

Exploring Liberia's Quota Debate to Empower Female Voices in Governance

Dekontee Drapper and Patience C. Logan

Pan African University, Yaounde, Cameroon

Abstract: *This article examines the discourse around gender quotas implementation in Liberia as part of efforts to not just empower female voices in governance but also to increase women's political representation. Liberia, a country characterized by eras of conflict and undemocratic rule has a complex political history. Women are still confronting with immense challenges accessing leadership positions across socio-cultural, institutional and economic dimensions despite some milestones like indigenous women gaining suffrage rights in 1947. The debates have been proffered by those in support and those against gender quotas. In a political system dominated by male patronage networks hesitant to share power, proponent of quotas argue that it provides temporary corrective measure to longstanding unjust exclusion confronting qualified female candidates. Conversely, critics contend that it undermines voter's choice and meritocracy. Success stories like Rwanda achieving over 45% women legislators as a result of strong enforcement methods accompanying initial 30% quota, while countries like Mexico and Pakistan highlight limitations even with quota due to the absence of additional reforms enabling substantive influence for elected women. Advocate of gender quotas debate in Liberia are inclusive of gender rights groups, female lawyers, women legislators as well as young women wanting opportunities long denied by older male hesitant to change. Key debates dissect impacts on representation, equality and governance culture if quotas foster participation beyond just the legislature. Ultimately, quotas require legal shifts combined with cultural change and political will demonstrated by all major parties towards lasting gender balance. Liberia risks getting further left behind regionally if audacious steps are not taken to structurally increase women's leadership voice.*

Keywords: Liberia, Quota Debate, Empowerment, Female Voices, Governance

Introduction

A country situated on the west coast of Africa, Liberia's complex political history is characterized with periods of undemocratic rule and conflicts. Following independence, the political landscape of the country was dominated by descendants of freed American slave until a military coup led by Samuel K. Doe occurred in 1980 which resulted in the overthrow of the government (Harris, 2012). An era of authoritarian rule and civil conflict between 1989 to 2003 resulted in the deaths of over 250,000 people coupled with the destruction infrastructures as well as leaving the economy in ruins (Kieh, 2004). The first post-war democratic elections conducted in 2005 ushered in the regime of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf with her focus being reconstruction, reconciliation among other things (Harris, 2012). The two terms of Madam Sirleaf from 2006-2018 saw an increased in freedom of speech, enhanced institutional capacity, relative peace and stability and the restoration of basic services in multiple areas (Ekonomie, 2022).

Sawyer (1992) argued that political power in Liberia has focused on networks of patronage dominated by Americo-Liberians elites. Even though wilder political governance remains limited, political power is still deeply concentrated in the hand of predominantly male elites (Costa et al., 2017). Women in Liberia are confronted with specifically high barrier to political leadership and participation. After the civil conflict, the call for an end to violence against women as well as adequate representation was heightened leading to the election of Africa's first female elected president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Sirleaf vowed to outlawed certain forms of discrimination against women and increase political participation of women (Williams, 2007).

Yet, Liberia's governance sphere is riddled with substantial inequality. Costa et al. (2017) intimate that most women continue to encounter socioeconomic and institutional challenges accessing leadership positions even though Article 11 of the 1986 Constitution guarantees universal suffrage and equality under the law. Furthermore, only 12% of the legislative seats were won by women after the country's first post-war elections in 2005 (Kumar, 2018) with a slight increase in the number over time. According to Ekonomie (2022), Liberia sits near the bottom globally regarding political empowerment of women thus setting the stage for a critical evaluation of Liberia's national conversation relative to instituting gender quotas as part of efforts to increase women's representation in governance.

Over the last 15yrs, women activist has advocated quotas requiring a certain percentage of legislative seats be allocated to women (Gberie, 2011). However, Ekonomie (2022) and Fomunyoh (2019) argue that it is controversial and divisive in Liberia. The focus of this article will be on conducting an in-depth exploration of the arguments in Liberia's quota debate as well as discuss harmonizing efforts empowering women to have greater voice in the political future of the country.

