

# Quota Reform and Female Participation: Challenges to Gender Equality in Government Jobs

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**Abstract:** This paper dwells upon the role of quota reform on the representation of women in government jobs in Bangladesh and the perennial issues of gender equality. The study uses a mixed-method design, integrating both survey data (200 female applicants and employees) and secondary data to evaluate access and workplace experiences, as well as institutional barriers. The results show that although quota reforms have helped in the increment of the number of women, they have not been effective in guaranteeing substantive representation. A substantial percentage of respondents cited the continued gender discrimination in hiring, lack of equal promotion, and work-related issues determined by male-dominated company cultures. Family duties and gender norms that women have to address in their lives remain socio-cultural barriers to career growth. The analysis also reveals the gaps in current workplace policies, such as inadequate safety and supportive facilities. Overall, the results suggest that quota reform alone cannot address deeply rooted structural and institutional inequalities. The article proposes thorough policy measures such as open hiring procedures, inclusive workplaces, and social reforms at large, to attain meaningful and sustainable gender equality in the governmental workforces.

**Keywords:** Quota Reform, Female Participation, Gender Equality, Government Employment, Bangladesh

## Introduction

The issue of gender equality in the workforce of the government is one of the greatest concerns in developing countries, as the institutionalized practices, cultural beliefs, and policy guidelines are still shaping the involvement of women. Quota systems in Bangladesh are part of affirmative action to combat historical marginalization and provide a representation of people who are marginalized, such as women. Despite being constitutionally based and normatively well-grounded, the success of these policies in the realization of substantive equality is disputed (Ahmed, 2019; Rahman, 2024). Although quotas serve to broaden access, their effectiveness in guaranteeing meaningful participation and long-term empowerment is controversial.

Literature would indicate that the quota system tends to enhance numerical representation but not active inclusion. According to Panday, this gap is termed as representation without participation, as the presence of women does not translate to influence (p. 2008). On the same note, Asha

(2020) points out the exclusionary aspects of quota systems and asserts that quota systems can end up disenfranchising some groups unintentionally. Quota reform movements in Bangladesh in the recent past have further fueled the debate on fairness, meritocracy and social justice, a statement that shows the intricate political and institutional environment in which the policies are implemented (Akter, 2024; Salehi and Sharifi, 2025).

The structural and institutional barriers continue to be at the heart of the issue of low participation by women. Research on the Bangladesh civil service has found endemic issues like gender discrimination in hiring, lack of access to leadership, and inflexible organizational frameworks (Karim, 2008; Ferdous, 2014). The results of quota provisions on women are uneven and inconsistent, even though certain results indicate that women can enjoy the benefits of quota provisions in certain situations (Karim, 2019). Moreover, working conditions, including work-life balance issues that are defined by family obligations and social norms, still restrict the career progress of women (Sumi, 2015).

Comparative research shows that these problems are not only in Bangladesh. In South Asia, quota systems are subject to the same issues, such as a lack of effective implementation, opposition by dominant populations, and a lack of influence on substantive equality (Bhadrasen, 2025; Tariq and Rehman, 2025; Yadav, 2020). According to the reports of institutions, gender equality should be expanded with the new reforms, such as open hiring, employment policies, and career growth (Asian Development Bank, 2017; UNDP, 2022; International Finance Corporation, 2023). Simultaneously, the socio-cultural aspects like gender regulations, safety, and economic reliance continue to limit the access of women to jobs in the public sector (Concern Worldwide, 2024; Das, 2025; UN Women, 2025; World Vision International, n.d.).

Other recent literature also associates the involvement of women with better governance and democratic legitimacy, and that effective inclusion can enhance institutional performance (Aguilar-Gomez et al., 2025; Khan, 2025). Nonetheless, such results cannot be attained with quota-based representation. This paper thus looks at the effects of the quota reform of women in government employment in Bangladesh, based on the structural, institutional and socio-cultural factors that still restrain gender equality.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive and empirical research design to examine the impact of quota reform on female participation and the challenges to gender equality in government jobs in Bangladesh. A mixed-method approach was employed to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights into women's representation, experiences, and barriers within public sector employment. Primary data were collected from 200 female government employees and applicants across different ministries, departments, and geographic regions using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire included both closed-ended questions to gather quantitative data on participation rates, promotion opportunities, and experiences of institutional support, as well as open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights regarding workplace challenges, socio-cultural barriers, and perceptions of quota effectiveness. Secondary data were obtained from academic books, journal articles, government reports, policy documents, and credible online sources to provide theoretical grounding and contextual understanding of quota policies, legal frameworks, and gender equality indicators. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select respondents who are directly relevant to the objectives of the study, ensuring that the collected data accurately reflects the experiences of women in government employment. Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews and online questionnaires, with voluntary participation and strict confidentiality maintained throughout the process. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques and content analysis to identify key patterns, trends, and themes related to female participation, the effectiveness of quota reforms, and structural and cultural

