DEMOCRATIC MOBILISATION THROUGH QUOTAS – EXPERIENCES IN INDIA AND GERMANY

Dr. Brigitte Geissel
Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)
Reichpietschufer 50
10785 Berlin
GERMANY
Tel.: (+49) 030 25491 325
Fax: (+49) 030 25491 318
E-mail: geissel@wz-berlin.de

Presentation at the 20th International Political Science Association (IPSA) World Congress,
Fukuoka, Japan, July 2006

This article was published by Brigitte Geissel and Evelin Hust in:
The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, Vol. 3, No. 2; July 2005, pp. 222-244
The main purpose of this study is to examine the impact of quotas on the mobilisation of politically under-represented groups. This topic was analysed through two case studies of women in local politics in India and Germany. Gender quotas have changed the political landscape in both countries to a considerable degree. Firstly, most of the women interviewed in both countries began their political careers without political ambitions. Secondly, many female politicians enhanced their (feeling of) competence only during incumbency. Thirdly, once active in politics, most of the interviewees developed political ambitions. The last and by no means least important fact about the mobilisational capacity of quotas is that they not only change the political representation in terms of gender, but also in respect to class, caste, social, and educational background.

Keywords

Gender quota, mobilisation, India, Germany, Local Politics, Women, Participation.
Content:

INTRODUCTION

WHY DO PEOPLE RUN FOR POLITICAL OFFICE? – THEORETICAL APPROACHES

THE CONTEXT: ELECTORAL SYSTEMS, LOCAL LEVEL, AND QUOTAS

METHODS AND DATA

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: MOBILISATION THROUGH QUOTAS

a) Quotas encourage women to begin a political career

b) Quotas enable women to acquire political skills

c) Quotas facilitate to develop sustained political ambitions

d) Quotas support non-elite women to join politics

CONCLUSION
The worldwide triumph of democracy as a preferred political system is undisputed. Nevertheless, democratic systems increasingly face fundamental criticism in respect to their actual configurations. A major attack comes from authors who argue that most democracies are not representative in terms of an adequate presence of various social groups and therefore lack legitimacy. The failure of many democracies to adequately represent classes (such as the over-representation of civil servants in Germany), racial and religious minorities or women in the formal political process is cause for concern. Feminists argue that democracy is basically an androcracy, namely the rule of men and not of the people.\(^1\) Women are in the majority in most societies, yet only in few Scandinavian countries do they hold about half of the seats in the political world. Although women in most democracies vote nearly as often as men, they still rarely run for political offices and only hold few seats and positions in parliament or government. Several explanations can be found for this phenomenon.\(^2\) The few women who actually take part in the political arena are often members of the social and economic elite, sometimes from political dynasties. Thus – in spite of all national and regional differences – women can be characterised as a \textit{worldwide} politically marginalised group, whereas most other political minorities are specific to certain countries. Various avenues are explored to improve the situation and quota rules are one of the major possible solutions. About eighty countries around the world operate some type of gender quota system and this number seems to be increasing.\(^3\) Quota systems so far are the most successful mode of securing greater access for women into the political process. Countries that have enhanced the presence of women in their national
parliaments have often achieved this enhancement through quotas, introduced either through legislative action (for example, India, France) or self-imposed regulations by political parties (for example, Germany).

It is not surprising that the research on quota rules has just begun to flourish. At the beginning of the scientific debate, non-empirical arguments for and against quota rules have been discussed widely and all options and varieties of quota rules were disputed. Today, after a few years of experience, research mostly focuses on the contexts in which gender quotas were adopted, for example actors as well as their motivations and strategies, and on the ways quotas are implemented. The substantial consequences of quota rules were less of scientific interest. Whereas the outcome of quotas in terms of numbers is well known, the effects on policy changes and on the political process are less explored. The question whether female politicians make a difference is the topic of only few recent publications. But almost no information on questions regarding the processes of political mobilisation is available. The question whether and how quotas affect political interest and political ambitions of women has hardly been addressed empirically in the social sciences thus far. In contrast to the copious literature on gender quotas, therefore, this article scrutinises the mobilising capacity of quota regulations.

In this article, the mobilisation potential of quotas will be examined from a cross-national perspective, using data from an Indian and a German case study on women in local politics, each conducted by one of the authors. The Indian case study by Evelin Hust was carried out on women in the local rural government of the eastern state of Orissa between 1998 and 2000, the German study by Brigitte Geissel on women in the municipal parliaments and governments of the capital Berlin, was conducted between 1993 and 1995. These studies were not cooperatively designed, but were conducted
separately. At a seminar in Delhi, India, on quota in local government, the authors found some surprising similarities in their studies that propelled them to write this article.\(^{11}\)

Since the mobilisational effects on politically marginalised groups are of interest, it was potentially illuminating to look at two divergent cases and analyse the basic commonalities as well as the differences. The cases of Germany and India perhaps represent the greatest variations in many aspects, and thus comparing them enables a comprehensive insight into general and context-specific mobilisational effects of quotas.

Germany is an economically developed (post-) industrialised country, whereas India is still dominated by the agrarian sector. Social composition is much more heterogeneous in India than in Germany, with caste, class, religion and region as major cleavages.

There is great variation in the level of education between the two countries, with literacy rates in Germany being nearly 100 per cent for both sexes, whereas in India it was around 75.3 per cent for males and 53.7 per cent for females in 2001 (Census 2001).

Women in Germany are more or less at par with men regarding freedom of movement and legal decision-making abilities. In India, especially in rural areas, women have a severe disadvantage in these areas.