Research have established a strong correlation between stronger voices of women in governance and the improvement of democratic accountability as Wängnerud (2009) asserts. Women's political empowerment and leadership have shown to be crucial for strengthening democracies. Swiss et al. (2012) avers that women representation advances social justice policies focused on education, childcare, health and women's rights more than their male colleagues. Additionally, inclusive participation which empowers youth, women and marginalized groups promotes stability and reconciliation especially in the context of post-conflict societies stability (Tripp, 2015). After conflict, the circle of violence can be disrupted by bringing new voices into political structures which tend to increase citizen's sense of representation (Powley, 2005).

Furthermore, gender equality and women's empowerment share an intrinsic value for dignity and human rights. The restriction of women's voices in political discourse reinforces structural gender inequality present across society as well as institutions thus limiting life opportunities for women and girls (Duflo, 2012). Conversely, increased representation of women in politics challenges traditional cultural attitudes about leadership and gender. It influences young women's desire in pursuing governance positions as well as expands perceptions of what leaders look like (Franceschet et al., 2012).

Strengthening of democracy, practice of good governance, gender equality and stability can only be achieved in Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction when women voices at all stages of political decision-making are guaranteed (Costa et al., 2017; Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2017). Even though progress is relatively slow, however, the current debate around quota in Liberia provides a strategic platform to accelerate women's empowerment in politics.

In recent years, there has been heighten debates around the adoption of gender quotas which requires 30% percentage of women representative through reserved seats or party candidate quotas (Krook, 2009). The aim of gender quota is to fast-track women's voices and political inclusion in governance. Opposition to the quota debate in Liberia argues that the election of Africa's first female President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf justifies that quota is unnecessary. On the other hand, proponent of quota laws contends that affirmative action such as the quota laws help to reduce the inequality gaps in political representation between men and women (Kumar, 2018).

Globally, more than 150 nations have adopted some form of quota laws resulting in huge increase in women elected (Dahlerup et al., 2013). Few countries lead the way with Rwanda being top of the list where women hold 49% of the lower house following the adoption of gender quota laws (Powley, 2005). Additionally, in countries like Senegal, Tanzania, South Africa and Namibia have witnessed massive improvements in women's representation thanks in large to the adoption of some form of quota laws (Bauer, 2012). An examination of these diverse views on quota provides a platform for deeper evaluation of tensions around leadership access, gender roles and inclusive democracy within Liberia's everchanging political landscape

Historical milestones in women's participation in politics

Irrespective of the enormous challenges, the fight by Liberian women for an increased voice in governance over a century of advocacy, civil engagement and taking political office space from male counterparts reluctant to share power cannot be overstated. Over the course of history, there has been some historical achievements for women wanting a greater participation in political governance. The indigenous women's right to vote given in 1947 heralded a new beginning coupled with the appointment of the first female cabinet minister in 1970s as well as the crucial leadership roles played by women during the Liberian civil war and the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first female president in Africa in 2006 sums up how far women have come.

The first breakthrough came in 1947 when leaders were pressured into adopting the universal suffrage for all adults granting the rights to vote to indigenous Liberian women for the first time (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2017). However, persistent discrimination meant very few women ran or ascended to political office in decades immediately after the adoption of universal suffrage irrespective of the resilient activism among marginalized women focused on livelihood challenges (MacDonald, 2019).

Over two decades later in the 1970s, Angie Brooks was appointed by President Tolbert as Foreign Minister and later Justice Minister thus becoming the first female minister (Kieh, 2004). Nevertheless, she remained the only woman in the elite circles of Liberian governance and policymaking. Similarly, other notable women like Leymah Gbowee, Comortu Bright as well as thousands of ordinary Liberian women played a pivotal role in restoring peace to Liberia after 14 years of civil unrest which led to the death of over 250, 000 people with women and children being the most affected (Kieh, 2004). These advocacies coupled with a demand for women representation led to the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2006 as the first female president in all of Africa.

President Sirleaf committed her administration to advancing the status of women across the country leading to the appointment of several women to cabinet positions within her government. Though she opposed quotas considering she believed that could ascend in politics without special privileges (Fomunyoh, 2019). The end of Sirleaf's administration saw a 23% increase in the number of

seats held by women in the national legislature as well as incremental gains in the judiciary and local government but were still marginalized from most high-level governance positions (Costa et al, 2017).

