

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/67583>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2019-02-19 and may be subject to change.

This article was downloaded by: [Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen]

On: 10 July 2012, At: 06:23

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



International Feminist Journal of Politics

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfjp20>

A Gender Gap Not Closed by Quotas

Petra Meier ^a

^a University of Antwerp, Belgium

Version of record first published: 20 Aug 2008

To cite this article: Petra Meier (2008): A Gender Gap Not Closed by Quotas, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 10:3, 329-347

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616740802185650>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

A Gender Gap Not Closed by Quotas

THE RENEGOTIATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

PETRA MEIER

University of Antwerp, Belgium

Abstract

The article argues that while legislation on sex quotas can be seen as a renegotiation of the public sphere at macro level, suggesting a formal recognition of gender equality and a subsequent redistribution of power positions, it does not necessarily imply recognition of the issue at micro level. Nearly a decade after the first sex quotas act had been adopted, a survey among Flemish politicians reveals a gender gap on such quotas. Male and female politicians differ in their acceptance and perception of sex quotas. They also differ in their explanations of women's under-representation in politics, and relate these explanations to the need for these quotas. This distinction between a macro and a micro level might offer clues as to the dynamics explaining why sex quotas remain controversial, even when they have been adopted.

Keywords

gender gap, gender inequality in politics, gender/sex quotas, recognition, redistribution

INTRODUCTION

Together with the rise in sex quotas¹ there has been a growing literature studying their emergence on the political agenda, adoption, implementation and impact.² A point commonly made by this literature – although it is not necessarily the topic addressed – is the fact that there is a gender gap when it comes to the acceptance of quotas for elected positions. Women seem to favour quotas while men tend to be opposed to such measures. Recent reports on Western Europe and North America (Lovenduski *et al.* 2005), Asia (IDEA 2003) and Latin America (Marques-Pereira and Nolasco 2001) confirm this. In a broad overview, Krook (2007) points out a number of

common alliances of those for and against quotas. Men are predominantly among those who are against quotas. Krook does not claim to be exhaustive but her constellations of actors confirm the general picture.

Analysing the Swiss debates on quotas and the French ones on parity democracy, Sgier (2004: 2) argues that claims for and debates over quotas 'can be understood as attempts to re-negotiate the public sphere in more egalitarian terms'. Basing her argument on Fraser's (1997) distinction between redistribution and recognition, she underlines that quotas can renegotiate the public sphere from this dual perspective. On the one hand quotas are meant to increase the number of women in political decision making in order to achieve a balance between the number of men and women. This is a redistribution of power positions; some of the positions formerly occupied by men go to women. On the other hand quotas involve a renegotiation of the public sphere in terms of recognition because the acceptance of quotas requires a reframing of the public sphere:

Gender quotas also challenge the norms of the public sphere in terms of *recognition*. Indeed, the adoption of electoral quotas implies the discursive reframing of concepts and categories in such a way as to make quotas a legitimate and acceptable 'solution' to a commonly recognized 'problem'.

(Sgier 2004: 4)

As she underlines elsewhere, '[G]ender quotas are not "only" about women, but – amongst other things – about the relationship between the citizens and the state, conceptions of representative democracy, identities, and about the power to define the social world' (Sgier 2003: 21). The inclusion of quotas on the political agenda, and their adoption, require the reframing of concepts like citizenship, representation and equality in such a way as to make the lack of gender equality in politics become defined as a problem and quotas an acceptable means to solve it.

Sgier's argument is appealing in the way it relates the construction of the problem, its solution and the issue of recognition to each other. In order to have the under-representation of women in politics be recognized as problematic, the presence of women *as* women needs to be considered important. There may be different arguments why women should be present but sex needs to be recognized as an important feature to consider in political representation and decision making. The final issue at stake is broader than sex in the strict sense of the term, including the experiences men and women face in their life positions, roles and functions, and the gendered expectations of these. Nonetheless, it is at this importance attached to sex that the renegotiation of the public sphere in terms of recognition points. The intrinsic recognition is that of sex and of the subsequent need for a balance among men and women. The issue at stake is not the acceptance of quotas as such but of the underlying problem as a problem and of quotas as a means to solve it (which does not by definition exclude other means to

achieve gender equality). Following on Sgier's application of Fraser's concept of recognition, the adoption of quotas involves that sex is recognized as a constitutive element to be considered in issues of representation. Sgier's argument also implies that once quotas are adopted the discursive struggle has been won. Relating this argument to the gender gap on quotas for elected positions reported for in the literature, means that such a gap should not exist in countries where quotas acts have been adopted. Constitutionally or legally enshrining quotas involve a formal recognition and, in that respect, a renegotiation of the public sphere. The prevailing norms in the public sphere have been renegotiated so as to integrate gender equality.

