The past decades have witnessed a marked rise of women into elective offices across all branches of government, but especially into national legislatures; worldwide, the percentage of female members of parliament (MPs) has tripled since 1970. Women’s presence in national parliaments has come to be considered an important component of democracy by international organizations including the United Nations and political equality is now viewed as requiring participation from both sexes (Dahlerup 2006, Krook 2009, Franceschet and Piscopo 2013). Moreover, because female political leaders are thought to serve as role models who can awaken other women’s and girls’ interest in public affairs, and because female representatives are believed to represent women’s interests, women’s inclusion in decision making bodies is now regarded as improving the quality of democracy.

Despite these changing global norms and the increase in women’s descriptive representation, however, men still remain overrepresented in almost every country. Although women make up half the global population, in 2014 fewer than one quarter of MPs worldwide were female (Interparliamentary Union 2014). As a result of a growing concern about men’s political overrepresentation, policy makers in countries as diverse as France, Argentina, Taiwan, and Rwanda have adopted gender quotas for elective office as a way to facilitate women’s political participation. Quotas involve setting percentages or numbers for the political representation of specific groups, in this case women and, at times, men. Quotas take various shapes including the creation of special seats reserved for women, formal electoral laws regarding the sex of candidates, and – the focus here — voluntary commitments made by political party organizations. Political party candidate gender quotas initially began with some left-wing political parties in Northern Europe in the 1970s, but have now spread across the political spectrum and the globe, requiring ever-higher percentages of women to appear on the ballot (Krook 2009; Thames and Williams 2013).
Although at times very controversial, quotas have proliferated on the strength of several arguments including claims that they help achieve gender-equal participation in democracy and, with it, both role models for girls and better representation of women’s interests. Moreover, feminist scholars and practitioners have identified many discriminatory practices on the part of gatekeepers, or those who select candidates to appear on the ballot, and quotas were designed to overcome these barriers.

An extensive body of research on cases from around the world confirms that if properly designed and implemented, even voluntary party quotas can indeed increase the percentages of women in elective office (e.g., Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005, Kittilson 2005, Thames and Williams 2013, Tripp and Kang 2008). However, little empirical evidence exists of whether or not quotas’ goals of gender-equal participation in the democratic process, creating role models, and overcoming discrimination have actually been met. When quotas are successfully implemented, do male and female citizens participate equally throughout the political recruitment process used to winnow the millions of citizens legally-eligible to run for office down to the few who actually become candidates? That is, do men and women obtain the qualifications necessary to run for office at equal rates? Are qualified men and women equally prone to aspiring to elected positions? Quotas have increased the percentages of women who appear on the ticket, but have they truly leveled the playing field, giving aspiring male and female politicians equal chances of being groomed as candidates by their parties and appearing on the ballot in winning places?

While we do know that quotas can lead to more women in elective office, we do not know the answers to the above questions. The causal mechanisms through which quotas increase women’s presence in elective offices are poorly understood, making it impossible to evaluate whether quotas have achieved all that their proponents have hoped (see Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2010). Because there are far fewer positions in national parliaments than there are citizens eligible to hold office, it is possible that women’s numeric representation in powerful legislatures can rise while women remain underrepresented among the citizens who are qualified for, aspire to, and are selected as, candidates for elective office. If this were the case, quotas’ goal of improving women’s participation in the democratic process would only partially have been reached. This state of affairs could negatively impact women’s substantive representation as well, offering female citizens a narrower range of individuals from which to select a representative than male citizens enjoy. Further, because historically very few women have held elected office, it is possible that the numbers of women elected could increase while party leaders remain more likely to select male than female candidates. In such instances, quotas may
lead to increased percentages of women in elective office but politically-ambitious women would still face gender discrimination.

Thus in order to determine whether quotas’ goals have been fully met, we must examine all steps on the road to becoming an elected official when quotas are in place, examining who obtains the qualifications needed to run for elective office in a given democracy, which qualified individuals in turn aspire to elective office, which of these politically ambitious citizens are selected to appear on the ballot, and who among them is ultimately elected by the voters. To date, however, most investigations of quotas begin at the candidate or elected official stage, rather than earlier in the political recruitment process. As a result, while we do know that quotas can increase the numbers of women in elective office, we do not understand how this increase occurs. If qualified women remain less likely than men to aspire to elective office or to be selected to appear on the ballot, additional measures to achieve gender equal participation in democracy are needed and quotas alone are not enough.

Understanding whether this is the case or not is especially important because in recent years gender quotas have diffused, not only to parties across the ideological spectrum, but also to different groups such as racial and ethnic minorities (Hughes 2011, Geissel 2013, Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2014, Krook and Zetterberg 2014) and from the political to the corporate world (Engelstad and Teigen 2012; Franceschet and Piscopo 2013). This paper therefore departs from conventional practice and introduces a new method of studying the impact of quotas by systematically examining their impact on every phase of candidate recruitment.

In a longer book-length project,² I employ this method to study a setting where some – but not all – parties employ quotas to select their candidates. In that study I find that that, although quotas have indeed led to marked increases in women’s presence in legislatures, they have only had mixed success at obtaining their other goals. My research finds that quotas have prompted parties to promote their female members to positions of inner-party leadership more often than their male members, qualifying women to run for elective office, and, in parties with parity or near-parity gender quotas, quotas have rendered female party members more likely than their male counterparts to be asked by the party to run for elective office, to appear on the ballot, and to win elections. However, these results occur in part because quotas have been unable to spur equal numbers of women and men to join political parties and to aspire to elective office in the first place, creating favorable opportunity structures for the few women who do want to enter politics. In short, I argue that quotas have succeeded in some, but not all, of their goals and additional changes are needed to more fully achieve gender-equal participation in
democracy. Using the research methods described in this paper other scholars can conduct similar investigations to assess the external validity of my findings.

In this paper I first examine the initial rationale for adopting quotas and discuss why investigating the political recruitment process as a whole is required in order to determine whether quotas have achieved their intended aims. Second, I delineate the challenges of isolating quotas’ effects on political recruitment and then develop a method of doing so. Third, I preview the hypotheses that are tested empirically in my own research and raise questions for others to tackle.

