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# Quotas for Peace? Gender Inclusion in Post- Conflict and Stable Democracies

A comparative case study of Sweden and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Author: Natalia Ntouka  
Supervisor: Elina Pirjatanniemi

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the role of gender quotas in enhancing women's political participation and promoting peacebuilding, through a comparative case study of Sweden and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It questions how the application and efficacy of gender quotas are influenced by various political circumstances, such as stable and post-conflict democracies. Drawing on feminist political theory and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, the study applies a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) within the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). Sweden, a stable democracy, serves as an example of how party norms and internal political culture may promote inclusive governance with voluntary quotas. On the other hand, Bosnia and Herzegovina serves an example of how legally mandated, externally enforced quotas might boost descriptive representation without necessarily changing institutional norms or promoting peace. The research demonstrates that quotas alone are insufficient; rather, their effectiveness relies on more extensive structural, cultural, and institutional elements, such as party dynamics, political will, and enforcement strategies. Finally, the thesis argues that gender quotas can help peace and democratic resilience, but only if they are included into sociopolitical frameworks that support them. International actors are encouraged to use intersectional methods and capacity-building to reinforce quota rules in both contexts.

**Keywords:** gender quotas, women's political participation, women's rights, stable democracy, post-conflict society, peacebuilding, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sweden, WPS Agenda.

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## List of Abbreviations

BiH Bosnia and Herzegovina

EU European Union

MDSM Most Different System Design

NAP National Action Plan

NGO/ NGOs Non-Governmental Organizations

OSCE Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

QCA Qualitative Comparative Analysis

UN United Nations

WPS Women, Peace, and Security

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Efforts to increase gender equality in political representation have become central to global democratic reform, particularly through the implementation of gender quotas. Partially motivated by the 1995 United Nations Fourth Conference on women in Beijing, a growing number of states have adopted various forms of quotas as tools to address structural gender disparities by establishing a minimum proportion of female candidates or elected officials in political institutions and ensuring that women have an influence not only in governance but also in democratic stability.<sup>1</sup> Although full gender parity remains unattainable, quotas have proven effective in many contexts at accelerating women's political participation, fostering inclusive governance, and challenging male-dominated systems of representation.

While often seen as progressive innovations, quotas are far from uniform in their impact. In fact, the context in which gender quotas are adopted, stable democracies versus post-conflict societies, has a significant influence on their effectiveness. Most notably, several Nordic countries implemented gender quotas voluntarily decades before the Beijing Platform for Action, embedding them into longstanding political cultures of equality and consensus-building.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, post-conflict countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) adopted mandatory quotas as part of externally driven democratization and peacebuilding frameworks, often facing significant institutional and cultural resistance.

Moreover, the inclusion of women in peacebuilding is increasingly recognized as crucial for achieving sustainable and lasting peace. Conflict and post-conflict periods can serve as critical

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<sup>1</sup> Zainab Firdos, 'Women in Politics - a Comparative Analysis of Gender Quotas in Different Countries' (2024) 6 International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research.

<sup>2</sup> Li-Ju Chen, 'Do Gender Quotas Influence Women's Representation and Policies?' (2010) 7 The European Journal of Comparative Economics 13.

junctures for women to challenge traditional gender roles, assume new responsibilities, and advocate for long-term societal transformation.<sup>3</sup> Women's involvement in peace negotiations, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction can bring fresh perspectives and address the complex needs of affected communities.

This thesis uses a comparative case study of Sweden and BiH to explore how different political contexts shape the implementation and outcomes of gender quotas. Sweden represents a stable democracy where voluntary party quotas have led to near-parity in political representation and arguably contributed to inclusive, peaceful governance. BiH, on the other hand, offers a case of fragile post-war governance, where legal gender quotas were introduced under international pressure but remain constrained by ethnic power-sharing, weak enforcement, and persistent patriarchal norms.

While much of the post-conflict literature treats women's political inclusion as a result of peace agreements, this thesis asks whether the reverse may also hold true: if institutionalized inclusion, through gender quotas, contribute to building or sustaining peace. This thesis investigates the logic that women's political participation contributes to more inclusive governance, which in turn supports democratic legitimacy and sustainable peace. In this view, gender quotas function as institutional tools, not independent solutions, but mechanisms that can expand participation, redistribute power, and enhance political accountability. They do not guarantee peace, but they may help create the conditions in which peace is more likely to last.

To explore this, the research applies a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). These methods allow for a structured comparison between Bosnia and Sweden, two countries with contrasting political histories and institutional frameworks, but both committed to gender quota implementation. This design enables a deeper understanding of how quota

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<sup>3</sup> Julie Arostegui, 'Gender, Conflict, and Peace-Building: How Conflict Can Catalyse Positive Change for Women' (2013) 21 *Gender & Development* 533.

mechanisms operate under divergent political conditions, and what factors make them more or less effective.

The choice of comparison is not arbitrary. Sweden and BiH represent two ends of a spectrum, one a highly institutionalized, egalitarian democracy and the other a post-conflict state with complex political fragmentation and weak gender equality outcomes. This contrast is analytically powerful because it allows us to examine whether and how quotas translate into meaningful political inclusion, and what conditions make that possible. Rather than comparing success and failure in simplistic terms, the analysis asks why gender quotas work differently in different political environments and what this reveals about their potential as peacebuilding tools.

Last but not least, this thesis positions gender quotas not only as instruments of inclusion, but as potential contributors to democratic transformation and sustainable peace, especially in societies where traditional power structures have excluded women. By comparing two different cases, it offers a nuanced account of how gender equality and political stability may be mutually reinforced under the right institutional and societal conditions.

## 1.2 Research Questions and Case Selection

While gender quotas have been widely adopted, with a total of 130 states currently having some sort of gender quota in place<sup>4</sup>, their impact varies significantly based on political context. In stable democracies, quotas may reinforce existing democratic norms, whereas in post-conflict societies,

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<sup>4</sup> International IDEA, 'Quotas | International IDEA' ([www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)2024) <<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database/quotas>>.

they are often facing significant institutional and societal challenges. The research question guiding this study is:

*How do gender quotas affect women's political participation, democratic stability, and peacebuilding in post-conflict and stable democracies?*

To break this down further, the research addresses the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent do gender quotas contribute to women's political participation in post-conflict versus stable democratic contexts?
2. Do gender quotas support long-term peace and democratic resilience, especially in fragile or transitioning societies?
3. How can international organizations such as European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) strengthen gender quotas within peacebuilding efforts, based on the comparative experiences of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sweden?

This study focuses on two European countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sweden. These cases were chosen because they represent contrasting political and institutional contexts. BiH is a post-conflict society where gender quotas were introduced as part of internationally driven democratization and peacebuilding efforts, but challenges persist due to ethnic divisions and institutional weaknesses.<sup>5</sup> Sweden is a stable democracy with long-standing commitment to gender equality, where voluntary party quotas have emerged originally from domestic political culture and it is often considered a model for inclusive governance as many people attribute progressive legislation to the high number of women in government.<sup>6</sup> This contrast allows for a deeper comparative analysis of how political

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<sup>5</sup> 'Bosnia and Herzegovina' (*UN Women | Europe and Central Asia*) <<https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/bosnia-and-herzegovina>>.

<sup>6</sup> Jaya Nayar, 'Equal Representation? The Debate over Gender Quotas (Part 2)' (*Harvard International Review* 15 August 2022) <<https://hir.harvard.edu/equal-representation-the-debate-over-gender-quotas-part-2/>>.

context, quota type, and institutional support influence the effectiveness of gender quotas in promoting women's political participation and peacebuilding.

The analysis primarily focuses on the period from the mid-1990s to 2024. For BiH, this includes the post-Dayton era following the end of the war in 1995 and the initial introduction of quotas in 1998. For Sweden, the focus begins in the late 1980s, when voluntary quotas were first adopted by political parties, and traces developments up to the present. While global perspectives on gender quotas may be briefly referenced for contextualization, the empirical scope of this thesis remains centered on political institutions and quota implementation in these two national contexts. The study examines legal and institutional frameworks, but it does not provide an in-depth sociological or psychological analysis of gender norms, attitudes, or identity formation.

The thesis is structured in six chapters. The second chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework, drawing on feminist political theory, models of representation, and peacebuilding literature including the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. The third chapter provides case-specific analyses of BiH and Sweden, examining how political history, institutional design, and societal norms shape the implementation and impact of gender quotas. The fourth chapter offers a comparative analysis of the two cases, identifying how contextual factors influence quota effectiveness in terms of political participation, democratic stability, and peacebuilding. Moreover, the fifth chapter translates these findings into concrete policy recommendations, assesses future challenges and trends, and reflects cautiously on the applicability of quotas in other post-conflict contexts. Finally, chapter six concludes with a synthesis of key findings, their implications for theory and practice, and suggestions for future research on gender-inclusive governance.

### **1.3 Material and Method**

As I briefly mentioned before, to answer the research question, this thesis adopts a qualitative comparative case study design, using the method of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) in combination with a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). QCA enables the systematic comparison

of cases, in this instance BiH and Sweden, to identify patterns of similarity and difference across key variables.<sup>7</sup> These include the type of gender quota adopted (mandatory vs. voluntary), levels of women's political participation, and the degree of influence on democratic stability and peacebuilding outcomes. Rather than seeking to generalize across all contexts, the QCA aims to uncover causal complexities.<sup>8</sup> That is the specific conditions and configurations under which gender quotas appear to contribute meaningfully to inclusive governance and sustained peace.

The application of MDSD further strengthens the comparative design. This approach selects cases that differ in significant ways such as political stability, historical backgrounds, and institutional structures, yet share a common variable of interest which is the presence of gender quotas. By comparing a post-conflict, transitional democracy (BiH) with a consolidated, stable democracy (Sweden), the analysis aims to explore how political context mediates the outcomes of quota adoption. More specifically, it allows the study to examine whether the effectiveness of gender quotas depends not only on their design but also on broader institutional support, party commitment, and societal norms.

The fact that Sweden has implemented voluntary party quotas, while BiH has legally mandated quotas, is a deliberate and important feature of this comparison and not a limitation. Voluntary quotas often reflect strong internal party norms or bottom-up activism, whereas legal quotas are frequently imposed from above, sometimes with external pressure. In addition, this distinction helps reveal how the source and enforcement of quotas shape their legitimacy and long-term impact.

Data for this study is drawn from a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include national legislative texts, electoral laws, and official government documents from both countries. Secondary sources consist of academic literature, policy reports from international organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations, and publications from relevant

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<sup>7</sup> Charles C Ragin, 'The Logic of Qualitative Comparative Analysis' (1998) 43 *International Review of Social History* 105.

<sup>8</sup> Bård A Andreassen, Claire Methven O'Brien and Hans-Otto Sano, *Research Methods in Human Rights* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2024).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The research primarily examines the period from the early 1990s to 2024, covering the post-Dayton peacebuilding process in BiH, and the evolution of gender quotas policies in Sweden particularly since their formal adoption by political parties in late 1980s. The second chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework for this analysis, drawing from feminist theories of governance, representation and peacebuilding, including the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. These frameworks inform the selection of key variables and guide the case analysis in later chapters.

Throughout the thesis, attention is given to the interaction between institutional design and political culture, rather than to the psychological or sociological dimensions of gender identity, while global comparisons are referenced for context, the empirical focus remains exclusively on the two case countries. The study does not involve interviews or other human subject data collection but relies entirely on document-based and literature-based analysis. Although some limitations remain. In BiH, data availability particularly regarding the impact of quotas beyond descriptive representation is unequal. In Sweden, high levels of gender equality may make it difficult to isolate the effects of quotas from broader egalitarian norms. Additionally, while lessons may be drawn for other contexts, caution is necessary when transferring findings across vastly different political and cultural environments. Finally, since quota impacts evolve over time, this study offers a snapshot of patterns and mechanisms, rather than a definitive or predictive model.

By comparing these two contrasting cases, this research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how gender quotas function under different political conditions, and what that may imply for efforts to promote inclusive governance and peacebuilding globally. While policy recommendations will be offered in later chapters, they will be based on comparative findings and will be tailored to the specific dynamics identified in each context.

## 2. Gender, Quotas, Governance and Peacebuilding: Theoretical and Case-based insights

### 2.1 Feminist theories in governance and peacebuilding

#### 2.1.1 *Feminist Governance and Political Representation theories*

Democracy is often defined by its core principles of equality, inclusivity, and representation of diverse realities of those it serves. However, it remains fundamentally incomplete when half of the population, which is women, continues to be underrepresented in political institutions globally.<sup>9</sup> Feminist theorists have long argued if true democracy can ever be achieved when gender disparities persist at the highest levels of power. This underrepresentation not only limits women's influence but also undermines the legitimacy and depth of democratic governance itself.

Feminism, as both political movement and theoretical framework, has challenged the ways power is distributed and exercised, asserting that women's experiences and perspectives must be valued and included in public-decision-making. Early feminist critiques of liberal democracy, especially the movement that developed in USA towards the end of the 1960s, strongly emphasized how male-dominated institutions constrained women's participation and obscured their interests.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, central to feminist governance theory is the goal not simply of adding women into existing power structure, but of transforming how power itself is conceptualized and exercised. The "ethics of care" introduces values based on women's experiences such as empathy, care, responsibility and emotional intelligence, which are often overlooked in dominant political theories, into governance practices.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See the data here: UN Women, 'Women in Politics: 2025' (*UN Women – Headquarters*2025) <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/women-in-politics-map-2025>> assessed 24 March 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Held, 'Feminism and Political Theory' [2002] *The Blackwell Guide to Social and Political Philosophy* 154.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* 166.

One of the foundational contributions to political representation theory is Hanna Pitkin's typology, which distinguishes between formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation. Her distinction reveals that numerical presence alone is insufficient for achieving feminist goals in governance.<sup>12</sup> First of all, formal representation refers to institutional arrangements, such as electoral systems and party rules that enable political participation, while descriptive representation focuses in the extent to which representatives mirror the social characteristics of their constituents, such as gender. Furthermore, she continues explaining that substantive representation considers whether representatives advocate for and act in the interests of those they represent. Finally, symbolic representation captures the meaning and legitimacy conveyed by the presence of marginalized groups in political spaces.<sup>13</sup> These distinctions are crucial for evaluating gender quotas. Descriptive presence alone does not guarantee substantive outcomes, and symbolic inclusion can sometimes mask persistent inequalities. In this context, quotas must be assessed not only the number of women elected, but also by their ability to influence political agendas, shift institutional norms, and address women's diverse interests.