Belgium was one of the first countries to adopt a quotas act. Now that it has been more than a decade since this act was adopted and even succeeded by another one, what conclusions can we draw from the Belgian case about the challenging of the public sphere? A couple of years after the introduction of the first act, Celis and Woodward (2001) found that 40 per cent of women MPs in the Flemish Parliament are in favour of quotas as compared to 25 per cent of their male colleagues. And 70 per cent of the latter are against quotas, while the same is true of only 25 per cent of women. These percentages point at a gender gap. So what about the recognition of gender equality as an important constitutive element of Belgian or Flemish politics? Did the adoption of two successive quotas acts not lead to a renegotiation of the public sphere in terms of recognition?

This article discusses the opinions of Flemish politicians over a broad range of topics related to quotas, which were collected through a self-administered survey at the beginning of 2003. The argument is that – for the Flemish case at least – there are strong indications that quotas did not successfully manage to challenge and to renegotiate the public sphere at all levels. While the very adoption of two successive quotas acts can be seen as a renegotiation of the public sphere at a formal macro level, an investigation into the perception of quotas reveals a cleavage between women and men. The findings suggest that recognition at a macro level of politics does not necessarily imply recognition at the micro level of an individual politician.

QUOTAS AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN BELGIAN POLITICS

Belgium introduced its first quotas act in 1994.³ It stipulated that no more than two-thirds of electoral lists may comprise candidates of the same sex. In 2002 a new quotas act was passed.⁴ This act imposes an equal number of female and male candidates. Furthermore, candidates of the same sex may not occupy the two first list positions. In parallel with the adoption of the quotas acts, Belgian politics witnessed an increase in the number of women in politics. Before the 1990s, about 10 per cent of the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate were women. Since the introduction of the quotas acts the number of women in the Chamber of Representatives climbed to 12 per cent (1995),

19 per cent (1999), 35 per cent (2003) and 37 per cent (2007), while at the same occasion that of the women senators rose to 24, 28, 38 per cent and then dropped to 30 per cent at the occasion of the 2007 elections. A similar increase in the number of women could be found at the regional and local level.

The rise in the number of women in Belgian politics during the 1990s is generally attributed to the quotas acts (Peirens 1999; Verzele and Joly 1999; Carton 2001). However, the stipulations contained in the quotas acts were not in themselves enough to cause a redistribution of power positions. Rather it was the extent to which the quotas acts served as a benchmark for parties wanting to outdo each other in presenting a more women-friendly image, together with a reform of the electoral system that caused the number of women in elected positions to rise more quickly than had been the case in previous decades (Meier 2004, 2005). Even though it had but an indirect effect, the quotas act managed to challenge the public sphere at a redistributive level as defined by Sgier. When it comes to the challenging of the public sphere through a discursive reframing of it, the argument of this article is that – in the Flemish case at least – quotas successfully managed to renegotiate the public sphere only at a macro level.

This argument is based on an analysis of the opinions of Flemish politicians over a broad range of topics related to quotas, which were collected through a self-administered survey. The advantage of this approach is three-fold. First, most accounts of the perception and discursive construction of quotas are based on an analysis of the political debates preceding a vote on the question.⁵ In this case the survey was sent out at the beginning of 2003, when the quotas acts had already been passed. It is likely that positions on quotas were not as polarized as might be the case when a quotas bill is being discussed in parliament. Second, in a context in which party discipline is imposed, as in Belgium, a self-administered survey allows for more personal answers than when MPs are the party's voice in a parliamentary debate. Third, analyses of parliamentary debates allow only for an analysis of what has been said (or not) during a particular debate. A self-administered survey, by contrast, allows for the gathering of comparative material on a broad range of related matters.

The sample included all Flemish newcomers to a parliament⁶ (97) as well as the first candidate on a list who had not been elected at the previous elections (137), making a total sample of 234. A newcomer was a person who had never previously held an elected position at the level at which s/he was elected or at a level superior to that one. The first candidate on each list who had not been elected was the one who would have been elected if the party had won one more seat. The choice for this particular sample was due to the assumption that the opinions on quotas would vary depending on the self-interest related to them. General – and politically correct – principles might guide the answers of candidates with no particular interest in quotas, such as incumbents or candidates occupying ineligible positions. Both groups might be tempted to provide less personal answers while the sample tried to gather personal answers.

The questionnaire and the reminder were sent out at the beginning of 2003. Overall, 99 completed questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 42 per cent. Of the 99 respondents, 50 were women and 49 were men. As only 44 per cent of the sample was female, they are over-represented. Elected respondents were also over-represented. They returned 46 per cent of the questionnaires, while they only account for 41 per cent of the sample. When it comes to party affiliation and parliamentary assembly, the returned questionnaires reflect the composition of the sample. Only the right extremists were slightly under-represented.⁷

The questionnaire comprised a broad set of questions on the acceptance of quotas, their legitimacy, their effectiveness and the explanation of women's under-representation in politics (for the complete list of questions see the Appendix or Deschouwer and Meier 2003). The answers to these topics provide a detailed account of how individual politicians perceive quotas at a moment when the issue is not under debate. They also provide information on whether the public sphere has been renegotiated at a micro level through the internalization of the principle of gender equality and of quotas as a means to put that principle into practice. A renegotiation of the public sphere at all levels involves that politicians accept quotas and consider them to be legitimate. Furthermore, quotas should aid the redistribution of power positions, and this effect should be accepted and valued positively. Finally, it is interesting to consider how politicians explain the under-representation of women in politics, because it might provide additional information on their position on quotas.

