Women's representation in local governance

A case study on the effects of quota implementation in Colombo, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

A qualitative case study set in Colombo, Sri Lanka focusing on women's representation in local governance. The essay follows the aftermath of the country's newly implemented electoral reform, which since 2018 resulted in a mixed-member-proportional electoral system with a gender quota. Throughout an extensive interview process with local politicians and experts alike, six barriers were identified – thus clarifying the link between descriptive and substantive representation, a theory based on Phillips' politics of presence. The following barriers were analysed: patriarchy, economic dependence, political literacy, corruption, quota design and nomination process. The result showed modest substantial evidence that the quota system had been successful other than descriptively, with reports of substantive representation as process, but not outcome. The conclusion also underlines how country-specific context is a major determinant to what extent quota implementation addresses widespread structural inequalities and underrepresentation of minority groups. On the other hand, the quota has only been in place for four years and its effects cannot be fully evaluated.

Key words: Sri Lanka, quota, electoral reform, women's substantive representation, politics of presence

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Table of contents

I would like to thank Crishni Silva
for opening the door to Sri Lankan politics.

1 Introduction

In 1960, Sri Lanka became the first country in the world to elect a female head of government (Vijeyarasa 2020 p. 1). However, despite early signs of political equality and behind Sri Lanka's so-called "facade of a progressive nation" (ibid.), hides a historical average of five percent in parliament and two percent in local government for women's numerical representation (WMC 2021, p. 12).

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Cultural context

Despite scoring well on health and education indexes for women, Sri Lanka is a highly patriarchal society with current literature describing how women in politics are constantly challenged by stereotypes and existing norms about a woman's role (Vijeyarasa 2020, p. 1-7). Something which is especially problematic with politics being a key space for women to be seen and heard; and having an impact on their daily lives and livelihoods (ibid. p. 2).

Entering the male-dominated public domain is considered culturally inappropriate as it shakes traditional gender dynamics (UNDP 2009, p. 19). With reports of violence, gendered favouritism and exclusion from discussions and decision-making processes, from political opponents, but also within their own party (Vijeyarasa 2020, p. 39, 42). Thus, women struggle in the face of patriarchal societal norms, partly due to an entrenched public-private dichotomy, as they are expected to only engage in the private sphere with so-called women's affairs (Tambiah 2003, p. 62). Patriarchal party culture and masculinised political space also question whether women's representation is sustainable in the long run.

1.1.2 Legislative context

Sri Lanka stands out from its South Asian neighbours as being one of the last countries to introduce a quota system for women's representation (Vijeyarasa 2020, p.1). However, after two decades of lobbying from women and women's organisations; a 25% women's quota was introduced for local government level and implemented in the last election of 2018. Since its implementation, women's

descriptive participation within local governance has increased considerably, from approximately 92 to 1991 seats across the country (WMC 2021, p. 5). Still its design and implementation has been criticised for being poorly drafted, raising doubts whether it encourages substantial change, especially in the short- and medium-term (Vijeyarasa 2020, p. 2)

Behind the quota's legislative design stands three electoral reforms made between 2012 to 2017 (Vijeyarasa 2020 p. 4-5). The firsst Local Authorities (Elections) Amendment Act No. 22 of 2012, changed Sri Lanka's election system from proportional representation (PR) to a hybrid model with both PR and First-past-the-post (FPTP) systems of election. Thus, parties now have to submit two lists; two separate nomination papers through the PR and FPTP system. The act also changed electoral divisions to territorially and demographically smaller wards.

The increase in voting units later resulted in more seats, with the The Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act, No. 1 of 2016 increasing the number of candidates by one third; leading to an increase from 6619 to 8825 seats throughout the country (Kodikara 2016, p. 14). An independent group was also added, meaning that individuals can come together and form their own lists (Jayasinghe 2022).

The last amendment, the Local Authorities Elections Act, No. 16 of 2017 clarifies the percentages, stating that at least 50 percent plus three candidates of the nomination paper for PR and 10 percent of the nomination paper for FPTP have to be women (Vijeyarasa 2020, p. 4). To fit the new political landscape, it also added that 40 percent of council members are to be elected through PR and 60 percent through FPTP. This implies that women can constitute more than 25 percent of the council. However, no less than 25% of elected members in each local authority have to be women members (ibid.).

1.2   Purpose and research question

There is an increasing amount of work on whether higher levels of women's representation lead to a different style of politics and nature of decision-making bodies (Devlin – Elgie 2008, p. 237). With contemporary research suggesting that higher numerical representation of women positively affects policy agenda but not policy outcome; meaning that it encourages the debate of 'women's interests', but not its bill passing. The above reasoning stipulates a link between descriptive, variations in the number of women elected, and substantive representation, effects of women's presence. Something that, according to Taylor-Robinson, deserves further research for the continued development in the field of gender and politics (2014, p. 8). However, current literature overlook countries in the Global South and Western-based work is assumed to bear validity and significance even in developing world contexts, "suggesting that the experience of women's representation is universal rather than context-specific" (Devlin – Elgie 2008, p.

251). This problem will thus be addressed in the case study by looking at the consequences of women's political presence in a developing country.