barriers in government workplaces. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the questionnaire was pre-tested, reviewed by experts in public administration and gender studies, and administered uniformly. Ethical standards were rigorously maintained, with all participants informed about the academic purpose of the research and assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

### **Literature Review**

The issue of gender equality in the employment of the public sector has been highly studied in connection with quota programs, institutionalization and social-cultural impediments. Quota policies have been implemented in Bangladesh and other similar settings as affirmative action to overcome historical underrepresentation, but the success of these policies is debated in the empirical and theoretical literature.

The academic literature indicates that the quota system may enhance numerical representation, yet it may not bring about meaningful participation. In the initial studies, Panday (2008) believes that quotas in Bangladesh have been more likely to create representation without participation, where women's inclusion is more symbolic than transformative. In a similar vein, Ahmed (2019) discusses the constitutional grounds behind the reserved seats and proposes that such arrangements have a normative justification, but their practical application is usually not coherent and effective. Rahman (2024) also criticizes quota systems in terms of these being related to larger constitutional arguments about backwardness, claiming that gender-based quotas can promote classification, as opposed to eliminating inequality.

Structural and institutional barriers have been consistently found in empirical studies of the Bangladesh civil service. Karim (2008) and Ferdous (2014) report constant weaknesses against women, such as inaccessibility of decision-making processes, work discrimination, and institutional inflexibility. This story is complicated later by Karim (2019), who argues that women are not discriminated against but sometimes benefit from the quota system, implying unequal results in sectors. Sumi (2015) introduces one more aspect focusing on the problem of work-life balance, especially in urban administrative environments, where family issues have a disproportionate impact on the career development of women.

The recent studies further this debate by placing quota reforms into the context of wider socio-political processes. Salehi and Sharifi (2025) follow the history of the quota system in Bangladesh, which is fraught with tensions between meritocracy and social justice, especially in the recent movements of reforms. Akter (2024) evaluates the 2018 and 2024 quota movements, which he connects to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and claims that such reforms tend to create unintentional exclusions. Asha (2020) also opposes the exclusionary nature of the quota policies, which, in some instances, can benefit some groups at the expense of others, such as women.

These findings are supported by comparative views. As demonstrated by Bhadrassen (2025) and Tariq and Rehman (2025), the implementation of quota systems in other countries (such as India and Pakistan) is also fraught with challenges, such as resistance among mainstream groups, lack of enforcement, and insufficient influence on substantive equality. Yadav (2020) also illustrates that gender disparities are ongoing even when countries intervene through policies, which means that it is structural even when it goes beyond the national level. Shrestha and Rijal (2024) emphasize that institutional barriers in higher education are similar in Nepal, and gender inequality in state jobs is a local issue.

Organizational and institutional factors are also important. Such publications as the Asian Development Bank (2017), UNDP (2022), and International Finance Corporation (2023) highlight that gender equality needs full institutional reforms, encompassing transparent recruitment, leadership development, and inclusive workplace policies. UN Women (2025) also adds that gender disparities are further aggravated by political instability and social unrest that disproportionately impact women's access to opportunities in the public sector. World Vision International (n. d.) and Concern Worldwide (2024) highlight the larger socio-economic aspects of the gender disparity issue in Bangladesh, such as education disparities, economic dependency, and social conventions.

A common motif is the socio-cultural barriers. Das (2025) emphasizes the fact that women experience continuous safety issues and human rights challenges, which are related to workplace harassment and resistance in society. Aguilar-Gomez et al. (2025) go further and discuss the role of women in employment and connect it to the results of governance by stating that meaningful representation enhances institutional performance but needs enabling conditions. Khan (2025) places such problems in the context of more extensive constitutional and democratic changes, implying that the practice of exclusion invalidates gender equality and democratic legitimacy.