The ongoing advocacy around quotas was birthed as a result of the still extremely low numbers of women in the legislature more than a decade after the civil wars (Kumar, 2018). These advocacies being led by activists, women lawyers, gender-focused NGOs are demanding that Liberia follows the good example of like Rwanda and other African countries in adopting quotas as part of increasing the equality in political participation (Ekomie, 2022). The advocacies for representation and political voices over a century have been led by these courageous women.

Challenges faced by women in accessing leadership roles

Liberian women are confronted with immense challenges such as socio-cultural, institutional and economic barriers attempting to access political leadership positions across both national and local governance levels. Additionally, issues such as disproportionate family responsibilities, persistent discrimination, sexual harassment and gender-based violence as well as lack of education and professional opportunities coupled with resistance from male-dominated political networks reluctant to share power hinder women's political participation.

On the economic front, Fromunyoh (2019) argue that a vast majority of Liberian women lack adequate financial resources and independence to run a political campaign that is competitive in an electoral system dominated by patronage. Delving more into the economic challenge, Costa et al. (2017) intimate that female-headed households lean towards economic vulnerability and higher poverty given that they are at the lower end of wages in the informal sectors and the immense burden of rebuilding livelihoods after the devastating civil wars. Despite their desire to run for political offices, most women cannot shoulder the cost of hiring teams of advisors or running an effective campaign. Hyde (2012) concludes that in these kinds of situations, incumbents with more resources and established patronage relations hold numerous advantages leveraging state resources.

Institutionally especially within political parties and government, there exist very few measures reserving spaces for women emerging as leaders outside of political parties' lines or increasing nominations of female candidates on the ballot within political parties (Kumar, 2018). Public sector hiring is dominated by the appointment of favoring mostly male elites as a result of an engrained culture thus denying women equal representations within establishments that drive policy agendas and implementation (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2017).

Lastly, social challenges perpetuate the continuation of deep patriarchal cultural values portraying governance as mostly the domain of men and demoralize women who do dare to enter political races as less effective and efficient leaders (Ekomie, 2022). Further compounding the problem, MacDonald (2019) averred that elders and village chiefs who are considered as traditional authorities rarely support the political ambitions of women instead placing premium on the advancement of their sons. Even more so, those who are courageous to contest are confronted with instances of deeply personal gender-based attacks inclusive of rape which terrorizes women attempting to claim political space (Williams, 2002).

The multilevel challenges across institutional, economic and socio-cultural dimensions reinforce female voices exclusion from the leadership ranks in Liberia irrespective of their capabilities and valuable contributions they have already made towards the peace and stability of the country. These unjust and challenges denying women fair and equitable opportunities participating in national politics on an equal playing field with their male counterparts when there is sustained advocacies around gender quotas (Gberie, 2011).

What is the Quota System?

Dahlerup et al. (2013) argues that in politics, gender quotas relate to legislative, constitutional or measures by political parties that specify a minimum number or percentage of women to be included in parliament or other elected bodies. The objective of quota is rapidly increasing the descriptive representation of women in governance instead of waiting decades or centuries for equality to develop through slow cultural shifts. Legislative candidate quotas and reserved seat are two main approaches that exist.

Regarding legislative candidate quotas, they are quotas that legally mandate all political parties to propose a certain number or percentage of female aspirants for general electoral contestations. For example, 30% of all candidates on party lists must be women. The penalty for a party failing to meet the threshold is disqualification or a fine. Krook (2009) intimates that quotas such as legislative candidate quotas change candidate selection processes in order to ensure substantial number of women are represented on the ballots, though voters ultimately decide the winner.

On the other hand, reserved seats quotas are ones that exclusively set aside designated positions for only women. This quota guarantees the election of minimum number of legislators yet the seats contested may be through separate women's lists or geographically segregated. Illustratively, 30% of all seats may be entirely competed for only by women (Dahlerup and Freidenvall,

2015). Unlike the first, this method ensures more immediate numerical gains in women's representation though can risk sidelining the reserved women members within legislative bodies.