Building on Pitkin, Anne Phillips introduced the concept of the "politics of presence", arguing that shared experiences and social identity matter in representation.<sup>14</sup> According to Phillips, true democratic legitimacy cannot be achieved if large segments of the population are structurally excluded from decision-making. While men can advocate for women's issues, they may not fully understand or prioritize the lived realities of being a woman. This perspective stems from an anti-paternalistic political stance that emerged in movements like the U.S civil rights and feminist movements from the 1960s until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the broader democratic progress was marked by expanding citizenship and dismantling exclusionary barriers, particularly for women.<sup>15</sup> In fact, theory of presence challenges traditional liberal notions by highlighting the importance of having women in political positions to ensure that their interests are adequately represented. It is crucial to be understood why representation matters,

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<sup>12</sup> Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (University of California Press 1967).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Clarendon Press 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 13.

not just in theory but in practice. If representatives do not share the experiences of the groups they serve, they risk reinforcing systematic inequalities rather than dismantling them.

By the end of the 20th century, the number of state-based organizations, often referred to as women's political organizations, had significantly increased. These groups constantly advocated for greater female representation in political processes, though their demands often remained marginalized within mainstream politics. As a response, the rise of “state feminism” emphasized the role of women's political actors within formal institutions as key drivers of gender equality and political reform.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, bringing more women into political institutions is not just about increasing their numbers but a deeper challenge that strikes at the core of democracy and representation. Many feminists have long argued that true representation can only be achieved when women hold decision-making power in proportion to their presence in society. For example, Joni Lovenduski has further articulated why women’s political representation is essential, offering three justifications.<sup>17</sup> The justice argument emphasizes equal rights and fairness, the pragmatic one notes that diverse political bodies make better decisions and represent broader constituencies, and the difference argument which recognizes that women may bring distinct perspectives to politics based on their social roles and experiences.<sup>18</sup> This theoretical grounding reinforces the idea that political inclusion is not only about numerical fairness but about democratic quality. Increasing the number of women in politics may disrupt patriarchal norms, enhance responsiveness, and contribute to more inclusive and effective policymaking.

Another important theory that has been developed in the feminist discourse is the critical mass theory, which in the context of women representation, suggests that a certain threshold of women legislative bodies is necessary to effect significant changes in political behavior, institutions and public policy.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Joni Lovenduski, *State Feminism and Political Representation* (Cambridge University Press 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Joni Lovenduski, ‘Feminizing Politics’ (2002) 13 *Women: A Cultural Review* 207.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* 210.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook, ‘Critical Mass Theory and Women’s Political Representation’ (2008) 56 *Political Studies* 725 <[http://mlkrook.org/pdf/childs\\_krook\\_2008.pdf](http://mlkrook.org/pdf/childs_krook_2008.pdf)>.

The concept of critical mass gained prominence in political science following Drude Dahlerup's article and it was initially used to explain why women did not always appear to represent women's interests once in political office. The theory suggested that women needed to reach approximately 15-35% to have a significant impact on legislative outcomes.<sup>20</sup> Although some gender and politics scholars contend that the relationship between the percentage of female legislators and the passage of women-friendly legislation is more complex than the theory suggests, the idea of critical mass theory has gained widespread acceptance and has been used to justify measures aimed at increasing women's representation in political office.<sup>21</sup>

In recent years, feminist scholars have advanced a second-generation model of democratic representation, which goes beyond inclusion to emphasize accountability, responsiveness, and intersectionality. This approach values group advocacy, participatory mechanisms, and relational representation, highlighting the need to build trust and legitimacy between representatives and diverse female constituencies. It also recognizes that women are not a monolithic group, and their political representation must account for differences in class, ethnicity sexuality, and other intersecting identities.<sup>22</sup>

Taken together, these theories provide a robust framework for assessing gender quotas not just as tools for descriptive inclusion, but as potential catalysts for substantive democratic transformation. In the context of this thesis, they guide the analysis of whether quotas in BiH and Sweden have enabled women to enter political spaces, shape policy agendas, and contribute to more inclusive and stable forms of governance.

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<sup>20</sup> Drude Dahlerup, 'From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics' (1988) 11 *Scandinavian Political Studies* 275.

<sup>21</sup> Childs and Krook (n 20)

<sup>22</sup> Karen Celis and Sarah Childs, 'From Women's Presence to Feminist Representation: Second-Generation Design for Women's Group Representation' (2023) 6 *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 359.

### ***2.1.2 The role of Gender Quotas in Political Participation***

Gender quotas have emerged as one of the most significant institutional mechanisms for enhancing women's political participation. Designed to address structural and systematic barriers to women's representation, quotas have become a widespread form of affirmative action, now implemented in various forms in over half of the world's countries. These policies mandate a specific minimum proportion of a body's members, whether that body be a government, committee, a legislative assembly or candidate list, thereby aiming to accelerate gender parity in political institutions.<sup>23</sup>

Much of the global momentum for quota adoption can be traced to the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, where the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action urged governments to adopt concrete measures ensuring women's equal access to power structures, full participation in decision-making, and strengthened leadership capacities.<sup>24</sup> As the world approaches the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this landmark agreement in 2025, quotas remain central to international and national gender equality strategies.

The expansion of women's political rights, beginning with suffrage and culminating in quota-based representation, reflects a broader historical shift from formal equality to substantive inclusion. While countries such as New Zealand pioneered women's suffrage in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Rwanda now leads the world with over 60% female parliamentary representation, these headline achievements invite further inquiry into the depth and durability of gender equality in governance. Over the past three decades, from 1995 to 2025, the global representation of women in parliament increased from 11.3% to 27.2%.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, the number of women in parliaments worldwide has not increased consistently since the implementation of gender quotas. Rather, the number of women elected to national parliaments has

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<sup>23</sup> Julie Ballington and Azza Karam (eds), *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (International Idea 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women (15 September 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Women in Parliament: 1995–2025* (IPU, March 2025) Access: <https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2025-03/ipu-report-parliamentary-gender-gap-narrowed-over-past-30-years-progress-stalled-in-2024>

increased dramatically in certain nations when new quota restrictions were adopted, while it has changed more modestly or even decreased in others.

While early gender equality efforts focused on expanding suffrage, the introduction of quotas marked a strategic shift toward structural interventions aimed at accelerating women's political inclusion. As Drude Dahlerup has noted, countries have pursued two general approaches to increasing women's political representation: the incremental track, marked by gradual societal shifts and voluntary reforms as seen in Nordic countries especially, and the fast track, where quotas are used as decisive interventions to overcome persistent barriers to entry.<sup>26</sup> For instance, in Scandinavia, women reached 30% representation only after several decades of gradual change.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, countries that implemented quotas often saw sudden and substantial increases in women's parliamentary presence within a single electoral cycle.

As explained by Dahlerup, quota systems are broadly categorized based on who mandates them and at what stage of the electoral process they apply.<sup>28</sup> Mandating authorities can be either legal or voluntary. Legal quotas are enforced through constitutional provisions or electoral laws like in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In contrast, voluntary party quotas are adopted independently by political parties without legal obligation. While countries like Sweden have multiple parties implementing quotas, in many nations only few parties follow this practice.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, quota systems can be classified by their application stage. Candidate quotas require a minimum percentage of women among nominated candidates, these may be legally enforced or voluntarily adopted by parties and they are particularly relevant in plurality-majority electoral systems.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidenvall, 'Quotas as a "Fast Track" to Equal Representation for Women' (2005) 7 *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 26.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Drude Dahlerup, *Women, Quotas and Politics* (1st edn., Routledge 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> International Idea, 'Quotas | International IDEA' ([www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)2024) <<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database/quotas>>.

On the other hand, reserved seats quotas guarantee a specific number of legislative seats for women, independent of electoral outcomes.<sup>31</sup> Lastly, party quotas, introduced as early as the 1970s, aim to increase the share of women among a party's nominees and often favored by center-left parties, while conservative parties tend to resist them.<sup>32</sup> In general, while they are becoming more prevalent worldwide, the effectiveness of any quota system depends not only on its design but also on the electoral system. For example, proportional representation tends to favor quota implementation. Moreover, the political will and commitment of parties to enforce compliance and the presence of enforcement mechanisms such as sanctions for non-compliance, are determining factors for the impact of quotas.

While quotas have led to notable gains in descriptive representation, their impact on substantive representation, that is actual influence on political agendas, remains context-dependent. In some countries, quotas have succeeded in bringing more women into parliament without significantly changing legislative priorities or governance styles. In others, they have facilitated broader institutional and cultural change.

Table 1: Electoral Gender Quotas

Type of Quota	Mandating Authority	Where it applies
Legal Candidate Quotas	Constitution, Electoral law	Candidate nomination (ensures a minimum percentage of female candidates)
Voluntary Party Quotas	Political parties (self-imposed)	Candidate nomination (parties commit to a percentage of women candidates)

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Mona Lena Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics* (Oxford University Press 2009).

Reserved Seat Quotas	Constitution, Electoral law	Elected representatives (guarantees women a fixed number of seats in legislature)
Plurality-Majority Quotas	Political parties, Electoral Law	Aspiring candidates (e.g., all-women shortlists before nomination)

The adoption of gender quotas in politics reflects a complex interplay of motivations, actors, and contexts across diverse countries. There are four primary narratives explaining quota adoption; mobilization by women’s groups to enhance representation, strategic calculations by political elites, alignment with prevailing norms of equality and representation, and influence from international norms and transnational advocacy networks.<sup>33</sup> Often, domestic women’s movements initiate demands for quotas as pragmatic tools to overcome structural exclusion. However, support from political elites, while sometimes rooted on genuine commitment to equality, is frequently shaped by strategic incentives such as electoral competition or regime legitimation. In transitional or post-conflict settings, gender quotas are sometimes adopted to symbolize democratic renewal, fulfill international conditionalities, or gain external legitimacy. As Krook emphasizes, no single explanation accounts for all cases of quota adoption. Rather, quota policies are the product of alliances among civil society, state actors, and international organizations, all pursuing different objectives under varied circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

As we mentioned previously, while adoption is a key step, the effectiveness of gender quotas varies significantly across cases. As Krook argues, success is closely tied to policy design, including the clarity of quota provisions, enforcement mechanisms and sanctions for non-compliance,<sup>35</sup> as well as the institutional and electoral systems in which quotas operate. For instance, ambiguous language or

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid 20.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 9.

<sup>35</sup> Krook (n 32)

inadequate enforcement mechanisms can limit their success, while strong legal frameworks and oversight bodies may enhance compliance. Institutional factors, including the type of electoral system also influence outcomes. Quotas tend to be more effective in proportional representative systems, where candidate lists allow for more flexibility in achieving gender balance. Additionally, party-level dynamics, such as leadership support, ideological orientation, and internal democracy are crucial in determining whether quotas lead to real power or remain symbolic gestures.

The debate over which type of quota is more effective is endless in the academic world. Some scholars argue that voluntary party quotas, common in consolidated democracies like Sweden, are more likely to reflect genuine political commitment and thus lead to meaningful inclusion.<sup>36</sup> Others contend that in developing or post conflict contexts, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, legally mandatory quotas are more effective in guaranteeing women's entry into politics, especially when coupled with sanctions and enforcement mechanisms.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond representation, quotas also impact policy outputs and institutional culture. Studies have shown that quota adoption often leads to an increase in gender-sensitive legislation, although this is not universal.<sup>38</sup> In some contexts, quota-based inclusion has led to limited or even regressive policy change, which underlines the importance of contextual conditions and institutional support structures. Additionally, gender quotas influence policy through two mechanisms. First, signaling effects occur when the adoption or implementation of quotas sends a message to all legislators, regardless of gender, about the increasing importance of gender equality on the political agenda.<sup>39</sup> This shift in priorities can lead male legislators to become more responsive to women's issues. Second, quotas contribute to an increased presence and influence of women in legislatures, which can reshape overall policy preferences and strengthen women's collective power in decision-making. Also, quota elected women frequently

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<sup>36</sup> Chen (n 2)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Amanda Clayton, 'How Do Electoral Gender Quotas Affect Policy?' (2021) 24 Annual Review of Political Science 235 <<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102019>>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid 237.

engage in cross-party collaboration, working together to advance policies that reflects shared gender-related goals.<sup>40</sup>

While the academic debate on quotas includes both enthusiastic supporters and cautious critics, this thesis does not aim to take a normative stance. Rather, it acknowledges key arguments from both perspectives. Proponents argue that quotas improve democratic legitimacy and correct historical exclusions since women should have the same rights to equal participation and their experience is important in political life. So, quotas are the tools which help them to face the barriers of entering politics. Critics, however, warn that quotas may foster tokenism. Tokenism arises when quotas result in superficial representation without meaningful influence or substantive policy changes for women.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, they argue that quotas may provoke intra-party tensions or fail to confront deeper structural and cultural inequalities that persist within institutions. Instead of attempting to resolve this debate, this study focuses on how quotas function in different political environments, particularly post-conflict vs. stable democratic settings, to assess their institutional impact and their potential role in promoting peacebuilding and long-term democratic stability.

### ***2.1.3 Institutional and cultural barriers to Women's Political Representation***

While gender quotas are intended to promote women's inclusion in political life, their effectiveness is shaped by a range of structural, institutional and cultural factors. Despite the progress, women remain under-represented in political decision-making bodies worldwide. This under-representation is not only

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid 239.

<sup>41</sup> Dahlerup and Freidenvall (n 26)

a matter of justice but also impacts on the quality of democracy and governance.<sup>42</sup> These barriers do not necessarily disappear when quotas are adopted, rather they often reappear in more subtle or informal forms, limiting the transformative potential of quota policies.

Even in countries with formal equality measures, deeply embedded social norms and political practices continue to constrain women's access to meaningful representation. One of the most persistent barriers is the unequal distribution of family and caregiving responsibilities, which reduces the time, flexibility and resources women can devote to political engagement. Political careers often require long hours, mobility and irregular schedules which limit the time and energy women can devote to political engagement, campaigning, or sustaining political careers, making it difficult to compete equally with their male counterparts.<sup>43</sup> These conditions disproportionately burden women, particularly in societies with limited public childcare or family support policies.

In addition to these practical constraints, male-dominated political cultures further marginalize women. Leadership traits are frequently associated with masculine norms, such as assertiveness and confrontation, leaving women in a double bind. They either conform to these expectations or risk being perceived as weak or incompetent.<sup>44</sup> This cultural bias contributes to gendered expectations, undermining women's legitimacy as political leader and restricting their influence even when elected.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, gender-based harassment and violence in politics, including online abuse, has become a widespread phenomenon. This not only discourages women from running for office but also affects their performance

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<sup>42</sup> Zamfir Ionel, 'Women in Politics in the EU: State of Play in 2024 | Think Tank | European Parliament' (www.europarl.europa.eu6 March 2024) <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2024\)760348](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2024)760348)>.