Nevertheless, Indian women do not lag behind in every aspect: In Germany, no woman was ever appointed head of government, whereas Indira Ghandi was India’s Prime Minister several times, and Sonia Gandhi could have become Prime Minister in the last Parliamentary elections in May 2004, but declined. Furthermore, five out of twenty-nine states are presently headed by women Chief Ministers, namely Tamil Nadu (Jayalalitha), Delhi (Sheila Dikshit), Rajasthan (Vasundara Raje Scindia), Madya Pradesh (Uma Bharti), and Bihar (Rabri Devi), and various political parties are also led by women, most notably the Congress Party (Sonia Gandhi), the Bahujan Samaj Party (Mayawati),
and the Trinamul Congress (Mamta Banerjee). In that respect, politically active women at the highest level in India might provide more positive role models for Indian women than the few women in high positions in Germany.

However, the studies focus on the local level, not the national or state level. Firstly, quotas in India are only established at this political level. Secondly, participation in the political arena in Germany mostly starts at the local level and in India the importance of the local level for recruitment has been strengthened considerably in the last decade. Groups lacking the opportunity to get involved in local politics will unlikely be successful at higher political levels. Thirdly, local level politics is seen as an arena to develop political skills in India as well as in Germany. Although the data was gathered for local level politics, we assume that the results will also add insight to the effects that quota regimes have on the mobilisation of women in general.

We will first discuss established theories on political participation in parliaments and second describe the political as well as the quota systems in India and Germany. Third, our methods will be explained and finally our empirical findings presented. The discussion of these findings, the conclusion, and the wording of empirically well-founded theses complete the article.

**WHY DO PEOPLE RUN FOR POLITICAL OFFICE? – THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

Political mobilisation and participation are complex processes. Since various scientific disciplines study these processes, existing models and approaches emphasise diverse aspects and factors. Studies differ vastly according to their theoretical background and premises, their methods, and their operationalisation. For the different forms, scales
and levels of political engagement various theories have been put forward. So far, there is no comprehensive approach.

Some theoretical and empirical approaches deal with the question why people do and why people do not take a first step into institutionalised politics. There are several studies in Germany about the reasons why people join a party. However, mobilisation processes on a long-term basis after joining a party have hardly been scrutinised. In India the first step into politics does not necessarily mean joining a party. Prior party membership and engagement is not a necessary condition for a seat in a local parliament. Nevertheless, it can be said for both cases that processes of mobilisation towards the first steps of a political career are still a “black box”.

These research desiderata are particularly true for local female politicians. Far more explanations can be found in the literature as to why women do not participate, than studies exist about why they do participate. If studies are conducted at all, they focussed on the recruitment of women for national parliaments, thus mostly on the female political elite. The paths of “average” female party members to political positions at the local level and the entrance to the political arena are seldom scrutinised. This is even more astonishing, because the paths of under represented groups into the political arena are crucial from a democratic point of view. Due to the lack of specific approaches in answering our questions, we will work with general theories, widespread in the research on participation in political institutions.

Three main cluster approaches, operating at the individual or the structural level, can be found in the current debate on participation in institutionalised politics. The first cluster emphasises the individual motives and political or personal goals as important variables. This approach, based on so-called theories of rational choice, assumes that political
participation is a result of rational considerations of autonomous individuals. Accordingly, people become politically involved after a rational weighing of the costs and benefits of participation.\textsuperscript{21} If they decide that this kind of activity provides the best opportunity to achieve their political or personal interests and ambitions, they become a candidate.\textsuperscript{22} These political interests and ambitions are assumed to have developed in the pre-political arena, for example in school or in the family, and are therefore described as predispositions.

The second approach focuses on socio-economic factors, such as resources and skills. It is well known that, for example, family background (social and political), education, occupational status or income affects political participation tremendously. From this perspective, participation can mainly be explained in terms of resources that facilitate political action, which explains why the participation in political institutions is often a “path from privilege to empowerment”.\textsuperscript{23}

The third approach stresses structural aspects, such as the recruiting strategies of parties.\textsuperscript{24} This approach is mainly employed to explain cross-national variations, in which differences are described quantitatively.\textsuperscript{25} This strand of research can, for example, prove statistically that women are less represented in majority voting systems than in systems with proportional representation. This approach can help direct the scientific attention firstly to the effects of various recruiting strategies of political institutions with or without quotas in one nation and secondly to the mobilisational effect of structural innovations such as quotas in general.

It can be argued that an integration of the various theoretical approaches, operating at the structural as well as individual level, is needed to analyse the political mobilisation process. This has already been demanded in the field of social movement theory. Rucht,
for example, claimed that only the combination of approaches focusing on micro-conditions with approaches that are engaged with structure and structural changes can explain the emergence of social movements. We assume that the mobilisation of women to run for political office can also only be understood when employing different theoretical approaches.

However, the focus of our study is not on the general mobilisation of women. More specifically, we will analyse the effects that one specific structural innovation, namely the quota, has on the process of political mobilisation.

THE CONTEXT: ELECTORAL SYSTEMS, LOCAL LEVEL AND QUOTAS

For a better understanding of the effects that quotas have on political participation in the specific cases studied, it is necessary to delineate the Indian and the German electoral system, the status of the local level, and the specific quota configuration.

India

India is a Federal Republic, with national, state, and local governments that are elected through a majority voting system. The status of the local government had originally only been written into the non-binding Directive Principles of the Constitution, Article 40 claiming that the states shall constitute local governments. Realising the growing importance of decentralised government, the Indian Parliament passed the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution in 1992 (ratified in 1993), which made elections to the rural local governments (in India called Panchayati Raj; literally ‘Rule of the Five’) mandatory.
Quotas for marginalised groups were laid down in 1992 as well. Whereas reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes (SC; former untouchables) and the Scheduled Tribes (ST; indigenous population) proportionate to their presence in the population were already introduced after Independence at the higher levels of government, the introduction of a 33 per cent quota for women, also within the other reserved categories, was a rather revolutionary step.

