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The Nexus between Women's Gender Quotas and Political Representation: A Comparative Analysis of South Africa and Rwanda

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Introduction

Over the last century, significant strides have been made in women's political representation, with countries like Rwanda and South Africa leading the way in increasing female participation in national legislatures. Rwanda, for instance, achieved 68% female representation in 2020, the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, while South Africa ranks amongst the top ten globally with 41.5% representation in its lower house. The success of these countries emphasises the importance of legislative reforms, including gender quotas, in fostering women's political participation. Gender quotas, along with the support of civil society and state institutions, play a crucial role in challenging gender biases and promoting gender equality in politics.

The political effectiveness of women is closely linked to their ability to articulate and politicise issues that affect them, advocating for policies that promote gender equality and hold decision-makers accountable. As Goetz (2003) argues, women's political effectiveness is contingent upon the relationship between voice, accountability, and representation. In South

Africa and Rwanda, women's inclusion in political processes has been facilitated by gender quotas and the empowerment of civil society movements. These movements have been instrumental in pushing for legislative reforms and advocating for women's rights, shaping the political agenda in both countries. However, despite these advances, challenges persist in ensuring that women have the political influence to shape policies that directly address gender inequality.

South Africa and Rwanda serve as valuable case studies for understanding the relationship between gender quotas and women's political representation. While both countries have made remarkable progress, particularly through constitutional gender quotas and political reforms, challenges remain in fully integrating gender equality into political decision-making. The representation of women in leadership positions does not always translate into significant influence over policies related to women's rights and gender emancipation. To further enhance women's political representation, both countries must focus on strengthening women's political influence, addressing patriarchal structures, and ensuring that gender equality is a core component of all political decisions. The lessons learned from these nations can provide valuable insights for other countries seeking to promote gender equality in politics.

Feminist Political Economic Theory

The Feminist Political Economic Theory focuses on the lived experiences of gender and aims to clarify the factors that determine and influence gender dynamics in social and political relationships. It is not just concerned with the inclusion of women but emphasises the need for an equitable distribution of power and resources. This theory allows for intersectional analysis, exploring how gender, along with other systems of power like class and race, interact and affect various groups in society. Feminist political economy approaches, as seen in the work of scholars like Dorothy Smith, argue that many issues that women face stem from cultural, intellectual, and political frameworks that have historically been shaped by male

perspectives, often excluding the voices of marginalised groups (Pritlove et al., 2019; Bezanson & Luxton, 2006).

Feminist Political Economy Theory examines the role of politics in everyday life, specifically how gender, class, and race are shaped by institutions such as states, markets, households, and transnational activism. The theory is crucial in understanding the need for women's inclusion and empowerment, advocating for a fairer distribution of power and resources. While this theoretical framework has been applied in some research studies, there is a gap in the literature, highlighting the need for further exploration of feminist political economy in various contexts. This study used a qualitative desk research method, employing document analysis of secondary data from peer-reviewed journals and academic sources, to examine patterns and themes relevant to the feminist political economy framework (Wagner et al., 2012).

Women's Historical and Current Representation and Participation in South Africa

Apartheid, a racially segregated system enforced in South Africa in 1948, was a manifestation of white supremacy that institutionalised racial and gendered hierarchies, with non-white South Africans facing systemic disadvantages (Jaga et al., 2018a). The apartheid regime's policies not only enforced racial separation but also perpetuated colonialism and patriarchy, ensuring that the white minority held economic and political power. Black men, for instance, were confined to unskilled labour in rural areas, leading to the disruption of family structures and reinforcing gender and racial inequalities. These policies significantly shaped South Africa's socio-economic landscape, embedding disparities that persist today (Jaga et al., 2018b).

Women played an important role in resisting apartheid, often through peaceful protests and collective action. Seripe (2022) highlights that South African women, across racial lines, united through various organisations to challenge apartheid. One notable figure was Charlotte Manye Maxeke,

who orchestrated anti-pass protests in the early 20th century and led a deputation to the Prime Minister in 1918, advocating for women's rights (Makana, 2019)). Another key event in the history of women's resistance was the 1950 protest against the Urban Areas Act, where women from diverse backgrounds gathered at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, demonstrating their unity against apartheid (Seripe, 2022).

