TRACING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES: A GROWTH CURVE ANALYSIS OF UGANDAN MPS' ACTIVITY LEVELS IN PLENARY SESSIONS, 1998–2008

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Participation in legislative debates is potentially an important tool for Members of Parliament (MPs) to communicate policy positions and exert influence on the policy process. Yet there are few studies of legislative speech behaviour, and specifically gendered analyses are sparse. This article examines how gender and gender quotas affect speech activity measured in terms of how much MPs speak on the floor of the Ugandan parliament. An original dataset constructed from transcripts of parliamentary debates spanning a ten-year period (1998–2008) is applied in the analyses. Controlling for other possible determinants of speech activity, it is found that, contrary to expectations, there are no significant differences by gender in overall speech activity, but female MPs who hold parliamentary leadership positions speak significantly more than any other group. Differences between female quota MPs and their counterparts in parliament are also ruled out, countering common expectations in the quota literature.

The recent influx of women in national legislatures in sub-Saharan Africa, mainly via gender quotas, has ensured the enhanced presence of female members of parliament (MPs). It is still unclear, however, whether women are able to translate their presence into agency in the same way as their male counterparts—and, moreover, whether there are differences between female representatives elected with and without quotas. Overall, gendered analyses of parliamentary debates are sparse and few studies have specifically explored how quotas affect legislators' behaviour (but see Chaney 2006; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Piscopo 2011; Xydias 2008). This article addresses this gap in the literature by examining how gender, and gender quotas, affect speech activity. How much representatives participate in debates reveals whether they are favourably positioned and willing to advance policy concerns. I explore whether female MPs elected through quotas perform on par with their non-quota colleagues, male and female, on the floor of parliament in order to have equal influence on the process of legislative decision-making.

To examine these dynamics, this article uses an original dataset constructed from plenary proceedings in the Ugandan parliament between 1998 and 2008, focusing on how much a representative speaks on the parliamentary floor. MPs' speech contributions are taken to be indicative of both potential power and influence in the policy process. So far

research on the impact of gender and gender quotas have mainly been conducted within a theoretical framework based on Hanna Pitkin's (1967) concepts of representation. I argue that in order to fully capture the impact of gender and gender quotas it is also necessary to pay attention to who takes the parliamentary floor and why, yet such research is still largely missing.

Uganda is a pioneer of reserved seat policies in sub-Saharan Africa. The quota system ensures that parliament includes one female quota representative for every district. As new districts have been formed, the number of women in parliament has increased dramatically from 18% in 1996 to 35% after the 2011 general elections. Because women are also elected to open seats, this case enables a comparison of quota and gender effects in relation to speech patterns. A hierarchical growth curve analysis is used to explore determinants of MPs' speech activity, taking into account gender and mode of election.

Drawing on literature in political science and psychology, I hypothesise that female MPs will engage less in plenary debates than male MPs. Moreover, women MPs in leadership positions are expected to speak less than their male counterparts on the floor. Based on findings in the quota literature suggesting that quota recipients may be, to a larger extent than other representatives, more pliable, strongly beholden to party leaders, and relegated to subordinate or token positions (see, for example, Bauer 2008a; Goetz 2003; Gosh 2003; Meena 2004), it is hypothesised that female quota MPs will speak less than non-quota MPs on the floor of parliament.

The article finds that, contrary to expectations, there are no significant differences by gender in overall speech trajectories. Intriguingly, the effect of positional power on speech level varies with gender, with female MPs who hold parliamentary leadership positions speaking significantly more than any other group. Differences between quota and non-quota women are also ruled out, countering common expectations in the quota literature of women as a submissive and pliable 'vote bank' for the incumbent party. Women MPs are by no means invisible in decision-making, and while the possibility remains that their speech activity is 'tokenistic' in the sense of having little autonomy to speak in accordance with their own convictions, the analysis does not indicate that women are any different from their male colleagues in this respect.