<sup>43</sup> Yating Li, 'Systemic and Sociocultural Factors Impeding Women's Political Participation and Leadership Development: A Sociological Inquiry' (2024) 187 SHS web of conferences <[https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2024/07/shsconf\\_essc2024\\_03016.pdf](https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2024/07/shsconf_essc2024_03016.pdf)>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid 3

<sup>45</sup> Sue Maguire, 'Barriers to Women Entering Parliament and Local Government' (Institute for Policy Research 2018) <<https://www.bath.ac.uk/projects/barriers-to-women-entering-parliament-and-local-government-rapid-evidence-review/>>.

and confidence once elected.<sup>46</sup> In contexts where quotas are introduced, but political life remains hostile, women may be symbolically included but discouraged from full participation.

Beyond social and cultural constraints, institutional structures also pose significant obstacles to women's full participation in politics. In many systems, party gatekeeping remains a key obstacle. Women often face limited access to campaign financing, patronage networks, and nomination processes, which can result in their placement in unwinnable electoral districts even in quota systems.<sup>47</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, although legal quotas exist, women's placement on candidate lists is often strategically minimized. In contrast, Sweden's political culture and party organization have historically enabled more substantive implementation of voluntary quotas. Moreover, the electoral system itself matters. Proportional representation systems tend to be more compatible with effective quota implementation than majoritarian or single-member district systems, which favor established political actors and reduce opportunities for new entrants, including women.<sup>48</sup>

Informal institutions, including media narratives, professional networks, and political mentorship, continue to reflect and reinforce male dominance. The lack of female role models, mentors and access to political information or civic education disproportionately affects women's ability to navigate the political landscape.<sup>49</sup> These embedded biases perpetuate a cycle in which women's political engagement remains constrained, even in the presence of formal equality measures such as quotas. Lastly, economic inequality presents a persistent structural barrier which significantly impacts women's ability to enter and thrive in political life. Campaigns require financial resources that women, on average, are less likely to have due to wage gaps, occupational segregation and unpaid labor.<sup>50</sup> This economic imbalance can prevent women from entering politics in the first place or from sustaining long-term political careers.

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<sup>46</sup> Zamfir (n 41) 7.

<sup>47</sup> Aradhana Sharma, 'Challenges Faced by Women Leadership in Politics' (2019) 1 *International Journal of Political Science and Governance* 60.

<sup>48</sup> Zamfir (n 41) 8.

<sup>49</sup> Yating (n 42) 3.

<sup>50</sup> Lovenduski (n 17)

In conclusion, although gender quotas can provide formal access to political institutions, their overall effectiveness is shaped by the wider institutional, cultural and societal context in which they operate. This chapter underscores that quotas, on their own, are not enough to ensure meaningful change because their impact is influenced by underlying power dynamics and social norms. These dimensions will be further examined through the comparative case studies of BiH and Sweden.

#### ***2.1.4 Gender and Peacebuilding (Women, Peace, and Security Agenda)***

In recent years, the nature of war had changed dramatically and the brutal consequences of it affect millions of victims, especially women and girls, where extreme sexual abuse, kidnappings, forced marriage and enslavement have particularly targeted them. However, women are not only passive victims but also agents of change to whom recognition and contribution is not acknowledged. Scholars argue that women have a fundamental right to participate in peace negotiations, given their disproportionate suffering during conflict and a strategic value, as their inclusion broadens negotiation agendas and emphasizes long-term societal needs.<sup>51</sup> Their involvement is also seen as strategically beneficial since women are often more collaborative and more willing to bridge divides and perceived as less threatening due to their limited direct involvement in hostilities.<sup>52</sup> The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda enshrined in United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000 and its follow-ups, reflects this evolution in both normative and strategic terms.

As Arostegui notes, women consist half of the population and are essential to achieving lasting peace since their participation brings vital perspectives that focus on the human dimensions of peacebuilding, beyond ceasefires and power-sharing.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Gizelis supports that societies in which women enjoy comparatively better status are more likely to achieve successful UN-led peacebuilding outcomes, as

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<sup>51</sup> Miriam J Anderson and Liam Swiss, 'Peace Accords and the Adoption of Electoral Quotas for Women in the Developing World, 1990–2006' (2014) 10 *Politics & Gender* 33.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Arostegui (n 3) 535.

greater gender equality facilitates women's participation in peacemaking and fosters broader domestic engagement in the peace process.<sup>54</sup> It is therefore understood that promoting gender equality in peacebuilding is a continuous process tied to a broader pursuit of social justice, equality and durability of peace.

First of all, it is important to point out the definition of peacebuilding as the term is often used broadly and can encompass a wide range of activities, from post-conflict reconstruction to reconciliation and institutional reform. According to United Nations

Peacebuilding aims to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. It is a complex, long-term process of creating the necessary conditions for sustainable peace.<sup>55</sup>

Since conflicts impact genders differently, an intersectional approach to peacebuilding is essential. Women's participation in peace processes is both a human right and a strategic necessity for lasting peace. The incorporation of a gender perspective in peace processes has been widely promoted and defined by women. According to some scholars, there are four dimensions of gender perspective: ensuring the participation of women and marginalized groups in peace processes, addressing the distinct needs and priorities between genders since there are diverse experiences, acknowledging that peace agreements are often not gender-neutral and lack gender-sensitive language and lastly emphasizing the necessity of understanding power dynamics between genders and their influence on the conflict.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, 'Gender Empowerment and United Nations Peacebuilding' (2009) 46 *Journal of Peace Research* 505.

<sup>55</sup> United Nations, 'Terminology' (*United Nations Peacekeeping*2024) <<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/terminology>>.

<sup>56</sup> José Alvarado Cobar, Emma Bjertén-Günther and Yeonju Jung, *Assessing Gender Perspectives in Peace Processes with Application to the Cases of Colombia and Mindanao* (SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security No 2018/6, 2018) <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/sipriinsight1806.pdf> accessed 28 April 2025.

Having outlined the definition of gender and peacebuilding, and established the significance of gender in peace processes, it is essential to examine how this relationship has been operationalized in practice. The adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 marked a turning point in international peace and security frameworks. Building on earlier gender equality milestones such as the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Resolution 1325 emphasized full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in all stages of conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and reconstruction.<sup>57</sup> For the first time, the international community formally acknowledged that women are not only victims of conflict but also key agents of change in reconstruction and democratic governance, calling on all states to address the effects that war has had on women and girls worldwide and to systematically involve women in all peacebuilding initiatives.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, it calls for all participants “to adopt a gender perspective,”<sup>59</sup> indicates that is willing to consider a gender perspective into peacekeeping missions<sup>60</sup> and it recognizes the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly in the situations of armed conflict.<sup>61</sup>

The systematic conflicts had recognized that women and girls experience war and its consequences in ways that differ significantly from those of men and boys. They are frequently targeted during armed conflict, subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, displacement, and exploitation, often as deliberate tactics of warfare. Yet, their roles in conflict settings are far from uniform. While many women assume caretaking responsibilities and contribute to community resilience in the absence of men, others have actively engaged in protecting their families and organizing grassroots peacebuilding efforts through local and transnational organizations.<sup>62</sup> Despite this complex involvement, women have

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<sup>57</sup>Anderson and Swiss (n 51)

<sup>58</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Parliaments as Partners Supporting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: A Global Handbook* (UNDP 2019) <https://www.undp.org/publications/parliament-partners-supporting-women-peace-and-security-agenda> accessed 10 April 2025.

<sup>59</sup> UNSC Res 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325(2000) [8].

<sup>60</sup> Ibid [2].

<sup>61</sup> Ibid [10].

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

historically been marginalized in formal peace processes and underrepresented in peacekeeping operations, a gap the WPS Agenda seeks to redress by promoting full, equal and meaningful participation in all stages of peacebuilding.

Its four pillars, participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery, outline a holistic vision for integrating gender perspectives across peacebuilding efforts.<sup>63</sup> These pillars not only delineate the responsibilities of national and international institutions but also highlight the essential contributions of women at every stage of peacebuilding.<sup>64</sup> Since then, the WPS Agenda has expanded through nine additional Security Council resolutions, each reinforcing and deepening the original commitments, addressing a broader spectrum of issues, including women's leadership, gender-sensitive reparations and most notably the prevention of sexual violence in conflict. These developments reflect a growing international recognition of the disproportionate of war on women and girls. In 2010, the introduction of monitoring tools and indicators marked a significant step toward institutionalizing accountability, and numerous National Action Plans (NAPs) have since been adopted by member states.<sup>65</sup>

The question of whether women's presence at negotiating tables matters is not merely rhetorical but it strikes at the core of inclusive and effective peacebuilding. Their systematic exclusion from formal peace processes undermines the principles of social justice and democratic pluralism.<sup>66</sup> Empirical evidence shows that when women are included, whether in official negotiations or informal peace initiatives, they consistently broaden the agenda by introducing issues related to family welfare, education and healthcare. Moreover, women often adopt distinct approaches to conflict resolution that emphasize collaboration, reconciliation, and long-term stability.<sup>67</sup> Higher levels of gender equality are closely linked to increased

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<sup>63</sup> Sandu Georgiana and Ambrosio Ilenia, 'Strengthening the Women, Peace and Security Agenda' (European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens, Equality and Culture Directorate-General for Citizens 2025).

<sup>64</sup> UNSC Res 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325(2000).

<sup>65</sup> Senem Kaptan, *UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years: Perspectives from Feminist Peace Activists and Civil Society* (1st edn., Women's International League for Peace and Freedom - Women, Peace and Security Programme 2020).

<sup>66</sup> Elisabeth Porter, 'Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building' (2003) 15 *Global Change, Peace & Security* 245.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

national and international stability, with studies indicating that countries with greater gender parity are more inclined to resolve disputes through non-violent means and are less likely to engage in military interventions.<sup>68</sup> For instance, the presence of women in peace processes increases the likelihood of an agreement lasting at least two years by 20%, and the chance of enduring for 15 years by 35%.<sup>69</sup> In the political and security spheres, women increasingly serve as mediators, peacekeepers, and decision-makers, thereby contributing to more comprehensive and enduring peace agreements.

However, while the WPS Agenda calls for women's equal participation, it does not prescribe how this should be achieved. In practice, many countries particularly those undergoing internationally supervised transitions or institutional reform, have implemented gender quotas as a concrete way to fulfill WPS-related goals. In this sense, gender quotas serve as institutional tools to operationalize the participation pillar of the WPS framework. For instance, in BiH, gender quotas were introduced as part of post-war democratic reconstruction under international supervision, aligning with the normative goals of UNSCR 1325. Yet, the effectiveness of these quotas remains contested. While women's numerical representation increased, their substantive influence in peacebuilding and governance has remained limited. This reflects broader critiques of the WPS Agenda, such as the risk of symbolic inclusion without real power redistribution.

By contrast, in a stable democracy like Sweden, voluntary gender quotas have been adopted through internal party mechanisms, without external pressure. These quotas are embedded in a political culture already aligned with the WPS principles, especially gender equality, inclusion and cooperative governance. Therefore, while the WPS Agenda sets normative expectations, the form and impact of gender quotas vary across political contexts. In some cases, quotas act as vehicles to implement WPS

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<sup>68</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, 'Women's Participation in Peace Processes' (*Council on Foreign Relations*) <<https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

principles but in others they may exist without meaningful connection to peacebuilding efforts or women's empowerment.

It is also crucial to acknowledge that WPS Agenda through the Relief and Recovery pillar stresses the importance of securing that women and girls not only receive adequate humanitarian assistance but also actively participation in post conflict recovery efforts. This involves addressing their specific needs in aid distribution and supporting their engagement in rebuilding processes. The pillar advocates for the empowerment and resilience of women through access to economic opportunities, education and healthcare in post-conflict contexts too. Research by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights that women who are economically empowered are better positioned to contribute to recovery and peacebuilding.<sup>70</sup> Investing in women's economic security during transition from conflict to peace has proven to be both an effective relief strategy and a means of preventing future conflict. This insight is particularly relevant in post-conflict cases, where the formal adoption of gender quotas has not been matched by broader structural support for women's empowerment. Without parallel investments in economic inclusion, gender quotas risk becoming a symbolic measure, failing to achieve the full peacebuilding potential of women's participation. This underscores the importance of a multidimensional approach to inclusion, where political representation is supported by social and economic empowerment.

Despite the growing international consensus around the WPS Agenda, its implementation remains uneven. Women are still significantly underrepresented in formal peace processes and post-conflict governance. As of mid-2024, women comprised only 9.6% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators, and 26.6% of signatories across more than 50 peace processes. Moreover, none of the UN's eight

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<sup>70</sup> UNDP, *Gender and Recovery Toolkit: Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Crisis and Recovery Settings* (updated 2024) [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/gender-and-recovery\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/gender-and-recovery_toolkit.pdf) accessed 21 April 2025.

peacekeeping force commanders were women as of October 2024. These numbers reflect a persistent gap between WPS rhetoric and political reality.<sup>71</sup>

Critics have described this disconnect, between global policy and discourse and local realities, as an “add women and stir” approach, including women symbolically, without altering the structural power hierarchies that underpin conflict and governance. Under this model, women are too often tokenized, their skills are not fully utilized, and they are seen as victims rather than experts.<sup>72</sup> In addition, the absence of strong accountability mechanisms, along with ongoing militarism, patriarchal resistance, and insufficient funding, further constrain the transformative potential of the agenda.<sup>73</sup> This critique is particularly relevant in analyzing how quotas are implemented. In both BiH and Sweden, quotas exist but the depth of change they produce differs dramatically.

The WPS Agenda provides a normative framework for evaluating women’s participation in peace and governance processes. As such, the inclusion of women risks becoming used to legitimize peace processes without fundamentally altering the gendered hierarchies that perpetuate conflict. If the Agenda is to fulfill its transformative promise, it must move beyond representation alone and confront the deeper structural conditions that hinder genuine justice in peacebuilding. Gender quotas, in turn, are among the institutional mechanisms through which these goals may be pursued, though with varied results. This subchapter has shown that WPS principles are embedded differently in stable and post-conflict states, and that quotas may either reinforce or fall short these ideals. By examining how quotas operate within the broader frameworks of the WPS Agenda in BiH and Sweden, this thesis seeks to better understand

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<sup>71</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, ‘Women’s Participation in Peace Processes’ (*Council on Foreign Relations*) <<https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ruby Weaver, Susanna Rudehill and Bharathi Radhakrishnan, ‘Women, Peace and Security: Bridging the Global–Local Divide through Contextual Relevance’ (*SIPRI*26 September 2024) <<https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2024/women-peace-and-security-bridging-global-local-divide-through-contextual-relevance>>.

how institutional design, political will, and cultural context influence whether quotas can meaningfully contribute to peacebuilding and democratic resilience.

