



## Recipient of the 2011 LAPOP Best Paper Award

### Executive Summary

#### *Gender Quotas and Women's Political Participation in Latin America*

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**For more information on the Best Paper Award, and to read the full paper, please see the AmericasBarometer website,**

**[www.AmericasBarometer.org](http://www.AmericasBarometer.org).**

*Note: The analysis in this paper is based on data from the AmericasBarometer of the Latin American Public Opinion Project at Vanderbilt University; the data can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>. Funding for the 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Other important sources of support were the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University. The opinions and analysis in this paper are the sole responsibility of the author, and do not represent the conclusions of the Latin American Public Opinion Project or the U.S. Agency for International Development.*

In 1991, Argentina became the first country in the world to pass a law that would require all political parties running candidates for the Chamber of Deputies to include women in at least 30% of the list positions on party ballots. Since that time, over 30 countries in the world have passed similar laws or constitutional amendments for national legislative elections—14 of them in Latin America.<sup>1</sup> Although gender quotas are specifically designed to increase women's representation in politics, quotas could have much broader consequences. They may shape the kinds of women elected to office and what they do once there (Murray 2010), increase the legitimacy of government both internationally and domestically (Dahlerup 2006; Krook 2009), improve the image that female citizens have of government (Kittilson 2005; Vincent 2004), and more generally, serve to promote women's equality in society. As of yet, however, little empirical evidence exists to support or refute these claims. In this paper, I focus specifically on the question of whether gender quotas not only increase women's representation in national legislatures but may offer a partial solution to women's marginalization in mass political participation.

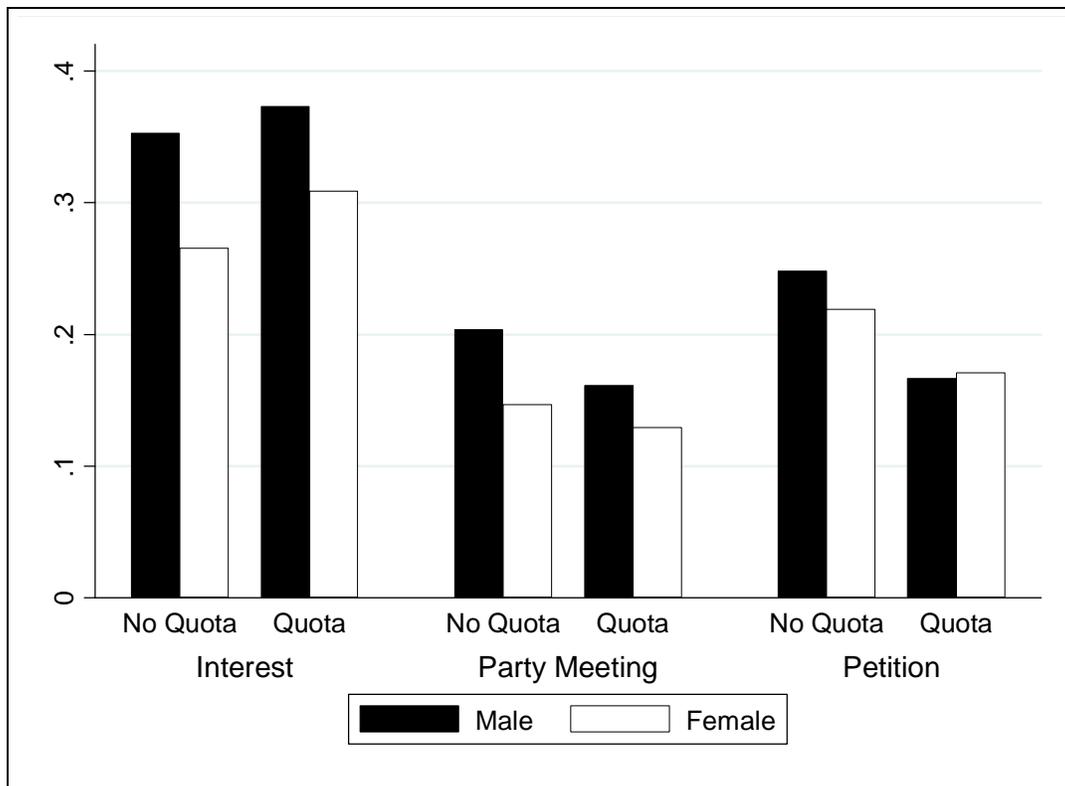
I argue that gender quotas symbolize a more legitimate and inclusive political system, are an example of women-friendly policies, and can mobilize women during the quota adoption process, all of which could lead to greater political participation by women and smaller gender gaps in political activity. I find, however, that gender quotas have only minimal effects on mass participation. I produce these findings with a cross-national statistical analysis of the relationship between gender quotas and the gender gap using the Americas Barometer 2010 survey data in 24 countries, and a case study of the differences between men's and women's participation before and after the adoption of a gender quota in the most recent Latin American country to pass such a law—Uruguay. On April 3, 2009, Uruguay joined eleven other Latin American countries with passage of a law that mandates gender quotas.