In Sri Lanka, as new female councillors are asserting their place in politics, it is essential to evaluate the newly introduced quota as a means to advance women's interests and rights (Vijeyarasa 2020, p. 2). This is also in line with Drude Dahlerup's criticism that research on quotas should also focus on its implementation and effect rather than just its introduction and design (Dahlerup 2006, p. 3-4). Furthermore, there is very little existing literature on Sri Lanka, leaving plenty of opportunities for research on the effects of increased women's representation in the country. Similarly, as put by the Sri Lankan organisation Women Media Collective – who played an active part in lobbying for the quota – winning "a quota might be half the battle" (WMC 2021, p. 4, 6), but ensuring women's rights to substantive representation is a constant challenge. It is therefore important to safeguard and evaluate Sri Lanka's newly implemented quota.

Unlike previous Sri Lankan studies focusing on women's entrance into politics, my research will empirically address whether the quota promotes a 'woman's perspective' and ensures representation of women's interests. I therefore take my point of departure from current research while at the same time making a contribution (Teorell – Svensson 2007, p. 18)l by answering the following research question:

 – To what extent does the Sri Lankan quota for women in local government promote substantive representation? What may be the barriers to its achievement?

1.3   Limitations and clarifications

Women are not all the same and contrary research risks essentialising women; something that has endured major criticism (Mansbridge 1999, p. 637). As women coming come from all corners of society – from different religions, ethnicities and classes to mention a few – it goes without saying that not all women vote for the same party and do not agree on all policies. Therefore, critics argue that researchers should give women more faces and characteristics to for example find out if it is only female elites who are successful in taking political action and what impact it has on who they represent. In other words, emphasising women's differences instead of similarities opens up a much more dynamic and unstudied research field (Taylor-Robinson 2014, p. 7).

Another intertextuality that is missing to clarify the connection between descriptive and substantive representation, is the impact of women's background for their political behaviour and representation. Here, empirical research can provide different results on the effectiveness of the link depending on whether you look at women only by gender distribution or on women who also belong to other

minorities (Taylor-Robinson 2014, p. 7). Lastly, the extent of women's differences makes gender research multifaceted and generalisations difficult (ibid.). Although a greater focus on intertextuality is suggested in order to fully ascertain the meaning of gender and representation, I have decided to remain within the limitations of this essay and it's time constraint and focus solely on gender distribution as a driving force for women's substantive representation.

2   Theory and previous research

Current literature describes how electoral quota systems are faced with three normative dilemmas in legitimacy and legality (Krook 2020, p. 202), with Krook et. al. pointing to how quotas (1) encourage affirmative action in the candidate selection process, thus questioning the very concept of equality (2) promote identities over ideas thus threatening democracy and (3) how it, in the name of political representation, only recognises some identities. However, with our traditional understandings, there is a consensus that we risk reinforcing prevailing patterns of exclusion without a quota and that it is more just to promote gender-balance in politics (Krook 2020, p. 202; Young 1990, p. 3).

2.1   Electoral quota systems

On average, women constitute 35 percent of representatives in local governments across the world (UN Women 2021, p. 5). This places women's representation in local government higher than in national parliaments with its 25 percent, but still not on equal terms with men. Following feminist criticism and campaigns, research has been largely focusing on the underrepresentation of parliaments and its slow and uneven cross-national progress. This has led to what is described as a "major knowledge gap" where the story of local governance participation remains untold; with UN Women stating that a more comprehensive narrative on local decision-making power is crucial for women's further political advancement (2021, p. 5). Fortunately, current research on women's political representation is showing a shift from national parliaments to local governments (ibid.)

Group-based quotas are increasingly being recognised around the world by both scholars and politicians as means to challenge the exclusion of marginalised groups through addressing gender bias in institutional settings (Franceschet 2008, p. 394; Vijeyarasa 2020, p. 5). Currently 130 countries have implemented a gender quota to encourage and guarantee the greater inclusion of women, whilst around 40 countries hold a quota based on other features such as nationality, ethnicity or religion (Krook – O'Brien 2010, p. 253). Despite this, very few countries have reached gender parity within local governance. However, quotas are still seen to have significant positive effects – especially in African and Asian countries where it has effectively disrupted the cycle of male-dominated political leadership (ibid.).

A growing number of women holding decision-making positions has awakened a new research area within the gender field where female political behaviour and its

effects are being highlighted (Höhmann 2020, p. 835). Research points out how the emergence of quotas stems from "the construction of 'relevant' political identities" with researchers identifying groups in need of descriptive representation (Mansbridge 1999, p. 628; Krook 2020, p. 198) and establishing empirical links between group identities and quota type. This suggests cross-cultural differences in which groups are considered to be politically salient and to what extent their representation is encouraged (Htun 2004, p. 439). Quota introduction and design is also affected by the institutional, cultural, economic and social context which impacts quota type as well as its success and failure – to what extent it addresses widespread structural inequalities and underrepresentation of minority groups.

Electoral gender quotas can be concretised as reserved seats, party quotas or legislative quotas. Reserved seats means setting aside places in political assemblies for women (Krook 2020, p. 198). An example of this system can be seen in Rwanda which has the highest political representation of women in the world (Devlin – Elgie 2008, p. 237). Party quotas and legislative quotas are the other two quota types which recognise the importance of descriptive representation. However, these two only address the candidate nomination process and not the proportion of women elected. Whilst party quotas means that parties voluntarily pledge to include a certain percentage of women, legislative quotas require – by law – that all parties nominate a certain share of women (Krook 2020, p. 199). An example of a party quota is the Swedish Social Democratic Party's zipper system from 1993 – where women and men are placed alternately on all party lists (Freidenvall 2005, p. 175). Lastly, previous research has found regional differences in which quota type countries adhere to as well as clustering around adoption time and time in history; all dictating quota type (Hughes et al. 2015). These findings suggest that countries learn from each other which is a positive indication to the importance of quota research and quota system's salience across borders and for minorities.