### 3. Case-Specific Literature

#### 3.1 Gender Quotas and Democracy in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina

##### 3.1.1 *Post-war political and constitutional landscape*

Bosnia and Herzegovina, a post-socialist state in the Western Balkans, has undergone significant political transformation, following the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and four years of ethnonational conflict. The transition from a single-party socialist system to a multiparty democratic framework has been marked by persistent challenges, most notably the difficulty of ensuring inclusive political participation, a core requirement of democratic transition that emphasizes the principles of equality and representation.<sup>74</sup> Despite constituting over half of the population, women were largely excluded from the formal power structures established in the post-conflict settlement hindering both peacebuilding and democratization efforts. Recognizing the potential of women to act as unifying actors across ethnic and political divides, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in collaboration with local women activists, initiated measures to enhance their political representation, most notably through the introduction of gender quotas.<sup>75</sup> This chapter will explore the development, implementation and impact of these efforts within Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-conflict political landscape.

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<sup>74</sup> Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism* (Cambridge University Press 2011).

<sup>75</sup> Tanya Domi, *ADVANCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS in BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: Making a Difference Early in the Peace Process (a Case Study)* (Columbia University 2021) 36–46.

To understand the context in which these reforms were introduced, it is important to examine the post-war political structure established in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The post-war constitutional framework was created through the General Framework Agreement for Peace, commonly known as the Dayton Accords, on December 1995.<sup>76</sup> The agreement marked the end of the Bosnian War but simultaneously introduced one of the world's most complex and ethnically entrenched governance systems. According to Annex IV of the Dayton Agreement, which serves as BiH's current constitution, the state is a unitary state consisting of two political entities called the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), composed mainly of Bosniaks and Croats, and the Republika Srpska (RS) of people with Serbian ethnicity.<sup>77</sup> In addition, a separate administrative unit, the Brčko District, was later established under international arbitration and operates under shared sovereignty.

Dayton Agreement institutionalized ethno-political power-sharing, a model often used in peace agreements to prevent the re-escalation of conflict that would ensure the utmost of human rights and freedoms. However, the Dayton Agreement reveals a deep-rooted conflict between the ethnic and civic conceptions of the Bosnian state, as its constitution recognizes only Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs as “constituent peoples”, marginalizing people of mixed heritage or those without a defined ethnic identity, an emphasis which is more pronounced in Bosnia than anywhere else in Europe.<sup>78</sup> The Office of the High Representative (OHR), created to oversee civilian aspects of the peace agreement, continues to hold substantial authority in BiH, including the power to impose legislation and remove elected officials. This degree of international oversight, while ensuring a level of stability, has also been criticized for weakening domestic ownership of democratic processes.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Caplan, ‘Assessing the Dayton Accord: The Structural Weaknesses of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina’ (2000) 11 *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 213

<sup>77</sup> General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Annex IV (Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina), signed 14 December 1995 <https://www.osce.org/bih/126173>

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> David Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton* (Pluto Press 2000).

In this fragmented and heavily supervised political environment, the inclusion of women in political life was not initially a priority. The post-conflict focus was overwhelming on ethnic representation and security sector reform, sidelining gender equality concerns. Nevertheless, women's organizations and international institutions, particularly the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and UN Women, played an important role in advocating for women's inclusion in governance. Understanding BiH's ethnically divided, and externally shaped governance system is therefore essential to evaluating both the implementation and limitations of gender quotas as mechanisms for democratic inclusion and peacebuilding. This section provides the foundational context for assessing how institutional design can either enable or constrain the effectiveness of gender-focused reforms in fragile and divided societies.

### ***3.1.2 Historical context on Women's Political Participation***

The political participation of women in BiH has evolved through several distinct phases, shaped by ideological, institutional, and post-conflict dynamics. Immediately after the Second World War, in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the right to vote was granted to the women of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is important to note that thanks to the egalitarian principles of communist ideology, women were in a position to participate in the political arena, where, due to the system of reserved seats adopted by the Communist Party for the representation of women, in 1986, women made up 24.1% of the People's Assembly of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and 17.3% of local or municipal assemblies.<sup>80</sup>

Despite a relatively high number of women being elected, their presence did not equate to genuine political influence, as many owed their positions to political connections rather than merit. The collapse of Yugoslavia and the onset of multi-party politics in the early 1990s revealed the fragility of this

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<sup>80</sup> Besima Borić, 'Application of Quotas: Legal Reforms and Implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina' (paper presented at the IDEA/CEE Network for Gender Issues Conference, *The Implementation of Quotas: European Experiences*, Budapest, 22–23 October 2004).

institutionalized inclusion. Reflecting traditional gender roles, those elections ultimately exposed the lack of real political empowerment for Bosnian women, who largely vanished from political institutions after the removal of reserved seats, dropping their representation to just 2.9%.<sup>81</sup>

The challenges of low female representation prompted both international and local actors to initiate reforms. According to Boric, the adoption of gender quotas in Western Balkan countries was a direct consequence of the establishment of international gender equality principles and post-conflict concerns.<sup>82</sup> Following the 1996 post-war elections, which were administrated by the Provisional Electoral Commission under the auspices of the OSCE in BiH, it became evident that women remained significantly marginalized from institutional decision-making processes. The situation changed in 1997 when the OSCE Mission developed a program to empower women through civic education, networking and training.<sup>83</sup> These efforts were complemented by advocacy from domestic women's NGOs and political activists, who argued that meaningful inclusion was essential for post-conflict democratic consolidation and peacebuilding.

In response to this pressure, a 30% gender quota was introduced for party lists in the 1998 general elections.<sup>84</sup> This quota applied to closed electoral lists, meaning that women's placement on the lists, not just their numerical presence, affected outcomes. The reform represented a benchmark for gender equality in post-war BiH. In the 1998 elections, the combination of the quota and closed-list system contributed to an increase in women's representation, offering a structural corrective to previous exclusion. As Boric notes, the quota system in BiH was not solely the result of internal feminist mobilization, but also a part of broader international agenda linking gender equality with democratic development and post-conflict peacebuilding.<sup>85</sup> In this sense, the adoption of quotas in BiH reflects the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid 2.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Domi (n 75) 38

<sup>84</sup> Van Heel and Selma Delalić, 'The Impact of Electoral Gender Quotas on Women's Political Participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina' (2023) 19 *Politics in Central Europe* 767.

<sup>85</sup> Boric (n 80) 6.

intersection of global gender norms, local civil society activism, and international governance frameworks.

### **3.1.3 Implementation challenges and limitations**

However, the implementation of these quotas was far from straightforward. Manipulation from the political parties had to be faced in the application of quotas, leading to sanctions by the Provisional Election Commission, which was the responsible monitoring body when rules were violated.<sup>86</sup> Although a one-third gender quota was implemented in the 2000 election, it faced strong opposition from political parties and drafters of the Election Law, who viewed it as undemocratic. Combined with the open-list electoral system, which tends to favor well-known male candidates, this led to a sharp decline in women's representation at the state level compared to 1998. The Election Law of BiH was enacted by the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH in 2001, after extreme pressure from international organizations, and as a result the 2002 general elections were the first to be carried out entirely by local authorities after the Dayton Agreement.<sup>87</sup>

Building on the existing legal framework, BiH continued to refine its electoral laws. In 2001, BiH adopted a gender quota requiring that at least 30% of parliamentary election candidates be women, later in 2013 increasing this threshold to 40% of candidates of each gender.<sup>88</sup> According to the electoral code, gender equality is considered achieved when one gender comprises a minimum of 40% of candidates on a party list. The Central Election Commission is legally empowered to impose sanctions for non-compliance, which might result in the rejection of coalition or political party lists.<sup>89</sup> While the CEC does review candidate lists for quota compliance and has the authority to reject non-compliant lists,

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<sup>86</sup> Emily Haves, 'Western Balkans and the Dayton Peace Agreement' (*House of Lords Library* 6 October 2023) <<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/western-balkans-and-the-dayton-peace-agreement/>>.

<sup>87</sup> Borić (n 80) 4.

<sup>88</sup> Heel and Delalić (n 84) 775.

<sup>89</sup> Merita Limani, 'Women's Political Participation: A Comparative Study of Gender Quota Implementation in Six Western Balkan Countries' (2023) 2(2) *Journal of Social and Educational Research* 23 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10440926>.

enforcement is often mechanical because it is only focused on numeric compliance rather than on assessing the quality of women's representation. Moreover, sanctions for non-compliance are few and inconsistently applied. In practice, political parties have adapted to these requirements without substantially altering their internal gender hierarchies.

Despite these legal measures, actual female representation in legislative bodies has remained well below the quota. As of July 2024, women make up only 23.8% of the House of Representatives and 13.3% of the upper house. Over the past three decades, women's parliamentary participation has been uneven, peaking at 28.6% in 1999, then declining to 19.1% in 2023.<sup>90</sup> Given current trends, BiH is unlikely to achieve gender parity in parliament by 2030, highlighting the limitations of quota systems when not supported by broader structural and cultural changes.<sup>91</sup>

Yet, despite these advances, several systemic barriers remain in the implementation of gender quotas. Scholarly literature highlights that the success of gender quota is shaped by various factors, including the motivations behind their adoption, the legal frameworks in place, the specific types of quotas and the extent of political will.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, even with quotas in place, women often struggle to translate formal inclusion into real political influence. This ongoing imbalance reflects the deeper entrenchment of patriarchal norms, where traditional gender roles and power hierarchies continue to marginalize women's voices in decision-making processes. Although the aspiration for European Union membership has driven legal reforms and the adoption of gender equality measures across the region.<sup>93</sup> According to UN Women data, women in BiH still occupy less than 25% of parliamentary seats, underscoring the limitations of quota systems when not supported by broader institutional and cultural change.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> 'Bosnia and Herzegovina | Equal Future' (*Equalfuture-eurasia.org*) <<https://www.equalfuture-eurasia.org/womens-representation-in-politics-and-public-administration/bosnia-and-herzegovina>>.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Krook (n 32).

<sup>93</sup> Limani (n 89) 24.

<sup>94</sup> UN Women, 'Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation' (*UN Women* 11 March 2025) <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation>>.

It is notable to mention though that the Head of the State and the Head of the Government are women.<sup>95</sup> As Dahlerup warns, quotas may facilitate women's entry into electoral politics, but they do not automatically guarantee substantive participation in power structures.<sup>96</sup> The case of BiH exemplifies the fragile nature of progress in gender equality, where legal provisions have not yet fully translated into sustained and transformative political empowerment for women.

### **3.1.4 Gender Quotas and Peacebuilding in BiH (WPS Agenda)**

While much attention has been placed on formal political structures in post-war BiH, women's contribution to peacebuilding extends far beyond institutional mechanisms. The recent history of BiH and the conflict from 1992-1995 significantly influenced the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. During the conflict, violence against women was widely used as a weapon, highlighting that wars deeply affect women's lives even as they are often excluded from decision-making and reparations processes.<sup>97</sup> Notably, during the Dayton peace negotiations in 1995, no women were included at the formal negotiating table, reflecting the broader marginalization of women during and after conflict.<sup>98</sup>

The international adoption of United Nations Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) in 2000 provided a critical framework for incorporating gender perspectives into peace and security, emphasizing women's participation, protection, and rights. Bosnian feminists and civil society actors played an active role in

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<sup>95</sup> UN Women, 'Women in Politics: 2025' (*UN Women – Headquarters*2025) <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/women-in-politics-map-2025>>.

<sup>96</sup> Dahlerup (n 28).

<sup>97</sup> Silvia Cittadini and Chiara Della Valle, 'Women Movements' Perspective on the WPS Agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Assessing "Human Security" and Peacebuilding' (2022) 8(1) *Interdisciplinary Political Studies* 41 <https://doi.org/10.1285/i20398573v8n1p41>.

<sup>98</sup> 'Explore the Data | CFR Interactives' (*Council on Foreign Relations*) <[https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/explore-the-data?\\_gl=1](https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/explore-the-data?_gl=1)>.

promoting the WPS Agenda domestically, which led to BiH becoming one of the first countries in the Western Balkans to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) for implementing UNSCR 1325 in 2010.<sup>99</sup>

Nonetheless, the implementation of WPS Agenda in BiH has revealed different perspectives between national and civil society organizations. While national institutions tend to focus on integrating gender perspectives and increasing women's representation in traditional security sectors such as armed forces and peacekeeping missions, many civil society organizations argue that this approach reinforces a militarized view of peace and security.<sup>100</sup> In fact, women's civil society organizations have played a vital role in peacebuilding in BiH, often through initiatives that fall outside the formal framework of the NAPs. These organizations were among the first to initiate reconciliation efforts across ethnic lines during and after conflict and they aimed to rebuild trust through the different multi-ethnic groups. This grassroots activism aimed at deconstructing the patriarchal and nationalistic narratives and granting visibility to women's crucial roles in Bosnian history and as peace agents.<sup>101</sup>

Despite these vital contributions, the work of women's civil society organizations is often not formally recognized as "peacebuilding" by traditional definitions used by the UN, states and many international NGOs, which tend to focus on post-war reconstruction and humanitarian aid. Women's broader understanding of peacebuilding encompasses issues like gender justice, non-violence, reconciliation, gender equality, human rights and democratic institutions, recognizing that these are all intertwined achieving meaningful and sustainable peace.<sup>102</sup>

Although the first part was focused on the informal peacebuilding role of women, it is important to analyze how gender quotas, introduced in the post-war period, intersect with broader peacebuilding goals and the WPS framework. As we mentioned previously, in BiH gender quotas were introduced in 1998,

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<sup>99</sup> Agency for Gender Equality, *National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 "Women, Peace and Security"* (Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

<sup>100</sup> Cittadini and Della Valle (n 95)

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Elisabeth Porter, 'Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building' (2003) 15 *Global Change, Peace & Security* 245.

mandating that 30% of candidates on party lists be women, later increased to 40% through legal mandates. These quotas were not solely tools of electoral reform but were also part of broader post-conflict democratization process guided by international norms, including the principles of UNSCR 1325. By mandating women's presence in political institutions, quotas were intended to foster not only gender inclusion, but also social legitimacy and political pluralism in a deeply divided society.