**Why Study Party Quotas and the Political Recruitment Process?**

Candidate gender quotas are at times quite controversial, but have been adopted with increasing frequency around the world on the strength of several arguments including simple fairness, quotas’ symbolic potential, and their role in improving women’s substantive representation (Phillips 1995, Mansbridge 1999, Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005, Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2009, Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2010). While increasing numbers of women holding elective positions may seem at first glance to be consistent with these goals, considering the political recruitment process makes clear that the two are not synonymous.

One of the primary ways in which quotas have been defended is through appeals to fairness, employing what Anne Phillips calls the “principle of justice” (1995, 62). It is simply not equitable, this argument goes, that one sex dominates representation in a democratic system predicated on political equality, and, in order to correct this imbalance in political participation, quotas are required. As the United Nation’s Beijing Platform for Action put it, “Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning” (qtd. in Dahlerup, 2006, 16-17). Certainly, rising percentages of women in national legislatures go far to rectify the injustice political philosophers such as Phillips identify. However, given that there are only a handful of top elective offices available in any particular country, even half of these positions being held by women offers only limited evidence that female citizens are participating as fully throughout the democratic process as male citizens.
Although women and men may formally enjoy the same right to run for elective office and while quotas have been found to increase the percentages of women candidates and elected officials, we know little about how quotas impact women prior to their becoming candidates for public office. Because virtually all existing research on quotas begins at the candidate stage or with elected officials themselves, it cannot shed light on whether or not male and female citizens obtain the qualifications for elective office at equal rates, whether qualified men and women have equal chances of developing political aspirations, being selected as a candidate, or elected to a public post. Yet if quotas are justified on the basis of fairness and giving women an equal chance to participate politically, it is important to know whether or not they actually render women and men equally prone to taking part in the various stages of political recruitment. If they are not, quotas can be considered only a partial success in achieving “justice”, even if they do increase the percentages of women in top elective offices.

A second motivation for quotas is the hope that such affirmative action measures will have symbolic effects (Mansbridge 1999, Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005, Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2010, Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012). As Jane Mansbridge argues, “Low percentages of Black and women representatives, for example, create the meaning that Blacks and women cannot rule, or are not suitable for rule... [T]he increased descriptive representation of women in the legislatures would undermine the perceptions that politics is a ‘male domain’” (1999, 649). By increasing the numbers of women elected, it is expected, quotas will in turn inspire women and young girls to become eligibles, aspirants, and candidates just as their role models have done.

Extensive research has established a connection between female elected officials and women and girls’ mass attitudes towards politics and political participation. When large numbers of women or very visible women take part in politics, some women and girls do know more about politics (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba, 2001; Reingold and Harrell 2010), talk more about politics (Atkeson 2003, Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007), and express a greater desire to participate politically – for example by running for elective office (Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007). However, far less attention has been given to whether women actually do participate more in these settings, and the studies that have been conducted unearth little connection between women in elective office and the average woman’s propensity to engage in other forms of political life such as contacting elected officials, attending political meetings, donating money to political causes, or working on election campaigns (Lawless 2004, Zetterberg 2009).

To determine whether quotas’ symbolic effects extend to running for elective office, scholars must first identify whether the gender breakdown of the candidate pool changes after quotas are introduced and
then compare male and female eligibles’ political ambitions. If, in practice rather than in opinion surveys, women exhibit a lower propensity to become eligibles and/or aspirants than men, quotas can be considered to have only limited symbolic effects. Thus, here too, in order to assess quotas’ full impact, all phases of candidate recruitment need to be studied.

A third justification for quotas is that they improve women’s substantive representation; that is, quotas will lead to women’s political interests being better served by elected bodies (Dahlerup 2006, Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2010, Franceschet, Krook, Piscopo 2012, Mansbridge 1999, Phillips 1995). As the Interparliamentary Union argued, “The concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when ... national legislation [is] decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regard for the interests ... of both halves of the population” (qtd. in Dahlerup 2006, 16). Studies of women’s substantive representation have established that the greater the numbers of women included in political decision making, the wider the range of women’s concerns that are taken up in political deliberations (Celis 2006 and 2009, Weldon 2002). If women are less likely to be qualified for, and aspire to, elective office than men, a narrower spectrum of women’s than men’s issues will likely be brought to the table. In this case, female citizens would enjoy fewer options to represent themselves then male citizens.

Moreover, many oppose quotas because they fear women elected via quotas will be mere tokens, unable to accomplish much for women (Dahlerup 2006, Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2010; see also Mansbridge 1999). If “quota women” are indeed grudgingly selected to fill affirmative action requirements, they may fear a “labeling” effect and wish to avoid speaking up on behalf of other women when they assume office (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008), reducing quotas’ ability to improve women’s substantive representation. Understanding the relationship between quota rules and political recruitment will help scholars better predict whether “quota women” are likely to be trivialized and fear being stigmatized, or whether quotas lead gatekeepers to groom women for elective office in ways similar to their male counterparts, endowing female officials with both legitimacy and a “mandate” to provide substantive representation (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). Where similar ratios of qualified men and women aspire to available ballot slots, and where party leaders promote promising female candidates, achieving a nomination to run for office will be equally competitive for men and women and the latter can hardly be derided as tokens. Where few women are qualified for, and interested in, running for elective office, however, or where gatekeepers discriminate against women, female elected officials run a higher risk of being labeled tokens or fearing being labeled as such. Studying all phases of
political recruitment where quotas are in effect will provide scholars with the evidence needed to determine which of these conditions is met.

Finally, considering the effect of quotas on political recruitment is useful for the same reason political recruitment has been studied for years in a non-gendered fashion: the process of winnowing out potential candidates inevitably contains biases in addition to sex including, for example, class, race, and ethnicity (e.g., Norris and Lovenduski 1995, Norris 1997). Just as certain types of men have been more likely to be selected as elected officials, so too will be certain types of women. Better understanding how the many eligible citizens are narrowed into a few candidates will shed light on what type of women quotas send to elective office and, in turn, the kinds of women who are likely to be sitting at the table when public policies are made and the sorts of “women’s interests” they may articulate.