Activists such as Dorothy Nyembe and Fatima Meer further advanced the struggle for women's rights and social justice during apartheid. Nyembe's leadership in organising protests, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, showcased the resilience of women in the fight against apartheid, culminating in her arrest in 1963 (Seripe, 2022). Nyembe's involvement in several movements, including the ANC Women's League and *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, emphasises women's integral role in the anti-apartheid struggle (Boatman, 2020). Similarly, Fatima Meer's establishment of the Black Women's Federation focused on addressing issues such as housing, human rights, and education, contributing to the broader movement for women's rights and equality (Seripe, 2022). These efforts helped to increase women's economic participation, with 32% of women involved in the workforce by 1960 (Seripe, 2022).

Post-apartheid, South Africa made strides towards gender equality, although challenges persist. The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1994 marked a new phase in the country's democratic transformation, where gender equality became a central focus (Seripe, 2022). Key milestones included the appointment of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka as the first female deputy president in 2005 and her later role as Executive Director of UN Women (Onditi & Odera, 2021). Despite significant progress, South African women continue to face challenges such as unemployment, violence, and poverty, but they persist in overcoming barriers and advocating for their rights (South African Government, 2009). The ongoing evolution of women's political representation, such as the 46% female representation in the Cabinet, demonstrates the growing role of women in shaping South Africa's democratic future (Seripe, 2022).

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Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has made substantial progress in increasing the political participation of women. This has been largely driven by policy changes, legislative reforms, and the establishment of organisations dedicated to advocating for women's rights (Ofusori, 2021). South Africa's commitment to gender equality, as enshrined in its Constitution, has fostered an environment conducive to female political representation. Despite these advances, challenges remain in ensuring that women are adequately represented in the political arena, and ongoing reforms are essential to fully realise gender equality in the country's governance.

As of 2021, women constitute 51.2% of South Africa's population (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). This demographic reality emphasises the growing need for female political representation. South Africa's political system, based on a proportional representation (PR) model, has significantly increased the number of women in the National Assembly. In 2021, women represented approximately 46% of the National Assembly, with 36% in the National Council of Provinces (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). These figures position South Africa amongst the top countries globally for gender parity in parliament, ranking tenth in the world and third in Africa.

This increase in women's representation can be attributed to the PR system, which has facilitated a more inclusive political landscape. The flexibility of PR enables political parties to create candidate lists that reflect the diversity of the population, including women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). However, while South Africa has made remarkable strides in achieving gender equality in parliament, challenges persist, particularly regarding the direct accountability of political representatives to their constituents and the influence of party politics.

South Africa operates on a five-year electoral cycle, where members of parliament (MPs) are elected through a PR

system. In this system, MPs are appointed from party lists rather than being directly elected by constituencies. While this model has increased women's representation by allowing political parties the flexibility to nominate women candidates, it has also led to concerns about the accountability of MPs to their voters (Sibalukhulu, 2012). MPs in South Africa are often bound to their party, which can lead to a disconnect between the representatives and the people who they are meant to serve. This is particularly problematic for women, whose specific needs and concerns may be sidelined in party-driven agendas.

Despite the advantages of the PR system, such as ensuring the representation of smaller parties and diverse candidates, it has significant limitations, particularly in terms of accountability. The PR system prioritises party loyalty over direct accountability to constituents, which can undermine effective governance and responsiveness. This dynamic is particularly problematic for women, as party politics often take precedence over addressing the specific issues of the broader electorate, including women's concerns. A potential solution to this challenge is the adoption of an open-list system, where voters can influence the ranking of candidates on party lists, giving them more control over the selection of their political representatives. Additionally, a constituency-based electoral system could enhance accountability by ensuring that MPs are directly elected by geographic constituencies, aligning political representatives more closely with the needs of voters.