Hypothesising about the Effects of Gender and Quotas on Speech Activity

Gender and Talking Time

Studies focusing on gender and legislative behaviour typically focus on voting patterns and the introduction of women-friendly policies. A small body of political science scholarship examines gender and speech contributions (Bäck et al. 2014; Kathlene 1994, 2005; Mattei 1998), but most of these studies focus on speech content. Consequently, we know little about speech quantity, or to what extent women representatives in fact participate in debates as a whole. Research in psychology supports the assumption that the speaking time for men and women may differ in debates. Research on the total amount of time spent talking in group contexts has pointed to the centrality of gender as a main factor for explaining talking time (Brescoll 2012; Mast 2002). Regardless of power differences, women tend to engage less in verbal aggressiveness or dominant behaviour. Studies of language, gender and political debates show that women do not break debate rules to gain advantage as much as their male counterparts (Christie 2003; Edelsky and Adams 1990; Shaw 2000, 2006).

Scholars point to cultural stereotypes about gender and expectations related to social roles as a reason that men and women behave differently. Assuming responsibilities at home, women develop traits that manifest communal and less aggressive behaviour (Eagly 1987; Eagly and Wood 1991). The prevailing political culture of masculinity engrained in legislative assemblies and organisations such as political parties may also act as a major obstacle to female politicians (Lovenduski 2005; see also Duerst-Lahti 2005; Whip 1991). In contrast to the above literature, Brescoll (2012) finds no main effect of gender on senators' speaking time in the United States. Taken together, this theoretical and empirical research would predict that female members of parliament are less vocal during plenary discussions than male members.

Hypothesis 1: Women representatives speak less than their male counterparts on the floor of parliament.

Interaction of Gender and Power on Talking Time

Participation in chamber debates may also be determined by positional power together with gender, such that women in leadership positions will speak less than male leaders. One key explanation is fear of backlash, which may deter women from engaging in debates in the same way as their male counterparts despite holding a leadership position. The risk of backlash may increase when women's numbers rise since male colleagues may feel threatened and close down space for women's participation and influence (Grey 2006; Heath et al. 2005; Kathlene 2005). In psychology, status incongruity theory suggests that women in positions of power can generate backlash (Rudman et al. 2012).

Men and women may also approach and use their positional power differently (Blair and Stanley 1991). Women chairing committee hearings are found to participate and interrupt less than male chairs in a study at the US state level (Kathlene 1994: 565). Another study finds a strong positive relationship between power and time spent talking on the US Senate floor for male legislators, but not for female senators (Brescoll 2012). These results comply with organisational research finding that women have a more democratic, inclusive and non-hierarchical leadership style. Conversely, men tend to adopt a more autocratic style (Eagly and Carli 2007). This suggests that male leaders, more than their female counterparts, would be willing to dominate verbally for a disproportionally longer amount of time in debates to maintain and assert their status and position in the power hierarchy (Mast 2002).

Hypothesis 2: Women in leadership positions will speak less than men holding leadership positions on the floor of parliament.

Quotas and Talking Time

Research on the impact of quotas has mainly been focused on substantive representation and the content of speech contributions, and has largely ignored legislative speech quantity. Yet from a power perspective there are also good reasons to examine legislative speech time. Some scholars propose that quotas make it more likely that women representatives advance women's concerns due to a perceived *mandate* to act for women. At the same time they suggest that quotas also reinforce *labels* in the form of negative stereotypes of women as less competent, with a negative impact on women's substantive representation (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). The label effect implies a stigma, namely that quota representatives are less qualified and deserving of their positions than their non-quota counterparts.

This suggests that they are 'token' representatives, pliable and easily controlled by the party elites. The consequence may be that female quota recipients shy away from taking on a mandate to act on behalf of women (Childs and Krook 2012; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). Tokenism could also lead to general inactivity, leading to fewer speech contributions on the parliament floor.

Reserved seat quotas have been considered especially prone to the above weaknesses, especially in African countries with dominant party systems in which the party and the executive influence and control the quota system (Devlin and Elgie 2008; Disney 2006; Muriaas and Wang 2012; Tripp 2006; Yoon 2011). In Uganda, studies have found that the quota policy has been used to bolster the incumbent party (Bauer 2008b; Green 2010; Muriaas and Wang 2012), in this way promoting women who are loyal to the governing party (Goetz 2003; Tripp 2006). The strong ties between the ruling party and quota representatives may further relegate the latter to take positions as subordinate or tokens (Bauer 2008a: 362, 2008b; Goetz 2003: 118).