Yet, that women’s interests should be represented in local politics had been discussed already in early reports on the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, like in the Balwantrai Methta Report (1957) and the Ashok Mehta Report (1978). In these documents the co-option of two women in the institutions was the favoured approach. A 30 per cent quota for women in local government had also already been proposed during discussions of the Committee on the Status of Women in India in 1974, but the proposal was met with stiff opposition by political parties and also by most women legislators and was finally not recommended by the report.

The issue lay dormant for more than a decade until Rajiv Gandhi seriously started to promote women issues. In the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000 A.D. a reservation for women in the institutions of local government was recommended and followed by Rajiv Gandhi in the formulation of the 64th Amendment Bill of 1989. The Bill was not passed by the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) for various reasons that were, however, not related to the issue of reservations for women, and resurfaced slightly modified as the 73rd Amendment. That the 33 per cent reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj made it into legislation at all has been claimed on the one hand as a result of a prolonged women’s movement struggle, whereas a popular discourse devalues it as an election gimmick by Rajiv
Gandhi. In any case, an overall consensus has not been reached yet since a similar reservation for women in the Legislative Assemblies and National Parliament (The Women’s Bill) is heatedly debated and has failed to been passed for several times already. Initially, there was major scepticism on side of the critics of the quota on the one hand and overenthusiastic optimism of the supporters on the other. The critics argued that women would be recruited from the elite, that they would be mere rubberstamps. The supporters, on the other hand, believed that the women’s quota in the Panchayati Raj would lead to an overall empowerment of women.

Yet, it is not easy to assess the concrete effects of quota rules especially because of the persistence of “macro myths and micro realities”. There is no denial that the social, political, cultural and economic framework in which women have to act is detrimental to their active participation in the political institutions, which leads many to conclude that the quota in the Panchayati Raj is a mere eyewash. Nevertheless, there are at least as many positive reports as negative ones about the effect of the women’s quota. Most carefully conducted studies show that some women have been able to use the new space provided to them – though maybe not to the full extent as wished for by the promoters. Yet, the question is also about the yardstick for an evaluation of the effectiveness of the quota. The process has just started and obviously takes time.

Altogether, the recently increasing literature on women in the Panchayati Raj does not provide a unanimous view on the concrete effects of the quota. One has to keep in mind that the pattern varies across union states and even within a single state one can find diverging accounts. This is understandable given the variations in economic, political, social and cultural factors in Indian rural communities.
It is also important to understand the procedure of how the quota is implemented. Since the Indian political set-up is made up of single member constituencies, these constituencies are reserved in such a way that only women can be nominated. With this method, India secures an output of no less than 33 per cent of women in the Panchayati Raj, and women contest only against other women in these constituencies. In order not to block constituencies forever, those designed for women rotate in every subsequent election. Positions are reserved (such as mayor or chairperson) at all three levels of the Panchayati Raj, namely village, block, and district.\textsuperscript{36} In some states, for example in Orissa, elections to the two lower tiers take place without parties; only at the district level candidates are filed by political parties.\textsuperscript{37} In the case of Orissa, women were usually nominated by their husbands or fathers-in-law, often after the village community had been consulted. As we shall see later, only few women decided on their own to run for election and most had been ‘talked into it’.

\textit{Germany}

Germany is a federal state with several "Laender" (states), which in their "Laender-" constitutions determine the organisational structure of local government within their territory. The German municipalities (Gemeinden) enjoy a particularly strong standing in this federal system, which is protected by Article 28 of the German constitution. The German electoral system of proportional representation is a system fundamentally opposite to the majority system. Proportional representation means that the number of candidates a party sends to parliament mirrors the percentage of the total vote going toward that party. This is possible because the German politicians elected to parliament
come from a party list. Citizens vote for these lists drawn up by the German parties, not for specific candidates.\textsuperscript{38}

In Germany the quota was self-imposed by some parties only. The Green Party decided for fifty-fifty-rule from its inception at the end of the 1970s onwards. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) decreed and implemented quotas in 1988. Since 1990, it is required that 40 per cent of each SPD candidate list be women on all political levels (local, state, and federal). Quotas work in systems of proportional representation through the party-lists. This means that an approximately equal number of men and women are represented on the party lists. To guarantee that half of the seats will go to women regardless of how many seats a party wins, the ‘zipper system’ has been adopted, alternating between one woman and one man in order to add names to the party list. Thus India and Germany have adopted two rather different forms of quotas. The particular form of quota depends generally on the electoral system; majority voting systems require regulations like reserved seats for women, systems of proportional representation use regulations like the fifty-fifty-rule on party lists. Nevertheless, the effects of quota rules seem to depend less on the form of the quota, but on the political will and the seriousness of its implementation, especially on sufficient sanctioning mechanisms.\textsuperscript{39} Also the perceived legitimacy of women elected by the means of different types of quota rules does not seem to vary very much. The perceived legitimacy depends more on the political culture in a country than on the type of the quota.\textsuperscript{40}
METHODS AND DATA

Researching a field that lacks empirical data calls for an open research design. The concept of Grounded Theory\textsuperscript{41} proposes that with fields lacking empirical research the starting point of research cannot be theory and a theoretically founded operationalisation, but the empirical material.\textsuperscript{42} Additionally, political mobilisation is a process that can be analysed better by using qualitative methods. Both studies are therefore basically qualitative in nature, although in the Indian case a quantitative method was also needed because of the lack of basic information on male and female local politicians, such as the socio-economic background.

In India, Orissa, a state on the eastern coast, was chosen because it presents a rather non-conducive setting for women’s political involvement. Orissa is one of the poorest states of the Indian Union (the poorest in 1996)\textsuperscript{43}, and its cultural ideology is quite patriarchal. The rationale for choosing a ‘worst case scenario’ was whether the quota has an effect, even under bleak circumstances.