In South Africa, gender-sensitive legislation has played a crucial role in addressing women's issues, particularly gender-based violence (GBV). In 2021, the National Assembly passed two significant GBV bills aimed at strengthening protection for women. However, the implementation and enforcement of these laws remain significant challenges caused by societal attitudes, resource allocation, and the effectiveness of law enforcement. Political parties in South Africa have a central role in shaping women's representation through the party list system, which allows for gender parity. However, party politics can sometimes overshadow the needs of individual citizens, including women, especially when the inclusion of women on party lists is driven

more by political considerations than by a genuine commitment to gender equality. The lack of direct accountability between MPs and their constituents further complicates efforts to ensure that women's concerns are adequately addressed.

To address these concerns, there is a growing call for electoral reforms that would allow for greater accountability and more direct representation of women in politics. Implementing a constituency-based system would allow MPs to be directly accountable to their voters, which could increase the responsiveness of political representatives to women's issues. Furthermore, an open-list system, where voters can influence the ranking of candidates on party lists, would empower women to play a more active role in the electoral process and in shaping political agendas (Chukwuemeka, 2020).

Prominent women in South African politics have played an important role in advocating for gender equality and women's rights. Figures such as Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who served as the Minister of Health and later as the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and Baleka Mbete, former Speaker of the National Assembly, have made significant contributions to the political landscape in South Africa. Their leadership has helped to pave the way for greater female participation in politics, setting an example for future generations of women leaders.

Furthermore, the establishment of women's organisations, such as the African National Congress (ANC) Women's League, has provided a platform for advocating for the rights and interests of women in South Africa's political system. These organisations have been instrumental in promoting policy reforms aimed at addressing gender inequality and ensuring that women's voices are heard in the political process.

Women's Historical Representation and Participation in Rwanda

The Rwandan Genocide of 1994, a catastrophic ethnic conflict primarily between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority, resulted in the mass killing of approximately 800,000 people,

predominantly Tutsis. The genocide, which began in Kigali and quickly spread across Rwanda, was fuelled by long-standing ethnic tensions and intensified by the political mobilisation of local officials who incited violence. The conflict not only caused widespread loss of life but also led to a massive displacement crisis, with millions of refugees fleeing the violence. The Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) military intervention aimed to end the genocide but could not undo the immense devastation (History.com, 2022).

Since the 1994 genocide, Rwanda has experienced a remarkable transformation, emerging as a model of gender equality, with women playing a central role in the nation's reconstruction. The genocide left a devastating impact, with women making up 70% of the remaining population, and many of them took on leadership roles in rebuilding the country. Today, Rwanda boasts the highest percentage of women in parliament globally, with women holding 64% of the parliamentary seats. This achievement is a direct result of the active involvement of women in political leadership and grassroots efforts to address the country's critical issues, such as education, health, and family life. The shift towards women's leadership was supported by male and female leaders, recognising women's resilience in the post-genocide era.

Prominent figures, such as Eugenie Mukeshimana, Chantal Kayitesi, Odette Nyiramilimo, Christine Tuyisenge, and others, have been instrumental in advocating for women's rights and gender equality in Rwanda's recovery process. Mukeshimana's survival story highlighted the resilience of Rwandan women, while Kayitesi's efforts to support widows and orphans and advocate for sexual violence as a crime against humanity played a significant role in Rwanda's legal recovery. Nyiramilimo, Tuyisenge, and other women in leadership positions helped to shape Rwanda's policies, focusing on gender-based violence, women's rights, and social welfare. Their contributions have been vital in the country's progress towards gender equality and in positioning Rwanda as a global leader in women's political representation.

Rwanda's journey towards gender equality has not been without challenges, as the deeply ingrained patriarchal system continued to exert influence over the country's history. However, through policies such as the National Gender Policy and efforts to involve men and boys in promoting gender equality, Rwanda has made significant strides in closing the gender gap. The implementation of such policies reflects Rwanda's commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or disability. As Rwanda continues to refine its policies, particularly in areas such as girls' education and gender-based violence, the country's relentless drive for improvement remains at the heart of its development vision, creating an example for others to follow in achieving gender equality and inclusive leadership.