A second criticism against quotas in general relates to MPs' qualifications and backgrounds, with quota women being assumed to lack competence—and thus being less likely to speak during plenary debates. Recent research finds that quota representatives do tend to bring different types of qualifications and experiences to office, yet they are not unprepared or unqualified (Franceschet and Piscopo 2012; Murray 2012; O'Brien 2012). Findings from Uganda show that contrary to expectations quota women are not less qualified than their non-quota counterparts (Josefsson 2014; O'Brien 2012). These findings contradict the expectation that quota women should talk less than other representatives based on merit.

Although the literature demonstrates conflicting findings, the broader debate might lead to the overall expectation that quota women should talk less in parliament than their male and female counterparts.

Hypothesis 3: Female quota recipients will speak less than non-quota mandated representatives on the floor of parliament.

The speech activity of parliamentarians in the plenary may be shaped by a number of structural and personal factors other than gender and quotas, including the balance of power between backbenchers and party leaders (Proksch and Slapin 2012). Further, MPs holding leadership positions, in their mere capacity of being leaders, could also be expected to appear more frequently on the floor and speak at greater length than rank-and-file members. Research in psychology finds, for example, that high-power individuals may simply feel entitled or required to talk more than others (Brescoll 2012; Fiske 2010). Party affiliation and party discipline could also be critical with respect to speech activity, with ruling party MPs being expected to talk less than opposition members. Finally, time served in parliament may also be an important determinant. Alternative explanations of speech activity are controlled for by including variables with information on position, party affiliation, experience, introduction of a multiparty system and background characteristics (age and regional belonging).

The Case of Uganda

Uganda can be considered as a 'most likely' case of finding gender differences in how much MPs speak in parliament. Uganda has among the highest shares of women in parliament in the world, yet it remains a strictly patriarchal society. Parliament is a deeply conservative institution and its institutional norms and internal structures and routines can be seen as inhibiting to women representatives (Tamale 1999; Tripp 2006).

The reserved seat system has also been widely criticised. The quota policy was introduced in 1989 in a top-down fashion spurred by the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) government's need to create regime legitimacy and stability, propelled as well in part from below by emerging trends in the international and national women's movement (Muriaas and Wang 2012). Historically, close ties between women and the NRM, together with the constraints of patronage politics, has been considered the reason behind women's relatively poor legislative record from 1996 to 2006 (Goetz 2002; Tamale 1999; Tripp 2006). This was related in particular to the use of electoral colleges to elect women district representatives prior to 2006 (Goetz 2002; Tamale 1999). Uganda thus constitutes a likely case of finding gender differences in speech activity, at the same time that its quota design enables a comparison of gendered versus quota effects.

The incumbent, President Museveni, and the NRM have currently ruled Uganda for more than 25 years. During what is known as the Movement years (1986–2006), a so-called 'no-party system' was established. Under this system, candidates were elected individually, with political parties being prohibited from participating. Partly as a result of this, political parties in Uganda are generally weak, although the dominant NRM has a more elaborate political organisation and greater capacity than the opposition parties (Kiiza et al. 2008). A multiparty system was reintroduced quite unexpectedly in 2005, yet Uganda still qualifies as hybrid regime with excessive power concentration in the executive (Tripp 2010). A simple plurality majority electoral system is utilised for the directly elected seats at the national level. Female district quota representatives in parliament are elected by universal suffrage at the district level in separate elections for women.

The Speaker or Deputy Speaker presides over parliamentary proceedings, regulates debates, and controls the speakers' list. Any MP wishing to speak must 'catch the Speaker's eye' by standing or half standing and may take the floor only if called to do so by the Speaker. Although MPs formally are free to take the floor, within the NRM in particular loyalty is rewarded and there are effective informal mechanisms of sanction such as withdrawal of party support in elections.

Plenary sessions are 'on the record' and subject to quite broad press coverage. This means that MPs may direct their speeches at different audiences. Plenary proceedings are covered by both radio and television channels. There is a press gallery in the parliamentary chamber and various modes of parliamentary outreach. All the same, there is still relatively low awareness of legislative work in Uganda (Humphreys and Weinstein 2012: 2–3).

