

Gender Equality in Politics. Implementing Party Quotas in Germany and Austria

Petra Ahrens / Katja Chmielewski / Sabine Lang / Birgit Sauer
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While traditional center parties in Austria and Germany commit to gender parity in their statutes, they almost always miss their self-set targets. Why do parties fail to fulfil voluntary gender quotas? Petra Ahrens, Katja Chmielewski, Sabine Lang, and Birgit Sauer engage with the post-quota gender gap in their book *Gender Equality in Politics – Implementing Party Quotas in Germany and Austria*. In a nutshell, the study develops and substantiates the argument that the party statutes of the Austrian Peoples Party, Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in Austria and Germany do not appropriately take the particularities of the electoral systems into account.

The first part of the book provides the basis for the empirical investigation through a description of the country-specific context and a review of the literature concerned with similar questions. The authors highlight communalities between Austria and Germany: Roots in the male bread-winner oriented welfare state, strong federal structures and multi-party systems with sizeable green parties result in similar trends in women's representation, quota adoption, and quota fulfillment (see Chapter 2). The share of women in parliaments remained low until green parties entered the political stage. At this point discussions on gender parity gained momentum with established parties introducing strong commitments to women's presence in parliaments in their statutes. Yet, until today, most parties fail to fulfill these pledges consistently (see Chapter 3).

The literature review outlines how insufficient social acceptance of quotas, low numbers of female candidates, the continuing dominance of male networks and related factors create barriers for parties to reach their self-declared parity goals (see Chapter 4). The

authors argue that these effects, which solely focus on the behavior of the involved actors, can not explain some of the patterns observed in the cases under study. Most notably, Austrian parties have had a more pronounced post-quota gender gap than their German counterparts until recently. This pattern occurs despite of the theoretical proposition that Austria's proportional electoral system should facilitate the effective implementation of gender quotas compared to Germany's mixed-member proportional system. Moreover, parties tend to be more successful in meeting their quotas in Austrian state parliaments compared to the federal one, even though most of the well-researched barriers to quota fulfillment should unfold their strongest effect at the sub-national level.

The second part of the book presents the argument that the institutional context under which parties implement quotas is decisive for the size of the post-quota gender gap. To develop this rationale, the authors combine existing literature with data about women's representation in parties and interview responses from party officials. The analyses take information on the federal level as well as selected regions into account.

How district magnitude and the electoral tier hinder quota fulfillment are just two examples for the multitude of insights presented here (see Chapter 5 and 6). The findings clarify that low district magnitude is a major obstacle to quota implementation, not only in the majoritarian tier of mixed systems but also in a proportional electoral system. In Germany, neither of the traditional center parties to date found a way to comply with its target for women's representation in the nomination process for viable single member districts. In Austria, the

tendency to place men as front-runners of regional lists organized by the zipper system (i.e. man-woman-man-woman), combined with the small number of seats per district, leads to the persistence of male overrepresentation. Furthermore, the analyses show that the post-quota gender gap is less sizeable for higher electoral tiers in Austria. On the one hand, gatekeepers at higher levels commit more consistently to gender parity. On the other hand, regional lists are the consequence of negotiations between multiple party districts and compromises between the local players often counteract efforts to take candidates' gender into account.

The study contains valuable information and insights for practitioners and academics. One of the many aspects that practitioners will value is the policy advice presented in the conclusion, which contains clear suggestions how traditional center parties in Austria and Germany could close the post-quota gender gap. Students of electoral systems and women's representation will, amongst others, appreciate the food for thought for future research: Which additional institutional roadblocks for quota fulfillment exist in single non-transferable vote or two-round majority-plurality systems? Might the effect of electoral system on the post-quota gender gap be less pronounced in societies with widespread emancipative values? And last but not least, why do we observe mismatches between party status on quotas and electoral systems in the first place? *Gender Equality in Politics* raises awareness for the fact that voluntary gender quotas in party statutes are sensitive to the particularities of the electoral systems and that this problem should be more carefully considered by scholars and decision-makers in political parties.