The questions on quotas were supplemented with background information on the respondent including sex, party affiliation/ideology, age and political career path. It allowed for the testing of the impact of a number of independent variables on the perception of quotas, their underlying principles and problems. Throughout the analysis, sex proved to be the major variable shaping the response pattern. This is an important finding. It confirms the gender gap regarding the perception and acceptance of quotas. It is also a strong indicator for a limited renegotiation of the public sphere. While women have internalized the recognition of sex as a constitutive element to be considered in politics as it prevails at a macro level, men do not share this position. The rest of this contribution discusses where and how men and women precisely differ in their perception of quotas.⁸

QUOTAS AND THEIR LEGITIMACY

The majority of women, 88 per cent, are in favour of quotas as compared to 34 per cent of the men. And while only 12 per cent of the women reject any form of quotas, this is the case for 66 per cent of the men. Not only are more women in favour of quotas, they prefer the most effective form of them to be applied in Belgian elections – this being an alternate ranking of candidates of both sexes over the list or eligible positions, in application of a zipper principle.

No woman is in favour of quotas without specifying how fe/male candidates are to be distributed over the list, which leaves open the option of reserving all eligible positions for candidates of one sex. Of the men in favour of quotas 30 per cent opt for this version of quotas. Not only is there more support for quotas among women, but they are also more in favour than men of quotas doing more than window-dressing. They seem to be convinced that once quotas are used they should be designed in a way making sure they have an impact.

The respondents were also confronted with a number of statements on the normative foundations of quotas, meant to estimate the perception of their legitimacy. As Table 1 shows, women and men have opposite views on this subject. While women do not call into question the legitimacy of quotas, men consider that they clash with a number of basic principles behind the Belgian political system. The majority of women do not agree that quotas would harm democratic

Table 1 Perception of the legitimacy of quotas (N = 99; M = 49; W = 50)

	<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>	
	<i>M (%)</i>	<i>W (%)</i>	<i>M (%)</i>	<i>W (%)</i>	<i>M (%)</i>	<i>W (%)</i>
Quotas are legitimate because they lead to more justice	67	8	16	70	17	22
In politics you have to earn your position and quotas undermine this principle	16	72	69	10	15	18
Quotas are unacceptable because they undermine our democratic principles	28	80	51	4	21	16
Quotas are unacceptable because they undermine voters' freedom	34	86	46	0	20	14
Quotas are acceptable because they promote equality	59	10	22	70	19	20
Quotas are unacceptable because they emphasize differences between the sexes	26	74	51	14	23	12
Quotas are acceptable because they correct the poor functioning of our democracy	65	20	12	64	23	16
Quotas are legitimate because they fit in with our perception of political representation	51	10	22	74	27	16
Quotas are unacceptable because they undermine the principle of non-discrimination	32	72	48	10	20	18

principles or tamper with the foundations of the Belgian constitutional state. On the contrary, the majority of women think that the democratic system functions badly and that quotas correct this bias. Quotas are considered to be legitimate because they promote equality and justice. A majority of women also think that quotas fit into the prevailing conceptualization of political representation and do not clash with the principles underlying a fair, democratic electoral process. Nor do quotas affect voters' freedom to vote for a candidate of their choice, or an equitable selection of candidates. Finally, a majority of women argue that quotas do not overemphasize differences between the sexes, an argument often used against quotas, stemming from a fear of essentialization.

Men think the opposite of their female colleagues. Quotas are unacceptable because they undermine the basic principles of the Belgian democratic order. They undermine the principle of non-discrimination. Nor are men convinced that quotas would promote equality or justice. This fits in with the conviction that quotas would not correct the poor functioning of democracy. Furthermore, men consider that quotas do not fit into the dominant conceptualization of representation, but lead to an unfair selection of candidates and deprive voters of the right to vote for a candidate of their choice. Finally, a majority of men are convinced that quotas emphasize the differences between the sexes.

Even though men and women have opposing views when it comes to the legitimacy of quotas, attitudes among men are, generally speaking, more divided on this subject than women's. The number of men disagreeing with the prevailing position within their group is higher than the number of women who do not share the dominant female point of view. Men and women still differ fundamentally on the extent to which they think quotas are legitimate. Their perception of legitimacy is consistent with the acceptance of quotas as such. Men put the legitimacy of quotas into question and it is therefore no surprise that they are against any form of quotas. Women consider them to be legitimate and consequently argue in favour of quotas.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF QUOTAS

The respondents were also confronted with a number of statements on the effectiveness of quotas (for details, see Table 2). A majority of both women and men share the opinion that quotas give women easier access to political office. Furthermore, they believe that quotas are not improperly used and that they are useful because they provide women with access to centres of power. In short, a majority of men and women think that quotas counterbalance traditional selection procedures in politics.