Data, Variables and Method

The dataset applied is constructed from transcripts of parliamentary debates (the Parliamentary Hansards) spanning a ten-year period, allowing for a unique longitudinal perspective. The sample size is relatively large, including a total of 2954 observations. The dependent variable is operationalised as the total number of lines contributed by each representative in transcripts from plenary debates per year. This variable reveals how well-placed MPs are to pursue their interests and to influence the legislative process. Active debaters are in most circumstances better positioned to advance their concerns. The variable is not intended to capture what issues MPs dedicate their time to in the plenary nor does it capture the quality or substance of performance.

To evaluate the hypotheses, the model build starts with a simple unconditional linear growth model as a base. It is gradually expanded on in multiple steps by adding explanatory

variables at the respective levels in a mixed effects model. The lowest level (level 1) variables are time-variant and include variables accounting for MPs' experience in parliament, mode of election, and positional power held. The highest level (level 2) variables are time-invariant. Variables falling into this category are gender, regional belonging, party membership, age, an aggregate variable for experience, and a dummy for the introduction of a multiparty system. The number of measurements is not the same for all MPs and there is also turnover among the MPs since the data cover two elections (2001 and 2006).

The subsequent analyses are run with the 'vce robust' option in Stata to correct for heteroskedasticity and ensure robust standard deviations (Wooldridge 2006). Correlation in the residual structure is expected in time-series data and an unstructured covariance matrix is therefore specified. The growth curve models are fit using maximum likelihood estimation, and the deviance statistic is used as an indication of how well the models fit the data. Standard fit indices like the Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) and Schwarz's Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) are also used to compare the models.

Growth curve analysis allows for causal heterogeneity and the possibility that effects may change over time. In this study each MP in the dataset has a separate growth curve. Of importance are differences across gender in verbal activity (and the development of this relationship over time), as well as intra-group disparities among women. The empirical analysis is structured according to the following logic: first the *trend* in MPs' speech is examined to establish how much the speech level of male and female MPs change over time. Second, whether there are any gendered differences and *variation* in the trend of MPs' speech is investigated. The final part of the analysis concerns what intra-individual (level 1) and inter-individual (level 2) predictors *account* for variation in how much MPs talk, with specific focus on gender-related effects.

Plenary Speech Activity in the Ugandan Parliament

Broken down according to gender, the summary statistics for the dependent variable shows that contrary to expectations, female legislators on average speak more than their male counterparts in the plenary proceedings, but the difference is modest and not significant according to a simple t-test.[1] As the maximum number of lines spoken is considerably higher for male than for female MPs, this most likely indicates that there are a few male MPs who take the floor more than anyone else.

To further investigate MPs' speech patterns, a base unconditional linear growth model for speech level is compared to a polynomial quadratic model accounting for curvilinearity, and it is found that the latter is a better fit. Results are reported in Table 1 (Models 1 and 2). The linear model indicates that MPs are getting more active as they acquire more experience and reveals considerable variation in how much MPs speak already at the beginning of the time period. The MPs have different starting points, and this in turn affects their later speech trajectories. Legislators that talk a lot at the outset increase their activity level faster than their fellow MPs. One interpretation is that personal qualities, like being an extrovert or introvert, is important. Other explanations relate to educational and previous political experience.

Having established that the shape of the growth curves are nonlinear over time and varies with experience the next step is to evaluate the hypotheses by identifying what account for how much parliamentarians speak during plenary sessions by examining predictors of change and cross-level interactions.

Table 1

Growth models for change in how much MPs speak in plenary debates (Models 1–3)

Fixed effects	Model 1 + linear/rand coef		Model 2+ quadratic		Model 3 + level 1 var	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Level 1						
Intercept	234.71	16.47	152.62	18.11	224.37	37.55
Experience	18.05*	5.13	102.27*	10.07	101.40*	10.35
Experience^2			−11.93*	1.22	−11.94*	1.24
Position					−89.78*	29.25
Mode of election					7.11	33.20
Random effects	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE	Variance Component	SE
Intercept	242.46	16.87	231.20	16.70	230.72	17.39
Experience	63.14	4.95	62.96	4.97	63.35	5.08
Level 1 residual	408.65	6.11	402.17	6.03	407.41	6.20
Corr exper_interc	0.358		0.47	0.128	0.47	0.13
Model fit						
Deviance	199.42		93.34		9.35	
Parameters	6		7		9	
AIC	44808		44717		43303	
BIC	44844		44759		43357	

Note: *Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level.