Analysis of Shared Approaches and Lessons on Gender Quotas in Political Representation in South Africa and Rwanda

Gender Quotas in South Africa and Rwanda

Gender quotas have played a central role in increasing women's political representation in South Africa and Rwanda, two countries that have made significant strides in advancing gender equality in politics. Although these nations differ in their historical and political contexts, their adoption of gender quotas has resulted in notable progress, with Rwanda emerging as a global leader in female political representation. This analysis explores the gender quota systems in South Africa and Rwanda, highlighting their impact and the lessons that can be drawn from each country's experience.

Rwanda is widely regarded as a model for gender equality in political representation, with women holding an unprecedented 63.8% of the seats in the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies as of 2021 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). This level of representation is the highest in the world, a feat largely attributed to the country's comprehensive gender quota system. The Rwandan government implemented a series of

quotas aimed at increasing women's political participation, including a constitutional provision that reserves 30% of seats in the national parliament and local government for women. Furthermore, the ruling RPF has adopted a 50/50 gender policy for its candidate lists, ensuring an equal number of men and women on the party's electoral lists (Morojele, 2016). The success of these measures is rooted in the political will of the government, which has prioritised gender equality as a cornerstone of national development.

In contrast, South Africa's approach to gender quotas has been less rigid, but it has still yielded substantial progress in women's political representation. South Africa's gender quota system is primarily party-driven, with the ANC leading the way in implementing a policy of gender parity on its candidate lists. The ANC's policy stipulates that at least one-third of its candidates for parliamentary seats must be women, which has significantly increased the number of women in South Africa's National Assembly (Morojele, 2016). As of the 2019 elections, women accounted for approximately 41.5% of the National Assembly seats, making South Africa one of the top countries globally in terms of female parliamentary representation (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). However, this progress has been tempered by the fact that other political parties in South Africa have not consistently adopted gender quotas, limiting the overall impact of the system on the national legislature (Hughes et al., 2019).

The differences in the implementation of gender quotas in Rwanda and South Africa emphasise the importance of political will and comprehensive policy design in achieving gender parity. Rwanda's constitutional quota system, coupled with the RPF's strict gender policy, has allowed for greater consistency in female political representation across the board. In contrast, South Africa's reliance on voluntary party quotas means that the gender balance in parliament is subject to the political priorities of individual parties, resulting in uneven progress across the political spectrum.

Despite these differences, both countries' experiences offer important lessons for other nations seeking to improve women's political participation. First, the example of Rwanda demonstrates that quotas must be accompanied by strong institutional support and political commitment. Rwanda's success is not just a product of its quota system but also the result of broader societal changes aimed at promoting gender equality in all spheres of life. Additionally, Rwanda's adoption of a 50/50 gender policy by its ruling party is an indication of how political leadership can drive systemic change (Morojele, 2016).

In South Africa, the lesson lies in the importance of consistent, party-wide implementation of gender quotas. While the ANC's efforts have contributed to significant gains in women's representation, the lack of quotas in other major political parties has hindered the country from achieving true gender parity in parliament. This suggests that for gender quotas to be fully effective, they must be adopted across all political parties to ensure that women are represented proportionately, regardless of party affiliation.

In summary, the gender quota systems in South Africa and Rwanda have been crucial in increasing women's political representation. Rwanda's comprehensive constitutional quotas, combined with a strong political commitment to gender equality, have led to the highest levels of female representation in the world. South Africa has also made significant progress, but the lack of a universal quota system across all political parties means that there is still room for improvement. Both countries offer valuable lessons in how gender quotas can be implemented to foster greater gender equality in political participation, with the need for sustained political will and the broader social transformation of gender norms being critical to their success.