In the first round of field research in 1998/99, quantitative data was gathered from 185 representatives, 105 women and 80 men, mostly located at the village level and some at the block level. Two blocks had been covered in the quantitative survey: in one block 100 per cent of the elected women and in the second block around 80 per cent have been included. In this respect it was no random but rather a full sampling of the women present in the Panchayati Raj Institutions there. The incumbents had been elected in January 1997, so they had been in office for two years at the time of the survey. In a second round of field research in 1999/2000, qualitative interview data was gathered mainly from the female incumbents, individual villagers, officials, and the village communities. Here, a certain bias in the selection of women is possible. As often in
empirical research probably the more forward and active women made themselves available for interviews. Since the process in India has just been started and the position of women in the country side is not very conducive to their political empowerment, changes towards political mobilisation that regard even a small number could be considered to be significant. Nevertheless, the quantitative analysis based on a full and unbiased sample shows a similar trend as the small and partly biased qualitative sample; thus it can be assumed, that relevant lessons can be drawn from the data presented.

In Germany, Berlin was chosen because of its comparatively high standard of gender equity, its relatively women-friendly policies, and its long tradition of women’s movements and of female representatives in politics. The research focused on the western part of Berlin, because the interviews were conducted in the middle of the 1990s – a time when the pattern of recruitment in the eastern part was still as chaotic as in all East-German municipalities. Interviews with 30 elected female members of local parliaments in the districts in Berlin were conducted. The interviewees were members of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Green Party, and the Liberal German Party (FDP). They reflected the basic population of all elected female members in this election period according to the accessible information (affiliation with the local electoral constituency, occupation and actual job): Firstly, women from the (at that time) about ten local electoral constituencies of Berlin were interviewed to prevent a possible bias because of local peculiarities. Secondly the occupations and the actual jobs of all local politicians in Berlin were analysed and it was secured that the interviewees reflect this composition. With these conditions in mind the interviewees were selected by a random process. The willingness to be interviewed was high, only very few of the randomly chosen women refused the request. Thus a process
of positive self-selection leaving out all women with negative experiences can be
excluded to a large extent. The interview questionnaire was constructed in a mixture of
narrative interviews and additional open-ended and focused questions.
Because of the small number of interviewees especially in the German case it will not be
possible to prove theses, but only to generate theses. Nevertheless, comparing the results
about the mobilising capacity of quota rules in two very different countries can add to
their reliability, although representative studies would be needed to prove them.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: MOBILISATION THROUGH QUOTAS

Impact of quotas can most easily be measured by numbers. Although these effects are
not the focus of our research, basic information is necessary. As expected, the number of
women in politics was enhanced by quotas. In Orissa, elections to the local government
at a village level had been held in 1970, 1975, and 1983/1984. Data on the 1970 election
is not available. In the 1975 election, out of 2,962 mayors 20 were women (0.68 per
cent), and out of 56,720 ward members only 103 (0.18 per cent). In the 1984 elections,
only 11 women were elected as mayors out of 3,384 (0.33 per cent), and 125 out of
67,002 as ward members (0.19 per cent). Hence, it is safe to argue that without the
quota women would have hardly entered local politics at all. After the implementation of
quota rules the percentage of women increased tremendously to about one third today.
In Germany, quotas had a remarkable effect on the numbers of women in politics as
well. In 1973, only 8.3 per cent of members of local parliaments were women, and in
1983, after the small Green party with its strict quota rules had entered the political
arena, the percentage had increased to 13.4 per cent. In 1996, after the huge social
democratic party had adopted quota rules as well, the number of women had risen to 25
per cent. Up to now there is a remarkable difference between parties with quota rules and parties without quota rules. Yet, numbers are only one effect of quotas. The empirical data about the impact of quotas on the mobilisation of women are described in the remaining sections. The four main outcomes can be summarised as:

a) Quotas encourage women to begin a political career.
b) Quotas enable women to acquire political skills.
c) Quotas facilitate in developing sustained political ambitions.
d) Quotas support non-elite women to join politics.

\textit{a) Quotas encourage women to begin a political career}

In the Indian as well as in the German study, it became obvious that most women had no specific political ambitions to begin with. In India, most women had not even been asked whether they had intentions of running for a political office. Husbands and fathers-in-law filed their nominations in many cases, or the women had been pressed by the village communities to run for election. Out of a sample of 105 women, only 17 (16 per cent) had at least partly decided on their own to run for elections to the local government, whereas nearly three-quarters (78 of 105) had been encouraged by villagers, and the rest by relatives. The majority of women also had no prior political experience (89 per cent), such as participating in party politics or other politically active associations. When asked why they had participated in this election, most women said that it was because they had been requested to do so and because they had been encouraged by others.

Surprisingly, most women initially had no interest in politics. Their usual answer was: ‘There was no scope for women in rural politics, so why should we have been
interested?’ This has changed considerably after they assumed office. To illustrate this point, one can relate the experiences made by Rita, a ward member, which echo the experiences made by other women as well. Rita was 32 years old when she was elected and she had held no prior political position. She said: ‘Before I became ward member, I was not interested in politics at all. This started only after my election.’

In the German sample, the majority of the interviewees became party members also mainly because already politically active relatives, partners, or friends had asked them to. In fact, when joining a party, 93 per cent had no political ambitions beyond being a member – especially in parties with quotas. When asked about their objectives and aims, typical responses were: ‘I had no particular aims’ or ‘Sometimes people join a party because they begin a political career. But I had no ambitions and goals at the beginning.’ Joining a party was more often connected with openness, interest, and curiosity than with political aspirations to begin a political career. Of course also non-quota recruitment of women takes place in politics. But comparing parties with and without quota rules or elections with and without reserved seats for women it is obvious that quota regulations increase the recruitment of women. Non-quota recruitment of women is often restricted to women deriving from a political or social elite background, whereas the social composition of female politicians in an environment with quota regulations is more diverse. This topic will be discussed in the chapter about the impact of quotas on non-elite women joining politics.