**Quotas and Political Recruitment: What do we Know?**

An extensive literature documents both women’s continual rise among the ranks of legislators and the diffusion of party quotas worldwide (e.g., Dahlerup 2006, Krook 2009, Thames and Williams 2013). See Figures 1 and 2. Countries where parties employ gender quotas feature, on average, more women in their national legislatures than states where parties have not committed to affirmative action. What is poorly understood, however, is how quotas interact with each phase of the political recruitment process used to select representatives of the population, leaving the mechanisms through which quotas escalate the percentages of women MPs hidden in a black box.

<Insert Figure 1 Here: Women in National Legislatures Worldwide>

<Insert Figure 2 Here: The Number of Parties Worldwide Employing Voluntary Quotas>

In order to open this box, it is first necessary to identify the steps involved in becoming an elected official. See Figure 3. In any given democracy elected officials represent the outcome of an extensive winnowing process termed political recruitment (Matland and Montgomery, 2003, 21). This trajectory begins with all the citizens who may legally run for elective office – in most democracies this includes a large pool of people who meet certain basic criteria such as a minimum age. Since women’s suffrage was obtained, roughly equal percentages of women and men may, in theory, become elected officials. Obviously, however, the vast majority of citizens in long-term democracies never consider running for elective office; as Robert Dahl famously put it, “in liberal societies, politics is a sideshow in the great
circus of life” ([1961]2005, 305). Relevant for the study of quotas and political recruitment, then, is that small subset of citizens who are interested in politics and choose to obtain the qualifications that would make them a suitable elected official.

<Insert Figure 3 Here: The Political Recruitment Process>

These individuals are the eligibles or those from whom the ranks of elected officials are drawn in practice; together eligibles make up the candidate pool. Even among those who are considered eligible to become an elected official, not all are interested in doing so. Eligibles may decline to run for office for a myriad of reasons such as concerns a candidacy may impede their professional careers, a desire to achieve political goals through other means, or because of ill health. Those who do wish to seek elective office are considered aspirants and present themselves to the gatekeepers, or those who are responsible for allotting ballot positions. These gatekeepers thus have the power to further reduce the field of citizens able to participate politically at the highest level by selecting who becomes a candidate. In democracies, voters have the final say, selecting elected officials from among the ranks of candidates. Most research on gender quotas’ impact begins at the candidacy stage (e.g., Htun and Jones 2002, Jones 2004, Matland 2006, Meier 2004) or after elections are been held (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2008, Franceschet, Piscopo, and Krook 2012, Thames and Williams 2013).4 In order to fully evaluate gender quotas’ effectiveness in reaching their stated goals, though, all stages of the political recruitment process, not just penultimate and final phases, must be examined. While it is relatively easy to identify the elected men and women (a very small and very public subset), and to investigate the men and women who appear on the ballot (a larger, but still well-documented group), it is much more difficult to determine who was eligible but not nominated or even interested in the first place. Many such individuals exist but no public records are kept of those who did not seek or receive their party’s nomination.

Identifying and studying the candidate pool is not impossible, however, and large-N surveys of eligibles have indeed been utilized to investigate gender and political recruitment at every stage of the process (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Maisel and Stone 1997; Maestas, Maisel, and Stone 2005; Fulton, Maestas, Maisel, and Stone 2006; Evans 2008; Lawless and Fox 2005 and 2010, Lawless 2012). Because, to my knowledge, such investigations have only been conducted where quotas are not in place, this work sheds no light on how successful quotas impact the candidate pool.5
A New Method for Studying Quotas and Political Recruitment

What is needed, therefore, are systematic comparisons of men and women’s experiences across all phases of political recruitment in a context where various affirmative action policies are in place. In my own empirical research a study a single country (Germany) in which three types of voluntary party quotas are employed: no quotas, enforceable quotas requiring that approximately half of the candidates are women, and a less-binding, 33% “quorum” for women. In such settings, researchers can investigate whether quotas have symbolic effects, increasing the percentages of women among eligibles and aspirants, ask whether quotas change gatekeepers’ propensity to actively recruit female candidates, and check how quotas shape female aspirants’ odds of becoming a candidate and getting elected vis-à-vis male members of the candidate pool. In short, the method presented here brings the study of quotas into what Gallagher and Marsh (1988) call the “secret garden” of politics: the phases of political recruitment before candidates are selected to run for office. To do so, I develop a research design capable of identifying the causal mechanisms linking quotas to an increase in women in elective office. This method can be employed in other, similar, cases around the world to further increase our understanding of quotas’ effect on political recruitment. Here I discuss the design of my study and then draw up arguments about the relationship between quotas and the various phases of political recruitment.

The Pathway Case Research Design

Given the great cross-national variance in both gender quota rules (Dahlerup 2007, Krook 2009) and in methods for selecting candidates (Hazan and Rahat 2010, Siavelis and Morgenstern, 2008) – combined with cross-country differences in factors influencing the percentage of women in elective office including the level of economic development (Inglehart and Norris 2003), political culture and religion (Inglehart and Norris 2003; Ruedin 2012), gender norms (Paxton and Kunovich 2003), electoral rules (Matland 2006, Salmond 2006) and party systems (Kittilson 2006) – it would be very difficult in a multi-country study to isolate the causal mechanisms through which gender quotas shape political recruitment. Moreover, locating candidate pools in multiple countries would prove even more challenging.
In order to best determine how well-designed and implemented party quotas increase women’s descriptive representation in decision making bodies, then, a single country research design is required. John Gerring terms this research design a pathway case and argues that it offers a “uniquely penetrating insight into causal mechanisms” (2007, 238-9). To select a pathway case, a situation must be found in which quotas’ positive influence on political recruitment can be isolated from other causes such as those mentioned above. Studying a single country where quotas have been adopted and increased the numbers of women in elective office can better meet this standard than a multi-country approach, where controlling for alternative explanations would be quite difficult.