Women are divided on whether quotas merely cure the symptoms without actually tackling the problem of their under-representation in politics, while 65 per cent of the men agree on this. This finding has to be read in connection with others. While 74 per cent of the women think that quotas are not redundant, 63 per cent of the men think the opposite – namely, that women

Table 2 Perception of the effectiveness of quotas (N = 99; M = 49; W = 50)

	<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>	
	<i>M (%)</i>	<i>W (%)</i>	<i>M (%)</i>	<i>W (%)</i>	<i>M (%)</i>	<i>W (%)</i>
Quotas are redundant because women also make their way without them	10	74	63	10	27	16
Quotas have a negative effect on the credibility of women as competent candidates	22	56	53	20	25	24
Quotas merely correct the symptoms – they do not tackle the real problems	12	34	65	36	23	30
Quotas are improperly used: women feature on the lists but are encouraged not to take up office	55	72	12	8	33	20
Quotas are useless because they do not give women access to the real centres of power	48	60	16	8	36	32
Quotas help women to gain a place in politics	6	6	79	92	15	2

would also make their way in politics without quotas. Furthermore, a majority of men think that quotas have a negative effect on the credibility of women candidates, while a majority of women disagree on this.

Perceiving quotas as an effective tool does not automatically mean that this effectiveness is experienced as positive. The fact that both sexes acknowledge the redistributive character of quotas, helping women to have access to political office, does not prevent them from perceiving this effectiveness differently. Women frame it in positive terms, as a correction of incorrectly functioning selection mechanisms. Men frame the effectiveness of quotas in negative terms, as interference with selection mechanisms that function correctly. This difference between the sexes in framing the effectiveness of quotas is confirmed by the fact that 75 per cent of the respondents who did not mention a positive effect of quotas were men. Men attribute less positive effects to quotas than women.

EXPLANATIONS FOR THE UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

The respondents were also questioned on the factors that account for women's under-representation in politics. While 64 per cent of the women surveyed consider that they get fewer chances in politics than men do, 73 per cent of

the latter do not agree on this point and believe that women get at least as many chances as they themselves do (for details, see Table 3). To a lesser extent, women also think that political parties prefer men, assuming that men believe women are less suited to politics. While 40 per cent of the women are convinced of this, 79 per cent of the men again disagree. In parallel with this, 95 per cent of the men do not believe that parties would prefer male candidates because they consider women to be of less benefit from an electoral point of view. Interestingly, 60 per cent of the women share the male position on this point. While they think that parties prefer male candidates, considering them to be more suited to politics than female candidates, they believe that men are not preferred because they would be more useful from an electoral point of view. This different perception by women can be explained by the dominant belief that parties have to be open to women candidates in order to maximize their electoral attractiveness.

Neither women nor men think that the former lack the experience and training required for politics. Eighty-eight per cent of the women and 91 per cent of the men consider that women have sufficient assets in this regard. In parallel with this, 71 per cent of the men believe that women have the contacts

Table 3 Factors explaining women's under-representation in politics (N = 99; M = 49; W = 50)

	<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>	
	<i>M (%)</i>	<i>W (%)</i>	<i>M (%)</i>	<i>W (%)</i>	<i>M (%)</i>	<i>W (%)</i>
Women get fewer chances in politics than men	73	24	10	64	17	12
Parties prefer men because they consider women to be less suited to politics	79	32	6	40	15	28
Women lack important contacts	71	30	6	58	23	12
Parties prefer men because they think women are less interesting from an electoral perspective	95	60	0	22	5	18
Women do not fight strongly enough for their ambition to be elected	46	24	38	58	16	18
Women are less interested in political office than men	32	38	53	36	15	26
Women lack suitable experience and training	91	88	2	6	7	6
Women give priority to their family, not to a political career	8	6	73	80	19	14

necessary to make their way in politics. On this point women differ, 58 per cent of them believing that they lack the contacts necessary for pursuing a political career. Men and women also differ in their perception of whether women sufficiently defend their ambition to become elected. While 46 per cent of the men consider that women fight sufficiently hard for realizing their political ambitions, 58 per cent of the women believe that this is not the case. However, while this leads 53 per cent of the men to believe that women are less interested in a political mandate than themselves, women are more divided on this point. Thirty-eight per cent of the women do not agree that they would be less interested in a political mandate than men, while 36 per cent share the male point of view. But women and men agree that women give priority to their family instead of to a political career.

The main distinction in perception between men and women lies in the fact that the former locate the explanation for women's under-representation at the level of the individual woman while women seek the causes at a structural level, for example in the way in which political parties operate. Men do not think that women face discrimination, or lack the formal or informal assets needed to build a political career, or that they fail to invest enough in such a career. According to men, women are simply less interested in political office than men are, giving priority instead to their family life. Women, conversely, consider that their under-representation in politics can partly be explained by the fact that they are given fewer chances than male colleagues and that they lack some of the assets that facilitate a political career. In their view, thus, women are under-represented in politics not so much because of formal factors, such as their lack of the necessary professional experience or training, but rather because of more informal ones, such as lack of contacts. According to this perception, the causes of women's under-representation are to a large extent to be found at a more structural level. Even the fact that women, more than men, tend to agree with the idea that they do not sufficiently defend their political ambition to be elected fits in here: women associate this attitude with a struggle against gender-related discrimination in politics, while men relate it to less interest in a political career.