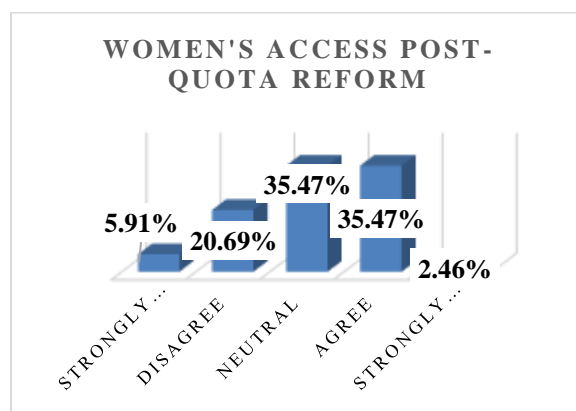
In general, there is a generalization of the literature: quota reforms themselves are not a sufficient step to substantive gender equality. Although they can be used to enhance access, they fail to sufficiently focus on deeply rooted structural, institutional, and cultural obstacles. The best way to include gender is through a multi-dimensional process that incorporates legal frameworks, institutional accountability, workplace reforms and societal change. This literature provides a foundation on which the effects of quota reforms and their interplay with systemic issues can be analyzed, especially within the framework of the changing Bangladesh system of public administration.

## Results and Discussion

### Women's Access Post-Quota Reform

According to the survey carried out among 200 people on the statement, I believe that women's access to government employment opportunities has declined since the quota reform; there is a mixed perception. There was a Neutral response of 35.47%, indicating uncertainty or ambivalent experiences with the impact of the reform, and an equal proportion (35.47) Agreed, indicating a perceived loss of access. 20.69% Disagreed, whereas 5.91% Strongly Disagreed and 2.46% Strongly Agreed. These results show that, despite a large percentage of respondents noting a negative impact, the largest percentage is neutral, indicating varied experiences and views on the effectiveness of quota reforms in enhancing gender equality in government jobs.

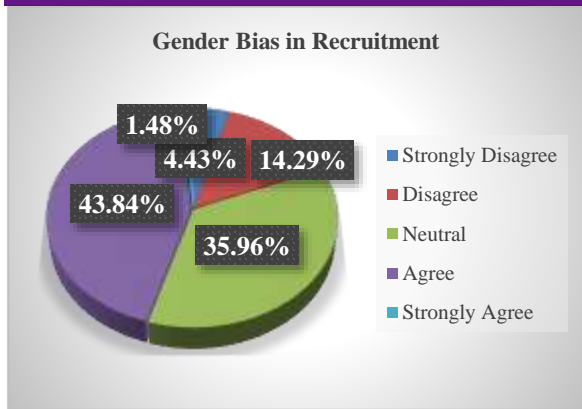
Figure 1, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data



### Gender Bias in Recruitment

The survey results on the statement, Gender bias is still present in the recruitment process in government jobs, show that most of the respondents believe that there is still some bias. Among the 200 respondents, 43.84% Agreed that gender bias was still present in the hiring process, with 35.96% being Neutral and enjoying the uncertainty or ambivalent experience. It is only 14.29%. Disagreed with smaller percentages Strongly Disagreeing (4.43%) and Strongly Agreeing (1.48%). The results indicate that a sizeable number of the respondents acknowledge that there is still gender bias in government hiring, yet a fairly large number are undecided, which points out that there are mixed views regarding the equity and inclusivity of employment practices towards women in government jobs.

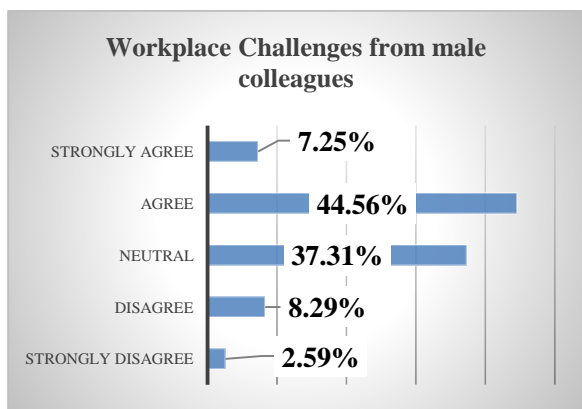
Figure 2, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data



**Workplace Challenges from Male Colleagues:**

The responses to the survey question on the statement, the attitudes and behaviors of male colleagues make it difficult to work in government workplaces, show that most respondents are aware of the challenges in the workplace that are associated with gender behaviors. Of 200 respondents, 44.56% Agreed, and 7.25% Strongly Agreed, meaning that more than half feel that the attitudes of male colleagues are a serious hindrance. There was 37.31% uncertainty or mixed experiences about the subject in relation to Neutral, and 8.29% Disagreed and 2.59% Strongly Disagreed. These results indicate that the actions and the workplace culture of male colleagues continue to be the crucial determinants of women's involvement and experience in government jobs, despite the fact that a significant number of interviewees are still unsure about the level of these issues.