To sum up, the existing of quota rules was a crucial factor for the mobilisation of many women to join a party or the panchayats. Because of the quota in India as well as in Germany the panchayats respectively parties were looking for women. In both countries,
the interviewed local female politicians would not have started their political career without this encouragement enforced by the structural innovation.

b) Quotas enable women to acquire political skills

Several studies have found that women do not run for political positions because they feel they are not qualified. That was also true for the women from the two samples presented here. Many interviewees in India as well as in Germany, nevertheless, developed (the feeling of) competency needed to proficiently serve in a political office. In Orissa, women felt especially inhibited because of their low educational qualifications and their lack of public exposure in general. Women usually do not address men who are not part of their family and are generally not allowed to enter the public domain. The quota in local politics has opened up an opportunity space in which they legitimately meet men of their villages and become involved in village politics. It is difficult to assess the exact percentage of women who use this opportunity to increase their competences. Nevertheless, the majority of those interviewed twice after a lapse of one year had definitely gained in skills and confidence. For example, Rita, the ward member from the first example, said: ‘I learned a lot of things because everybody is talking about politics in the meetings and there are discussions in the panchayat office. … Now I get to know everything about different government programs, and I even receive information from the Collector (highest bureaucrat at district level). So I am learning a lot.’ Similarly, Babita, a vice mayor from the Scheduled Castes, stated: ‘My husband is guiding me in everything, and also our sarpanch (mayor) is supporting me and teaching me a lot. From 12:00 to 4:00 p.m. I am going to the office and learn
things like the keeping of records and the essentials of politics. I am very interested to
learn.’

She also started reading the manuals issued by the Panchayati Raj Secretariat and
participated in training courses. The important fact for developing skills is obviously the
hands-on experience while being in office.\textsuperscript{46} The presence of other women also
facilitated necessary political activities.\textsuperscript{47} Furthermore, most women interviewed
experienced a raise in self-esteem. Especially the necessity of speaking in public
contributed to this enhancement. Many reported that they were too shy to raise their
voice in the beginning. But being coaxed by others, they adapted in many respects.
Some really wanted ‘to do something for their villages’, and thus felt compelled to
participate in the political process and learn the ropes in the job.

For the German case, Miss Berger illustrates the process of gaining competence (and
confidence). After joining the party, she started to get involved in several political
events. At that time, she ‘felt sometimes overtaxed and not very competent’, but she was
supported by the local party unit. Additionally, she started to go to seminars to train
herself. ‘Finally, you begin to think, I want to give a talk and you dare to do it. And after
you have done it, you find out, you really can manage it. Making this experience several
times you get more relaxed and you start to dare to go even further and take the next
steps. I was not a high-flyer, but I found out that the other politicians are not better than I
am.’

Encouraged by their colleagues and local party units, many interviewees learned the
skills ‘on the job’.
'I had a lot of fears to talk in front of an audience. But the local party unit wanted me to become a member of the local parliament. So I tried to work on my fears and I had the experience that my fears disappeared with the training on the job.’

Similar to the cited female politicians, more than half of the interviewees started their political engagement without feeling fully competent. It was especially helpful when competent and long term members served as mentors in this period of training. Also a network of members willing to support was useful in this stage. Mainly the stress of women without political family background was relieved when helpful party members were available to answer all questions concerning formal and informal rules and all other necessary information.

The interviewees especially developed competences in parties with quotas; about two-thirds of the interviewees from these parties enhanced their (feeling of) competence during participation. The interviewees of the parties without quotas had mostly started with high feelings of competency – often because of a political family background. Skills seldom increased in these parties.

Hence, one can conclude that in India as well as in Germany women started to gain confidence in their abilities mostly after they had entered the political process. During the incumbency period of learning on the job, encouragement by others, support by mentors and networks seem to have a crucial influence. This does not mean that there were no differences between the women in India and in Germany. German women felt for example more confident in a male dominated arena than the Indian and they depend financially and socially less on their husbands. Nevertheless, the structural similarities were striking. German as well Indian women had to learn political skills and many did so when quota rules enabled the necessary experiences.
c) Quotas facilitate to develop sustained political ambitions

It could be assumed that a rather logical outflow of the gain of (a feeling of) competence is a growing ambition to remain in politics and/or aspire for higher positions. This was indeed the case in both studies. In India, Babita, for example, feeling that she had learned the rules of the game, aspired to move ahead: At the beginning of her career she wanted to be a ward member and learn important things, but being a ward member for several months she aspired to become the next sarpanch (mayor), even if the seat will not be reserved for a woman. Another instance is Nita, the present chairman of the local government at block level. She is only in her early twenties and comes from a Scheduled Caste. She is eager to run as MLA (member of legislative assembly, state level) in her constituency and hopes that the party will give her a ticket.

Even though some of the interviewed still feel inhibited especially because of lack of education and freedom of movement, the majority would like to remain in politics and quite a number also wishes to move to higher political levels: Only 18 per cent (19 out of 105) do not wish to participate in politics once their present term is over; 31 per cent would like to contest for the same position; and a stunning 37 per cent (39 out of 105) would like to run for a higher office, such as mayor or even MLA (13 per cent were not able to give an opinion). 48

Whether all women who want to stay in politics will actually be successful remains an open question. Firstly, those who want to remain in their position may perhaps not be promoted again. The reserved constituencies rotate in every election and men will then compete for the then non-reserved seats. Secondly, those who want to move beyond the local level like Nita might not get a chance, because neither the State Assemblies nor the
National Parliament has a women’s quota at present. In addition, family members have a strong say on the political career of all women in the case study. This can be illustrated by the case of Kali, a SC ward member. She said that if her husband will not allow her to run in the next election, she would have to drop out – which she would regret.