However, the effectiveness of quotas as peacebuilding tools remains contested. While they have increased the descriptive representation of women in political institutions, evidence suggests they have not led to consistent substantive influence or agenda-setting power for women in governance. The political system in BiH, characterized by ethno-nationalism, institutional complexity, and international oversight, has often limited the transformative potential of quotas. Moreover, quotas have been criticized by some civil society actors as insufficient or symbolic if not accompanied by structural reforms, such as greater support for women's leadership, accountability mechanisms, and the inclusion of women's grassroots agendas in national policymaking. This critique mirrors broader concerns within the WPS Agenda that top-down inclusion strategies risk tokenism unless grounded in deeper institutional change. Nevertheless, gender quotas remain one of the few institutional mechanisms through which UNSCR 1325's participation pillar is implemented in BiH's formal political system. Their presence signals an international commitment to gender inclusion, even if the outcomes fall short of feminist or peacebuilding efforts.

In summary, gender quotas in BiH emerged alongside international peacebuilding efforts and the evolving WPS Agenda. While they represent an important step toward institutionalizing women's political participation, their impact on peacebuilding remains limited by structural, cultural, and political constraints. Simultaneously, women's civil society organizations have filled critical gaps, advancing a broader and more transformative vision of peace. This duality, between mechanisms like quotas and informal grassroots efforts, will be further explored in Chapter 4, where BiH's experience is compared with that of Sweden. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to assess whether quotas can function not only as tools of electoral reform, but also as mechanisms of long-term peace and democratic stability in post-conflict societies.

### 3.2 Gender Quotas and Democracy in Stable Sweden

Sweden is widely recognized as a model of gender equality, frequently ranking among the most gendered-equal countries in global indices such as the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum<sup>103</sup> and the Gender Equality Index by European Institute for Gender Equality.<sup>104</sup> This reputation is supported by a high rate of female labor market participation and gender-balanced political assemblies, ranging from national parliament and government to regional and municipal councils.<sup>105</sup> In Swedish society, the idea of gender equality in all decision-making processes is unquestionable and therefore this commitment aligns with one of the four binding objectives of Sweden's gender equality policy “women’s and men’s equal access to power and influence”.<sup>106</sup>

Sweden is characterized by a longstanding tradition of political stability and gradual, consensus-driven reform. Its governance model is shaped by incremental policy development rather than abrupt change, supported by a robust public sector and a comprehensive welfare system. These features reflect a broader commitment to egalitarian values, where social equity and equal access to public services are prioritized as fundamental principles of the state. The fact that gender equality politics have traditionally been consensus-oriented, advocating for collaboration between women and men rather than special treatment for either sex, has shaped the approach to increasing women’s representation.

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<sup>103</sup> Kim Piaget, Yanjun Guo and World Economic Forum, ‘Global Gender Gap Report 2025: Progress despite Uncertainty’ (*World Economic Forum* 11 June 2025) <<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/06/global-gender-gap-report-2025-key-findings/>>.

<sup>104</sup> See the data: ‘Gender Equality Index | 2024 | SE | European Institute for Gender Equality’ (*European Institute for Gender Equality* 10 December 2024) <<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2024/country/SE>>.

<sup>105</sup> Lenita Freidenvall, *Gender Quota Spill-Over in Sweden: From Politics to Business?* (EUI Department of Law Research Paper No 2015/28, 2015) <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2665250>.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid 7.

### ***3.2.1 The evolution of Women's Representation***

There have been identified many factors that promoted women's participation in the case of Sweden. Such key determinants include socioeconomic factors, like education, employment, and social services, cultural attitudes such as traditional values and egalitarian norms and institutional elements like the electoral system and the party structure and stability.<sup>107</sup> Sweden's steady rise in women's political representation stands as compelling case within broader debate on democracy. Since 1970, the proportion of women in the Swedish parliament has risen from 14% to approximately 45% to date, making one of the most significant and sustained increases in the world. This progress is particularly notable when contrasted with the relative stagnation of the 1950s and 1960s, when women's participation remained minimal. By the 1980s, female representation had already reached 38%, and by the late 1990s it had surpassed the 40% threshold, well ahead of the rest of Europe.

The push for increased women's political participation accelerated during the 1970s with the rise of the second-wave feminist movement, which mobilized large numbers of young women and provoked a revival of organized women's activism. Unlike other countries where radical feminism was a dominant influence, Swedish feminism emphasized equal rights and outcomes for both genders, adopting a more consensus-driven and integrative approach. The focus was on dismantling traditional gender roles that confined both men and women, thereby framing gender equality as a democratic integrity. Moreover, this period marked a renewed energy within the women's movement, where both party-affiliated and independent women's groups actively contested the male-dominated understanding of citizenship, advocating for a more inclusive and gender-equal political sphere.<sup>108</sup> By shifting the discourse in this way, gender representation was no longer viewed as the concern of a marginal group, but as a fundamental issue for all major political parties.

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<sup>107</sup> Diane Sainsbury, 'Women's Political Representation in Sweden: Discursive Politics and Institutional Presence' (2004) 27 *Scandinavian Political Studies* 65.

<sup>108</sup> Lenita Freidenvall, *Women's Political Representation and Gender Quotas: The Swedish Case* (Working Paper Series 2, Gender Quotas – A Key to Equality?, Department of Political Science, Stockholm University 2003).

Central to this reorientation was the growing emphasis on descriptive representation, the idea that political institutions should mirror the demographic composition of the population, including gender balance rather than focusing solely on substantive representation, which emphasizes advocating for women's interests regardless of who holds office.<sup>109</sup> For these reasons, the period from the late 1960s to the early 1970s marked a pivotal shift. Women's sections within parties, particularly from the Communist Party and other leftish movements, began pushing more assertively for increased female participation. These efforts helped integrate gender equality into official party platforms and redefined it as a matter of democratic legitimacy, challenging the structural exclusion embedded within the political system and calling for a more inclusive and reflective model of representation.

### ***3.2.2 The way to the adoption of quotas***

By the early 1980s, the Swedish Ministry of Gender Equality recognized this democratic deficit of underrepresentation and established a committee of inquiry to explore ways of enhancing women's political participation. While initially hesitant to recommend quotas, the committee adopted a soft quota approach by setting targets: 30% by 1992, 40% by 1995, and parity (50%) by 1998.<sup>110</sup> Statutory quotas were proposed only as a last resort if voluntary goals were not met. Nevertheless, even if there were no mandatory mandates, they exerted pressure on political parties to address gender disparities in nominations, especially following the decline in women's representation in the 1991 elections, from 38% to 34%, the first drop since 1920s. This setback catalyzed public backlash and renewed feminist activism, including the emergence of the Support Stockings network, a cross-party initiative that held parties publicly accountable for gender imbalance. Their advocacy led to a rapid rebound, with women's representation in the 1994 parliamentary elections reaching 41%, a world leading figure at the time.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Sainsbury (n 107) 75.

<sup>110</sup> Diane Sainsbury, 'Party Feminism, State Feminism and Women's Representation in Sweden' in Joni Lovenduski (ed), *State Feminism and Political Representation* (Cambridge University Press 2005) 195–215.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite being a model for gender equality, Sweden has not enacted mandatory legal gender quotas in politics or other sectors. Instead, voluntary measures have been the preferred strategy.<sup>112</sup> Voluntary party quotas began appearing in Sweden during the 1980s, once women already occupied 20-30% of parliamentary seats. Quotas were framed as a mechanism for balancing representation, rather than meeting minimum thresholds. The Green Party and the Left Party were pioneers in this regard introducing quotas systems as early as 1987. First, the Green Party instituted a 40% quota for each gender, which later increased to 50% in 1997. A significant milestone occurred in the 1993 when the Social Democratic Party, Sweden's largest political party, implemented the "Every other one for the ladies" rule. This introduced the now well-known zipper system, altering male and female candidates on electoral ballots to ensure gender balance.<sup>113</sup>

This reform worked particularly well due to Sweden's proportional representation electoral system with open lists, which allows voters to select a party as well as individual candidates. Although voters can cast preference votes, parties maintain significant control over list rankings, allowing them to strategically influence outcomes. The zipper system functions especially effectively under these conditions, enabling parties to structure ballots in a way that promotes predictable gender balance in elected offices.<sup>114</sup> Resistance to legal gender quotas in Sweden has reflected a broader national preference for party autonomy over state-imposed mandates. Feminist mobilization in the Nordic region during the 1980s and 1990s framed gender inequality in terms of 'male dominance' and patriarchy.<sup>115</sup> The significant resistance of legal gender quotas reflected the country's broader preference for party autonomy over state-imposed mandates. Rather than enacting legislation, Swedish political parties took the lead in

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<sup>112</sup> Lenita Freidenvall, Drude Dahlerup and Hege Skjeie, 'The Nordic Countries: An Incremental Model' in Drude Dahlerup (ed), *Women, Quotas and Politics* (1st edn, Routledge 2006) 28.

<sup>113</sup> Dahlerup and Freidenvall (n 26)

<sup>114</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties* (7 July 2014) <https://www.osce.org/odihr/120877>.

<sup>115</sup> Freidenvall, Dahlerup and Skjeie, (n 112) 70.

adopting a variety of internal mechanisms aimed at increasing women’s political representation. These measures included voluntary targets, internal recommendations and party-specific quotas.

This evolution reflects on the “incremental track” to gender parity, an approach marked by gradual, sustained progress over time, rather than the rapid “fast track” enabled by legal quota mandates.<sup>116</sup> The steady historical rise in women’s political participation served to validate this incremental model, reinforcing a discourse of evolution rather than intervention. Within parties, women’s sections played a pivotal role in advancing gender equality by advocating for gender to become a key criterion in candidate selection and by pushing for greater female presence on electoral lists. Furthermore, the diffusion of party quota adoption was facilitated by a contagion effect; once one party implemented gender measures, others felt compelled to follow, either out of political competitiveness or normative pressure, further reinforcing a culture gender-sensitive party practices.<sup>117</sup>

In short, quotas in Sweden have generally been framed in gender-neutral terms to align with the principle of fairness for both sexes and function as a conflict-avoiding measure. This framing along with the country’s political tradition of conflict avoidance and cross-party dialogue, allowed gender quotas to be implemented without provoking major ideological polarization. Thus, the Swedish quota model reflects long-term, institutionalized process of democratic deepening, where party-led reforms aligned with a national culture of egalitarianism and consensus. The success of voluntary quotas in Sweden demonstrates that under the right conditions such as supportive political culture, party commitment, and institutional design, gender parity can be achieved without legal mandates.

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<sup>116</sup> Dahlerup and Freidenvall (n 26) 30.

<sup>117</sup> Lenita Freidenvall, ‘Sweden: An Incremental Process’ in Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook and Netina Tan (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Women’s Political Rights* (Palgrave Macmillan 2019) [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59074-9\\_31](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59074-9_31).

### *3.2.3 Voluntary versus mandatory Quotas*

While Sweden is often cited as a global leader in gender equality and women's political representation, its success has largely been achieved through voluntary gender quotas adopted by political parties rather than legally mandated frameworks. This approach has sparked considerable academic debate over the effectiveness of voluntary and mandatory quotas systems in achieving substantive gender parity in politics. In Sweden's case, party-driven quotas, particularly the zipper system, were adopted and sustained due to strong societal support for egalitarian values. Consequently, voluntary quotas can produce results comparable to, or even more effective than, legislative quotas when embedded in a supportive political culture.

Nevertheless, other scholars caution that Sweden's success may not be replicable in other contexts. Krook points out that voluntary quotas rely on heavily political will, strong party discipline and public legitimacy<sup>118</sup>, all of which are more likely to be found in stable democracies like Sweden than in emerging or post-conflict democracies. In less supportive environments, voluntary quotas can be readily altered or administered inconsistently. In addition, critics contend that although Sweden has attained numerical parity, issues with intersectional representation still exist since women from ethnic or minority backgrounds continue to be underrepresented.<sup>119</sup> These critiques do not diminish the achievements of the Swedish model but highlight its dependency on cultural and institutional preconditions. The effectiveness of voluntary quotas is closely tied to the presence of a strong civil society, gender-equal policy legacies, and responsive party institutions, all of which are more common in Sweden than in many other global contexts.

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<sup>118</sup> Krook (n 32)

<sup>119</sup> Sainsbury (n 107)

### ***3.2.4 High women's representation and inclusive governance***

Sweden's voluntary gender quotas have not only contributed to achieving parity in political representation but have also led to meaningful participation of women in governance and policy-making. As of recent elections, women make up nearly 50% of the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag), consistently placing Sweden among the top countries globally for female political representation.<sup>120</sup> This outcome is largely attributed to the early and continuous adoption of party-based quota systems, which implemented alternating gender placements (zipper systems) on their candidate lists.<sup>121</sup>

Importantly, the high number of women in parliament has translated into substantive policy outcomes. Studies show that increased female representation in Sweden has significantly influenced the legislative agenda, especially in areas such as childcare, parental leave, anti-discrimination and social welfare.<sup>122</sup> Female politicians have not only shaped discourse around equality but have also held key leadership positions, including the role of party leaders, ministers, and parliamentary speakers. These outcomes demonstrate that the Swedish model supports both descriptive and substantive representation, reinforcing the idea that women's presence in decision-making bodies leads to broader inclusiveness in policy development.

Furthermore, it is emphasized that this success is deeply connected to Sweden's political culture and institutional trust. High levels of public support for gender equality, combined with low corruption and a strong civil society, have made it feasible to use voluntary quotas in a way that encourages long-term inclusion and steers clear of tokenism.<sup>123</sup> The Swedish case, therefore, emphasizes how voluntary quotas

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<sup>120</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments | IPU Parline: Global Data on National Parliaments' (*IPU Parline: global data on national parliaments* 8 September 2023) <[https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date\\_month=4&date\\_year=2025](https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_month=4&date_year=2025)>.

<sup>121</sup> Dahlerup and Freidenvall (n 109)

<sup>122</sup> Lena Wängnerud, 'Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation' (2009) 12 *Annual Review of Political Science* 51 <<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.053106.123839>>.

<sup>123</sup> Lenita Freidenvall, 'A Discursive Struggle—the Swedish National Federation of Social Democratic Women and Gender Quotas' (2005) 13 *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 175.

have the ability to promote inclusive government and go beyond numerical targets, as long as the societal and political structures are supportive.