**Figure 3,** Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

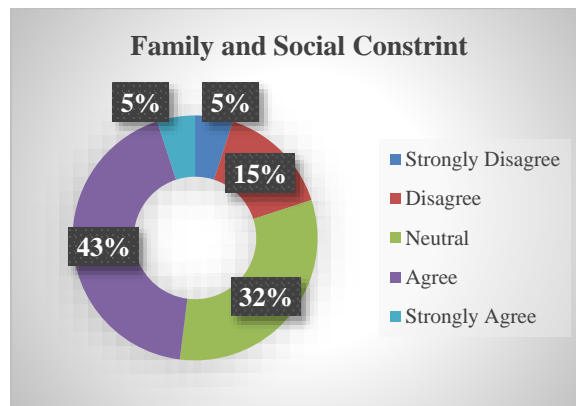


**Family and Social Constraint**

According to the results of the survey, family duties and social norms are still major forces that influence the career progression of women in the government. Out of 200 respondents, 43% Agreed and 5% Strongly Agreed, which means that almost half of them feel that these responsibilities are restricting their career development. Neutral (doubt or ambivalent experiences) 32% and, Disagreed (and Strongly

Disagreed) 15% and 5% respectively. These findings imply that there is still a place for social and family pressures in the professional opportunities of women in governmental employment, yet some respondents are not sure or less influenced by these issues.

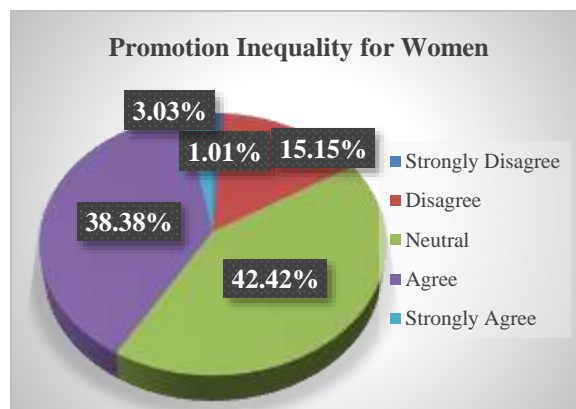
**Figure 4,** Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data



**Promotion Inequality for Women**

The survey results on the statement, Opportunities for women to get promotions have become more unequal since the reform of the quota, reveal that there are some mixed perceptions. Among 200 respondents, 38.38% Agreed and 3.03% Strongly Agreed, showing that a significant percentage of respondents believe that there is growing inequality in promotions. They were 42.42% Neutral, i.e., uncertain or mixed experiences, 15.15% Disagreed, and 1.01% Strongly Disagreed. These results indicate that although a large percentage of the respondents think that women's promotions have become more discriminatory since quota reforms, there are still many who are undecided, which points to a lack of clarity and varying situations with respect to career promotion in government employment.

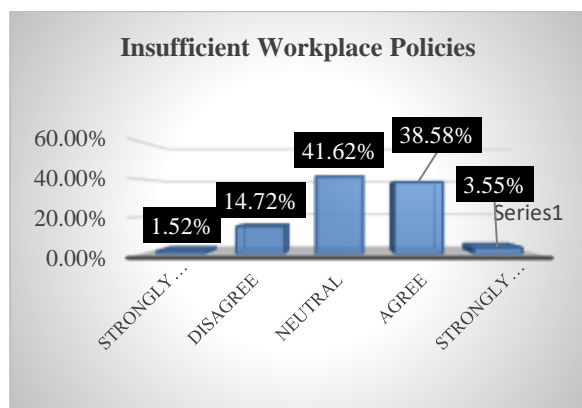
**Figure 5,** Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data



**Insufficient Workplace Policies**

The survey responses regarding the statement, “Existing government policies are insufficient to ensure a safe and inclusive working environment for women,” indicate mixed perceptions among respondents. Out of 200 participants, 38.58% Agreed and 3.55% Strongly Agreed, suggesting that a significant portion perceive current policies as inadequate. 41.62% were Neutral, reflecting uncertainty or mixed experiences, while 14.72% Disagreed and 1.52% Strongly Disagreed. These findings highlight that while many respondents recognize gaps in policy for ensuring women’s workplace safety and inclusivity, a considerable number remain uncertain, indicating varying experiences and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of government measures.