2.2 Descriptive and substantive representation

Academic literature proposes a much-used distinction between descriptive and substantive representation (Wängnerud 2009, p. 52). Descriptive representation concerns the composition of political assemblies in relation to the share of the general population, especially in regards to social characteristics such as gender. In other words, it deals with numeric representation of women or the proportion of seats belonging to women, with research mainly adhering to cultural explanations and the importance of gender-related values (Paxton – Kunovich 2003, p. 87). Whilst substantive representation looks at the promotion of group interests in policy making, thus the effects of women's presence in decision-making (Franceschet – Piscopo 2008, p. 393-396; Wängnerud 2009, p. 52). That can include everything from "eliminating violence against women, expanding reproductive rights and women's health, and advancing equality" to other non-discriminatory measures (Franceschet – Piscopo 2008, p. 397). The chain or link between descriptive and

substantive representation depicts the interplay between the two steps of the legislative process; elections and policy making (Wängnerud 2009, p. 66).

Research on descriptive representation is said to have matured and to be easily calculated, setting it apart from substantive representation; a less researched field as a result of only a few countries – historically – having a substantial number of women (Wängnerud 2009, p. 52). Substantive representation is regarded as a difficult theory to measure due to the unpredictability of how women's presence affect institutions and the uncertainty of the obstacles faced; resulting in the dependent variable being described as multifaceted or even diffuse (ibid.). However, some common suggestions are male-dominated networks and negative reactions towards women with Lovenduski arguing that long rooted culture of masculinity in political institutions is the biggest threat for women's political participation (2005, p. 52). Along with this, there are conflicting views within academia on what effects to expect from higher numerical representation of women – beyond the fact that gender has an impact. However, some scholars have tried to identify a certain numeric threshold or tipping point referred to as 'critical mass' from where women's substantive representation is said be seen. Some analysts cite between 15 to 20 percent, whereas others suggest 30 percent (Chaney 2006, p. 710). However, the literature suggests that there are no clear-cut effects and obstacles that are universal for women's representation, rather it is affected by time and space – suggesting that concepts such as women's interest and gender equality are contextual and can only be defined by the actual political sphere studied.

2.2.1 Politics of Presence

Substantive representation is long rooted in the concept of democracy, or what Phillips (1995) terms the 'politics of presence', whereby politicians act on the behalf of its constituents. Phillips believes that the presence of women is essential to promote women's interests, thus proposing a link between descriptive and substantive representation. One example is how inequalities in the labor market make women more interested in wage reforms or the fact that only women can carry children makes questions about safe births more important than that of a man. Other examples are sexual harassment, violence and the exclusion from economic or political power (Phillips 1995, p. 67-68).

In other words, Phillips' theory is built on the sociological assumption that men and women face different challenges in their everyday life and that women have certain policy interests in common (Wängnerud 2009, p. 57). For example, Western research shows that women are more active in social and permissive policies and affirmative action such as quota implementation (Heidar – Pedersen 2006, p. 192). As a result of these common experiences and policy preferences, women are better equipped to represent their own social group, the theory stipulates (Wängnerud 2009, p. 61). Moreover, the theory is based on the belief that equal rights to vote is

not enough to cover minorities' concerns; there must also be equality in decision-making positions.

However, the very existence of Politics of Presence theory has been disputed, with Phillips herself underlining the rigidity of political institutions as a factor disturbing the interconnection between descriptive and substantive representation; as political institutions do not change easily (Phillips 1995, p. 67-68). On the other hand there are still many accounts of female politicians acting on behalf of women as well as studies showing female politician and female constituents having similar policy priorities (Wängnerud 2009, p. 62)

2.2.2 The mandate and label effect

Fransceschet and Piscopo furthermore suggest two ways in which quotas affect attention to group interests, thus promoting or obstructing the link between descriptive and substantive representation. These are called the 'mandate effect' and the 'label effect' (Franceschet – Piscopo 2008, p. 393-396). The 'mandate effect' entails that women in political positions feel an obligation to act on behalf of women and promote women's interests. According to theory it is a result of arguments for new perspectives in policy making during prior quota campaigns (ibid). Whilst 'label effect' looks at the negative stereotypes and stigma directed towards quota women's capacity, particularly their autonomy and experience, which the women are received and regarded by (Franceschet – Piscopo 2008, p. 393-396). As a result of female legislators desire to distance themselves from the stigma, women avoid gendered policy areas such as social and family policy and health care, in order to be perceived as "serious politicians" (ibid.). Whilst the mandate effect is said to be a strong predictor for substantive representation, the label effect has a more contested impact (ibid. p. 403-404).