Focusing on a single country also makes the complicated task of identifying eligibles who never become aspirants or candidates somewhat easier. A country employing electoral law gender quotas – which apply to all parties in the system – would be unsuited to this design, however, as assessing quotas’ impact on political recruitment would require comparing recruitment for elections prior- and subsequent-to quota adoption. When doing so a researcher could not be certain whether quotas or other temporal factors, such as, for example, increases in domestic attitudinal support for gender equality or changing global norms about women’s political representation, were driving any observed changes in recruitment. In addition, since party quotas are often considered less effective than electoral law quotas because the latter have the force of law to sanction violators, voluntary quotas represent a difficult case in which to detect quotas’ effects. If quotas are found to shape political recruitment where parties have only made voluntary promises, they are likely to have even greater effects where parties are legally bound to implement affirmative action.

Thus an appropriate pathway case would allow a scholar to investigate candidate recruitment at a single point in time in a single case where the relationship of interest, gender quotas and their impact on political recruitment, varies. A country where some parties use quotas to increase women’s descriptive representation and others do not would fit this bill. Since symbolic effects do not occur overnight, but rather over a generation as girls undergo political socialization, the case selected also would need to have utilized voluntary quotas long enough for such generational effects to have occurred; electoral law gender quotas are a newer phenomenon than voluntary party quotas, again making them less suited for study here.6 These criteria considerably restrict possible pathway cases (see Thames and Williams 2013 for a complete list of party quotas and their dates of adoption).

A study limited to a single country that was an early adopter of a range of voluntary party gender quotas, then, allows a range of independent variables to be held constant in order to better isolate the
causal impact of gender quotas on political recruitment. Not all states featuring early party quota adoption are equally suited to answer the questions at hand, however. Some within-country variables, other than quotas, may still drive the candidate recruitment process. Two potential problems which must be considered involve cross-party variance in candidate selection procedures and in ideology. In some countries each party employs a different method to select its candidates (Hazan and Rahat, 2010, 4), for example one party might utilize primaries while in another a single party leader might draw up the ballot; as a result, diverging internal candidate selection procedures, rather than quotas, could drive observed variance in political recruitment. Similarly, there is a potential endogeneity problem.

Voluntary party quotas originated in new left political parties with progressive gender ideologies (Kittilson 2006) and cross-nationally left-wing parties have been most prone to select female candidates (Caul 1999), so variance in women’s political recruitment at each stage could be driven by party ideology rather than by quotas in and of themselves.

Despite these challenges, I was able to identify a suitable pathway case which allowed me to control for these possible sources of variance: contemporary Germany. Readers are encouraged to identify further such cases. Some German political parties began to adopt voluntary quotas in the 1980s and between 1980 and 2010 the percentage of women in the Bundestag increased threefold.7 Today, most – but not all – German parties employ voluntary quotas. The Federal Republic thus meets the criteria of a single country where quotas increased women’s descriptive representation, where some parties were early quota adopters while others never used quotas and where no electoral law quotas exist. Moreover, Germany allows me to control for in-country variables as well.

Due to concerns about undemocratic party gatekeepers in the wake of the Nazi era, the founders of the Federal Republic created very explicit laws governing candidate selection. As a result, all parties in Germany are required to follow the same procedure for choosing ballot nominees, regardless of their other characteristics (Roberts, 1988, 97).8 Moreover, this type of candidate selection – termed party loyalist (Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008) – has been shown in cross-national research to be the context in which voluntary quotas have proven most effective in increasing women’s representation (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2008).9 Thus, Germany is typical of cases where voluntary party quotas have been shown to succeed and the mechanisms through which quotas have increased women’s presence in top German posts are likely at work elsewhere.

Further, while German quota regulations indeed began in the 1980s when the post-materialist Green party adopted a minimum 50% quota for women, quotas have diffused across the political spectrum and
are now employed by parties with a range of gender ideologies, mitigating the endogeneity problem. Moreover, while very dissimilar German parties have adopted quotas, other parties with similar gender ideologies have not done so, allowing me to exploit a natural experiment and compare political recruitment in ideologically-similar parties with and without affirmative action policies. Another way to demonstrate quotas’ independent impact on political recruitment is to compare women’s electoral fortunes in the two parts of Germany’s mixed electoral system. Even within the same party, women have far better chances of election through the proportional representation half of the ballot – where quotas are used – than through the first-past-the-post component where quotas do not apply (Davidson-Schmich and Kürschner 2011). Selecting Germany as a pathway case thus allows me to control for a number of factors and isolate the impact of gender quotas on each stage of political recruitment.

This pathway case research method can be applied to other cases meeting the criteria outlined here. Western European and Latin American countries where effective voluntary quotas have long been employed and where candidate selection procedures are similar across parties would be the most suitable sites for future investigations.

Based on my examination of the German case, I conclude that quotas increase the percentages of women in elective office not through a symbolic effect – spurring women to join political parties and to aspire to elective office at rates similar to men’s – but by elevating the women who do overcome obstacles to party membership into positions of eligibility, leading gatekeepers to identify, train, and recruit promising women for elective office, and where quotas of over 40% are in place, to more often select women for promising ballot slots than their male counterparts. I discuss these arguments in detail below. Future research in this vein can assess the external validity of my findings.

**How Quotas Shape Political Recruitment**

Political recruitment does not take place in a vacuum. See Figure 4. Instead, it is embedded in what Matland and Montgomery term the *recruitment environment* or a broader set of social norms and institutions (2003, 21) – of particular interest here are those relating to gender, such as expectations about who performs household labor, who cares for the young and the sick, and who pursues what type
of paid work outside the home. Gender quotas do not attempt, and would be unlikely, to change this recruitment environment in any significant manner.