On the overall, advocates of quota contend that it provides a corrective temporary measure that disrupt historical challenges excluding potential women leaders. Quotas can gradually be lifted once lasting equality take hold after adoption considering that it enables women politicians to gain experience so far, they are accommodated by political parties (Powley, 2005). Conversely, the critics of quotas argue that meritocracy is undermined by favoring gender over qualification. Similarly, they worry backlash against women politicians if appearing to benefit from special treatment and also question the legitimacy of quota representatives (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2014)

The Implementation of Quota System in Other Countries

Several countries around the world have instituted some forms of gender quotas. More than 130 countries have instituted various gender quota laws both at national and sub-national levels (Dahlerup et al., 2013) though the outcome of implementation vary significantly across these countries. The gold standard for inclusive participation of women into national decision-making process through quotas has been set by Rwanda with a 49% increment in the representation of women in its lower parliamentary house by adopting an initial 30% minimum target for all parties coupled with adequate enforcement (Powley, 2005).

In West Africa, many countries have adopted different forms of quotas voluntary measures in Mali and Nigeria political parties, legislating candidate list requirements in Senegal, and instituting reserved seats in Niger and Ghana (Bauer, 2012). The effects of the adoptions vary accordingly with Senegal achieving 42% of female legislators by 2013 while Nigeria festered around 7% without legal enforcement for party quotas.

The remarkable success of Rwanda followed the genocide that took place in 1994 and the subsequent rise to power of Paul Kagame who was the leader of the Rwanda Patriotic Front. Kagame instituted major governance reforms irrespective of his increasing autocratic rule. Burnet (2011) avers that legislation relative to initial quota mandated all parties have a transition period in which they start with 25% female candidates ultimately increasing to eventual parity of 50% coupled with the dissolution of non-compliant parties are strong enforcement mechanism. These effects saw the expansion of opportunities for women to play key role in the rebuilding process of the country while reflecting aim of Kagame demonstrating a break from the exclusive Hutu regimes that necessitated the genocide

Coupled with the fierce implementation mechanisms, Rwanda also implements substantial training programs and civic education to build the capacities of elected into thousands of new leadership positions that are created. This is accompanied by funding mechanisms such as providing business microcredit assistance specifically for female entrepreneurs as well as removing school fees impacting girls access to education (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013). Even though Rwanda is confronted with democratic challenges, it remains the success story of quota adoption especially in relations to other post-conflict states struggling to empower its growing number of skilled women advocating for greater political voice.

Arguments for and against the quota system

There have been several arguments made for and against gender quotas which has primarily focused on its effect on justice, equality outcomes, representation and impacts on political system. Regarding its effect on representation, supporters of gender quota argue that by reserving spaces for women, the long-standing unjust exclusion confronting qualified female candidates is mitigated (Krook, 2009).

Considering that half of the population lack equal opportunities demonstrating competence, politics cannot be considered as meritocratic which is why quota provides a compensation for biases as well as a level playing field, enabling new ideas into governance. Dahlerup (2006) contends that quotas do not undermine best candidates instead it expands the pool to facilitate fairer competition. Conversely, critics contend that the choice of the voter is overridden considering that it undermines selection of most competent representatives (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2014). Additionally, they argue that it only allows women elites into reserved spots risks leaving deeper systematic challenges confronting poor and marginalized women unchanged.

On the gender equality front, supporters aver that quota provides the most direct-action and fastest way of increasing women's representation towards parity with their male counterparts (Powley, 2005). Without quotas, advocates argue that countries like Liberia with under 25% of women in the legislature may not reach parity for 50+ years to come despite incremental change over generations. The institution of quota kickstart progress so women increasing gain visibility as leaders and policy actors which thus shift cultural attitude over time (Beaman et al. 2009).

In contrast, critics intimate that it often fails in delivering lasting gains after initial rapid increase (Meier, 2008). Furthermore, minimal measures like voluntary party quotas being implemented by many countries are done without ongoing investment

empowering women politicians within hostile institutional cultures. Krook (2009) espoused that quotas set unrealistic expectations about immediate shifts in policy regarding pressing women issues or backlash throws women into difficult situations they are underprepared to navigate.