Thus men and women differ significantly in their explanation of women's under-representation in politics.⁹ This difference may explain the different attitude towards quotas, but it may also reflect a different attitude towards the consideration of gender in the process of political representation. From a woman's point of view, the current imbalance between men and women in politics reflects the problems women face when trying to build a political career. This explains their positive attitude towards quotas. Women do not think that quotas are redundant, because they define gender-related thresholds in structural terms and quotas can help overcome them. This makes quotas not only efficient but also legitimate. However, quotas are not an end in themselves. What they really think to be important is the achievement of a balance between men and women and quotas are a means to do so. Men, on the other hand, think that quotas are redundant, because they do not see a

problem in women's under-representation in politics. Men consider the existing imbalance to be due to individual choices. This can partly explain why they are less in favour of quotas. From men's perspective, using quotas can only have but a negative impact on the perception of women candidates, because it is perceived as a form of preferential treatment. This explains why men are more inclined than women to associate quotas with stigmatization. But it can also explain their fundamental rejection of quotas. Since they believe that women's under-representation in politics is due to their personal choices and that the system functions correctly, quotas disturb the democratic working of the representative institutions. Finally, men do not consider sex to be an important element in processes of representation. Otherwise they would consider quotas to be legitimate and necessary even though they argue that the under-representation of women in politics is due to their personal choices.

CONCLUSIONS

The present article shows that quotas can remain controversial, even after they have been adopted. The present findings also show that – at least in the Flemish case – quotas oppose men and women. In this respect the findings confirm the gender gap on quotas referred to in the literature. One could have expected not to find such a gap or any other broad controversy on quotas in Belgium, because quotas have been adopted more than a decade ago and applied to several elections. The adoption of quotas acts can be seen as a renegotiation of the public sphere involving an element of redistribution and one of recognition. Redistribution refers to an increased number of power positions going to women as a consequence of quotas. But the adoption of quotas also implies that sex is recognized as a constitutive element to be considered in issues of representation.

The Flemish case illustrates that this kind of renegotiation of the public sphere need not take place. The Belgian quotas acts do have a redistributive effect and this is acknowledged. Both men and women underline the fact that quotas give women access to political office. But the data show that there is no far-reaching renegotiation of the public sphere in terms of recognition. The adoption of two successive quotas acts can be seen as a renegotiation of the public sphere at a formal macro level. They involve an enshrining of the principle of gender equality, which has also been given a prominent place in the Belgian constitution, and of quotas as a means to achieve it. This does not, however, necessarily involve a renegotiation at a micro level through the approval of these principles and means by individuals. It is not because quotas acts were passed that the problem of women's under-representation in politics and quotas as a means meant to solve it, become all of a sudden generally accepted. Once a controversial policy has been established it can over time become more accepted throughout society and in this respect legitimized. But the renegotiation of the public sphere at the formal macro level does

not automatically involve that politicians accept quotas and consider them to be legitimate.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the renegotiation of the public sphere at the macro level is but an integration of norms already prevailing to a certain extent at the micro level. Although there are no data to prove this point, it is likely to assume that women's attitudes with respect to the issue of gender equality in politics and quotas are not necessarily a consequence of the renegotiation of the public sphere in terms of recognition. The Belgian struggle for quotas acts, as so many struggles for gender equality, has mainly been and is fought by women. It could be argued that the macro level has taken over the acceptance of gender equality norms and quotas already prevailing at the micro level among women. Legal texts, then, enshrine feminist principles, be it often in a weakened version. Other factors than a renegotiation of the public sphere might account for this acceptance of feminist principles at a macro level. But other individuals need not automatically adopt these principles.

This distinction between a macro and a micro level offers clues as to the dynamics that lead to the continuous contestation of quotas, even when they have been adopted and applied. The lack of recognition at the micro level explains for instance why quotas are questioned over and again. In themselves quotas do not seem to be sufficient to challenge power relations fundamentally in society. Their adoption and repeated implementation does not necessarily imply the recognition, in the eyes of the dominant group, of gender inequality as an issue legitimizing political action. The data, then, point at the limits of legal strategies. This conclusion poses questions on how to tackle the deeply embedded attitudes towards gender (in)equality.

Such questions might be especially interesting since Belgium is today one among many countries having adopted quotas. While the Flemish findings might offer explanations for the dynamics underlying quotas in other countries, an application of the questionnaire in other cases or in a comparative setting might also challenge the gender gap presented in this article. It might be that no controversy is found or that no gender gap is to be noticed, both of which are very unlikely given what the literature on quotas reports. However, in case other findings would confirm those presented in this article, the question of how to tackle the issue of gender inequality in politics becomes even more relevant.