Shared Approaches Used on Gender Quotas

South Africa and Rwanda have both implemented gender quotas as part of their broader efforts to promote gender equality in political representation. In Rwanda, the quota

system is constitutionally mandated, and the country has been widely recognised for its outstanding achievements in women's political participation. The Rwandan Constitution, adopted in 2003, stipulates that at least 30% of the seats in the lower and upper chambers of parliament must be occupied by women (Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, 2015). As a result, Rwanda boasts one of the highest percentages of female parliamentarians globally, with women holding 61.3% of the seats in the lower house of parliament as of 2021 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021).

Similarly, South Africa's gender quota system is implemented through its electoral laws. The country uses a proportional representation system, which includes a provision for gender parity within party lists. The South African Constitution enshrines the principle of gender equality, and political parties are encouraged to place women in winnable positions on their candidate lists. As a result, South Africa is ranked amongst the top countries in the world for women's political representation, with women holding 46% of the seats in the National Assembly in 2021 (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). These efforts are part of a broader commitment to gender equality in the post-apartheid era.

One shared feature of both countries' approaches is the emphasis on legislated quotas that ensure women's representation in political offices. These quotas have led to a significant increase in female representation in legislative bodies, creating opportunities for women to influence policy and decision-making processes in both countries. In Rwanda, the use of women's representation in local government and the national parliament has become a model for gender equality worldwide, while South Africa's focus on gender parity within political parties has been critical in ensuring that women can access leadership positions in government.

Effectiveness of Gender Quotas in Achieving Gender Parity

The effectiveness of gender quotas in achieving gender parity in political representation has been demonstrated in

South Africa and Rwanda, albeit with differing outcomes and challenges. Rwanda has achieved remarkable success in this area, with women currently holding 63.8% of the seats in its lower house, making it one of the highest in the world (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). This success is largely attributed to the country's strong commitment to gender equality, backed by the implementation of a 30% gender quota for women in parliament, which was later expanded to ensure 50/50 gender parity on political party candidate lists (Tripp et al., 2009). The political will demonstrated by the RPF, which mandates equal representation of men and women on candidate lists, has been critical to achieving these outcomes. The Rwandan model showcases the significant role of political leadership in driving gender parity through quotas, as well as the value of a proportional representation electoral system that ensures women's inclusion in governance.

In contrast, South Africa has made significant strides in increasing women's political representation, mainly through its adoption of gender quotas, but it still faces challenges in achieving full gender parity. The ANC, South Africa's ruling party, implemented a policy of gender quotas, requiring that at least 50% of candidates on party lists be women (Hughes et al., 2019). This has led to South Africa ranking 10th globally regarding women's representation in parliament, with women holding 41.5% of the seats in the National Assembly as of 2021 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). However, the effectiveness of the quotas has been tempered by challenges such as the marginalisation of women in senior political positions and the relatively low number of women in leadership roles within political parties (Morojele, 2016). The lack of gender parity in executive and ministerial positions highlights that quotas alone are insufficient without political will to ensure women's equal participation at all levels of governance.

While gender quotas have undoubtedly contributed to increased female representation in South Africa and Rwanda, the implementation and outcomes of these quotas have been shaped by different political and cultural contexts. Rwanda's success demonstrates the importance of political will and leadership

in ensuring gender equality in political representation. The country's high levels of women's political participation are a direct result of consistent efforts by the government to institutionalise gender equality. In contrast, South Africa's experience highlights that while quotas can increase the number of women in parliament, additional structural reforms and shifts in party dynamics are necessary to ensure that women achieve parity not just in terms of numbers but also in power and influence within political institutions. Therefore, the lessons from both countries emphasise the importance of integrating gender quotas with broader strategies for women's empowerment and political leadership development.

Electoral Systems and Broader Political Factors Influencing Gender Quotas in South Africa and Rwanda

South Africa and Rwanda both employ a closed party-list proportional representation (PR) electoral system, a model widely associated with high levels of women's representation in legislative bodies (Morojele, 2016). This system is designed to enable minority groups, including women, to gain more representation in national politics by allowing political parties to compile candidate lists and assign seats based on the proportion of votes each party receives. The PR system, according to Hughes et al. (2019), has been proven to be more beneficial for women's political participation compared to majoritarian electoral systems, which tend to perpetuate existing power dynamics and male-dominated political structures.