The Gender Quota Debate in Liberia

Like in many countries, the debate around gender quotas continue to center stage of national discussions in Liberia. Liberia is one of many African countries still languishing at the bottom globally relative to women's political representation irrespective of the fact that it produced Africa's first female elected president in 2006 as well as other milestones (Kumar, 2018). As of 2020, women in the legislature held just 17% of seats in both houses combined and remain largely underrepresented in traditional and local government leadership roles (Ekomie, 2022). Data for 2024 could not be used considering the new government were in the process of forming their cabinet which later had to go for confirmation.

Gberie (2011) argues that the aims associated with the adoption of quotas is to rapidly improve these dismal numbers of inclusion that fails in reflecting the status of women as important social and economic rebuilders in post-conflict countries. However, advocates demand comprehensive governance and electoral reforms mitigating deep-rooted challenges to women accessing political opportunities long dominated by male elites.

Research shows that both Liberian men and women largely support the idea of greater female legislative participation with many holding the view that women are less corrupt representatives and are less likely to be manipulated by patronage incentives (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2017). Nevertheless, substantial number still rank men as inherently superior political leaders compared to equivalent qualified women and still see governance as primarily a male domain. The progress of women political participation is continuously hampered by the mix of moderate enthusiasm but prevailing skepticism and stereotypes towards women.

Advocates contend that symbolic appointments given to few women leaders falls short of achieving substantive representation and inclusive participation where those elevated advocate for interest of ordinary women across the country's impoverished communities (Kumar, 2018). Deep exclusion and inequality will continue without measures to foster new alternative female voices from outside monopolistic political classes considering that most women politicians currently rely heavily on existing networks of patronage for survival. Thus, the stalled gains of Liberia demonstrate failures of assuming meritocracy and incremental cultural change as enough drivers empowering women's voice and access in political leadership. More immediate and direct action through additional policy changes and quotas sits at the center of continued tensions between advocates and establishment parties satisfy with preserving status quo exclusion of women.

Initiatives and Policies Promoting Gender Equality

Over the years, Liberia has instituted few policies and initiatives aim at promoting gender equality. Liberia has passed expansive anti-discrimination, equal rights and gender-based violence laws during the early years of Sirleaf's administration which overturned long-standing patriarchal legal standards (Isser et al., 2009), some of which include the landmark Inheritance Law which gave women equal inheritance rights given that most wealth held traditionally in male names. Additionally, the country created a dedicated ministry called the Ministry of Gender whose responsibility is to support the mainstreaming of gender perspectives across all sectors of government.

Similarly, though lacking strong enforcement mechanisms of sanctions for non-compliance, the National Election Commission adopted regulations mandating political parties to nominate 30% women candidates in the 2005 presidential and legislative elections (Dunn, 2021). Even though political parties have continuously failed to meet the voluntary goals of 30% yet, they have recruited a handful more of female aspirants. There are ongoing debates spearheading by the Governance Commission indicating that electoral reforms lack adequate gender expertise or sensitivity towards mitigating challenges women candidates are confronted by (Eisa, 2020).

At the local levels, advocates spotlight promising models in sustained civic engagement such as huts bringing women into traditional justice spaces which addresses disputes around sexual violence and denial of maintenance claims from male former partners (Isser et al. 2009). Female leaders shaping responses reflecting women's legal reality within community are empowered by such customary law reforms. Most efforts that are exciting focus greatly on increasing women voters turnout considering that they constitute majority of the populations instead of comprehensive leadership inclusion across varied political spaces. Advocates of gender quotas insist that Liberia follows other African countries like Rwanda in adopting bolder national agenda for women empowerment into governance decision-making and not just mobilization of women voters.