Petra Meier
Department of Politics
University of Antwerp
Sint Jacobstraat 2 M278
2000 Antwerpen
Belgium
E-mail: petra.meier@ua.ac.be

APPENDIX: TRANSLATION OF THE FLEMISH QUESTIONNAIRE
(QUESTIONS ONLY)

1. Assembly for which you were a candidate at the latest elections: 0 European Parliament; 0 Senate; 0 Chamber of Representatives; 0 Flemish Parliament; 0 Parliament of the Brussels Capital Region.
2. Party for which you were a candidate at the latest elections: 0 Groen; 0 Vlaams Belang; 0 CD&V; 0 VLD; 0 SP-A; 0 NVA; 0 Spirit.
3. Since when are you a member of that party: . . .
4. In case you have been a member of a different party before, please indicate its name and the period in which you have been a member of that party: . . .
5. In case you are by now a member of a different party than the one for which you were a candidate at the latest elections, please indicate that party: 0 Groen; 0 Vlaams Belang; 0 CD&V; 0 VLD; 0 SP-A; 0 NVA; 0 Spirit; 0 Other: . . .
6. How often have you been a candidate for the assembly for which you were a candidate at the latest elections (including that candidacy): . . .
7. Did you volunteer as a candidate or have you been approached by the party: 0 I volunteered (go to question 9); 0 I was approached by the party (go to question 8).
8. In case you were approached by the party, which factors do you think played a role in this and how important were they (please provide an answer for all factors listed):

	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Less important</i>	<i>Unimportant</i>
Party membership	1	2	3
Active involvement in the party	1	2	3
Other activities profitable for a political mandate: . . .	1	2	3
Surname well-known in Flemish/Belgian politics	1	2	3
Well-known by a larger public	1	2	3
Sex	1	2	3
Other socio-demographic characteristics (age, foreign origins, etc.)	1	2	3
Other factors: . . .	1	2	3

9. Did quotas influence your position on the electoral list at the latest election: 0 yes, the statutory quotas had a positive influence; 0 yes, the statutory quotas had a negative influence; 0 yes, the party quotas had a positive influence; 0 yes, the party quotas had a negative influence; 0 no, quotas played no role.

10. a. In case you have been elected at the latest elections, which factors do you think played a role in this and how important were they (please provide an answer for all factors listed):

	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Less important</i>	<i>Unimportant</i>
Good personal score	1	2	3
Good party score	1	2	3
Position on the electoral list	1	2	3
Other factors: ...	1	2	3

Were you elected on the list of successors: 0 yes; 0 no

10. b. In case you have not been elected at the latest elections, which factors do you think played a role in this and how important were they (please provide an answer for all factors listed):

	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Less important</i>	<i>Unimportant</i>
Good personal score	1	2	3
Good party score	1	2	3
Position on the electoral list	1	2	3
Other factors: ...	1	2	3

11. The proportion of male and female MPs can vary. Which proportion do you prefer (only one option): 0 an equal number of men and women; 0 the smaller group should at least account for 1/3 of the MPs; 0 the smaller group should at least account for 1/4 of the MPs; 0 it does not matter how many male and female MPs there are.
12. To what extent do you agree with the following explanations for the lower number of women in politics (please provide an answer for all explanations listed):

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
Women do not fight strongly enough for their ambition to be elected	1	2	3
Women get fewer chances in politics than men	1	2	3
Women give priority to their family, not to a political career	1	2	3
Women lack suitable experience and training	1	2	3
Women are less interested in political office than men	1	2	3

(Continued)

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
Parties prefer men because they consider women to be less suited to politics	1	2	3
Women lack important contacts	1	2	3
Parties prefer men because they think women are less interesting from an electoral perspective	1	2	3
Women are discriminated against	1	2	3
Other explanations: ...	1	2	3

13. a. Opinions vary on the positions male and female candidates should occupy on electoral lists. Please indicate your personal opinion (only one option): 0 in favour of a zipper principle; 0 in favour of a zipper principle applied to all eligible positions; 0 in favour of a zipper principle for the first two positions; 0 against quotas for eligible positions; 0 against quotas.
13. b. How should this distribution of male and female candidates on electoral lists be regulated (only one option): 0 by law; 0 by party rule; 0 not, I'm against quotas.
14. To what extent do you agree with the following statements on quotas (please provide an answer for all statements listed):

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
Quotas are unacceptable because they emphasize differences between the sexes	1	2	3
Quotas stimulate the opinion that a balanced number of women and men in politics is the normal thing to be	1	2	3
Quotas are legitimate because they fit with our perception of political representation	1	2	3
Women are taken more serious because of quotas	1	2	3
Quotas are acceptable because they correct the poor functioning of our democracy	1	2	3
Quotas help women to gain a place in politics	1	2	3
Quotas are unacceptable because they undermine the principle of non-discrimination	1	2	3
Quotas merely correct the symptoms; they do not tackle the real problems	1	2	3
Quotas are legitimate because they lead to more justice	1	2	3

(Continued)