In the region-wide analysis of nine different forms of political participation, I find that quotas only mediate the gender gap in three areas—political interest, attending party meetings, and petitioning government officials—and those effects are small and of only borderline statistical significance. Figure 1 shows the predicted probabilities for men and women generated from a statistical model accounting for a range of alternative explanations for political participation. The gender gap is predicted to be smaller in countries with quotas, but that change is clearly small. No significant decreases occur in any of the other six forms of political participation—voting, persuading others to vote, working for a political campaign, protesting, attending a local government meeting, and attending women's group meetings.

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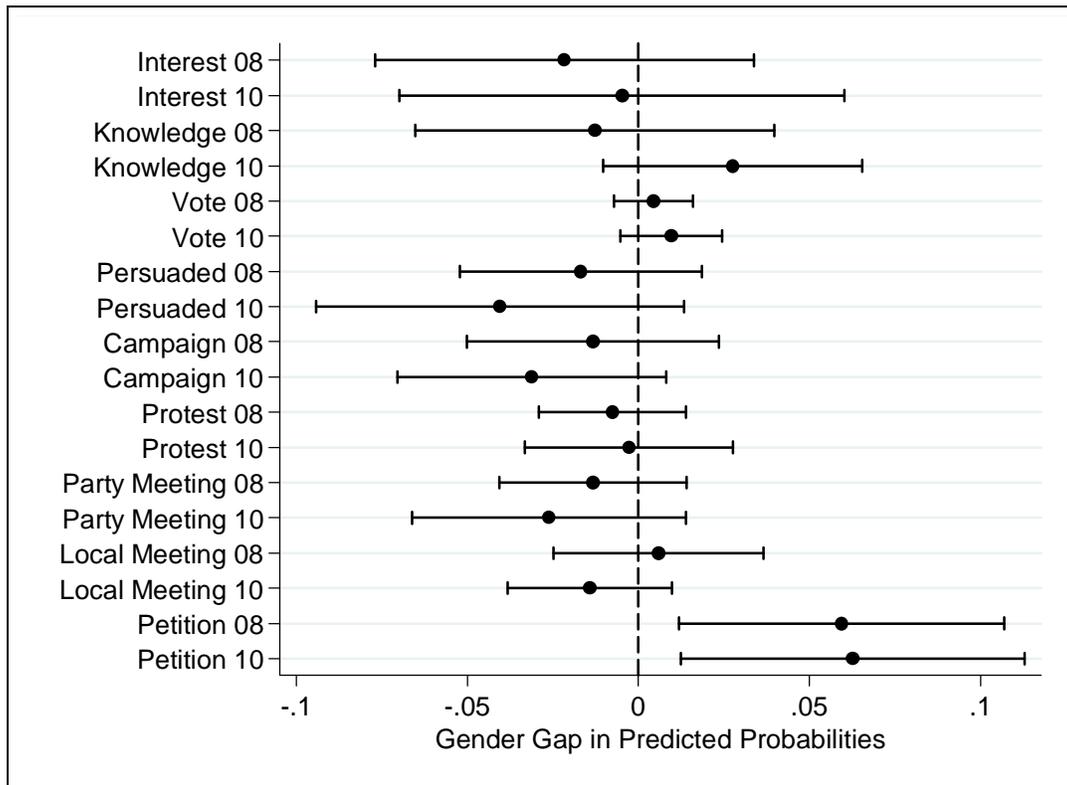
<sup>1</sup> Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela (eliminated in 1999).

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**Figure 1: Predicted Probabilities for Men's and Women's Political Participation in Latin America**

In the Uruguay analysis, I find even less evidence of quotas mediating gender gaps in political participation. Using data from the 2008 and 2010 Americas Barometer survey of Uruguay, I estimate the effect of being female on nine different forms of political participation and find no statistically significant changes after the adoption of quotas in 2009. Figure 2 shows the predicted probabilities for the size of the gender gap in each form of political participation from the 2008 and 2010 models, all else equal. The only gender gaps that are statistically different from zero are those for petitioning government officials in both 2008 and 2010. And, in both cases, the model predicts that women will be more likely to petition the government than men. More importantly, however, the estimates for the predicted gender gaps are very similar in 2008 and 2010 for most political activities. The largest change is in political knowledge where women were slightly less knowledgeable than men in 2008 and slightly more knowledgeable in 2010. Neither this change nor any of the others are statistically significant.



**Figure 2: Gender Gap in Predicted Probabilities for Political Participation in Uruguay**

Note: Predicted probabilities generated from multivariate logit models holding all other variables at their means.

In sum, gender quotas have done exactly what they are designed to do in many countries—increase women’s representation in elected office. Their benefits for women, however, do not extend to the masses.