Up to now there is very little empirical research done on how women in India will manage and already managed the transition from local to state politics. So far not much can be said apart from the fact that the political system is not very conducive. Major impetus would definitely be created if the Women’s Bill for an introduction of a women’s quota also at the level of Legislative Assemblies and the National Parliament will be passed. Without a quota there it will become rather difficult for women to climb up the political ladder.

In Germany as well, the participation of women in politics, spurred by the promotion due to the quota, had facilitated their development of further political ambitions. One woman stated: ‘When I joined the party I had no ambitions, but today I am in the party executive and I intend to run for a position in the Abgeordnetenhaus (the House of Representatives in Berlin).’ To exemplify this further, we return back to Ms. Thompson. She said that over time she became more and more involved and realised that she loved political discussions and political work. The local party unit elected her several times for Vice Chairman. After three years, fellow party members asked her to run for a position in the local parliament, which she did successfully. At the beginning she was proud of being elected, but after several months she found out that local politicians only have a minimal influence. Her wish to have a more substantial impact led to the decision to run for a position in the Bundestag, the national parliament. Whereas in the beginning of her
career she was asked to run for an office, her ambition to become a member of the Bundestag was not the result of invitation.

Women developed political aspirations and the idea to begin a political career during the course of their political activities more often in parties with quotas than in non-quota parties. In fact, about two-thirds of the interviewed women from the SPD and all women from the Green Party developed an interest to begin a political career, whereas in the parties without quotas the percentage was much lower and almost negligible. These results cannot be generalised, because the sample size is small. But another indicator lends substance to the thesis: Detailed analyses of different German studies on female politicians reveal that successful female party members often developed political aspirations in parties with quotas. Conversely, most of the successful female politicians in parties without quotas had not developed their ambitions, but aspired political careers from the beginning of their memberships, mostly supported by their politically involved family.

Considering advanced political ambitions of local female politicians, one difference between Germany and India is striking. German parties with quota rules adopt those on all political levels, from the local to the state and the national level. German local female politicians who had developed ambitions can pursue a political career more easily than comparable women in India. Based on the results of our studies it can be summed up that quota rules at the local level facilitate the development of sustained political ambitions, whereas the realisation of these ambitions depend at least partly on quota rules on further political levels.
d) Quotas support non-elite women to join politics

Women of the elite have a particularly easy time pursuing a political career. In a comparative study it was scrutinised whether female party leaders came from a higher social background than male party leaders did. In fact in most countries there was a close relationship between the profession of the parents and the political career: The parents of the female political elite worked in higher professions and mostly came from a high social class. Economic, social, and educational capital of female leaders’ parents was significantly higher than those of male leaders.

This fact also holds for politicians at the national and state level in India. Without the quota system operating there, most of the female politicians up to the rank of Prime Minister, like Indira Gandhi, were either daughters or widows (as in the case of Sonia Gandhi today) of influential politicians.

Quotas changed this pattern – at least at the local level. It was unexpected that the quota had an effect on the composition of the political elite. Critics of the women’s quota in India claimed that it would mainly benefit the elite, since politically ambitious families would field their women to “keep the seat warm” for the next male competitor. Yet, the Orissa sample shows that the female respondents were mainly not drawn from an elite background, especially when compared to their male colleagues. Women came from poorer households, lower castes, and lower educational achievements. Women not only had less of an education than the male incumbents, which could be expected since educational levels are much lower among women than men in this region, they also came from households with lower educational levels, which was ascertained through data about their husband’s education and the highest education reached by any parent.
Furthermore, the presumed influence of ‘political families’ was much less than originally envisaged (32 per cent of the women vs. 26 per cent of the men came from families with political background). In that respect, the women’s quota in Orissa has introduced new politicians not only in regard to sex, but also to class, caste, and education.  

In the German study as well, the parties that had adopted a quota for women attracted women from less prestigious backgrounds. Women of working class origin or non- or even anti-political backgrounds and women without university degree were mostly found in parties with quotas. In contrast, the CDU, the FDP and the SPD – before the introduction of quotas – supported especially women with a politically active father or husband and generally privileged women with high educational levels and with elite professions. This is also true when general differences between bourgeois parties (CDU, FDP) and non-bourgeois parties, especially the Social Democrats, are taken into account. Even in the SPD before the implementation of quota rules especially women deriving from ‘political party elites’ had good chances to be recruited and promoted. But after the introduction of quota rules also women without a ‘social democratic pedigree’ were supported.  

To sum up, both studies, from India and from Germany, indicate that quotas may change the pattern of class as well, since without a quota mainly elite women enter institutional politics.  

**CONCLUSION**

The main purpose of this study was to find out the impact of quotas especially on the mobilisation of politically under-represented groups. Thus, it was asked whether quotas
could be a means to solve the problem of unequal representation, criticised by political philosophers as well as by politically marginalised groups. This topic was analysed through two case studies on women in local politics in India and Germany.

It can be claimed without doubt that gender quotas have changed the political landscape in both countries to a considerable degree. The most visible change is the numerical one, since women’s presence in the political bodies was enhanced in both cases. Yet, the quota’s impact went much further, leading to changes in the democratic mobilisation of women.

Firstly, most of the women interviewed began their political careers without political ambitions and desires. This meant in Germany to join a political party and in India to run for a seat in the local government. These women involved themselves in political activities because they had been encouraged to do so. In that respect, political participation and running for an office were not the result of prior existing individual motives or political ambitions, and in the case of India, many did not even have political interests to begin with.