In South Africa, the PR system has played a critical role in increasing the number of women in parliament. According to recent figures, women make up approximately 46% of South Africa's National Assembly, making it one of the most gender-representative parliaments globally (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). However, the impact of this system is influenced by political parties' internal policies regarding the placement of women on candidate lists. The ANC, South Africa's dominant political party, has instituted a policy of gender quotas, which, at best, ensures that every third candidate on their list is a woman. Despite this, the overall representation of women in

South Africa lags that of Rwanda, where the PR system has resulted in women occupying 63.8% of parliamentary seats (Hughes et al., 2019).

Rwanda's higher level of female representation can be attributed to the combination of the PR system and strong political will, particularly within the ruling party, the RPF. The RPF has implemented a 50/50 gender policy on their candidate lists, ensuring a more balanced representation of women and men. This deliberate placement of women on candidate lists has significantly boosted female representation, far surpassing South Africa's achievement (Morojele, 2016). In contrast, South Africa's lack of consistent party-wide adoption of quotas by other major political parties has hindered the country from reaching similar levels of gender parity.

While the PR system is a crucial element in enhancing women's political participation, the key factor in both countries' success is the strategic placement of women candidates on party lists. The lesson from Rwanda is clear: the more stringent the gender quotas and the more committed the political leadership is to gender equality, the higher the level of women's representation in parliament. South Africa's experience, on the other hand, highlights the need for broader adoption of gender quotas across all political parties, as well as stronger political will to implement these measures.

In conclusion, the adoption of a closed-party list PR system is an effective means of increasing women's representation, but it must be coupled with a strong political commitment to ensure that women are placed strategically on candidate lists. Rwanda's success in achieving higher levels of female representation offers valuable lessons for South Africa and other countries seeking to enhance women's political participation. Political will and consistent quota implementation are essential to achieving gender equality in political representation, and these lessons should be central to ongoing reforms in South Africa's electoral system.

Lessons To Be Learnt

The experiences of South Africa and Rwanda in using gender quotas offer several important lessons for other countries seeking to increase women's political representation. One of the key lessons is the importance of strong political will and commitment at the highest levels of government. In Rwanda, the government's commitment to gender equality is evident in the legal framework and the broader political culture. The RPF, led by President Paul Kagame, has actively promoted women's participation in governance, with the government consistently prioritising gender equality in national development strategies (Burnet, 2012). This top-down approach has played a significant role in Rwanda's success.

South Africa's commitment to gender equality is similarly reflected in the post-apartheid constitutional framework, which guarantees equality for all citizens, including women. However, while the country has made significant strides in increasing women's representation in parliament, the impact of gender quotas has been somewhat limited by the political party system, which often prioritises party loyalty over direct constituency representation (Sibalukhulu, 2012). As a result, there is a need to further empower women within the party system and ensure that political structures are more accountable to the needs and concerns of women constituents.

A second lesson is creating a supportive environment for women in politics. In Rwanda, women have access to various forms of support, including mentorship programmes and leadership training, which have contributed to their success in political roles. These programmes have helped women build the skills and confidence necessary to participate effectively in governance. Similarly, South Africa has seen the establishment of networks and organisations to support women in politics, such as the Women's Parliament, which offers a platform for women to engage with political leaders and discuss issues of importance (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). Providing training and leadership development opportunities is crucial in

ensuring that women are not only present in politics but are also equipped to lead effectively.

Another lesson is the importance of intersectionality in designing and implementing gender quotas. In both countries, quotas have been instrumental in ensuring women's representation. Still, there is an ongoing challenge to ensure that the most marginalised women, such as those from rural areas, are adequately represented. In South Africa, the inclusion of women from different racial and social backgrounds has been a key focus, particularly in a country with a history of racial and economic inequality (Ofusori, 2021). Similarly, while Rwanda's gender quotas have largely been successful in increasing female representation, there is still room to address the intersectional challenges faced by women, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic minorities.

