lines for each of the three treatment groups. We find that working across party lines only reduces the perception of quota women as pawn-like and does not have similar effects for other types of politicians.

In Appendix 8, we report the results by pre-registered sub-groups (respondent gender, hostile sexism attitudes, and patriarchal attitudes). Broadly, we find that male respondents, respondents with hostile sexist attitudes, and respondents with patriarchal attitudes provide lower competency ratings for quota women compared to female respondents, respondents with lower hostile sexist attitudes, and respondents with less patriarchal attitudes (difference-in-means). However, they do not provide particularly harsh evaluations of quota women compared to non-quota politicians; in other words, the difference-in-differences is not significant. We do not find consistent evidence

Table 1. Differences in means: politician gender and election mode

	Mean (quota women)	Mean (non-quota women)	Mean (non-quota men)	Difference (QW versus NQW)	Difference (QW versus NQM)
Competence	5.648	5.655	5.741	-0.007 (p-value: 0.966)	-0.093 (p-value: 0.583)
Pawn-like	5.245	4.895	5.224	0.35* (p-value: 0.051)	0.021 (p-value: 0.906)

QW, quota women; NQW, non-quota women; and NQM, non-quota men.
 Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

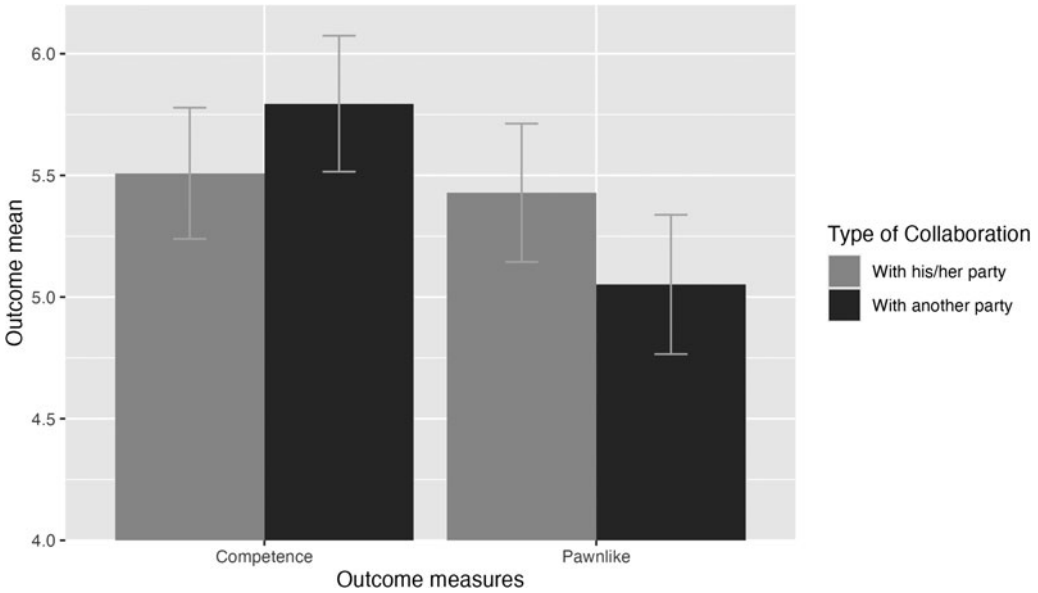


Figure 2. Effect of collaboration type on competency and pawn-like measures, quota women only. Subsetted to quota women treatment group only, $N = 455$.

that male respondents, respondents with hostile sexist attitudes, and respondents with patriarchal attitudes view female politicians as more or less “pawn-like” compared to female respondents, respondents with lower hostile sexist attitudes, and respondents with less patriarchal attitudes.

6. Political engagement and views of quota women

To what extent are these results driven by respondents with different attitudes toward or distinct engagement in politics? Previous research has found that views about gender quotas and women in politics in the MENA region are mediated by attitudes toward the regime and trust in elections (Bush and Jamal, 2015; Noh and Shalaby, 2024). Accordingly, we conduct some exploratory (not pre-registered) analyses to understand how trust in elections and political engagement may mediate attitudes toward quota women in our study.