<Insert Figure 4 Here: The Recruitment Environment and Recruitment Structures>

In addition to the overall societal backdrop against which elected officials are chosen, Matland and Montgomery also note that candidates are selected through recruitment structures including political parties’ formal and informal practices (2003, 21). While quotas can quickly change parties’ formal requirements regarding which sex may be selected for which ballot slot, quotas do not directly apply to informal party norms or rituals which may themselves be highly gendered. In other words, quotas may alter rules governing who may selected as a candidate, but they do not prohibit mostly-male local branch organizations from, for example, holding prolonged meetings in smoke-filled bars in the evening when no childcare is available. Over time, quotas may chip away at these traditional recruitment structures, but such change does not occur overnight.

As a result, I hypothesize that the more influence the recruitment environment and traditional, informal recruitment structures have on a given phase of political recruitment, the less likely quotas are to be successful in reaching their goals at that stage of the process. I expect that the recruitment environment will matter most early on in political recruitment – hindering women from becoming eligibles and limiting their subsequent propensity to become aspirants – but that its influence will subside later in the process. Quotas should exert their biggest impact on gatekeepers and at the candidate stage. Below I discuss each of these expectations in turn.

**Eligibles**

In most democracies around the world, political parties play a key role in recruiting and selecting candidates for elective office (Hazan and Rahat 2010) and in party loyalist systems such as Germany’s (Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008) becoming a party member is the first step in becoming an eligible. But to be a viable contender for a party’s nomination, however, more than simple membership is expected; instead, the leading characteristic sought by parties is a potential nominee’s track record of service to the party and to the electoral district (Gallagher 1988, 248; Matland 2005; Matland and Montgomery, 2003, 24). Although quotas require changes to the sex of the candidates that parties select, they do not mandate changes to the nature of party life (recruitment structures), which is heavily masculinized. Moreover, quotas do not alter other aspects of citizens’ everyday lives (the recruitment environment) –
such as gender discrepancies in professional careers and in unpaid household labor – which result in women possessing fewer resources and less time to devote to parties than men enjoy. Thus quotas are expected to have little impact on the rates at which women join political parties.

However, if gender quotas are used not only to select candidates but also inner-party officers, as is common where party quotas are in place,\(^{10}\) affirmative action measures can have a salutary effect in that they promote the limited women present to positions of authority within the party. This quota-driven “elevator effect” is expected to create eligibles and is likely to render women overrepresented among party leaders when compared to their percentage among rank and file party members.

**Aspirants**

As Figure 3 notes, not all individuals eligible to run for elective office are interested in doing so. People may join political parties and become officers within them not because they want to become politicians, but to have an influence on policy or experience social solidarity with others in the group (Gallagher, Laver, Mair, 2011, 332). Aspirants, then, are a subset of eligibles – those who desire elected office and who have the resources to pursue it. Just as in the first phase of political recruitment, at this stage too, quotas are likely to come up against a recruitment environment that results in women having fewer resources than men possess, rendering female party members, on average, less likely than male party members to desire political office.

To become aspirants, eligibles must be endowed with what Norris refers to as “political capital” (1997, 13): they need to be qualified for the job, have confidence in their own qualifications, and enjoy the time to pursue political office (Matland and Montgomery 2003, Murray 2010b, Lawless 2012). While gender quotas that extend to inner-party office can increase women’s objective qualifications for elective office in a party-loyalist system of candidate recruitment, quotas cannot increase women’s endowments of the other aforementioned resources.

Quotas are not expected to (directly) change a highly gendered recruiting environment that values different types of behaviors and experiences, deeming some more appropriate for women than men. While quotas may elevate women to positions of inner-party leadership, they are unlikely to change the masculinized nature of “qualifications” for elective office and, on average, women are expected to be less interested in elective office and to feel less confident about their own abilities to run for elective office then men are.
Even if an eligible individual wants, and feels qualified, to run for elective office, however, she must also have the time to do so. Responsibility for childrearing and household tasks clash with the long and irregular hours associated with a political career. Because the vast majority of candidate pool members also pursue professional careers in addition to politics, agreeing to hold any amateur elective office – for example becoming a volunteer city council member – would add a “triple burden” to anyone, male or female, responsible for household and care work. However, women are on average more likely to find themselves in such ambition-dampening personal circumstances than are men. Higher-level elective offices that are full-time positions, and thus require “only” two shifts, may be more appealing to women, but in Germany and elsewhere, the prerequisites for such professional offices often include first holding amateur local office. At this stage of recruitment too, then, quotas are hypothesized to exert only a limited impact and women are hypothesized to be less likely than their male peers to become aspirants.

Gatekeepers

Extant candidate pool studies – most of which focus on situations where quotas are not in place – consistently depict women as less often asked to run for elective office than their male counterparts (Evans 2008, Lawless and Fox 2010, Lawless 2012, Niven 1998, Sanbonmatsu 2006, Shepherd-Robinson and Lovenduski 2002). Indeed, in Germany gender quotas were initially adopted because feminist activists hoped they could overcome such gatekeeper bias (Kolinsky 1991). While quotas have increased the percentages of female elected officials, scholars to date have not been able to determine whether gatekeepers are now grudgingly selecting available aspirants for ballot slots or whether parties are deliberately identifying and recruiting promising female eligibles, as they have in the past promoted auspicious men within their ranks (Patzelt 1995). By studying male and female eligibles’ experiences, however, it is possible to discern which mechanism is actually at work.

I hypothesize that since gatekeepers’ goal is to select winning candidates, their reactions to quotas will depend on whether or not they believe women (or at least some female eligibles) will be attractive to the electorate. If gatekeepers fear that female candidates will not garner votes for their party, they are unlikely to want to implement quotas and thus unlikely to either recruit or select women. Where quotas have “teeth” and must be implemented, in contrast, party gatekeepers skeptical of female candidates’ viability cannot resort to evasive strategies. In such cases party leaders pressed to select female candidates have an incentive to actively identify, recruit and train women who can win votes for their
party. There is little theoretical reason to expect that in the long run party gatekeepers would sit back and allow quotas to thrust unwanted candidates upon them.