Additionally, the Swedish model is best described as incremental and integrative. Women's organizations worked within existing party structures rather than challenging them from the outside. Political parties, the long gatekeepers of women's underrepresentation, began responding to internal and external pressures, especially from women's federations and electoral competition, to adopt proactive measures. From the 1970s onwards, women's exclusion was recognized as a structural problem requiring structural solutions, and the framing of equal representation a matter of democracy. Therefore, Sweden's model shows us the potential for quotas to succeed even in the absence of legal mandates, provided the democratic institutions are stable and societal values support inclusion. However, academics also caution that Sweden's success may be exceptional and not easily transferable to contexts lacking similar institutional and cultural foundations.<sup>124</sup>

### ***3.2.5 Democratic stability and Peace in Sweden***

Although Sweden is a state that has not experienced conflict in the same way as a post-war state, scholars often highlight its model of inclusive governance as contributing to long-term democratic stability. It has been mentioned that in the Swedish case, one of the problems was the democratic deficit in political decision-making.<sup>125</sup> This indicates that increasing women's representation was viewed as necessary to improve the democratic quality of decision-making. Wider research has suggested that increased descriptive representation, for example a higher number of women elected in parliament, enhances the perception of legitimacy among the electorate.<sup>126</sup> Sweden has always been mentioned as a country with historically and to date high parliamentary representation of women. These high levels of women's

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<sup>124</sup> Lenita Freidenvall and Mona Lena Krook, 'Discursive Strategies for Institutional Reform: Gender Quotas in Sweden and France' in *Gender, Politics and Institutions* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011) [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230303911\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230303911_3).

<sup>125</sup>Freidenvall (n 108)

<sup>126</sup>Wängnerud, (n 122) 243.

representation were not an automatic process but by implementing specific measures such as party quotas and zipper system, Sweden has addressed a perceived democratic flaw and aligned it with higher female representation and greater perceived legitimacy and citizen effectiveness. In a few words, the sustained political participation of women, facilitated by voluntary gender quotas, has enhanced the legitimacy and accountability of democratic institutions.

Furthermore, Sweden's case demonstrates how gender-equal political institutions contribute to what Galtung terms "positive peace", a concept that goes beyond the absence of violence to include justice, inclusion, and the equitable distribution of power.<sup>127</sup> Since the absence of structural violence is fundamentally linked to unequal power, gender inequality in political systems represents a form of this unequal distribution of power where decision-making authority is not equally accessible. By definition, gender-equal political system would have a fairer distribution of power, which would directly combat a fundamental mechanism in structural violence. Moreover, Galtung outlined mechanisms that maintain inegalitarian distributions, such as linear ranking orders, correlation between rank and centrality, and concordance between ranks.<sup>128</sup> Gender inequality often involves these mechanisms, where one gender is consistently ranked lower or excluded from positions of power and centrality. Consequently, by ensuring gender parity in political institutions, facilitated through voluntary quotas, Sweden actively works against such structural hierarchies. As such, gender quotas have served as tools not only of inclusion but also of long-term peacebuilding by promoting social justice and representative legitimacy.

Having examined how inclusive politics function through the increased participation of women in political life, the enhancement of accountability in democratic institutions and the positive outcomes for peace, it is pertinent to analyze that in foreign policy Sweden has long positioned itself as a norm entrepreneur in international peace and security. Between 1945 and 1990, it ranked among the most active countries in global peacekeeping efforts.<sup>129</sup> By the early 1990s, Sweden had established itself as a

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<sup>127</sup> Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research' (1969) 6 *Journal of Peace Research* 167  
<<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/002234336900600301>>.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid 176.

<sup>129</sup> Annika Björkdahl, 'Ideas and Norms in Swedish Peace Policy' (2013) 19 *Swiss Political Science Review* 322.

credible actor in conflict prevention. Its influence on the global stage expanded further with its 1996 election to the UN Security Council, where it successfully advanced conflict prevention within the UN and helped integrate this priority into the EU's security agenda.<sup>130</sup> Central to this diplomatic identity has been Sweden's commitment to the WPS Agenda.

In addition, Sweden had actively worked on the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 by adopting 4 National Action Plans (NAPs) from 2006 with the most recent the one of 2024-2028. The aim of the last NAP continues to be the guidance of Sweden's efforts to implement Women, Peace and Security Agenda not only nationally but also internationally. As part of its strategic direction, Sweden is committed to advancing the equal participation of diverse groups of women and girls in conflict prevention initiatives believing that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without addressing the gendered dimensions of conflict. Furthermore, Sweden acknowledges the intersection of democracy, gender equality, and peace and therefore advocates for the inclusion of gender quotas as a tool to operationalize equality in post-conflict governance systems.<sup>131</sup>

While Sweden's internal political stability offers valuable lessons, its global peacebuilding efforts further illustrate how gender equality and democratic development are connected in both domestic and foreign policy. It is essential to mention that the Swedish state works with conflict affected and post-conflict countries, tailoring its efforts to each specific context, but consistently grounds them in the promotion of women's rights. Through the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), it has contributed to strengthening democratic governance, enhancing the efficiency of the judiciary, and advancing human rights and gender equality in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>132</sup> SIDA funding has contributed to

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid 328.

<sup>131</sup> Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Sweden's 2024–2028 National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security: Annex to 1:4 of Government Meeting of 9 November 2023* (2023).

<sup>132</sup> The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina' (*Sida2024*) <<https://www.sida.se/en/sidas-international-work/countries-and-regions/sidas-work-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina#development-0>> accessed 10 May 2025.

inclusive peacebuilding programs, judicial reform, and gender-focused institutional development, often advocating for quota mechanisms as part of broader democratization efforts.

This connection to BiH is not incidental. It illustrates how Sweden's internal experience with voluntary quotas an inclusive democracy informs its external peacebuilding agenda. Unlike many donor countries, Sweden has grounded its development assistance in principles drawn from its own domestic reforms, including pragmatic, incremental model of quota adoption, coupled with strong support for civil society and women's organizations.

In this sense, Sweden offers a comparative model for how gender quotas can serve as peacebuilding tools not only in post-conflict settings, but also as preventive mechanisms in stable democracies. Its experience shows that institutional gender inclusion, when built into the political system through quotas, supports long-term peace, accountability, and democratic resilience. The following chapter will further explore these dynamics by comparing the Swedish and Bosnian cases. It will assess how quotas function under very different political conditions, and what lessons can be drawn for international organizations and state actors seeking to strengthen gender equality in peacebuilding processes.

## 4. Comparative Analysis: Context, Quotas and Outcomes

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of the two selected case studies of post-conflict BiH and the stable democratic Sweden, with the aim of answering the stated research question: *How do gender quotas influence women's political participation, democratic stability, and peacebuilding in post-conflict and stable democracies?* Building on the contextual findings presented in Chapters 2 and 3, this section moves beyond descriptive accounts to critically examine the mechanisms, outcomes, and underlying conditions that shape the effectiveness of quotas in these two contrasting political environments.

Rather than treating quotas as inherently progressive tools, this analysis explores the extent to which they foster genuine political inclusion or operate as symbolic measures, depending on the institutional, cultural, and historical context in which they are embedded. The chapter is structured thematically to compare key variables across cases: the origins and political legitimacy of quota adoption, the role of electoral systems and enforcement mechanisms, and the influence of civil society and political culture, the link between descriptive and substantive representation, and the broader peacebuilding implications of gendered political inclusion.

By analyzing these dimensions, the chapter seeks to uncover how and why gender quotas produce different political and social effects in a stable versus a post-conflict democracy. It also reflects on what these differences reveal about the transformative potential and limitations of quotas as tools for advancing democratic resilience and gender equitable peace. Each subchapter provides a comparative lens that synthesizes theoretical insights with empirical evidence, thereby laying the foundation for the concluding policy recommendations and future outlook in Chapter 5.

## 4.1 Political contexts and the quota effectiveness

The political, institutional, and historical conditions under which gender quotas are introduced play a critical role in determining their effectiveness. In comparing BiH and Sweden, two markedly different environments, it becomes evident that quotas are not an isolated system. Instead, their legitimacy, societal ownership, and long-term potential are shaped by the broader context of state stability, democratic culture, and the actors involved in their adoption. While Sweden represents a case of voluntary quota implementation within a stable and inclusive democracy, BiH exemplifies the externally driven, post-conflict introduction of quotas as part of an international peacebuilding agenda. These contrasting pathways reveal how the source and framing of quotas can influence their reception, sustainability, and transformative potential.

In Sweden, gender quotas were neither imposed by law nor introduced in response to external mandates. Instead, they emerged through internal political dynamics and sustained feminist mobilization during the 1970s and 1980s, in a period marked by growing attention to democratic legitimacy and gender equality. The Swedish political system, characterized by proportional representation, strong party autonomy, and high institutional trust, provided fertile ground for voluntary party quotas to take root. The pressure to implement gender-balanced lists came not from international organizations, but from women's sections within political parties and an active civil society that framed women's inclusion as a matter of democratic integrity and social justice. Moreover, while no formal legal requirement was enacted, there was a perceived political expectation that if voluntary measures failed, legislative quotas could eventually be introduced. This implicit threat of regulation served as a motive for political parties to act preventively, allowing them to maintain control over candidate selection processes while aligning with evolving social norms around gender equality.

The internal, bottom-up adoption process gave quotas a high degree of legitimacy and cultural resonance. The voluntary nature of Swedish quotas also allowed parties to innovate mechanisms such as the zipper system, ensuring alternation of male and female candidates on party lists. These measures were framed not as affirmative action, but as fairness principles, appealing to Sweden's broader egalitarian values. As

a result, quotas in Sweden are deeply embedded in political culture and are rarely questioned, reflecting their institutional normalization.

In contrast, gender quotas in BiH were introduced in a highly unstable post-conflict environment following the 1992-1995 war. The Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the conflict, laid the foundation for the country's current institutional framework. The country's decentralized system, consisting of the two entities, the Brčko District, and multiple cantonal governments, created significant challenges for consistent enforcement and monitoring of gender-based reforms, prioritizing ethnic representation over gender inclusion. In this context, gender quotas were implemented under the strong influence of international actors, particularly the OSCE Mission and other UN agencies, as part of broader Western liberal norms of inclusion and peacebuilding aimed at democratic consolidation and gender equality.<sup>133</sup>

The initial introduction of a 30% quota party lists in the 1998 elections was a direct result of international advocacy and local women's mobilization supported by donor programs. However, the fact that quotas were externally promoted and legally mandated has contributed to their perception as symbolic or imposed, rather than as authentic tools of democratic reform. This perception limits transformative potential, as political elites often comply minimally without internalizing the principles behind them. Moreover, BiH's political instability, weak party accountability and ongoing ethnic fragmentation hinder the effective institutionalizations of quotas. Women's representation in parliaments has increased numerically, but the broader political culture remains resistant to gender-sensitive reforms, especially in a context where governance is still driven by ethnonationalist interests.

This contrast illustrates a critical point in which the effectiveness of gender quotas is closely related to their origin and the context in which they are introduced. In Sweden, quotas gained legitimacy through political and civil society alignment while in BiH their association with international mandates and post-

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<sup>133</sup> Milica G Antic and Sonja Lokar, 'The Balkans: From Total Rejection to Gradual Acceptance of Gender Quotas' in Drude Dahlerup (ed), *Women, Quotas and Politics* (1st edn, Routledge 2006).

war reconstruction has rendered them vulnerable to instrumentalization and resistance. As Krook argues, when quotas are viewed as external impositions rather than internally motivated reforms, they are more likely to be treated as symbolic or temporary measures.<sup>134</sup>

Furthermore, quota effectiveness is conditioned by state capacity and political stability. Sweden's robust democratic institutions, high public trust and consensus driven politics support the long-term integration of quotas into governance practices. In contrast, BiH's fragile post-conflict setting, combined with institutional dysfunction and polarized political competition, undermines efforts to use quotas as tools for structural change. Ultimately, context is not a setting but a determining factor because quotas may be identical in form, but their function and impact depend on whether they are adopted in environments that support their goals and values.

## 4.2 Representation and Political influence

While gender quotas are often evaluated by their ability to increase the number of women in legislatures, descriptive representation alone does not guarantee transformative political impact. As Hanna Pitkin's seminal typology reminds us, true representation involves more than numerical presence, it requires substantive and symbolic influence.<sup>135</sup> The experiences of Sweden and BiH reflect this tension since both countries have improved women's descriptive representations through quotas, but their ability to translate that presence into meaningful power and policy influence diverges significantly.

In Sweden, voluntary party quotas have not only contributed to near-parity in parliamentary representations but have also fostered conditions for substantive representation. As of 2024, women hold

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<sup>134</sup> Krook (n 32)

<sup>135</sup> Pitkin (n 12)

approximately 45% of the seats in the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament).<sup>136</sup> Representation is similarly strong at regional and municipal levels, where many local councils and executive committees also approach or exceed gender parity.<sup>137</sup> In addition, Swedish women politicians have successfully shaped legislative priorities in areas such as childcare, gender-based violence, parental leave, and anti-discrimination laws, often working across party lines. Research has shown that female MPs in Sweden are more likely than male counterparts to advocate for legislation related to family policy, gender equality and social welfare.<sup>138</sup>

Importantly, the sustained presence of women in decision-making spaces has helped normalize female leadership and reshape institutional agendas.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, Swedish women in politics are not confined to “soft” portfolios. They have consistently held influential roles in defense, finance, and foreign policy, demonstrating that quotas embedded in egalitarian political cultures can lead to real power redistribution. As a result, women have not only filled seats but have also occupied key leadership roles, including prime ministers, party leaders, and ministers of finance and foreign affairs and expanding their capacity to shape national agendas. Their presence has shaped Sweden’s reputation as a gender-equal welfare system, where inclusive governance is not only symbolic but deeply committed.

By contrast, in BiH, the increased descriptive representation achieved through legal quotas has not resulted in proportional gains in substantive political influence. Although women must make up at least 40% of candidate lists, they remain underrepresented in actual elected positions, largely due to open-list voting systems and strategic manipulation by party elites. Even when women do attain office, their roles are often marginalized. Those who are elected are rarely able to challenge the party line or advocate for transformative policies related to peacebuilding, justice or gender equality. They are disproportionately assigned to committees or ministries dealing with social issues, while male politicians dominate sectors

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<sup>136</sup> ‘Sweden | Inter-Parliamentary Union’ (*Ipu.org* 13 March 2025) <<https://www.ipu.org/parliament/SE>>.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Municipalities and Regions’ (*skr.se* 22 May 2024) <<https://skr.se/skr/englishpages/municipalitiesandregions.1088.html>>.