First, we examine our main outcomes among respondents who are more or less likely to agree that elections in Morocco are free and fair (*trust in elections*) and among those who express lower versus higher satisfaction with the current government in Morocco (*government satisfaction*). Our findings with respect to these two respondent characteristics are similar. Figure 3 shows the average competence and pawn-like ratings within each treatment group among respondents with low versus high trust in elections. Figure A.17 in Appendix 9.2 shows the comparable average ratings among respondents with low versus high government satisfaction. Respondents with higher trust

Table 2. Differences in means: type of collaboration (quota women only)

Outcome	Mean (with her party)	Mean (with another party)	Difference
Competence	5.509	5.795	0.286 (p-value: 0.148)
Pawn-like	5.429	5.052	-0.377* (p-value: 0.066)

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

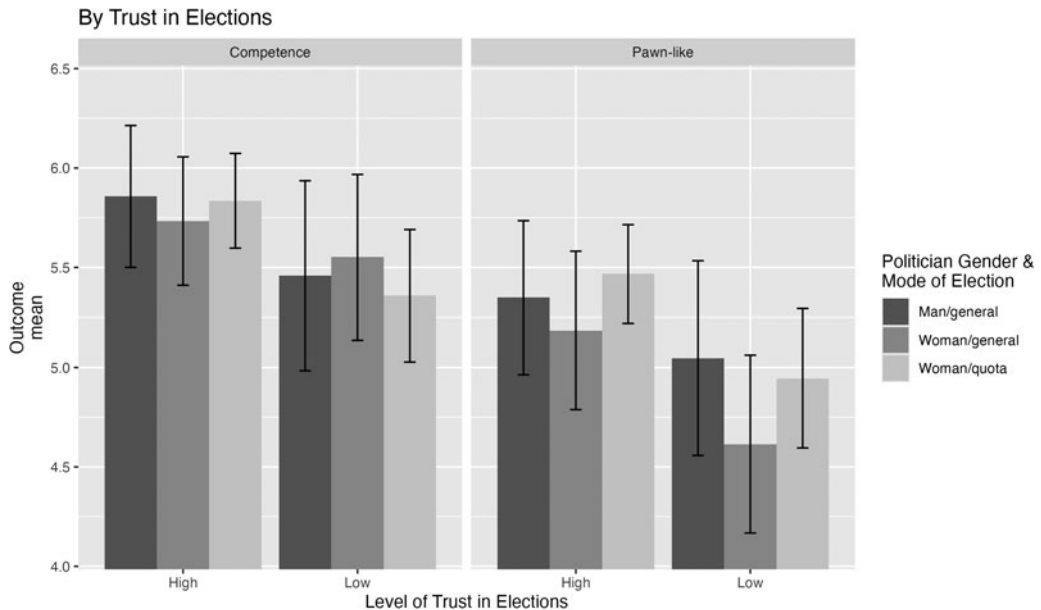


Figure 3. Competency and pawn-like outcome measures by degree of trust in elections.

in elections or greater government satisfaction overall rate politicians higher on both outcome measures. That is, they are more likely to describe politicians as both competent and pawn-like than respondents with low trust in elections or lower government satisfaction. Partially due to this overall tendency, high-trust respondents are more likely than low-trust respondents to see quota women as pawn-like.¹⁰

Similarly, we examine whether our outcome measures vary by whether respondents report voting in the 2021 parliamentary elections (Figure 4).¹¹ Voters view female politicians as less competent than non-voters do. Among voters, both quota women and men are viewed as more pawn-like than non-quota women, consistent with the results presented in the prior section. In contrast, non-voters view quota women as relatively competent and do not rate any type of politician as more pawn-like than the others.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the obstacles we anticipated quota women facing—being viewed as less competent and more pawn-like than other politicians—are more likely to be found among the most politically engaged. In contrast, non-voters are less biased against quota-elected women. Analyses that look at the entire population, rather than the most politically engaged, may thus overlook real biases relevant to women's electoral prospects.