Similarly, when gatekeepers believe that women are – or can be – winning candidates, they possess the same decision calculus. Gatekeepers’ estimation of female candidates’ chances may be high due to reasons unrelated to quotas – such as the overall level of socio-economic development and religiosity in a country (Inglehart and Norris 2003) – but where quotas are present there are additional mechanisms that raise the likelihood that women will be seen as desirable candidates. For example, quotas can give ammunition to feminist activists who support the selection of female candidates (Matland and Montgomery 2003, 33). If quotas initially lead to the success of some female candidates, other women’s candidacies would subsequently begin to seem more viable. Finally, comparative research has determined that when the number of female gatekeepers increases, as is the case when quotas apply to inner-party offices, the probability that women will be asked to run for elective office rises as well (Caul 1999, Cheng and Tavits 2011, Kunovich and Paxton 2005).

Whatever their motivations for recruiting female candidates, gatekeepers desiring to locate women to run for office face a complicated task; almost everywhere there are fewer female than male aspirants available (Matland 2005; Lawless 2012). In contrast, male aspirants are plentiful and, on average, are expected to be less in need of encouragement to run. As a result, I hypothesize, gatekeepers are likely to ask the women within their ranks to run for elective office when quotas are implemented.

Quotas may also alter the informal channels through which parties locate viable candidates. Because women often do not hold the traditional, gendered, qualifications for elective office (Murray 2010b), quotas may force gatekeepers to develop other methods of identifying competent party members when they are faced with determining which female eligibles to select for the ballot. Moreover, candidates have traditionally been selected by male gatekeepers who occupy gendered social networks (Kürschner 2009, 18; Sanbonmatsu, 2006, 153). Because parties cannot change the recruitment environment and create women with traditionally male careers or circles of friends, gatekeepers seeking electable female candidates as a result of quotas are expected to begin casting a wider net in order to identify potential candidates.

Simply asking women to run for office, however, will likely not be enough to generate the requisite number of candidacies because there are likely to be fewer women than men in party organizations and these women are likely to be, on average, less confident about their abilities than their equally-competent male peers (Lawless 2012). In order to generate a sufficient number of aspirants,
organizations required by a quota to locate a steady stream of female candidates are predicted to create new training and mentoring programs designed to make women more confident about their own abilities – efforts not previously required when parties primarily sought aspirants among their more-confident male members.

In sum, quotas are expected to be very influential at this stage of political recruitment. Where gender quotas are implemented, party gatekeepers are likely not only to ask women to run for elective office but also to alter the ways in which they train and recruit candidates.

Candidates and Elected Officials

These gatekeeper efforts to develop a cadre of promising female candidates should yield observable effects when it comes to the next phase of political recruitment: becoming a candidate. Here too quotas are expected to have a marked impact on political recruitment; however, exactly what this influence is is hypothesized to vary with quota type in Germany. In parties with parity- or near-parity quotas, mandating at least 40% female candidates, women are expected to enjoy numerical advantages in the candidate selection process because a gap exists between the percentage of women in the party and the (higher) percentage of women required by the quota. As a result, female party members are expected to not only be actively recruited by party gatekeepers but also, on average, even more likely than their male counterparts to become candidates. In contrast, where a 33% quorum is in effect, the gap between female party members and the percentage of female candidates required is not expected to be as large and, as a result, women’s political opportunities are anticipated to be more circumscribed. This affirmative action policy requires only one of every three ballot spots – usually perceived to be the third spot – to be filled by women, leaving the two higher ballot positions for men. As a result, on average, male party members are hypothesized to be significantly more likely than their female counterparts to have been selected as candidates.

Quotas’ strongest impact is expected to come in the final phase of political recruitment: becoming an elected official. Women in parties with parity- or near-parity quotas are anticipated to be more likely than their male counterparts to have been elected. Quotas should ensure that, although fewer women than men join such parties, and although these women, on average, find themselves in personal circumstances that depress political ambition, the women who do join will be promoted to positions of eligibility, encouraged to run, and enough will be placed in electable ballot slots to give women better odds than the men in their party of being elected. Where quotas require only 33% women, female
eligibles – who are ensured only one of every three ballot nominations – are anticipated to be less likely to win elective office than their male counterparts.

Summary

Quotas are expected to have had only limited effects early in the recruitment process, exerting but a partial sway on women’s propensities to become eligibles and aspirants. The mechanisms through which quotas increase the percentages of women in elective office are predicted to come later in the political recruitment process. Quotas are hypothesized to wield a far stronger impact on gatekeeper actions, increasing women’s odds vis-à-vis their male colleagues of being asked to run for elective office and prompting gatekeepers to cast a wider net for candidates, redefine selection criteria, and implement formal programs to increase women’s confidence about their abilities. In addition, due to the above-mentioned elevator effect, quotas, particularly parity- or near-parity quotas, should increase women’s odds of successfully pursing candidacies and becoming elected officials when compared to their male peers. Thus, in the pathway case I study, quotas, especially (near) parity regulations, are anticipated to be successful in shaping the later stages of political recruitment; however, more will likely need to be done in order for their goals to be reached earlier in the recruitment process, enabling female citizens to participate in democracies in equal rates as their male counterparts. Quotas are unlikely to have an impact early on in the political recruitment process until a gendered division of household labor is overcome and parties alter their day-to-day practices in ways more welcoming to women.

How to Get Data to Test These Hypotheses

I tested these expectations empirically using two original sources of data: a mail survey sent to over one thousand members of the German candidate pool and forty-one semi-structured interviews conducted in person with potential candidates in Germany. My survey targeted eligibles – political party members playing leadership roles at the grass-roots level. In Germany, the lowest level of party organization is the precinct level (Ortsverein) and the most entry-level leadership posts available are positions on the local executive board (Vorstand): (Co)Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and Board Member. The German political party law11 requires these positions to be filled through democratic inner-party elections held at
least every two years; winners are easily identifiable on party websites and in local media reports. These precinct-level boards are thus where the broadest possible sample of German eligibles can be found. Precincts were randomly selected from within five representative German Länder which varied on a number of dimensions associated with political recruitment and quota enforcement, including religion, population density, regional political culture, and the dominant party in politics; local and state electoral rules also differ across these Länder (Davidson-Schmich 2006b). Sampling from these states ensures that respondents represented the diverse range of settings from which the parties studied recruited their candidates. Within each precinct, a survey was sent to the highest-ranking male and the highest-ranking female member of the executive board of five parties’ branch organizations. Two of these parties had parity quotas, two employed no quotas, and the last a 33% quorum. Further details about survey questions are available from the author upon request.