2.2.2 Substantive representation as process and outcome

To understand descriptive representation's relationship with substantive representation, Franceschet and Piscopo propose we look at the quotas' effect on substantive representation as *process* and *outcome* (2008, p. 393-397). Substantive representation as *process* revolves around women's capacity to affect the legislative agenda and whether gendered attitudes and preferences impact the issues represented. This "feminisation of the political agenda", can involve networking with female constituents, women's organisations and like-minded colleagues as well as bringing a gendered perspective in debates and advancing women's interest in introducing or supporting bills (ibid.). Substantive representation as *outcome* on the other hand looks at the legislative passing of women's rights laws. However, substantive representation as process does not necessarily result in substantive representation as *outcome* or a "feminisation of legislation" and vice versa (Franceschet – Piscopo 2008, p. 397, 400). Like any policy, its introduction tells us very little about its future success and looking at its outcomes tells us very little

about women's representation. Successful substantive representation can therefore be seen as a connection between action and change (ibid. p. 400).

3 Method and material

The method will entail a single qualitative case study focusing on women's representation in Sri Lanka's capital of Colombo. I chose a case study method as it allows for intense detailed research of an event such as the aftermath and monitoring of Sri Lanka's quota system in regards to substantive representation (Esaiasson 2017, p. 108-109). The city of Colombo was chosen as the research site based on its political importance and feasibility. It is not only a region where my contact person – a local academic – has many connections, but also the area with the most female councillors since the quota's implementation (CLGF 2018, p. 227). The method will be a critical case study, which may permit analytic generalisation for the Western province or even for Sri Lanka as a whole (Esaiasson 2017, p. 89).

3.1 Interviews and focus group

I will conduct one focus group interview with female councillors and several key-informant interviews with local academics, officials and women's organisations. I will aim to meet experts before conducting the councillor interviews to aid in well-thought-out method selection and informed interview questions (Esaiasson 2017. p. 332).

3.1.1 Reliability and validity

Good reliability will be achieved by making repeated applications of identical measurement methods during one occasion. In other words, all interviews will be conducted within a short time period of three weeks, with the units of analysis being asked similar questions. The strength therefore lies in the quantity to be able to minimise chance and demonstrate a sufficient causal explanation. However, a certain level of unsystematic measurement errors can be expected as it is the interviewees who estimate the degree of substantive representation. On the other hand, a larger number of interviews is also expected to be able to minimise these unsystematic fluctuations around the correct measurement value (ibid., p. 59).

Another important aspect here is to be clear with the interviewees that the material is collected anonymously. This is particularly important as the councillors may be reserved or feeling the need to conform to party politics in front of an outsider. If this is not done, a problem with validity arises. I also need to be mindful of different

power agendas, but at the same time not essentialise women in regard to their political power (ibid).

3.1.2   Selection

Local governance in Sri Lanka consists of three legislative bodies. Municipal councils preside over the largest cities, whilst urban councils and pradeshiya sabhas operate in second and third tier municipalities (CLGF 2018, p. 227-232). Although they differ in number of councillors and constituents and geographical area (ibid.), they still operate in a similar way and will for the simplicity of this essay be regarded as such. However, for purpose of a well-though out method selection I have chosen one of each legislative body in Colombo to represent the capital's local governance. In the case of intensive studies of a few cases, it is wise to undertake some form of strategic selection (Teorell – Svensson 2007, s. 85). The local governments where strategically selected based on type, although after being divided into three groups my sample was chosen based on feasibility, which closer resembles stratified selection. The importance of local knowledge and feasibility is further discussed below.

3.1.3   Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are "individuals who directly or indirectly facilitate or inhibit researchers' access to resources such as people, institutions, information and logistics" (Bonnin 2010, p. 183). I expect that conducting field work with interviewees in elite and powerful positions will require foresight, planning and some negotiation on a daily basis. This is especially true for qualitative research where the researcher is an outsider (Scheyvens 2014, p. 202-6). In the light of the time constraint, my contact person will aid me in facilitating local contacts with councillors and key-informants. Her social capital will help me to establish legitimacy for my research as well overcoming the possibility of being perceived as a threat.

3.2   Causal explanation

Studying the theories of politics of presence and substantive representation provides a methodological challenge due to the complexity of political institutions (Beckwith 2007, p. 27). Previous researchers further suggest that the closer one gets to citizens' everyday life – to depict the relationship between representatives and its constituents – the more difficult it is to empirically test the chain of representation and its outcomes (Wängnerud 2009, p. 52). I therefore expect my illustration of the link between descriptive and substantive representation in Sri Lanka to provide probabilistic rather than deterministic conclusions (Dodson 2006, p. 8). Meaning

that *x*, descriptive representations relationship with substantive representation, *y*, will not be fully isolated. By identifying the intermediate variables or mechanisms as explained below, I will still be able to strengthen the correlation, but we may not be able to produce a strong causal explanation as it would have required more extensive work where underlying factors are identified (Teorell – Svensson 2017, p. 64).

The second half of the research question (What are the obstacles to its success?) aims to identify causal mechanisms that can be used as a strategy to prove or disprove causality and clarify the link between descriptive and substantive representation. The mechanism is said to be "a chain of intermediate cause-effect relationships that connect x with y" (Teorell – Svensson 2007, p. 71). Although the study is of an explanatory nature (Teorell – Svensson 2007, p. 28), it is also to a certain extent theory developing as the causal mechanisms are not fully established from the outset of the study.