Finally, one may wonder whether the differences we observe in respondent perceptions of quota versus non-quota women result from the disparate modes of their elections, with non-quota women included (at parties' discretion) on district-level party lists and quota women placed on separate national lists. Notably, however, non-quota men are elected on district-level party lists like non-quota women and are also consistently viewed as more pawn-like than non-quota

¹⁰It is important to note that, while high-trust respondents are more likely in the aggregate than low-trust respondents to see quota women as competent and pawn-like, there is still a negative correlation *among* high-trust respondents between politician competence and perceptions of politicians as pawn-like (see Figure A.16 in Appendix 9.1). In other words, respondents who are most engaged in politics see being a pawn as a negative thing. These results suggest that they are overall attentive to these politicians.

¹¹In our sample, around 45 percent of the respondents report voting in the previous elections.

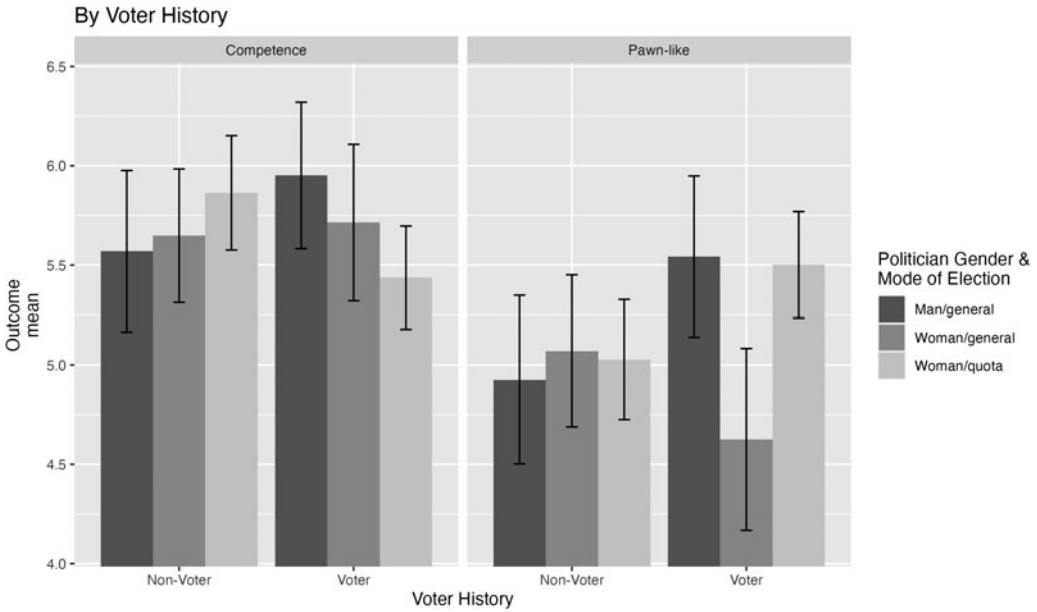


Figure 4. Competency and pawn-like outcome measures by voter status.

women. Like quota women, male politicians are often viewed as deeply tied to patronage networks.

7. Robustness checks

Appendix 7 contains several robustness checks of our results. First, we discuss missing values in our outcomes, as our analyses do not impute missing data (Appendix 7.1). Between 2 and 4 percent of respondents either said they “did not know” or refused to respond to one of the outcome measures (competence, pawn-like, and cooperative). The pawn-like outcome had the highest rate of non-response (3.7 percent). We examine the correlation of pre-registered demographics with an indicator for whether a respondent ever gave a non-response (47 unique respondents, or 5.1 percent) and find a substantively small correlation between this indicator and respondents’ socio-economic status and religiosity, but no other characteristics. Both better-off respondents and more religious respondents were slightly more likely to respond. If such respondents are disproportionately favorable toward quota women, this pattern of non-response might bias our findings toward null results in comparisons of quota women to other types of politicians. However, the low number of non-response observations suggests this is not a major contributor to our findings.