<sup>138</sup> Wängnerud (n 122)

<sup>139</sup> Phillips (n 14)

related to security, constitutional reform, and post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>140</sup> This pattern reflects Dahlerup's concern that without broader cultural and institutional change, quotas risk producing tokenism rather than transformation.<sup>141</sup>

Further, women's capacity to act as agents of policy change in BiH is constrained by the patriarchal structure of political parties, where decision-making remains heavily centralized among male elites. Party loyalty and ethnic identity are prioritized over issue-based politics, leaving little room for women to advance gender equality or peacebuilding agendas independently. Women are often placed in unelectable positions on the list or selected based on their loyalty to male party leaders rather than their expertise or advocacy for gender equality.<sup>142</sup> As a result, the quota system functions more as a mechanism of symbolic inclusion, one that satisfies international visibility requirements without altering the gendered hierarchies of power. These factors not only undermine the effectiveness of gender quotas but also reveal the complex realities of post-conflict governance where identity politics dominate democratic processes.

The symbolic dimension of representations is also instructive. In Sweden, the visibility of women in politics contributes to the legitimacy of the democratic system itself. The presence of women signals to society that politics is inclusive and responsive to all citizens. In BiH, however, the idea that quotas are imposed from outside and unrelated to local concerns weakens the symbolic value of women's inclusion. Rather than embodying democratic equality, quotas are often viewed as technical requirements or donor-driven targets, which undermines the capacity to shift societal perceptions of gender roles in politics.

In a summary, while both countries demonstrate improvements in women's descriptive representation, only Sweden offers strong evidence of substantive and symbolic transformation. This contrast underscores that quotas alone do not empower women, but they must be accompanied by political will,

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<sup>140</sup> Adnan Kadribasic, Barbara Chiarenza, Maida Cehajic-Campara and Lejla Ramic-Mesihovic, *Baseline Study on Barriers to Political Participation of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (UNDP and UN Women 2020).

<sup>141</sup> Dahlerup (n 28)

<sup>142</sup> Elissa Helms, *Innocence and Victimhood: Gender, Nation, and Women's Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina* (The University of Wisconsin Press 2013) 158–192.

party reform, and cultural change to create the conditions in which women can exercise genuine political agency. As such, quotas must be understood not as endpoints, but as instruments whose effectiveness depends on the broader system of democratic practice and gender equity.

### **4.3 Quotas and peacebuilding: A critical intersection**

Gender quotas are often promoted not only as tools for enhancing political inclusion, but also as mechanisms that may contribute to peace building and long-term democratic stability. Yet, their actual contribution to post conflict transformation depends on more than numbers. It hinges on whether inclusion is meaningful, sustained, and situated within broader institutional and normative frameworks. The cases of BiH and Sweden illustrate two fundamentally different relationships between gender quotas and peacebuilding, shaped by context, intention, and structural conditions.

In BiH, as we have already mentioned, gender quotas were adopted as part of the international community's liberal peacebuilding agenda in the aftermath of war. Introduced by the OSCE and embedded within a legal framework shaped by the Dayton Agreement, quotas served as a visible commitment to democratic norm and gender inclusion. Yet, this top-down implementation occurred in a political environment that prioritized ethnic balance over inclusive governance, and where nationalist politics dominated the post-war agenda. Although BiH was among the first Western Balkan countries to adopt a NAP, its operationalization on WPS Agenda has remained fragmented. Training programs and institutional reforms have often emphasized technical participation, such as increasing women in security forces, over structural empowerment or political agenda-setting.

In practice, this has produced a system in which quotas symbolize progress but rarely deliver it. Women in BiH face institutional barriers that prevent their meaningful participation in peacebuilding processes, including limited access to decision-making, weak party support, and minimal engagement with transitional justice or reconciliation policy. Since political legitimacy is determined by ethnicity rather than gender, the ethnically divided system of government further marginalizes the positions of women. Even when women raise issues of peace, justice, or inclusion, they are frequently sidelined in favor of ethno-national priorities. In this sense, quotas in BiH have helped institutionalize presence but not

influence, reinforcing critiques that liberal peacebuilding often delivers procedural inclusion without substantive transformation.

On the other hand, Sweden does not frame gender quotas within peacebuilding discourse. Rather, its model exemplifies peace through inclusive governance, a long-term internally cultivated system where gender equality is integrated into political culture, party practices, and policymaking norms. Even if it is not post-conflict, Sweden shows how persistent gender inclusion may be linked to high levels of trust, social resilience, and policy responsiveness, all of which are linked to democratic stability. The voluntary nature of quotas, combined with broad public support for gender parity, has enabled women to access meaningful political power and shape national priorities, including welfare, education and security policy, in ways that reinforce inclusive governance.

Although Sweden does not implement quotas as part of the WPS Agenda per se, its practices align with its goals. Swedish women have held leadership roles in peacebuilding abroad, and gender equality is a core element of its foreign and development policy. For example, successive governments, regardless of party orientation, have branded their policy platforms as “feminist”, most notably through Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy, which positioned gender equality as a core principle in diplomacy, aid, and conflict resolution. Unlike in BiH, women’s representation in Sweden is not symbolic or externally mandated but integrated into the substance of governance. This implies that rather than being imposed as post-conflict standards, gender quotas may promote peacebuilding more successfully when they originate from and strengthen democratic consensus.

Comparatively, these cases reveal that gender quotas can only contribute to peacebuilding under certain conditions. Quotas may institutionalize the possibility of inclusion, but whether that translates into peace-oriented outcomes depends on the presence of:

1. Institutional support and political will
2. Party openness to gender equality
3. A civic space that encourages multidimensional activism, as seen in Swedish feminism, or BiH’s civil society and
4. Broader cultural shifts away from politics centered on identification and exclusion

In post-conflict settings like BiH, where political life is divided and legitimacy is disputed, quotas typically become an element of the democratic transition process rather than its driving force. In contrast, in stable democracies like Sweden, quotas can reinforce already existing inclusive norms and extend their reach. Lastly, this comparison cautions against assuming that gender quotas are inherently peacebuilding tools. Their potential is context-dependent, shaped more by conditions that allow women to transform representation into political power and political power into action that is important to peace than by the existence of a policy.

#### **4.4 What comparison tells us: Implications for Policy and Theory**

The comparative analysis of gender quotas in BiH and Sweden reveals a central insight that quotas are not inherently transformative tools. Their effectiveness in promoting women's political participation, supporting democratic legitimacy, and contributing to peacebuilding is fundamentally shaped by political context, institutional design, and societal norms. While both countries have implemented gender quotas, their outcomes diverge sharply, underscoring the importance of not just whether quotas are adopted, but how, why and in what conditions.

From a theoretical perspective, this analysis supports the argument that gender quotas should be understood as mechanisms that interact with broader systems of power. In Bosnia, quotas were introduced as a peacebuilding target and an accelerator of post-conflict democratization. However, without political will, party reform or cultural transformation, quotas are largely seen as symbolic. Descriptive gains in women's representation have not been translated into real political influence, especially in areas related to reconciliation, justice or security. This result is consistent with criticisms of tokenistic gender changes and liberal peacebuilding that put outward conformity above long-term improvement. Instead, Sweden demonstrates that quotas embedded in egalitarian political cultures can achieve both descriptive and substantive results. Women's inclusion in politics is not limited to numerical presence, but is reflected in leadership roles, cross-party cooperation and influence in important policy areas. Importantly, the Swedish experience demonstrates that quotas are most effective when they are

embedded in a broader construct of democracy and gender equality rather than in isolated technical solutions.

From a methodological perspective, the use of QCA and MDSD has enabled a systematic exploration of how similar policy instruments operate across divergent contexts. By holding the presence of quotas constant but varying the political, institutional, and cultural environments this approach highlights the conditional logic behind quota effectiveness. In simple terms, it shows that quotas themselves do not determine outcomes, they interact with electoral systems, party structures, enforcement mechanisms, and the political legitimacy of women's participation.

These insights carry direct implications for both theory and practice. First, they challenge universalist assumptions about gender quota efficacy. Policies that succeed in one setting may fail in another if they are transplanted without attention to context. Second, they underscore the importance of aligning quota design with domestic political realities where legal mandates may be necessary in post-conflict states, but without embedded accountability and local ownership, they risk superficial compliance. Third, they suggest that international actors must move beyond numeric targets and support deeper structural reforms, including feminist civil society, gender-sensitive political training, and mechanisms for monitoring substantive participation.

From both case studies, the following factors emerge:

Table 2: Results from comparison

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	<b>Sweden</b>
<b>Quota Type</b>	Mandatory, weakly enforced	Voluntary, strongly embedded in party rules
<b>Origin of reform</b>	International imposition (OSCE, EU)	Domestic feminist activism and party initiative
<b>Electoral System</b>	Open list, easy to manipulate	Closed/zippered lists with strategic placement
<b>Political Culture</b>	Low, externally imposed	High, internally motivated
<b>Civil Society Engagement</b>	Fragmented, limited influence	Strong, feminist activism integrated into politics
<b>Institutional Capacity</b>	Weak enforcement, low transparency	High trust, strong monitoring
<b>Cultural Norms</b>	Patriarchal, male-dominated politics	Egalitarian, gender-inclusive
<b>Substantive Impact</b>	Minimal influence on governance or peace processes	Clear policy outcomes and leadership participation
<b>Implementation and Monitoring</b>	Formal compliance focus, weak sanctions	Internal enforcement, public accountability
<b>Peacebuilding Contribution</b>	Limited, peripheral to ethnic politics	Indirect but sustained contribution to cohesion

Finally, the findings lead us back to the central research question of this thesis: *How do gender quotas affect women's political participation, democratic stability, and peacebuilding in post-conflict and stable democracies?* The analysis underscores that the influence of quotas is highly conditional. While they can open pathways for women's political participation, their broader contribution to long-term democratic stability and peacebuilding depends on the political and institutional environment in which they are applied. In BiH, the adoption of quota laws has fulfilled international expectations for women's inclusion, yet weak institutions and patriarchal political culture severely limit their transformative potential. On the other hand, Sweden shows that when gender equality is a shared norm and institutionalized across political life, quotas can produce both representation and real influence. In states that have experienced conflicts in the past, adopting quotas without addressing structural barriers risks reinforcing symbolic participation rather than achieving genuine democratic inclusion. The Swedish case, therefore, offers not only a point of comparison but also important lessons for designing gender quotas systems in ways that are context-sensitive, culturally embedded and institutionally supported. These findings form the foundation for the policy recommendations outlined in the next chapter, particularly for international actors as the European Union and United Nations engaged in advancing gender equality in peacebuilding processes.

## 5. Translating findings into policy and practice

### 5.1 Policy recommendations

This section offers practical policy recommendations for international institutions, especially the EU and UN, based on the comparative results between BiH and Sweden. By combining technical implementation with institutional support, cultural legitimacy, and long-term democratic transformation, these ideas aim to improve the efficacy of gender quotas in unstable democracies.

#### *5.1.1 Strengthening quotas through international norms and support*

To enhance the effectiveness of gender quotas globally, particularly in fragile or transitional democracies, it is essential that international actors such as the EU, UN and other multilateral institutions promote not only the adoption of quotas, but also their meaningful implementation. One critical lesson emerging from the comparative case study is the importance of context sensitive quota models. Quotas should not follow a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Rather, they must be tailored to the specific political, cultural and institutional framework of each country. For instance, placement mandates may be particularly necessary in open-list electoral systems to avoid women being relegated to unelectable positions on party lists, whereas closed-list systems demand internal party regulations and enforcement mechanisms to ensure balanced representation.

Equally important is the need to move beyond technocratic or symbolic solutions. Quotas must be integrated into broader democratic reform agendas that include party-level gender training, civic education programs, and media strategies designed to build public understanding and support. Without such structural backing, quotas risk being perceived as tokenistic and may provoke backlash, undermining their legitimacy and long-term sustainability.

Lastly, prioritize enforcement and monitoring mechanisms are essential for ensuing accountability. The creation of independent electoral oversight bodies, supported by digital monitoring tools to track gender representation in real time, can play a critical role. Additionally, the implementation of concrete sanctions for non-compliance is necessary to prevent parties from violating quota laws without consequences.

These measures not only uphold the integrity of quota systems but also contribute to building trust in democratic institutions. Only through such holistic approaches can quotas contribute meaningfully to long-term political inclusion and gender equality.

### ***5.1.2 The role of the UN and WPS Agenda***

The WPS Agenda, rooted in UNSCR 1325, has significantly shaped global discourses around women's political participation in conflict and post-conflict settings. However, its transformative potential depends on how comprehensively its principles are integrated into institutional processes. The support should go beyond legislation, from formal adoption to functional implementation. One key recommendation emerging from comparative and policy literature is the necessity to embed gender quotas at the earliest stages of peacebuilding. Bell and O'Rourke's research has shown that peace agreements that include gender provisions are more likely to lead to sustainable peace and inclusive institutions.<sup>143</sup> When quotas are incorporated directly into peace agreements, transitional governance frameworks, and constitutional negotiations, they are more likely to influence the foundational rules of the political order. Conversely, treating women's political inclusion as a subsidiary concern risks entrenching their marginalization in the post-conflict state.

Moreover, the UN's engagement must move beyond procedural interventions such as training workshops and gender mainstreaming checklists. While candidate training and electoral support remain important, they must be complemented by more sustained and strategic interventions. This includes mentorship networks, access to campaign financing, civic engagement and targeted support for women's political leadership within parties, where systematic inequalities often persist and undermine women's ability to compete on equal terms. Through partnerships with local media, educational institutions and cultural leaders, gender inclusion can be a part of society's path to justice and stability. For instance, UNDP's

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<sup>143</sup> Christine Bell and Catherine O'Rourke, 'Peace Agreements or "Pieces of Paper"? The Impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Peace Processes and Their Agreements' (2010) 59 *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 941.

Strengthening Electoral Processes program in countries like Nepal includes community-level training on gender-sensitive elections, which has led to broader support for inclusive governance.<sup>144</sup> Without addressing these structural barriers, quota implementation may increase the number of women candidates without meaningfully shifting political power dynamics.

Another crucial step that can be adopted is the strategic funding and empowerment of feminist civil society actors, who often serve as the backbone of advocacy and monitoring for gender equality initiatives. Long-term, flexible funding models should prioritize grassroots women's organizations, which possess local legitimacy and the capacity to push for accountability from below. Relying solely on state institutions risks depoliticizing or bureaucratizing gender forms, particularly in fragile or semi-authoritarian contexts where state commitment to equality may be superficial.

Finally, there is a need to align WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) with domestic electoral and institutional reforms. Too often, National Action Plans remain disconnected from tangible political strategies. To close this gap, governments should be encouraged to integrate quota policies directly into their NAPs, supported by clear indicators, dedicated budgets, and strict reporting mechanisms. This alignment would enhance the coherence and enforceability of commitments to women's political participation, ensuring that the WPS Agenda moves beyond rhetorical support to actionable, measurable change.