3.3   Methodological reflections

3.3.1   Connection to the Sustainable Development Goals

Gender equality in politics is essential for peaceful and sustainable development and involves a fair distribution of "power, influence and resources" (UNDP 2021). Protection from political discrimination is also a human right and achieving gender equality is considered necessary – for individuals and society as a whole – for it to reach its full potential. The proposed research explicitly addresses a number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The quota relates to SDG 5.1 as it is intended to fight against gender discrimination and more explicitly 5.5. which seeks to ensure full and effective political participation and leadership in all levels of decision-making. Quota research also addresses 5.C; to adopt and strengthen legislative measures that encourage gender equality (ibid.)

3.3.2   Ethical aspects

My research will aim to provide a mutually beneficial experience and safe environment for all participants. I believe that this is especially important as participants will be giving up their time. Throughout the process of conducting cross-cultural field work, including pre- and after work, I will be aware of my social positioning including "culture, sex, class, age" and other unequal power balances (Scheyvens 2014, p. 15). I will also keep this in mind when selecting a translator with whom my interviewees will feel comfortable with. It is also important to decentralise Western centrism through "unlearning dominant systems of knowledge

and representation"; a so-called 'ethics from the bottom up' (Scheyvens 2014, p. 12, 161). This will be done by presenting the interview questions during the expert interviews and then reworking them, so as not to ask normative Western questions during my material collection as well as avoiding leading questions from presumed hypotheses.

I will be sensitive towards the topic and local context and view interviewees as active subjects rather than passive objects for a self-serving exercise. I will plan the research with care and in respect of the interviewees' "knowledge, skills and experience" as well as culture and traditions, which heighten the chances for the participants to find the experience rewarding (Scheyvens 2014, s. 161, 212). I also hope to share my findings which will open up for dialogue and feedback. Other important aspects I will be considering are informed consent, privacy and anonymity (Ibid. p. 163-4). I expect to constantly be debating, negotiating and reflecting on the aspects stated above.

4 Result and analysis

As previously presented, the aim of this study is to distinguish the link between descriptive and substantive representation – thus evaluating the quota's success or not, whilst at the same time contributing to current literature on women's representation and Sri Lanka. To be able to identify a strong correlation and to prove cause and effect, causal mechanisms were identified throughout the data collection. These have been stylised below from the interview process, followed by a short discussion on how it clarifies the chain of representation.

The below piece will follow women's process from entering politics to practising politics. However, with a focus primarily on the quota system's aftermath and to what extent it promotes substantive representation of and for women. Lastly, Sri Lanka's recent electoral reforms and quota implementation was a "historic intervention" and successful descriptively (Gajanayake 2022), with only 16 out of 341 not reaching its 25 percent aim (Jayasinghe 2022).

4.5 Politics of Presence

"Care for the country like a mother cares for its child." – PAFFREL

Something that can help us in identifying the link between descriptive and substantive representation and evaluate the quota system is Phillip's theory politics of presence. As mentioned previously it focuses on the common experiences shared by female representatives and female voters (Phillips 1995, p. 67-68).

Samantha Jayasinghe, deputy commissioner of the Sri Lankan election commission and responsible for handling the gender subjects during the formulation of The Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Acts – the latter which resulted in the quota system, suggests that "there are specific things to be considered by women" and that women in Sri Lanka "have a different school of thought" and "see things from their angle". This is later confirmed in another expert interview with Kamala Linayage – "a pioneer of the quota system" (Deshapriya 2022) – who underlines how the success of the quota system lies in increasing the number of female politicians in local governments. "Now they are visible" and "now they can make a voice" she states – raising the questions whether the Politics of presence theory holds. Linayage later describes how women come together to represent other women's voices and how, with an almost critical mass, they have become stronger in their political advocacy (Linayage 2002). Questions of schools, covid vaccines

and the current food crisis, the latter predominately being a women's issue, are now being discussed whilst women and child committees are being set up ignoring the threat and obstacles of current local authority leaders in "trying to serve the people best" (Linayage 2022; Gajanayake 2022). This suggest the existence of the mandate effect where issues like this are described as an "eye opener" for the agenda setting at local governments (Linayage 2022), suggesting a shift to substantive representation as *process*.

From interviews with female politicians, descriptions of changes in the behaviour of the council's constituents also emerged. Suggesting that the entrance of more female councillors had a gendered effect. One politician stated that being a woman brings her closer to her parties' constituents, as she can understand other women's issues more easily whilst – at the same time – they can open up and tell their issues more freely to her (Interviewee 1 2022). Another female politician agreed to this, stating that people – irrespectively of gender – are more prone to reach out to female representatives because they see them as mother figures (Interviewee 3 2022).

The term mother figure recurred many times during my study. At an event celebrating 100 female politicians, elite politicians underlined and justified the importance of women's representation as they "care for the country like a mother cares for its child" (PAFFREL 2022). This was further supported in an interview with one of the local politicians stating that women relate to the issues of the people from the perspective of a mother (Interviewee 2). However, essentialising women to their caring and mothering touch is problematic with Fernando suggesting that that womanly or motherly attributes as nurturers and protectors is the sort of mentality that "kept women in the house in the first place". In other words, women are confined to family affairs because their primary job is to *protect* their children.

The above gives evidence to Phillip's theory. It shows how an increase in the presence of women – due to the quota – shortens the chain of representation and encourages good governance as the female representatives have a greater understanding of their constituents as well as evidence of more women's issues being brought up and even committees established. However, whether this changes the council's policies – substantive representation as *outcome* – is yet to be seen.