We also reproduce our results while excluding (a) respondents who did not correctly answer a manipulation check question (265 *attention check failers*, with 662 respondents remaining) and (b) respondents who gave the same response to a battery of questions related to gender norms and sexism more than two-thirds of the time (48 *straightliners*, with 879 respondents remaining). The results of the latter check do not differ from those presented above (Appendixes 7.2 and 7.3).

The manipulation check question asked whether the politician who had been described had been elected via a quota. Those in the quota woman treatment were more likely to correctly answer this question (84 percent) than respondents in the non-quota woman treatment (58 percent) or the non-quota man treatment (59 percent), perhaps because it was a more cognitively taxing question for those in the latter groups since a quota was not mentioned in the treatments for those groups (i.e., it was harder to recall something absent from the prompt).

Among the smaller sample who correctly responded to this manipulation check question, we again find no evidence that quota women are perceived as less competent, but we do find that they are seen as more pawn-like. We still find that portraying quota-elected women as working across party lines reduces perceptions that they are pawn-like. Unlike in the larger sample, we also find that working across party lines increases perceptions of quota women's competence. This suggests that our overall results are biased slightly toward null findings by including inattentive survey respondents. We do not find the same effects of collaboration for other types of politicians. Finally, we account for testing multiple hypotheses in Appendix 7.4.

8. Conclusion

Overall, we do not find evidence that quota-elected women are viewed as less competent than other politicians. This finding is surprising and goes against common expectations—including among political elites with whom we have interacted—that quota women are viewed as unqualified or incompetent. However, we find partial evidence that voters view quota women as more pawn-like. This finding is mostly driven by voters' negative perceptions of Morocco's political parties and candidate selection procedures. Notably, our respondents viewed male politicians as equally as pawn-like as quota women. Non-quota women, in contrast, were perceived as the least pawn-like, perhaps because their success outside of the quota system signals some kind of maverick personality or abilities. More work is needed to better understand how citizens' perceptions of the political parties may mediate their views of politicians, especially women elected via gender quotas.

The implications of our findings extend beyond the Moroccan case and may travel to other democratic and undemocratic contexts where parties play a prominent role in recruiting and selecting quota women. First and foremost, citizens' evaluations of quota politicians matter for the substantive impact of these policies. Gender quota proponents in Morocco and elsewhere argue that quotas can facilitate women's access to non-quota seats and other leadership positions, as voter perceptions change and women gain more political experience. As long as quota women are viewed differently, these desired effects may not materialize. In this respect, our findings are optimistic: they suggest that whatever bias voters have against quota-elected women is modest and may be overcome by particular interventions, such as promoting female politicians' CPC that may reinforce voters' perceptions of their autonomy and democratizing parties' candidate recruitment and selection processes.

Furthermore, our results demonstrate the incongruity of political elites' views of quota women and those of the general public. Political elites' negative views of the quota-elected women, which are echoed in our qualitative interviews, are not representative of the mass public. In this respect, our study aligns with recent findings showing that political elites do not hold accurate perceptions of public preferences (Walgrave *et al.*, 2023) and tend to overestimate the political conservatism of their constituents (Broockman and Skovron, 2018; Pilet *et al.*, 2023).

Finally, our results speak to burgeoning literature on the importance of the political environment in shaping quota effects (Krook, 2009). This research shows that citizens' evaluations of quota women can be tightly linked to the political and electoral contexts under which they operate. Previous work lends further evidence to this claim. For instance, Noh and Shalaby (2024) find that citizens' support for gender quota policies is linked to their evaluations of the electoral system in Tunisia and Morocco. Finally, our work supports Baldez (2006)'s assertion that the outcomes of gender quotas must be analyzed in relation to the broader political context, not solely in terms of their impact on attitudes toward women but also how they interact with other aspects of the electoral process (108).

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2024.69>.

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