### ***5.1.3 The role of the EU***

The EU plays a pivotal role in shaping political and institutional reforms across the accession countries, particularly through its conditionality mechanisms and normative influence. However, as the case of BiH illustrates, gender equality, especially in political representation, often remains peripheral within EU's enlargement agenda. Drawing on the comparative analysis with Sweden, this section outlines key

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<sup>144</sup> UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, *Lessons from Evaluations: UNDP Support to Electoral Processes* (21 October 2020).

recommendations to more effectively leverage the EU's influence in promoting gender-inclusive governance in post-conflict and transitioning democracies.

First, gender equality standards need to be elevated to the level of fundamental democratic reforms. In current EU accession frameworks, issues such as judicial independence, media freedom, and anti-corruption are treated as foundational indicators of democratic progress. Gender quotas, by contrast, are frequently relegated to the category of “soft” social policy. This undermines their perceived importance and weakens incentives for political elites to take them seriously. As demonstrated in the Swedish case, embedding gender parity within democratic norms, not as a granting of equality but as a prerequisite for lawful governance, is essential for long-term impact. Therefore, the EU should explicitly link gender quota implementation to broader democratization and rule-of-law benchmarks in the accession process.

Second, the EU should enhance its scrutiny beyond formal legal compliance. In BiH, gender quotas exist on formal papers but have limited substantive impact due to weak enforcement and the persistence of patriarchal political structures. The EU's monitoring processes often focus on whether laws are adopted, rather than whether they are implemented in ways that produce meaningful change. A more rigorous approach would include assessing whether women are placed in electable (winnable) positions, whether they hold decision-making posts within parties and institutions, and whether they are included in post-conflict negotiations and governance structures. Without such scrutiny, there is the risk that quotas may become symbolic rather than transformative. For example, technical support should also extend to monitoring compliance, building digital systems to track gender representation in real time, and assisting local electoral bodies in designing sanction mechanisms for non-compliant parties.

Third, EU support should be reoriented toward regional feminist networks, oversight institutions, and media platforms. In many post-conflict states, women's NGOs are primary advocates for gender inclusion, yet they often operate with limited resources and under short-term donor frameworks. While the EU does fund civil society, much of this support is directed at formal NGOs or government-aligned entities. A more strategic approach would prioritize transnational women's coalitions, independent watchdogs, and journalistic initiatives that are capable of monitoring political processes and advocating for the substantive inclusion of women. These actors play a critical role in exposing gaps between legal provisions and political practice and in holding parties accountable for gender commitments they support.

The Swedish experience shows that progress often comes not only from institutions, but also from strong external pressure from women's movements and civil society.

Taken together, these recommendations underline that the EU has both the authority, accountability and responsibility to treat gender equality in political representations as an essential pillar of democratic consolidation. Integrating gender-sensitive conditionality into its enlargement agenda and supporting mechanisms to ensure compliance would significantly enhance the prospects for more inclusive and stable democracies in the Western Balkans and beyond.

## **5.2 Future Outlook: Trends, challenges and evolving debates**

As gender quotas become increasingly institutionalized across various democratic contexts, their trajectory is shaped by evolving political, cultural, and institutional dynamics. Using the comparative analysis of this thesis, this section outlines several key developments that will likely influence how gender quotas are perceived, adapted and contested in the coming years. While the cases of Sweden and BiH demonstrate the varied effectiveness of quotas depending on context, they also point to broader structural and normative shifts that may affect future implementation globally.

### ***5.2.1 Backlash and political resistance***

One of the most important risks to the sustainability of gender quota systems is the rise of political backlash, particularly in the context of growing right-wing populism across Europe. Parties in Hungary, Poland, and parts of the Western Balkans increasingly frame gender equality measures as externally imposed or culturally incompatible with national traditions. These parties often reject feminist discourse and criticize gender quotas as undemocratic interventions that undermine meritocracy.<sup>145</sup> This rhetorical

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<sup>145</sup> Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim (eds), *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in the Anti-Gender Mobilizations in Europe* (FEPS and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2015).

strategy seeks to undermine their legitimacy by portraying quotas as anti-meritocratic or undemocratic. This discourse may be persuasive even in democracies that are stable, where public mistrust of “positive discrimination” is still dormant.

This anti-gender discourse has consequences not only for new quota initiatives but also for the stability of existing systems. In contexts where quotas are not constitutionally entrenched or strongly supported by public opinion, political backlash could lead to the overthrow of gender parity commitments, particularly when economic or migration crises dominate the political agenda. As it has been argued, the current wave of right-wing populism in Europe often relies on “illiberal democracies” that instrumentalize women’s roles while rejecting institutional feminism.<sup>146</sup>

Even in Sweden, where gender equality is deeply embedded in political culture, anti-general narratives have emerged on the sidelines of the public debate. This raises the concern that political will, so crucial for quota effectiveness, cannot be taken for granted. In fragile democracies like BiH, such backlash can be even more damaging, as it risks weakening already limited institutional support for gender reforms. Thus, while quotas open space for women’s political participation, their sustainability requires continued political commitment and proactive defense against regressive narratives since these mechanisms are not immune to the growing backlash against gender equality.

### ***5.2.2 Intersectional Representation***

Another emerging trend is the growing emphasis on intersectionality in the discourse around political representation. While early gender quota initiatives focused primarily on increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, there is increasing awareness that not all women benefit equally from these measures. In Sweden, there is now a deliberate effort to broaden the lens of representation to

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<sup>146</sup> Andrea Pető, ‘Gender and Illiberalism’ in András Sajó (ed), *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* (1st edn, Routledge 2021).

include marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women from migrant or rural backgrounds.

The shift reflects a maturing of the gender equality agenda, from focusing solely on numerical parity to a more nuanced understanding of inclusive participation. It also highlights the limitations of one-dimensional quota systems, particularly in post-conflict societies like BiH, where ethnic power sharing dominates political life. In such contexts, women from minority or non-dominant ethnic groups may remain excluded, even as overall female representation increases. Moving forward, more sophisticated quota designs may be needed to address intersecting inequalities, both to enhance legitimacy and to ensure that democratic representation must evolve to meet the realities of increasingly diverse societies.

### ***5.2.3 Public-Private Synergies and norm diffusion***

The future of gender quotas is also likely to be influenced by developments in the private sector, where gender diversity initiatives are gaining momentum. The EU's 2022 "Women on Boards" Directive, which mandates a minimum level of female representation on corporate boards, marks a major policy shift toward gender parity in economic leadership.<sup>147</sup> This policy signals a growing convergence between gender equality norms in political and economic governance. It may also increase normative pressure on political institutions to keep pace with reforms in the corporate sphere.

However, this trend presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, public-private cooperatives can help normalize gender parity as a cross-sectoral value, reinforcing broader commitments to equality. On the other hand, if advances in the private sector outpace political reforms, especially in states with weak democratic institutions, there is a risk that the symbolic legitimacy of quotas in politics could be threatened. Lessons from corporate governance may offer helpful frameworks in

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<sup>147</sup> 'The European Women on Boards Directive: What It Means and Why It Matters' (*Institute of Directors* 21 March 2024) <<https://www.iod.com/resources/inclusion-and-diversity/the-european-women-on-boards-directive-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters/>>.

situations like BiH, where elite resistance and institutional stagnation are still present, but only if strong citizen involvement and political accountability systems are also in place.

Looking ahead, the future of gender quotas will not be determined by legislative design alone but by the broader system in which these measures operate. The cases of Sweden and BiH illustrate that quota effectiveness hinges on political will, civic pressure, cultural legitimacy, and institutional coherence. As international actors like the EU and UN continue to promote quotas in both stable and post-conflict settings, the challenge will be to adopt these tools to evolve democratic norms and guard against both apathy and backlash.

### **5.3 Cautious reflections: Applying Gender Quotas in post-war reconstruction beyond Europe**

Although this thesis centers on BiH and Sweden, it is worth offering a brief reflection on the relevance of these findings for post-conflict reconstruction efforts beyond Europe. Countries such as Rwanda, Tunisia, and Colombia are highlighted here because they represent post-conflict settings where gender quotas were rapidly institutionalized, often under strong international influence and in response to active women's movements. These cases suggest that post-war moments can offer unique political openings for institutionalizing gender equality.

However, these examples also reveal important limitations. In Rwanda, for instance, women hold over 60% of seats in the lower house, the highest rate in the world.<sup>148</sup> Yet, this has not led to a greater statutory

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<sup>148</sup> 'Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments | IPU Parline: Global Data on National Parliaments' (*IPU Parline: global data on national parliaments* 8 September 2023) <[https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date\\_year=2025&date\\_month=04](https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_year=2025&date_month=04)>.

protection of women's rights nor deep democratization or fully empowered participation.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, in Tunisia and Colombia, formal gender parity laws have not always translated into lasting political influence or structural transformation, especially when women's leadership continues to be questioned or undermined in practice. For instance, Tunisia adopted gender parity laws in its post-revolution constitution and implemented a zipper list system like Sweden, but women in the assembly are not viewed as legitimate political actors by their peers.<sup>150</sup>

These experiences underscore a critical insight mirrored in the Swedish case in which quotas alone are insufficient. Their success depends on whether they are rooted in broader democratic norms, sustained civic engagement, and strong institutional frameworks. In BiH, where quotas are externally encouraged but implemented in a fragile context, the result has been symbolic inclusion more than substantive change. Thus, while comparisons must be made cautiously, the core lesson is transferable. The impact of quotas depends less on the model itself and more on the political culture and institutional will behind their implementation.

Their effectiveness is not determined by a country's geographical location but rather by its historical trajectory and political will. While quotas can create essential opportunities for women to enter the political arena, they should be understood as starting points rather than comprehensive solutions. For international actors promoting gender inclusion in post-conflict settings, the priority should not be to replicate specific quota outcomes, but to support local processes that build legitimacy, accountability and inclusive political institutions over time.

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<sup>149</sup> Jennie E Burnet, 'Women Have Found Respect: Gender Quotas, Symbolic Representation, and Female Empowerment in Rwanda' (2011) 7(3) *Politics & Gender* 303 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X11000250>.

<sup>150</sup> Mounira M Charrad and Amina Zarrugh, 'Equal or Complementary? Women in the New Tunisian Constitution after the Arab Spring' (2014) 19 *The Journal of North African Studies* 230.

## 6. Conclusion

The thesis began with the premise that gender quotas are not merely numerical tools of representation but potential instruments for democratic transformation and peacebuilding. By comparing two contrasting political environments, Sweden as a stable democracy and BiH as a post-conflict state, this study set out to explore how quotas operate differently depending on the institutional, cultural and historical context.

This thesis has aspired to answer the central research question of: *How do gender quotas affect women's political participation, democratic stability, and peacebuilding in post-conflict and stable democracies?* To answer this question, the use of comparative analysis revealed that while gender quotas do increase the descriptive presence of women in politics, their transformative impact is conditional. In Sweden, voluntary party quotas embedded within a culture of gender equality and political consensus have resulted in both descriptive and substantive representation. Quotas are not radical intervention but an extension of democratic values, fostering legitimacy and contributing to inclusive and stable governance.

By contrast, BiH's case exposes the limitations of externally imposed quotas in a fragmented, post-conflict environment. While quotas did raise the numerical presence of women in politics, they fell short of enabling women to substantially influence political agendas or peacebuilding processes. Structural barriers, weak enforcement, and patriarchal resistance continue to hinder meaningful transformation. This thesis finds that quotas introduced without accompanying cultural and institutional change risk becoming symbolic and producing inclusion without influence.

These findings disrupt the simplistic binary of quota "success" or "failure". Instead, they bring to the forefront the conditions under which quotas can serve not only as tools of gender inclusion but also as mechanisms of democratic deepening and sustainable peace. This research contributed to a more nuanced understanding of gender quotas by positioning them within the WPS framework. When aligned with the WPS Agenda, gender quotas can operationalize the participation pillar, anchoring women's rights in formal political institutions. But WPS goals cannot be fulfilled through numerical targets alone. Genuine impact demands political commitment, structural reforms, and feminist engagement from both top-down and bottom-up actors.

So, this insight does matter because it shifts the discourse from “do quotas work?” to “under what conditions do quotas work meaningfully contribute to inclusive governance and peacebuilding?”. This perspective avoids simplistic evaluations and emphasizes the need for context-specific strategies. It also reinforces that gender equality in political representation is not only about fairness but also about building more representative and peaceful democracies. Furthermore, by integrating feminist theories of governance and peacebuilding with empirical evidence, this research makes a normative contribution in which gender equality is not a peripheral issue in post-conflict reconstruction or democratic governance, but it is foundational. Women’s presence in political spaces is not only a matter of justice but a prerequisite for legitimacy and resilience. A democracy that excludes half its population is neither complete nor stable.

Last but not least, this thesis offers three key contributions. Firstly, a conceptual reframing of gender quotas from merely representational mechanisms to potential peacebuilding tools when embedded in the right conditions. Secondly, a methodological advancement by applying QCA and MDSD to assess how the same policy instrument performs across radically different settings and a policy-oriented framework for enhancing the effectiveness of gender quotas, grounded in real-world comparative insight. These contributions, taken together, advocate for a more context-sensitive, feminist-informed approach to democratic reform and peacebuilding. The thesis challenges practitioners and scholars to move beyond “add women and stir” and toward genuine gender transformation in political institutions.

The implications of these findings are both practical and theoretical. For policymakers and international organizations, especially those engaged in peacebuilding and democratic reform, this research suggests that quota adoption should never be introduced in isolation but should be tailored to local political cultures, and that institutional capacity-building and civil society engagement are crucial to success. Moreover, support should be directed not only toward legal reforms but toward strengthening local feminist movements, ensuring women’s grassroots agendas are integrated into national peacebuilding and governance frameworks, something that could help avoid the trap of symbolic inclusion. In post-conflict societies, legal quotas can be valuable entry points, but their design must include placement mandates, sanctions for non-compliance, and mechanisms for monitoring not just who is elected, but how they participate. Lastly, for stable democracies, voluntary quotas should be complemented by

broader equality policies that tackle informal institutions, media narratives, leadership stereotypes and economic barriers, that still hinder full parity.

Future research should delve deeper into how intersectional identities such as ethnicity, class, age, and sexuality shape women's political engagement in both stable and post-conflict contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess the evolving impact of quotas over time, particularly in societies undergoing democratic backsliding or renewed conflict. In conclusion, this thesis has shown that gender quotas matter but not in the abstract. They are not magic bullets but when they are designed with integrity, implemented with accountability, and embedded in a political culture that values equality they can be transformative. In the pursuit of inclusive democracy and lasting peace, gender quotas are not the end goal, but they are a critical means of getting there.

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