4.2   Patriarchy

"Whether you go for a job, you come home sometimes straight to the kitchen, kids are waiting for you to cook the food, bathe them, do everything for them, the children, husband, everybody. All the people in the family, like, they all wait for this woman to return home." – Sujatha Wijethilaka

Long-rooted gender norms were also identified as one of the main obstacles for descriptive representation to translate into substantive representation when

discussing the quota system with both politicians, officials, activists and scholars. Interviewees highlighted how women are less welcome into the political sphere as a result of the country's patriarchal society and how women – if entering politics – are still expected to fulfil their duties at home (Wijethilaka 2022). However, this is not an essay on recognising domestic work as work, instead their point lies in women having to face multiple spheres and at least one more that of a man. One of the five female politicians interviewed admitted she felt compelled to leave politics at some point, "because the burden of the family is placed upon the shoulders of women" (Interviewee 5 2022). Considering the responsibilities a woman is expected to fulfil in her household, the capacity of a woman is naturally reduced and a male politician can engage in politics much more actively merely on the fact that he is a male, another politician states (Interviewee 1 2022). In other words, when a man goes into politics he can leave the family behind, but when a female comes into politics she has to manage her family – thus "playing a multiple role in their life" (Gajanayake 2022).

However, in agreement with the female politicians that were interviewed: "women are limited by their role, but it is not impossible for them to do everything. They are very capable". (Gajanayake 2022). Upekshi Fernando, program manager of Sri Lanka's pioneering election monitoring organisation People's Action for Free & Fair Elections (PAFFREL) also agrees that women are "performing", and Gayajanake suggests that this has led to a change in attitude towards women's political activism. Nonetheless, changing the attitude of society and changing its mindset and culture "takes a lot of time" (Fernando 2022), with records of women still being met with a mentality of not being "cut out" for the job and being judged very harshly (Linayage 2022). There is also evidence of women, whilst in office, being looked down upon and facing lack of recognition when addressing issues in their council. There are also reports of women facing harassment, both verbal and physical with incidents involving pulling saris and worse assaults (Linayage 2022). All of the above are examples of women's capacity being questioned, suggesting the existence of a label effect and a hindrance to the quota's attention to group interests, as also proposed by Franceschet and Piscopo (2008, p. 393).

Prevalent social norms in Sri Lanka are the virginity of girls and the importance of marriage for women. Interviewees explain how girls are limited to the home and describe parents as "over-caring" (Interviewee 2 2022). At the same time, a female politician states that "the environment in Sri Lankan society is not very safe for women due to sexual harassment." When marrying Sinhala Buddhist, as a majority of the Sri Lankan population do, husbands are described as having a tendency to keep their wives below their social status, making marriage for Sinhala Buddhist women "a sort of challenge" (Interviewee 3 2022). Another interesting observation made was how most of the interviewees got into politics through their husbands. This was further explained by one of the female politicians who stated that "strict husbands" were one of the main limitations for a political career. She explains how wives have to follow the instructions of their husbands. "If husbands say don't go out, the female members have no choice". (Interviewee 4 2022). This limits their

ability to work in the field. Something which is further developed in accordance with the women's organisation Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR). Sujatha Wijethilaka, a director, states that lack of acceptance from families hinders women's political participation. She further points out the fear of violence and that one's name and "reputation is spoiled if entering politics" due to the bad name of local governments as corrupt (Wijethilaka 2022). Two times during my expert interviews, Sri Lankan politics was described as going into a "muddy field", suggesting a deterrent for many prospective candidates, because why go "tarnishing your good name?" (Fernando 2022). Lastly and despite the quota, it is clear that Sri Lanka's patriarchy and societal norms still effect women's participation, both when looking at their entrance and as practicing politicians – thus limiting the quotas effect on promoting substantial change for women and obstructing the chain of representation.

4.3   Economic dependence

"Your ability to spend, if you are a real rich person, if you're gonna spend a lot of money, I will also likely accept you as a potential candidate because you will be able to spend a lot of money, not only for your own election, but when I contest for my parliamentary election, because you can." – Peris Pradeep

Economic conditions are also an important factor encouraging or limiting women's political participation in Sri Lanka. The monthly pay for a local politician is between 15000 to 20000 rupees a month – 300 to 400 crowns – which means the allowance members of local authorities receive is insufficient for them to practise politics full-time (Methsiri De Silva 2022). Thus only being a politician is not enough to cover all monthly expenses, resulting in them engaging in other economic activities too. This means that the politicians I met had occupations ranging from teachers to hospital workers, whilst at the same time practising politics. This discourage political aspirants, thus limiting women's ability to participate actively (ibid.), something which is further hampered by marriage and the extra added sphere of domestic work as discussed in section 4.2 Patriarchy. Economic dependency upon the husband, as a result of taking care of the family, is another factor limiting the quotas effect on women's substantive political representation. This is also described to be applicable for educated women (Interviewee 2 2022).