Finally, both countries demonstrate the importance of monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of gender quotas. In Rwanda, continuous assessments of the quota system's impact have ensured that women's political representation remains a priority, and adjustments have been made to improve the system. South Africa's Parliamentary Monitoring Group similarly emphasises the importance of tracking progress in achieving gender parity and ensuring that women's voices are heard in political decision-making (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). This process of evaluation and adjustment is essential for ensuring that gender quotas do not become a mere formality but lead to meaningful change.

The gender quotas implemented in Rwanda and South Africa offer valuable insights for other countries striving to improve women's political representation. While each country's approach has unique aspects, the shared focus on legislated quotas, political will, and creating supportive environments for women in politics has been fundamental to their success. Lessons drawn from these experiences emphasise the importance of strong political commitment, intersectionality, and continuous evaluation to ensure that gender quotas lead

to meaningful and sustained change. These lessons are crucial for enhancing women's political representation globally and ensuring that women are not only present in political spaces but are also empowered to lead and influence governance effectively.

The Way Forward: Addressing the Gaps in Women's Political Representation

While South Africa and Rwanda have made significant strides in increasing women's political representation, the work is far from complete. While beneficial in some respects, the country's electoral system still presents challenges to achieving full gender equality in politics. Reforms such as implementing a constituency-based system, open-list voting, and stronger mechanisms for holding MPs accountable to their constituents are necessary to ensure that women are not only represented but are also able to shape political decision-making actively.

Moreover, special attention must be given to ensuring that women from marginalised groups, including rural women, women with disabilities, and those from LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and others) communities, are adequately represented in the political process. As both countries progress, it is essential to continue pushing for reforms that will empower women to take on leadership roles and contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable political system.

Conclusion

This research has explored the nexus between women's gender quotas and political representation in South Africa and Rwanda, providing a comparative analysis of how each country has approached increasing female political participation. Both countries have made significant strides in improving the representation of women in political offices. Still, their strategies and the effectiveness of their gender quotas differ significantly, influenced by their unique historical, cultural, and political contexts.

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Rwanda's success in achieving gender parity in politics, exemplified by its global-leading representation of women in parliament, highlights the effectiveness of comprehensive constitutional quotas, strong political will and party-level commitment to gender equality. The Rwandan experience demonstrates that quotas, supported by institutional mechanisms and broader societal shifts, can lead to profound and sustained changes in women's political empowerment. The Rwandan model provides key lessons for other nations, particularly regarding the importance of a unified, top-down approach that includes legal mandates, party policies, and public awareness campaigns.

In contrast, South Africa's experience highlights the importance of voluntary quotas within political parties, most notably the ANC. While South Africa's approach has led to substantial gains in women's representation, the lack of consistent quotas across all political parties has resulted in a more uneven representation in parliament. The South African case emphasises the need for broader adoption of gender quotas across the political spectrum to achieve true gender parity. Additionally, the reliance on party politics rather than mandated constitutional quotas suggests that women's representation is susceptible to shifts in political priorities, which can undermine the sustainability of progress towards gender equality.

Ultimately, this research reveals that gender quotas can be a powerful tool for increasing women's political representation, but their effectiveness depends on a combination of factors: political will, the design of the quota system, and the broader socio-political environment. The experiences of South Africa and Rwanda offer valuable lessons for other nations seeking to improve women's political participation. It is clear that gender quotas alone are not sufficient to achieve gender parity in political representation; they must be part of a wider framework of legal, social, and political reforms that support the empowerment of women and challenge existing gender norms.

For future progress, countries aiming to enhance women's political representation must consider adopting more inclusive

and consistent quota systems, ensuring that gender equality in politics becomes a permanent feature of their democratic processes. Moreover, the focus should not only be on numerical representation but also on ensuring that women in political office have the power, support, and resources to influence policy and drive societal change. Through such comprehensive strategies, nations can move closer to achieving true gender equality in political representation.

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