The second crucial result is that many female politicians enhanced their (feeling of) competence during incumbency. In both countries, they stated that they felt shy at the start of their career and not competent, for example to speak in public. This changed considerably after their first experiences in the political arena, when learning on the job took place – in Germany especially in the parties with quota. Gains in competence were often facilitated by stimuli of supportive colleagues, networks, and positive feedback.

Thirdly, once in politics most of the interviewees developed political ambitions. In Germany, this happened predominantly in parties with quotas. The empirical evidence
from both studies is rather compelling: Most of the women interviewed wanted to remain in the political process or even aspired for higher political offices.

Considering these results, it appears that conventional participation theories and models are inadequate to fully analyse political mobilisation via quotas. Most theories operating at the micro-level postulate that the development of political interest and ambition usually takes place in the pre-political arena. Furthermore, in that line of argument the decision to run for a political office is understood to be the outcome of rational considerations. In contrast, the experiences from such divergent cases as India and Germany show the mobilisational effects of being in political office, which was not taken into account in the conventional literature.

In addition, the study shows that neither theories focusing on structure nor on the individual and its interests can fully grasp the effects of quotas on women’s mobilisation. To understand these effects, a dialectical approach has to be employed, which takes into account the interplay between structure and individuals: Through the structural innovation of the quota, women are recruited into the political process that otherwise would not be there. Quotas, whether imposed through political parties or through legislative action, open up an opportunity space for women to become active in politics.56 This new structure facilitates changes at the level of the individual: Once women have entered the political arena, they are likely to develop political interests, skills and ambitions, which are mainly an outflow of practice, or learning on the job, enabled by quotas.

The change in recruiting strategies creates options and opportunities for participation, and following Carole Pateman’s argument this supply creates its own demand.57 In her
words referring to Rousseau, Mill and Cole: ‘[W]e do learn to participate by participating.’

The last, but by no means least, important fact about the mobilisational capacity of the quota is that it also promotes different kinds of women. Polities or parties without quotas usually tend to promote women from elite and/or political family backgrounds. By contrast, the female politicians in the political institutions (party, local government) with quotas predominantly came from modest social, and economic as well as non-political backgrounds. This implies that the quota does not only change the political representation in terms of gender, but also in respect to class, caste, or education. Thus, quotas introduce changes in the political elite that go beyond mere gender. They lead to a democracy in which politically marginalised groups are represented in a better way than today by mobilising and helping those groups to develop political ambitions and enhance their skills and competence.

It can be summarised that quotas have surprisingly similar effects on mobilising women in countries as different as India and Germany. One could have assumed that women in the Indian rural communities have few ambitions or feel less competent to begin with, but it is astonishing that the qualitative remarks of the female local politicians themselves are amazingly similar to those in Germany. This is not to deny that there are differences because of divergent social and economic contexts. Some of the differences have been mentioned in this article. The commonalities, nevertheless, are convincing.

On the one hand these results cannot be generalised because of the relatively small number (but mostly unbiased selection) of interviewees (see for the discussion of the reliability of our figures the chapter on methods and data). On the other hand, since quotas lead to similar outcomes in two very diverse settings, the thesis that quotas have a
powerful mobilisation potential can be stated with stronger conviction. In that respect, the results may give direction for future research on the possibility of enhancing the presentation of politically marginalised groups in the political as well as other arenas.

1 E. Biester, B. Holland-Cunz, B. Sauer (eds.), Demokratie oder Androkratie (Frankfurt/M./New York: Campus, 1994).


3 A helpful global database on quotas for women is provided by www.quotaproject.org.

4 See, for example, European Political Science, 3/3 (2004).


10 Geissel, Politikerinnen. Politisierung und Partizipation.


17 E. Wiesendahl, ‘Parteien als Instanzen der politischen Sozialisation’, B. Claußen/R. Geißler (eds.), *Die
33


18. B. Sauer, ‘Was heisst und zu welchem Zweck partizipieren wir? Kritische Anmerkungen zur 
Partizipationsforschung’, E. Biester/B. Holland-Cunz/B. Sauer (eds.), Demokratie oder Androkratie 
(Frankfurt/M./New York: Campus, 1994), 99-130.

Cambridge University Press, 1995); B. Meyer, Frauen im Männerbund. Politikerinnen in Führungspositionen 
von der Nachkriegszeit bis heute (Frankfurt/M./New York: Campus, 1997).

Female Local Party Activists’, Women and Politics, 3 (1994), 77-92. More research was done on the question of 
how local female politicians cope with the different tasks in politics and their family lives (S. Benzler/I. 
Annies/G. Peterman/C. Pfaff, Frauen in der Kommunalpolitik. Politikerinnen im Landkreis Gießen (Gießen: 
manuscript, 1995); I. Grolle/R. Bake, Ich habe Jonglieren mit drei Bällen geübt. Frauen in der Hamburgischen 


politischen Systems der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997), 444-
49.

23. D. E. Fowlkes, White Political Women. Path from Privilege to Empowerment (Knoxville: The University of 

24. B. Geissel/V. Penrose, Dynamiken der politischen Partizipation; Leijenaar, Monique, How to Create a Gender 
Balance in Political Decision Making. A Guide to Implementing Policies for Increasing the Participation of 

25. E.g., B. Hoecker (ed.), Handbuch politische Partizipation von Frauen in Europa (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 
1998).

26. D. Rucht (ed.), Research on Social Movements. The state of the art in western Europe and the USA (Frankfurt/M.:
27 The 74th Amendment secured this for the municipalities, for detailed information see, for example, P.S. Chaudhary, *Indian Quota System for Women for the Local Elections*, World Congress of IPSA, Quebec, 1-5 Aug. 2000.