Personal, German-language interviews were conducted with interviewees whose political experiences ranged from never having joined a party or run for office despite an interest in politics, to serving multiple terms in the Bundestag, Germany’s national parliament. All were (or could have easily become) eligibles for elective office by virtue of their active contributions to party or public life in Germany. Moreover, three quarters of these interviewees were also gatekeepers for elective office because they held leading roles within their parties. Their ages ranged from their 20s to their 70s and their places of residence varied from an Alpine village of 5,000 souls to a major German city of well over 500,000 inhabitants. Although some interviewees were not members of any political party, most were affiliated with the parties surveyed. Interview questions focused on respondents’ political careers to date, their motivations for and against running for particular elective offices, their perceptions of the nomination process in their precinct, of campaigning, and of serving in government, as well as their future plans. Interviewees were also asked what they believed made a good candidate, which careers and family structures they deemed compatible with elective office, and what role certain characteristics such as gender played when their local party organization selected individuals to run for office. Further details about the interview questions are available from the author upon request. Finally, I supplemented my original data with translations of German-language sources including academic studies, government and party documents, and media reports.

**Methodological Contributions**
The research methodology presented here allows for an exploration of the “secret garden” of candidate selection (Gallagher and Marsh 1988). By extending the candidate pool survey technique developed by students of Anglo-American politics (e.g., Norris and Lovenduski 1995, Lawless and Fox 2005) to a country in which affirmative action policies are implemented, quotas’ effect on the early stages of political recruitment can be assessed. Surveying eligibles – those with the basic qualifications required to be nominated for elective office – enabled me to assess men and women’s experiences at each stage of political recruitment, both in parties employing affirmative action and in those not doing so. By comparing the sex breakdown of a given party’s rank and file membership to the percentage of its female inner-party leaders, I could document quotas’ elevator effect in creating eligibles.

By surveying and interviewing male and female eligibles about their propensities to have always wanted to be a politicians, to have thought about running for certain public posts, and their willingness to accept a nomination to become a candidate for public office, I was able to document gender differences in political ambition. Interviewing these eligibles allowed me to discover the gendered and non-gendered mechanisms shaping their ambition.

My survey of eligibles also helped me to document potential male and female candidates’ direct experiences with party gatekeepers – for example whether they had ever been asked by their party to run for elective office – as well as their perceptions of gatekeepers’ preferences – for example whether they believed men and women in their party were equally likely to be selected as candidates. Here again, personal interviews with eligibles and gatekeepers allowed me to discover the changing strategies gatekeepers have employed to identify and groom promising female eligibles since quota adoption.

Finally, by surveying eligibles I was also able to examine the fortunes of similarly-qualified male and female inner-party leaders by comparing whether they had actually endeavored to become a candidate, had been selected to appear on the ballot by gatekeepers and whether they had ultimately been elected. I could also document the motivations for such activities, including whether party encouragement to run for office played a role. The conventional approach to studying quotas, examining who appears the ballot or gets elected, cannot shed light on the above aspects of political recruitment.

My research methods not only allow me to understand the process of candidate recruitment in a setting where affirmative action is used, they also enable me to help contextualize others’ findings regarding gender and political ambition in the U.S. (e.g., Lawless 2012, Lawless and Fox 2012). In the United States’ quota-less, entrepreneurial system of candidate selection, female eligibles have been found to be less
politically ambitious than their male counterparts, less often asked to run for office by party gatekeepers, and less likely to become candidates or democratically-elected officeholders than similarly-qualified men. My empirical research indicates that these latter gender gaps are not universal, but rather highly conditioned by the institutional context in which eligibles find themselves.

The pathway case research design further allowed me to rule out alternative explanations as causes of the political recruitment patterns I observe. By holding factors such as the level of economic development, the nature of the welfare state, the electoral system, political culture, and candidate selection procedures constant, I was able to go far in isolating quotas’ effects on the political recruitment process in Germany. While my work has a very high level of internal validity, future studies in other contexts are now needed to assess its external validity and better address a potential endogeneity problem. I conclude by outlining some such future research ideas.

Avenues for Future Research

The methodological approach presented here can be employed in various national contexts with other types of quotas to determine how different affirmative action measures – such as reserved seats, electoral law quotas, a binding 33% quorum, or an easy-to-violate 50% quota – shape men’s and women’s experiences throughout the political recruitment process. Comparing these and other quota types deployed in various electoral systems will allow for greater assessment of this study’s external validity. Examining countries in which legislative quotas have been adopted would solve the possible endogeneity problem here. Electoral law quotas are imposed upon political parties via state mandates rather than freely chosen to promote gender equality. As a result, observed changes in a party’s political recruitment practices following the enactment of a quota law could not be caused by party ideology and would seem to be attributable to quotas.12

Of special interest in future studies would be issues such as the threshold at which quotas acquire “teeth” and can force gatekeepers to alter their behavior. What types of sanctions or incentives are most effective in this regard? How large of a gap between the percentage of women among party members and the percentage of female candidate required by the quota must exist before gatekeepers are spurred to take actions to develop viable female candidates? Moreover, the changes in gatekeeper actions I observed were intimately related to Germany’s electoral system and how it determines the qualities required of a successful candidate. Other electoral systems are expected to generate different alterations in gatekeeper behavior in line with the electoral incentives that they create; more research is
needed to determine what form these changes might assume. An additional question raised here is what types of quota “watchdogs” emerge in other contexts to push quota-less parties to promote female candidates. In Germany these were largely found in political parties, in the media, and in women’s policy agencies and women’s organizations. Watchdogs might assume other forms in different contexts, however; in a democratizing country, for example, international actors might play this role.