Stakeholders involved in the Gender Quota Debate in Liberia

The debate around gender quotas have seen diverse stakeholder weigh in across government, political parties, youth leaders and civil society organizations. Key advocates of quotas debate include female lawyers, and gender rights organizations like Paramount Young Women Initiatives demanding swifter action towards equal representation of women (Dunn, 2021). Quota proposals have been backed by several women legislators given immense marginalization confronting female legislators within Liberia's elite-driven and corrupt legislatures. Conversely, few vocal female legislators have argued that meritocracy serves the country best without resorting to giving special treatment that might undermine the credibility of women politicians overall (Fomunyoh, 2019). On the traditional front, some elders have argued openness recognizing the need for inclusive rebuilding and reconciliation while others argue cultural practices favoring male communal authorities as a justification hindering women's leadership emergence (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2017).

Additionally, entrepreneurs as well as young female students constitute key constituency advocating quotas enabling opportunities for growing group of skilled young women denied political voice and economic freedom by older generations of male leaders. The active media in Liberia drives the discourse around gender quotas facilitating different views reach wider audiences. Several civil society coalitions formed specifically pressing the legislative quota agenda combine sophisticated legal arguments on rights and justice with grassroots testimonies of ordinary women struggling immense burdens from war's legacy towards a more egalitarian future.

The pulsating multi-stakeholder debate highlights complex attitudinal scopes across Liberian society affecting the advancement of women into visible leadership. The passage of gender quota laws rest on continued pressure requiring reluctant politicians to adopt reforms bringing an end to deep exclusion women face throughout the male-dominated governance history of Liberia.

Analysis of challenges faced by countries with gender quotas

The implementation of quotas comes not without challenges risking backsliding on the initial achievements or entrenching the marginalization of women. For example, in Pakistan, over 60 women were elected to the national assembly through reserved seats in 2002 however, subsequent reforms around local governments eliminated those quotas thus leading to a decline to 20% of women's representation by the 2018 general elections (Zaidi, 2018). The interest of fostering deeper leadership or voice for elected women legislators within actual lawmaking processes were of no interest to military patrons spearheading quotas.

Similarly, even though women occupy new reserved seats in local government since 2005 in Lesotho yet still they are denied positions leading influential portfolio committees in councils dominated by male members (Matashane-Marite, 2014). It is important to note that chairs of these committees have enormous power in deciding agendas as well as resources. The effectiveness of women is limited when quotas insert women numerically without the transfer of power to oversight roles. In Mexico, disproportionate influence led by senior male party figures is retained despite female politicians gaining notable campaign assistance to achieve 30% candidate quota due to being shut out from access to elite insider peer mentorship and dealmaking circles (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2014).

Goetz and Hassim (2003) argue that women representatives in quota lists and reserved seats are also confronted with immense pressure highlighting visible impact that should be immediate while at the same time combating sidelining and harassment from hostile parties fearing the loss of patronage control. First generation of women advocates of quotas often lack protection empowering practical leadership and participation tenants that must take hold through sustained engagement and subsequent election cycles fostering shifts in political institutional culture over generations.

Potential Impacts and Drawbacks on Liberian Politics

The implementation of gender quotas within the Liberian society comes with its own impacts as well as drawback on politics in the country. Implementing a well-designed gender quota reserving 30% of seats for women promises to dramatically accelerate women's descriptive representation in Liberian politics if only it is combined with robust enforcement and funding mechanisms. The initial impact of gender quota in Liberia is contingent on whether incrementally implemented increases in women candidates through placement mandate election over election or constitutional reserved seats approach taken immediately guaranteeing placements (Krook, 2009).

Adopting a well-designed gender quota reserving 30% of legislative seats for women combined with robust enforcement and funding mechanisms promises dramatically accelerating women's descriptive representation in Liberian politics. Initial quota impact depends on whether constitutional reserved seats approach taken immediately guaranteeing placements or incrementally implemented increases in women candidates through placement mandates election over election (Krook, 2009).

Sudden large influx under reserved seats fosters rapid transformation allowing fresh perspectives shaping national policies. But incremental growth lessens risks backlash against women politicians allowing gradual building of public confidence. Steady increase

through legislated party quotas enables emerging women leaders demonstrate capabilities while shadowing incumbents. Hybrid approaches provide staged integration.