No systematic differences are found between female MPs and their male counterparts in terms of speaking when adding the inter-individual predictor of gender (Model 4, Table 2). This effectively counters the expectation that male MPs are more active in plenary proceedings than female MPs (Hypothesis 1). This aligns with the previously conducted t-test. There is, however, significant cross-level interaction between experience and gender indicating that time-trends in speech quantity differ across women and men (see Model 5, Table 2). As seen in Figure 1, the speech trajectory for male legislators increases at a less steep rate than for female legislators. This reflects that female MPs speak more initially and thus have steeper growth trajectories than their male counterparts.

Intriguingly, the effect of positional power on speech level also varies with gender, but not as expected according to Hypothesis 2 (see Table 2 and Figure 2). High-power women talk for a longer amount of time than any other group in parliament. Explanations such as fear of backlash therefore do not seem to hold in Uganda. The negative significance attained for the interaction between position and gender (both individually and when tested collectively) confirms that there are relevant differences and that gender has a moderating effect. Female frontbenchers have a consistently higher level of speech than male frontbenchers as well as backbenchers of both sexes. This means that a limited group of women speak a lot, while the bulk of female MPs together with male backbenchers make up the least active segment in terms of speech activity. It is to be expected that holding leadership positions results in longer speaking times (the intra-individual predictor of position is significant, see Model 3, Table 1), but the considerable disparity in speech quantity between female and male leaders is striking. Gender moderates the effect of positional power, but in seemingly different directions: for female frontbenchers the effect is positive, while the effect for female backbenchers is negative.

The results reported in Model 3 (Table 1) imply that whether one is a quota district seat representative or elected to parliament on a non-quota seat does not significantly affect
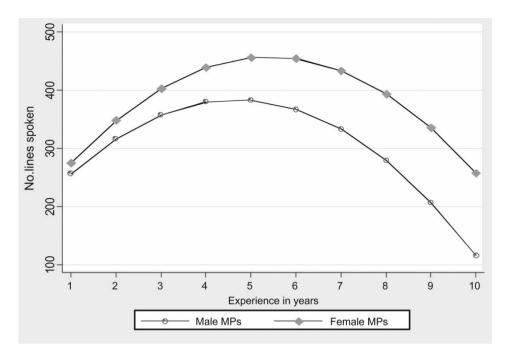
Table 2

Growth models for change in how much MPs speak in plenary debates (Models 4–5)

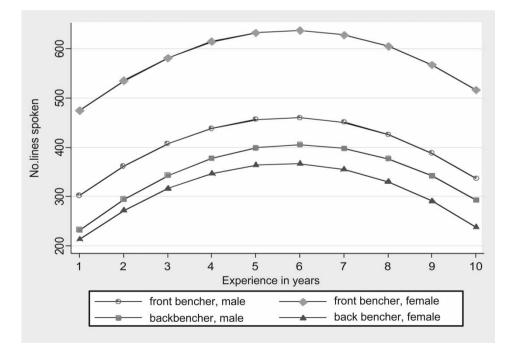| Fixed effects	Model 4 + level 2 variables		Model 5 + Interaction	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Level 1				
Intercept	116.49	89.24	120.33	43.33
Experience	91.27*	10.60	87.47*	10.69
Experience^2	−9.45*	1.38	−8.06*	1.49
Position	−73.43*	29.89	−18.52	34.64
Mode of election				
Level 2				
Party m'ship	−93.72*	42.27	−21.58	48.41
Experience (agg)	2.54*	1.12	3.27*	1.06
Female	20.52	36.29	178.08*	62.03
Age	1.56	1.64		
Multipartysystem	−10.66	40.55		
Cross-level				
Exper*Gender				
Position*Gender			−209.75*	64.15
Exper*Party m'ship			−19.29**	9.71
Random effects	Variance Component	SE	Variance Component	SE
Intercept	227.92	17.43	228.55	17.30
Experience	62.10	5.07	61.65	5.03
Level 1 residual	406.51	6.19	405.77	6.17
Corr exper_interc	0.45	0.13	0.42	0.13
Model fit				
Deviance	26.02		14.54	
Parameters	13		13	
AIC	43284		43271	
BIC	43362		43348	