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
Quotas help women achieve their political ambitions	1	2	3
Quotas are acceptable because they promote equality	1	2	3
Quotas are redundant because women also make their way without them	1	2	3
In politics you have to earn your position and quotas undermine this principle	1	2	3
Quotas are useless because they do not give women access to the real centres of power	1	2	3
Quotas are unacceptable because they undermine our democratic principles	1	2	3
Quotas have a negative effect on the credibility of women as competent candidates	1	2	3
Quotas are unacceptable because they undermine voters' freedom	1	2	3
Quotas are improperly used: women feature on the lists but are encouraged not to take up office	1	2	3

15. Opinions vary on the effectiveness of quotas. Please indicate your personal opinion (only one option): 0 quotas are the appropriate means used for the right end; 0 the end justifies the means: quotas are not the best but necessary means; 0 the end does not justify the means: quotas are unacceptable; 0 quotas are superfluous.
16. Opinions vary on the term of quotas. Please indicate your personal opinion (only one option): 0 quotas have to be abolished immediately; 0 quotas have to be abolished at some moment in time; 0 quotas can be lasting.
17. What do you think are the positive effects of quotas: ...
18. What do you think are the negative effects of quotas: ...
19. The first statutory quotas were adopted in 1994. How would you describe possible changes in politicians' attitude towards quotas (only one option): 0 the negative attitude towards quotas diminished; 0 the negative attitude towards quotas increased; 0 there is no real change in the attitude towards quotas.
20. The first statutory quotas were adopted in 1994. How would you describe possible changes in politicians' attitude towards the number of men and women in politics (only one option): 0 more politicians think that a balanced number of men and women in politics is important; 0 less politicians think that a balanced number of men and women in politics is important; 0 there is no real change in the attitude towards the number of men and women in politics.

21. To what extent do you support the following measures to increase the number of women in politics (please provide an answer for all measures listed):

	<i>Support</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Do not support</i>
Awareness-raising campaigns to vote for women	1	2	3
Neutralizing the impact of the list vote	1	2	3
Limiting the number of political mandates occupied simultaneously	1	2	3
Limiting the number of political mandates over time	1	2	3
More transparent selection of candidates	1	2	3
(More) financial support of political women's groups	1	2	3
Training female candidates and mandate holders	1	2	3
Sensibilizing potential female candidates	1	2	3
Supporting women's networks	1	2	3
Changing societal gender patterns	1	2	3
Gender training of party leaders	1	2	3
Better child care provisions	1	2	3
Regulating maternity/parental leave and breastfeeding facilities for MPs	1	2	3
Family friendly meeting schedules for MPs	1	2	3

22. Would you suggest that such measures (only one option): 0 replace the statutory quotas; 0 complete the statutory quotas; 0 need not be taken.

23. In several assemblies exist, next to the statutory quotas for women and men, reserved seats for the language groups. Comparing both measures do you think that (only one option): 0 statutory quotas for men and women are less justified than reserved seats for language groups; 0 statutory quotas for men and women are as justified as reserved seats for language groups; 0 statutory quotas for men and women are more justified than reserved seats for language groups; 0 statutory quotas for men and women cannot be compared to reserved seats for language groups.

24. In case you would like communicate any other suggestion or point of view with respect to quotas: . . .

25. Background information: You are: 0 male; 0 female; Year of birth: . . .

Notes

1 While the literature often refers to gender quotas one should actually speak of sex quotas because they address the numerical balance of men and women in politics. For reasons of readability this article will simply refer to quotas. However, the issue at stake is gender equality, encompassing the broader construction of gender when it

comes to the equality of men and women. Therefore the article will refer to gender equality when not simply addressing the numerical balance of men and women in decision making. Also, as this article will show, one can speak of a gender gap with respect to quotas. While statistically speaking men and women tend to have different attitudes towards quotas, their attitudes are based on a broader set of gendered perceptions of reality.

- 2 Jones (1996, 1998); Arioli (1998); Studlar and McAllister (1998); Jones and Navia (1999); Caul (2001); Marques-Pereira and Nolasco (2001); Htun and Jones (2002); Bruhn (2003); Guadagnini (2003); Meier (2004); Lovenduski *et al.* (2005); Dahlerup (2006); Krook (2007).
- 3 Belgisch Staatsblad 01/07/1994.
- 4 Belgisch Staatsblad 28/08/2002, 13/09/2002, 10/01/2003.
- 5 Marques-Pereira (1998); Marques-Pereira and Gigante (2001); Sgier (2003, 2004); Lovenduski *et al.* (2005).
- 6 These were the European Parliament, the federal Senate and Chamber of Representatives, the Flemish Parliament and the Parliament of the Brussels Capital Region. All of them had been elected in 1999, which allowed for a large sample.
- 7 SP-A (Social Democrats): 15 per cent (15/99) of questionnaires, 15 per cent (36/234) of sample; CD&V (Christian Democrats): 15 per cent (15/99) of questionnaires, 15 per cent (35/234) of sample; VLD (Liberals): 21 per cent (21/99) of questionnaires, 22 per cent (52/234) of sample; Groen (greens): 18 per cent (18/99) of questionnaires, 17 per cent (40/234) of sample; NVA (regionalists): 15 per cent (15/99) of questionnaires, 13 per cent (30/234) of sample; Vlaams Belang (right extremists): 15 per cent (15/99) of questionnaires, 18 per cent (41/234) of sample.
- 8 The fact that, in Belgium, sex is the main factor influencing the perception of quotas confirms earlier findings (Mateo-Diaz 2002). For a full account of the findings see Deschouwer and Meier (2003).
- 9 The survey investigated the perception of explanatory factors but the fact that men and women provide such different answers makes it plausible to assume that women face gender-related thresholds.