Substantive representation impact involves women legislators translating presence into influence on issues like healthcare, child services, gender-based violence, education access, and support local women's economic livelihoods most impact daily life for impoverished women across Liberia (Whipper et al., 2021). Beyond initial quota numbers, women politicians require strengthening capacities shaping debates, oversight and budget allocations benefiting female citizens.

Broader impact on governance culture depends on how quota adoption stimulates women's participation across state institutions like judiciary, local councils and public sector which shapes accountability ecosystems protecting women's rights. Quotas insertion without additional broader participation reforms risks limiting durable influence (Costa et al. 2017). Sustainability requires multilevel representation expansion.

Potential drawbacks involve backlash against initial major gains either socially doubting efficacy of quota women representatives or politically by parties manipulating access for elite women already influential rather than marginalized female voices. Quotas may raise expectations on delivering immediate policy results before women politicians consolidated leadership. Male incumbents can resist ceding meaningful influence over budgets, chair positions and informal dealmaking. And lack of sustained financing mechanisms can inhibit long term participation if initial seats secured through quotas without economy and society leveling playing field enabling women's political leadership across sectors (Krook and Norris, 2014).

What Lessons Can Liberia Learn from Other Countries?

Considering that different forms of quotas have been implemented in several countries around the world, Liberia stands primed drawing lessons from these countries inclusive of Rwanda as well as countries in Latin America translating aspirational goals of quota into lasting representative enhancement through political will demonstrated by all major parties, not just ruling elites. Shortcomings in the implementation of quotas in Pakistan and Lesotho can pave the way for the implementation of quotas in Liberia that accompanies women gaining substantive policymaking authority, not simply token presence. Unless directly confronted, the limitations from Mexico highlights the barrier of old boy's club persisting retaining disproportionate influence.

Crucial accountability checking the resistance of party can be provided through sufficient civil society capabilities and mobilization to not just advocate but also to track and enforce quotas. Quotas work well where women politicians actively show leadership on national priority issues like poverty reduction among other issues. Funding assistance provided to women politicians or political parties cannot substitute for judicial and electoral reforms protecting women's participation rights. When implemented in Liberia, reserving seats should phase towards strengthening women politician emergence through open contests. The impacts of gender quotas require a combination of legal and cultural shifts altering how capabilities and voice are viewed in Liberia's prevailing patriarchy.

Conclusion

This article examined the overbearing of strengthening greater female voice and leadership in the political landscape of Liberia as well as the ongoing increasing debates around adopting legislative gender quotas as a corrective intervention fast-tracking stalled progress. We recapitulated Liberia's complex political history from indigenous women's respected authority roles within traditional governance eroded by Americo-Liberian settler domination to recent pivotal contributions by activists and citizens towards peacebuilding albeit with women still severely marginalized politically today. Persistent challenges across institutional, socio-cultural, and economic realms underpin exclusion of female voices from the leadership ranks irrespective of their competence and eagerness for fairer participation opportunities.

The vibrant quota debate in Liberia highlights willingness the recognition of the contribution of multistakeholder perspectives and leadership potential women must have if Liberia hope fully reconcling and prospering inclusively after the devastation of the civil unrests. However, resistant politicians hold desperately towards monopoly of power patriarchal delaying the audacious structuring reforms all spearheading democracies underwent adopting quotas and additional actions that fostered faster gender balance in political voice. Liberia risks getting left further behind if these bold and deliberate steps are not taken to increase women's participation in political decision-making.

The eyes of the world are on Liberia and stands ready supporting homegrown efforts towards lasting gender equality and governance inclusion that provides an opportunity that no Liberian daughter is ever denied her dreams of political leadership by barriers confronting mothers today. Nevertheless, political will must arise within all major parties voluntarily adopting gender quotas accompanied by economic access, comprehensive transparency and violence prevention mechanisms transforming deep exclusion characterizing prevailing political culture. Civil society guidance and sustained public activism can lead resistant leaders towards

reform, in order for Liberia to fully recovery, it is required that women who are serving tea today emerge top officeholders spearheading national affairs tomorrow. What the daughters of the future will inherit hangs in the balance with this generation.

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