When a political aspirant wishes to join a local government – despite the above barrier – the second obstacle is receiving a nomination. According Gajanayake, the nomination process of the quota system makes receiving nominations for women to contest in elections "the hardest thing in Sri Lankan politics". One of the underlying reasons for this is monetary, or rather the lack of finances among female contestants (Peris 2022). Women are not, compared to their male counterparts, receiving beneficiaries from well-wishers and other wealthy supporters when contesting, something which discourages parties from selecting them as sufficient

finances is needed for successful candidacy (Suriyabandara 2022). This results in women "losing the race" and becoming "the victims of this election culture" as they generally are less wealthy and often economically dependent (Gajanayake 2022). This makes women especially sensitive to the importance of financing within Sri Lankan politics. The importance of finances is later prolonged after winning an election as Sri Lankan politics is perpetuated by patron-client relationship, where politicians maintain a relationship with their voters on the basis of "kind of a transaction" of material benefits in return for votes (Peris 2022). "The superalternation" to surpass this problem was introducing the quota with mandatory nomination requirements (Gajanayake 2022). However, despite this, the contestant's finances still serve as a limitation during the nomination process as well as when practising politics, as the lack of a campaign finance law regulating the political arena and equalising all contestants is still not in place (Gajanayake 2022; Fernando 2022)

4.4   Corruption and gender

"It is a well-known fact that the Sri Lankan local governments are more corrupted entities and its chairmen are abusing their powers under the blessings of their political party leaders." – Manjula Gajanayake

In parliament, as well as in provincial and local governments, the line between duties of an official and a politician is blurred and taking commission for official procurements is a common feature (Gajanayake 2022). With studies from contemporary literature on women's political representation showing how larger numeric representation of women reduces corruption (Dollar et. al. 2001, p. 427), it is of interest to see how the introduction of the quota system correlates with corruption – to determine to what extent corruption constitutes a barrier and to what extent the electoral reform promotes substantive representation. However, in this study, results were contradictory by experts and politicians alike.

In one of the politician interviews, claims that corruption had been reduced in her local councils since the quota's introduction were made (Interviewee 5 2022). This was further supported by one of the experts claiming that closer gender parity has led to less corruption through women taking fewer bribes and simply not obtaining commissions like their male counterparts (Gajanayake 2022). At the same time, other experts disagree and points to how successful female politicians play "the men's game" and how corruption and gender have "no connectivity" (Fernando 2022; Peris 2022). Peris suggests that all politicians – irrespectively of gender – act like politicians of that particular political culture, thus if it promotes "corruption, thuggery and nepotism" – "you need to play them very well." This is further supported by one of the female councillors of the same council as the politician above, who states that there is no gender polarisation in committing to corruption and directly or indirectly women are also subject to be corrupted (Interviewee 4).

The latter raises the question whether substantive representation is gendered if women who enter politics are the ones with masculine characteristics or that women, once entered, are forced to adhere to masculine space. Moreover, party membership is also said to play a role here with some parties justifying corruption for its members "personal benefit" (ibid.). This suggests that politicians are prone to adhere to corruption, not only because of personal traits, but also as a result of the political party they represent (ibid.). Lastly, corruption is said to permeate Sri Lankan politics and its existence in local governance is confirmed by both politicians and experts alike. It can therefore be seen as a causal mechanism preventing efficient governance. However, whether there is a gendered effect in the case of Sri Lanka is disputed. It is therefore unclear whether higher descriptive representation of women – as a result of the quota system – hampers or promotes women's substantive representation.

4.5   Political literacy

"Madame, you know we do not know how to serve women. Only thing we know, it is very competitive to really repair this small roads, culverts, wells, why are men trying to do this kind of construction things?" – female politician from Eastern Province to Kamala Linayage

As new female councillors are asserting their place in politics, a knowledge gap can be seen from women taking on a new role (Linayage 2022); disrupting effective political representation. Lack of political literacy is thus underlined as one of the main barriers for effective women's political organisation; partly as a result of civics having a very small part of the national syllabus (Deshapriya 2022). With descriptions of scarce political literacy due to low levels of formal education hampering women's political entrance, measures are suggested to be introduced in second and tertiary education to encourage women's political participation. (Gajanayake 2022; Deshapriya 2022). This is not only a problem for women's capacity to make substantive change, but also for voters' ability to adhere to responsible voting (Deshapriya 2022).

A knowledge gap was further identified when looking at more practical matters such as preparing proposals and budgets. With Kamala Linayage pointing out: "earlier they didn't know how to speak, they did not know how to write things, a small petition or letter" or "how to dress, how to make a small speech, how to get up onto stage and address about 100 to 150 villagers". However, improvements in "their behaviour, dress code, leadership qualities, leadership skills" were also identified (ibid). Suggesting that political work is not exclusively for members with higher education and that the lack of political literacy is a so-called infant problem belonging to any new quota implementation.

However, political literacy in Sri Lanka is not only challenged by formal education and a new supply of politicians. On the island there is a discrepancy between their local government acts and the actual work being done by local governments – where infrastructure projects are highly overrepresented compared to social work – the latter which could have a positive gendered effect (Linayage 2022). This is a result of the politicians being responsible for procurements and taking commissions from them as illustrated by the italicised quote. In other words, Sri Lankan politicians both produce policies and execute them without an independent body for the latter, compared to Western democracies where legislative and executive work separated. Fernando adds that although organisations are educating and equipping women for a different kind of politics, "it's years of years of patriarchal male dominated field". The above suggests that the success of the quota system and whether descriptive representation translates to substantive representation, is not measured to what extent the new female councillors fit in, but rather whether they do politics differently. In other words, for the quota to have a substantial effect on the wider female population and for it to meet the desired objective, women can't play the men's game. If the quota's success was only measured in their ability to adapt – long rooted gender norms are at risk of being prolonged.