My empirical research conducted using the method described here also indicates that quotas’ impact has been limited in the Federal Republic because voluntary party regulations are unable to change the gendered division of labor in society. As a result, the unpaid nature of local office in Germany appears to be a deterrent to women’s political ambition. Studies of eligibles in contexts where local-level political positions are paid offices can shed light on whether professionalizing community office can increase women’s participation in earlier stages of the democratic process. In addition, future research is needed to determine which public policies or initiatives are best suited to altering gender roles and increasing men’s participation in the domestic sphere. Many countries, including recently Germany, have begun to adopt paid paternity leave to establish routines early in parenthood in which men play a greater role than in the past in childrearing. Whether such policies have an impact on the domestic division of labor and, in turn, on women’s participation in civil society as a whole, and on women’s participation in parties in particular, merits future scholarly consideration.

Future research in other national contexts can also help further elaborate on how affirmative action regulations shape men’s political ambition. My empirical research finds, on the one hand, that when quotas improve women’s odds of local-level election compared to their male peers, male party members become less likely than female members to seek a ballot nomination in their community. Men are also less often asked by party gatekeepers to run for elective office than women. On the other hand, the candidate training programs parties develop to encourage women to run for elective office have positive externalities for male party members; men in parties with quotas report significantly more access to such professional development programs than their male counterparts in quota-less organizations. Thus gender quotas, even those targeted specifically at women, can have a spillover effect and shape men’s willingness and ability to participate in democracy as well. Future research can explore in more detail how men’s careers are impacted by various affirmative action policies.

Future eligibility pool surveys like the one conducted here could select a survey sample with an eye toward intersectional analysis. Conducting surveys of the (very few) racial and/or ethnic minority members of German parties – or parties in other democracies – would allow for an assessment of the
role other descriptive characteristics play in political recruitment. As quotas extend beyond gender to other groups, it will also be possible to study the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, and affirmative action in political recruitment. Such work could also be conducted comparing women across generations and regions to determine how gender role socialization impacts political recruitment.

Finally, the results presented here suggest that quotas should have an impact on women’s substantive representation. Because parties with (near) parity quotas have the most women in their eligibility pool, prior work on women’s substantive representation (e.g., Celis 2006, 2009) suggests that MPs from these parties will express the broadest range of issues of interest to women, followed by parties with less stringent quotas. Because quota-less parties feature the fewest female elected officials, their MPs could be expected to bring up the most narrow range of issues of interest to women. Conversely, because women still make up a minority in both parties and elected bodies in Germany, it is also likely the case that a broader range of men’s than women’s interests are articulated in parliamentary discourse. By systematically comparing the range of women’s and men’s interests raised by MPs from parties with various (or no) quota policies, we can empirically investigate the relationship between the two affirmative action types and women’s substantive representation. In her research, Christina Xydias (2008) establishes that “quota women” in the Bundestag are more likely to advocate for women’s interests in committee debates than women from parties with no quotas; moreover, in a later study she also finds that men from parties employing affirmative action are more likely than male MPs from quota-less parties to engage in substantive representation for women (Xydias 2014).

Future investigations in this vein could investigate the breadth of issues that are raised by parties before and after quota adoption, or as affirmative action rules change. Such scholarship should also pay particular interest to documenting which women’s voices are not heard. My research indicates these are likely to be the voices of immigrant, poor, or less-educated women, single mothers, and those employed in private sector. German quotas intersect with a political recruitment process to create a situation where a certain type of women’s descriptive representation has likely increased, but other groups of women are likely to remain underrepresented politically. Future studies of quotas and women’s substantive representation can investigate the intersectional relationships between political recruitment procedures and various groups of women’s substantive representation.

In short, there are many potential benefits to assessing the impact of gender quotas on all phases of the political recruitment process and readers are encouraged to pursue research in this area!
Works Cited

Please contact the author for complete citations to the work alluded to here.

Notes

1 Essential components of successful quotas include placement mandates for women (i.e., they cannot be relegated to unelectable ballot slots) and sanctions for non-compliance.
2 Davidson-Schmich, Louise k. 2016. Gender Quotas and Democratic Participation: Recruiting Candidates for Elective Office in Germany. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. [The previous working title was A Glass Half Full: Gender Quotas and Political Recruitment]
3 Of course, quotas are not always effectively designed and/or implemented and do not always increase the number of women in legislatures. The goal here is not to argue that quotas are guaranteed to raise the percentage of women in elective office, but to understand how they bring about increases when they are successful.
4 For notable exceptions see Freidenvall (2006), Murray (2010b), and Kenny (2013). However, Freidenvall’s dissertation is in Swedish and in both Murray’s case of France and in Kenny’s case of Scotland affirmative action measures failed to be fully implemented. These latter works therefore focus on how quotas fail, rather than how they succeed, the object of study here.
5 Some qualitative studies of political recruitment and gender quotas in Germany do exist, but these focus solely on women’s experiences and fail to compare them to men’s (e.g., Holuscha 1999, Geissel 2000).
6 While the first party quotas were adopted in the 1970s, the first electoral law quota, Argentina’s Ley de Cupos, was passed in 1991.
7 When Germany unified in 1990, these quota regulations were extended to the new eastern branches of existing West German political parties and the East German communist successor party adopted a 50% quota.
8 The German party law regulates how candidates must be selected, not which sex they must be. The latter is at the discretion of individual parties.
9 This method of selecting candidates distinguishes itself by its relatively centralized and bureaucratic nature when compared to more decentralized, entrepreneurial, or patronage-based systems. Hazan and Rahat (2010, 112), Murray (2010b), and Caul (1999) make similar points regarding centralization and/or institutionalization in candidate selection being conducive to women’s representation.
12 Such a study would, however, have to take into consideration that temporal factors might also be responsible for any observed changes.
13 See Celis et al 2014 for how this could be done.