31 The main problem was that non-Congress state governments felt that the Bill vested too many powers in the Governor and the National Government (B.K. Chandrashekhar, ‘Panchayari Raj Bill: The Real Flaw’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 July 1989, 1433-5).


34 This has been aptly captured in Mukta Banerjee, ‘Women in Local Governance. Macro myths, micro realities’, in *Social Change, 28/1* (1998), 87-100.

35 The variations in the status of women, economic set-up, kinship structures and political equations in India are enormous. Roughly sketched, the situation in the North is rather detrimental to women’s empowerment whereas the situation in the south (esp. in the state of Kerala or Karnataka) seems to be more conducive, but also there problems persist. For various studies undertaken in different states of the Indian Union, e.g., see, M. Bhaskar, ‘Women Panchayat Members in Kerala: A Profile’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26 April 1997, WS13-WS20; on Kerala: D.K. Ghosh, ‘Women Panchayat Members as Head of Offices. A Study in West Bengal’, *Journal of Rural Development, 14/4* (1995), 357-66; on West Bengal, D.K. Ghosh, ‘Grassroot Women Leaders. Who are They? A Study in a West Bengal District’, *Journal of Rural Development, 16/2* (1997), 291-311; S. G.

36 In less populous states, it is a two-tiers-system only.

37 This rule is not uniform for all Indian states; in west Bengal, e.g., elections to all the local bodies take place with political parties. The question of which role political parties should play in the local government was very controversial right from the beginning of the Indian Republic. Bhargava distinguishes two positions: the Sarvodaya (welfare for all) school following the ideas of M.K. Gandhi, V. Bhave and J.P. Narayan, who argue for a “partyless, communitarian or participating democracy”, and the other school of thought that argues for the participation of political parties in local government (B.S. Bhargava, *Panchayati Raj System and Political Parties* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1979), 7-21).

38 On the national level, Germany has a dual electoral system in which two ballots are cast. On one ballot, German citizens choose a single candidate from each political party. But on the other ballot they select a party and by selecting the party they vote for the party list. In local elections the dual system is not used, only a system of proportional representation. But there is another specialty: In a few ‘Bundesländer’ (states), citizens can vote in local elections for the person they want, no matter what his/her place is on the party list.

39 In countries with a gender equality oriented political culture any kind of sanctions are less necessary (e.g., Finland). But only few countries fulfill this condition.

40 See, for example, the situation in Slovenia, Finland, Iraq or Afghanistan, described in *European Political Science*, 3/3 (2004).
According to research desiderata, the empirical material is furthermore not to be analysed by a previously decided theory in order to avoid inappropriately imposing preconceived analytic constructs on the data. Rather, the approach is developed in the process of the empirical research by oscillating between theoretical reflections and the empirical data (H. Bude, *Deutsche Karrieren. Lebenskonstruktionen sozialer Aufsteiger aus der Flakhelfer-Generation* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1987), 107).

It is often said that women rarely reveal ambitions, because it does not fit into the social stereotype of women K. Flaake, ‘Frauen und öffentlich sichtbare Einflussnahme. Selbstbeschränkung und innere Barrieren’, *Feministische Studien*, 1 (1991), 136-42. However, this was not true for the interviewees. They admitted very openly ambitions developed during their participation.

A study on the effects of local quota rules in four Panchayat Samities in Alwar showed similar results: ‘[M]any [of the female Panchayat members] had discovered their own talents and abilities and developed self-confident.’ Chaudhary: Indian Quota System, 32. See also Kudva, who writes ‘… in a number of instances, women members participated and governed through PR institutions because of their experience of being in office (Kudva, Engineering Elections, 454; emphasis added).’

This seems to confirm the theory of a critical mass as being important for minorities to overcome inhibitions (D. Dahlerup, ‘From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics’, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 11/4 (1988), 275-98).

A study on the effects of local quota rules in four Panchayat Samities in Alwar showed similar results: “Interest for participation was created through participation.” Chaudhary: Indian Quota System, 31.


50 See ibid.

51 E.g., V. Mino, Access to and exercise of power, manuscript, World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Quebec, 1-5 Aug. 2000.

52 Similar: D. E. Fowlkes, White Political Women. 

53 For detailed information, see E. Hust, Political Representation and Empowerment: Women in the Institutions of Local Government in Orissa after the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics, South Asia Institute, Department of Political Science, University of Heidelberg (2002), to be found at: http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/volltexte/2003/4098/pdf/hpsACP6.pdf and Hust (2004) op. cit.

54 This has not necessarily happened everywhere. Many reports confirm the pattern of the ‘beti-biwi-bahu brigade’ (daughter, wife, daughter-in-law), esp. in numerous newspaper reports but also in studies on Karnataka (see Kudva, Engineering Elections). However, there are up to now no systematic comparisons between male and female incumbents.

55 B. Geissel, Politikerinnen. Politisierung, 165-67. One possible reason for this might be an enhanced feeling of competence, which women from non-elite backgrounds often lack. Not surprisingly, only women presenting themselves as very competent were able to be successful in parties without quota. Other studies confirm this result. For example, in the local party units of the German CDU, those members who were fully convinced of their own competence were more likely to be promoted (W. P. Bürklin/V. Neu/H.-J. Veen, Die Mitglieder der CDU (Interne Studie der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Sankt Augustin, 1997), 140). Those members without any doubt regarding their own competence were the ones who were being considered when putting together the party list (I. Reichart-Dreyer, Fünf Methoden, Frauen aus der Politik herauszuhalten – und was dagegen zu tun ist (Berlin: Manuskript, 1994) 3).

56 This result might be comparable to the importance which Tarrow and others attach to structural changes, captured in the term ‘Political Opportunity Structure’.