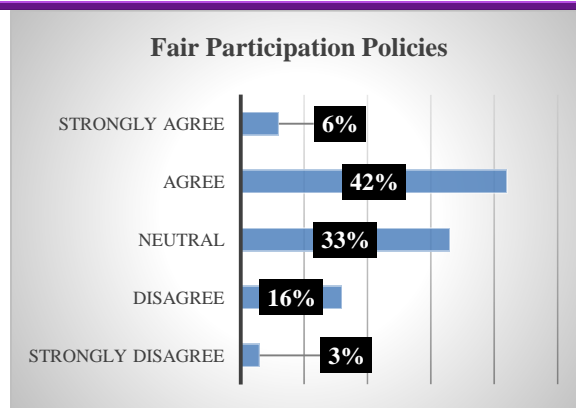
Figure 6, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data



### Fair Participation Policies

The responses of the survey on the statement, to ensure fair participation of women, the government needs to revise or reorganize the quota system, indicate overwhelming support for the restructuring of the quota system. Among 200 respondents, about 42% Agreed and 6% Strongly Agreed, which means that a considerable part of them think that reform is required to enhance the role of women. Approximately 33% of them were Neutral, which means that they were either uncertain or had ambivalent views, 16% Disagreed, and 3% Strongly Disagreed. These results indicate that the general awareness among the respondents is that the quota system is reorganizable in order to improve gender equality in government jobs, although a fraction still remains unconvinced or content with the existing system.

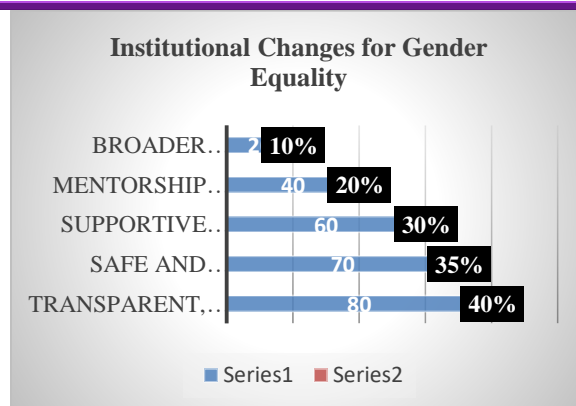
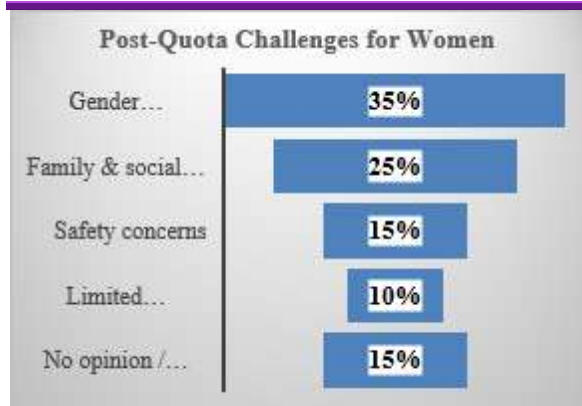
Figure 7, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data



### Challenges for Women Post-Quota

The research indicates that women have a variety of issues accessing and advancing in government employment following the quota reform. Approximately 35 percent of the respondents were in agreement with 5 percent strongly agreeing that female access to government jobs has declined, 30 percent were neutral and 35 percent disagreed. In gender bias in recruitment processes, 40 percent of the respondents said it was true and 5 percent strongly agreed that the issue of bias exists. Another factor that impedes career development is the attitude of male colleagues, as 43 percent agree, 7 percent strongly agree and 30 percent were neutral. Women are greatly hobbled by social and family duties and 50% of them admit to being pressured by these aspects. Opportunities to be promoted are also seen to become more unequal, with 38 perceiving and 7 strongly agreeing, with 30 remaining neutral. Current government policies are perceived to be inadequate in terms of providing a safe and inclusive workplace, with 39 percent agreeing and 5 percent strongly agreeing. Women are still underrepresented in leadership (45% agreed, 6% strongly agreed) and still have low involvement in non-traditional areas such as administration and technical cadres (38% agreed, 4% strongly agreed). There are serious policy gaps in retaining women employees because 41% were in agreement and 6% strongly agreed, and 35 percent were neutral. The restructuring of the quota system to increase participation of women is well supported by respondents, with 42% agreeing and 6% strongly agreeing to the idea. In terms of significant obstacles, 35% identified gender discrimination and bias at the workplace, 25% identified family and social expectations, 15% identified safety issues, and 10% identified limited opportunities because of quota reduction, and 15% were unsure or did not answer. In general, the results suggest that even with the quota reforms, structural, cultural, and institutional obstacles such as gender discrimination, workplace biases, social norms, low promotions, and work-related safety still hinder women from entering, staying, and growing their careers in governmental positions.