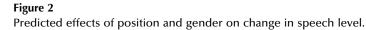**Note**: *Significant at the 1% level. **Significant at the 5% level.

speech level in plenary proceedings, in this way disproving Hypothesis 3. Quota recipients do not speak less than men and women elected from open seats (the intra-individual predictor for mode of election is not significant). As quota MPs are female this effectively counters common arguments against gender quotas, namely that quota representatives contribute less in parliament and that a reserved seat quota may create a two-tiered system of legislators, where quota MPs take the backseat. There is no evidence of this based on these data. Within level interactions between gender and party membership were tested but did not attain significant results, adding further support to this notion. The effect of party does not operate differently for male and female MPs in parliament, indicating that there is no reason to believe that female MPs are more loyal to the party line than male MPs. While membership in the NRM is significantly and highly negatively correlated with the average number of lines spoken by MPs, a possible explanation is the formalisation of a dominant party system and the imposition of strict party discipline, particularly within the ranks of the ruling party. Perhaps related to this, the reintroduction of a multiparty system in advance of the 2006 general elections is negatively, but not significantly, associated with how much parliamentarians speak.

Figure 1
Predicted speech level by gender and experience.

Figure 2
Predicted effects of position and gender on change in speech level.

Conclusion

This article seeks to provide insights into how gender and gender quotas affect MPs' speech behaviour during plenary sessions in the Ugandan parliament. Drawing on a diverse set of literatures focused on women's representation, as well as legislative and speech behaviour, three hypotheses about MPs' speech level in plenary proceedings are developed. The analyses are conducted using a unique dataset constructed from transcripts of plenary debates covering a ten-year period.

Uganda constitutes a 'most likely case' of finding gender differences in MPs' verbal activity, yet at first glance, the study's most interesting findings with respect to gender are in fact what it does not find. Female and male MPs do not display significantly different speech trajectories on the floor of the House, defying expectations based on social role theory. This finding could imply that over time the pervasive culture of masculinity within parliament has been transformed and become more conducive to women. This could be because gender bias in cultural practices may be challenged as more women representatives enter parliament (Chaney et al. 2007; Childs 2004b; Freedman 2002). Alternatively, women may have adapted by adopting a masculine style of politics (Childs 2004a).

Interestingly, women in leadership positions speak more than their male counterparts on the floor of parliament rather than less. Female leaders demonstrate the highest verbal activity level in parliament and have steeper growth trajectories than their male counterparts. Why women in leadership positions outperform male leaders in parliament is puzzling. Possible explanations could relate to female MPs having become more organised than male counterparts in advance of chamber sessions (Wang 2013).

Finally, in contrast to expectations put forward in the quota literature (see, for example, Bauer 2008a; Goetz 2003; Gosh 2003), mode of election to parliament does not significantly influence speech activity in parliament. Female quota recipients do not speak less than other MPs in parliament. This pattern is consistent with previous research which has found that female quota representatives in Uganda are not less qualified than their non-quota counterparts (Josefsson 2014; O'Brien 2012). Furthermore, this lack of difference between quota and non-quota MPs could indicate that the former are not more prone to manipulation and relegation to subordinate status in parliament. This notion is further supported by the fact that the effect of party on speech activity does not operate differently for male and female MPs.

Altogether, the findings show that women parliamentarians in Uganda are well-positioned to influence policy-making in parliament. They are decidedly not marginalised or 'tokens' in the sense of being invisible and passive in legislative debates. The possibility remains, however, that they are excessively loyal to the ruling party. In this respect, however, female MPs are not expected to be better or worse than their male counterparts.

The findings in this article point to a variety of new directions for future research. One would be to analyse various quantitative indicators of debate influence and acknowledged presence (see Clayton et al. 2014) (both in the plenary and parliamentary committees). Thus far, most studies of MPs' verbal behaviour have been carried out in Western Europe and North America in contexts where quotas do not exist or are voluntarily adopted by political parties. More studies are required in contexts with reserved seats in order to better understand the effects of quotas and gender on MPs' agency. Since the great majority of such quota policies have been adopted in non-Western countries, this broadens the empirical focus of the literature and may pave the way for more rigorous comparative analyses.

NOTE

1.   The t-statistic is -0.8798 and the corresponding two-tailed p-value is 0.3791.

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