References

- Arioli, K. 1998. 'Die Schweizerische Debatte um die Einführung von Frauenquoten in der Politik', *Swiss Political Science Review* 4 (2): 131–7.
- Bruhn, K. 2003. 'Whores and Lesbians: Political Activism, Party Strategies, and Gender Quotas in Mexico', *Electoral Studies* 22 (1): 101–19.
- Carton, A. 2001. 'The General Elections in Belgium in June 1999: A Real Breakthrough for Women Politicians?', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 8 (1): 127–35.
- Caul, M. 2001. 'Political Parties and the Adoption of Candidate Gender Quotas: A Cross-National Analysis', *Journal of Politics* 63 (4): 1214–29.
- Celis, K. and Woodward, A. 2001. *Het Vlaams Parlement, Nieuwe Politieke Cultuur en het potentieel voor een valorisering van het maatschappelijk kapitaal van vrouwen in de politieke besluitvorming*. Brussels: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap.
- Dahlerup, D. (ed.). 2006. *Women, Quota and Politics*. London: Routledge.

- Deschouwer, K. and Meier, P. 2003. *Antitrustwetgeving of aanfluiting van de democratie: hoe Vlaamse politici denken over genderquota*. Brussel: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap.
- Fraser, N. 1997. *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition*. New York: Routledge.
- Guadagnini, M. (ed.). 2003. *Da elettrici a elette: Riforme istituzionali e rappresentanza delle donne in Italia, in Europa e negli Stati Uniti*. Torino: Celid.
- Htun, M. N. and Jones, M. P. 2002. 'Engendering the Right to Participate in Decision-Making: Electoral Quotas and Women's Leadership in Latin America', in Craske, N. and Molyneux, M. (eds) *Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*, pp. 32–56. New York: Palgrave.
- IDEA. 2003. *The Implementation of Quotas: Asian Experiences*. Stockholm: IDEA.
- Jones, M. 1996. 'Increasing Women's Representation Via Gender Quotas: The Argentine Ley de Cupos', *Women & Politics* 16 (4): 75–98.
- Jones, M. 1998. 'Gender Quotas, Electoral Laws, and the Election of Women: Lessons from the Argentine Provinces', *Comparative Political Studies* 31 (1): 3–21.
- Jones, M. and Navia, P. 1999. 'Assessing the Effectiveness of Gender Quotas in Open-List Proportional Representation Electoral Systems', *Social Science Quarterly* 80 (2): 341–55.
- Krook, M. L. 2007. 'Candidate Gender Quotas: A Framework for Analysis', *European Journal of Political Research* 46 (3): 367–94.
- Lovenduski, J., Baudino, C., Guadagnini, M., Meier, P. and Sainsbury, D. 2005. *State Feminism and Political Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marques-Pereira, B. 1998. *La citoyenneté politique des femmes*. Brussels: CRISP.
- Marques-Pereira, B. and Gigante, C. 2001. *La représentation politique des femmes: des quotas à la parité?* Brussels: CRISP.
- Marques-Pereira, B. and Nolasco, P. 2001. *La représentation politique des femmes en Amérique latine*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Mateo-Diaz, M. 2002. *From Descriptive to Substantive Representation ... And Back Again?* Louvain-La-Neuve: UCL.
- Meier, P. 2004. 'The Contagion Effect of National Gender Quota on Similar Party Measures in the Belgian Electoral Process', *Party Politics* 10 (3): 583–600.
- Meier, P. 2005. 'Le système électoral belge et les rapports de genre', in Marques-Pereira, B. and Meier, P. (eds) *Genre et politique en Belgique et en Francophonie*, pp. 23–34. Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant.
- Peirens, K. 1999. 'Vrouwelijke parlementsleden na de verkiezingen van 13 juni 1999: Analyse van de toegang tot een parlementair mandaat', *Res Publica* 41 (4): 481–98.
- Sgier, L. 2003. 'Political Representation and Gender Quotas', paper delivered at the ECPR Joint Sessions, Edinburgh.
- Sgier, L. 2004. 'Gender Quota Debates as Discourses on the Public Sphere', paper delivered at the ECPR Joint Sessions, Uppsala.
- Studlar, D. T. and McAllister, I. 1998. 'Candidate Gender and Voting in the 1997 British General Elections: Did Labour Quotas Matter?', *Journal of Legislative Studies* 4 (3): 72–91.
- Verzele, V. and Joly, C. 1999. *La représentation des femmes en politique après les élections du 13 juin 1999*. Brussels: CRISP.