Figure 8, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data



### Institutional Changes for Gender Equality

The respondents gave varying information about the policy changes and institutional reforms that need to be done to improve gender equality and the involvement of women in government employment. One major reason that was highlighted by a considerable number of 40 percent was the need to have transparent, fair and gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion systems with proper application of quotas and equal opportunity policies. Approximately 35% emphasized the urgent necessity of safe and inclusive working environments, emphasizing the importance of enforcing stringent anti-harassment legislation, surveillance systems, and promoting respectful practices in the context of male coworkers. Approximately 30% recommended supportive workplace amenities, e.g., day-care centers, separate restrooms, flexible working hours and gender-friendly infrastructure to meet work-life balance and enhance retention. Twenty percent of the respondents suggested mentorship programs, leadership development and career advancement opportunities that would help empower women to take higher positions and decision-making roles. Also, 10% of participants indicated that wider societal and economic resources, such as education, sensitization about gender issues, and financial aid, are required to enable women to overcome structural and social obstacles to career advancement. The answers are all pointing in the same direction in that quota reforms are a needed move, but not enough. Comprehensive institutional reforms, including fair recruitment, transparent promotions, workplace safety, work-life balance measures, mentorship, leadership development, and societal support, are crucial to ensure meaningful gender equality and to increase women’s representation and active participation in government jobs.

Figure 9, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

### Conclusion:

This study explored the challenges of achieving gender equality in government jobs with a particular focus on quota reform and female participation. The findings show that quota policies have had a positive effect on the rise of women in the public sector, but the effects are minimal when applied alone. Although quotas can help curb historical underrepresentation, they do not necessarily remove structural and institutional problems that women find difficult to overcome when serving in government. Problems like gender-biased hiring and promotion procedures, absence of transparency in career advancement, harassment in the workplace and poor implementation of the available gender sensitive policies still limit the long-term participation and professional development of women.

In addition, the research indicates that the lack of supportive working conditions, including childcare facilities, flexible work arrangements, and gender-suitable infrastructure, has a great impact on the capabilities of women to reconcile both work and personal life. Women are also not empowered in government institutions because of limited access to mentorship, leadership training, and decision-making. Moreover, the existence of social norms and gender stereotypes tends to deter women from pursuing higher ranks, thus cementing inequality despite the official policy.

The results are that quota reform cannot guarantee substantive gender equality in government employment. Rather, it has to be incorporated into a larger system of institutional changes that lead towards transparency, accountability, safety in the workplace, and equal opportunity. To establish an inclusive and equitable public sector, it is necessary to strengthen monitoring mechanisms, enforce anti-harassment laws, invest in women leadership development and gender awareness, both at the institutional and the societal levels. Finally, to attain meaningful female representation in government employment, we need a long-term, holistic approach to policy which extends beyond numerical representation and meets the structural, cultural and institutional factors which underlie gender inequality.

### Limitations

Although this study has a lot of valuable insights about quota reform and the participation of women in government jobs, it is not without its limitations. First, the study is based mainly on the opinions and self-reports of respondents, which can be affected by personal bias, social desirability, or the lack of awareness about the policy implementation. Second, the research is limited to a particular group of people and a certain geographic area, which limits the extrapolation of the results to other areas or governmental entities.

Also, the paper lacks detailed qualitative interviews with policymakers or top government officials, which would have given a more detailed picture of the decision-making process within an institution. The resources and time available also restricted the research scope to the extent that the researcher could not conduct a longitudinal study on the long-term effects of the quota reforms and their effects on the career progression of women. Lastly, the lack of specific sector-wide data could miss differences in the gender equality practices in various departments of the government.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

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