This is further problematised in an interview with Dr. Pradeep Peiris, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Colombo, who argues that the gendered affect in Sri Lankan local governments is limited and questions whether it fits the theoretical expectation that descriptive representation translates into substantive representation. If the representatives are not representing the ideas and political interests of the community by policy introductions, but rather our material needs and desires through corrupt procurements, does gender really matter and if not: how can it justify the quota system if the main aim is to produce more material benefits? This questions whether giving women political space in local governments, in a Sri Lankan context, results in a substantial change of politics and if it does, then when? As "politics doesn't change overnight" (Peris 2022).

4.6   Quota design – contested, elected, selected

"Parachute women" – Mahinda Deshapriya

Sri Lanka's newly implemented quota system is said to be a success descriptively, with 325 out of 341 local governments reaching the 25 percent women's quota (Peris 2022; Linayage 2022; Jayasinghe 2022), thus the question remains to what extent the quota promotes substantive representation. However, whilst this essay promised to only focus on the quota's effect, as proposed by Dahlerup (2006, p. 3-4), it became clear throughout the interview process that the quota's design not only affected women's entrance to politics, but also their politics. In other words, the

quota's design bears a significance for whether descriptive representation results in substantive representation.

As mentioned earlier, Sri Lanka politics is based on a hybrid model called Mixed-member proportional electoral system (MMP) (Vijeyarasa 2020 p. 4). Meaning that parties submit two lists, one nomination paper for first-past-the-post (FPTP), representing wards, and another for proportional representation (PR), for the whole electoral district with a closed list. FPTP accounts for 60 percent of the electoral district and PR, 40 percent, whilst 10 percent women have to be *nominated* through FPTP and 50 percent through PR. To fulfil the quota, the election outcome has to result in at least 25 percent female councillors in a local government (Vijeyarasa 2020 p. 4-5).

However, there are few regulations as to which electoral system female politicians get elected from. For example, for the FPTP electoral system, there is only a nomination requirement for women, thus the quota is only, through that system, regulating the number of women *nominated*, not *elected*. This has led to parties nominating females to losing wards to fulfil the nomination requirement. The former chief of the election commission concludes that "this is male-dominated politics no? They give the females to the loser's place. So the girl lost, in that party. Everywhere is the same way." (Deshapriya 2022).

Secondly, considering the current law, the runner-up political party has to nominate and elect more female members. Partly as the nomination percentages are higher for PR as well as the female contestants having less success in FPTP – so the closed list has to weigh in to reach the quota threshold. This has been criticised for creating a "female-dominated opposition" as "most of these councils, they have female in opposition" (Deshapriya 2022; Gajanayake). It is also problematic as it functions like a punishment and for not being a healthy way to accommodate women in councils. This is also bound to create internal party struggles as men are not getting their due place (Gajanayake 2022).

Having a majority of female councillors elected through PR, is not only insufficient as it pushes women towards opposition parties, it also means that they serve no wards and therefore receive less funding (Deshapriya 2022). This was also criticised by the female politicians that I met. One politician stated: "one of my biggest challenges was being an appointed member by my party after losing the election. This has been a challenge for me when working for the community." In other words, since they are not responsible for overseeing any wards, most local government chairmen are not allocating money to them and pointing to "they are not elected." (ibid.). This makes it more difficult for PR members and female councillors to "run their seat" and "entertain their people" (Jayasinghe 2022). Gayanajake further stresses the importance of women's political involvement to the constituents as women are "on the fence" whether they will get nominations in the next election due to their current positioning. However, despite uneven funding, as a result of the electoral system, being a common criticism from my expert

interviews, both Kamala Linayage and Fernando Upekshi, agree that with four years since its implementation, female politicians have still had the time, space and opportunity to perform despite constraints in funding. With Fernando explaining "if you really really want to" there are opportunities and resources politicians can tap onto, such as those provided by women's organisations. However, one can still argue that resources should be more accessible for women for the quota to have a larger substantial effect – beyond numeric representation.

In an expert interview the electoral reform was also criticised for dividing politicians into two groups, thus creating a dichotomy. The former chief of the election commissioner during the quota's implementation, stated that councillors from the PR system are facing legitimacy problems, with rival politicians seeing them not as elected members, but rather selected "second class members" (Deshapriya 2022). This was a recurring phenomenon during the interviews, with interviewees suggesting there is a difference between elected and selected with the existence of the latter challenging the normative arguments of implementing a quota system. This results in them not receiving equal treatment such as not being allowed to perform speeches and suggest proposals (Jayasinghe 2022), which further hinders good governance and substantive representation. Furthermore, the legitimacy issue created by the two-edged design, makes women especially vulnerable since there "were more selected female candidates from the opposition than the elected" (Fernando 2022). There have also been reports of women, so-called selected by their party, being hindered to speak in their local authorities by FPTP members, their behaviour being justified as the PR members are "god given" or "parachute women", referring to the women not having a sufficient electoral base (Deshapriya 2022).

4.7   Nomination process

"In order to guarantee better representation of women in political parties and in politics, every recognized political party shall ensure the inclusion of one or more women office bearers in the list of office bearers of such party." – Sri Lanka's party regulation law

Another major criticism hampering the quota's success and its effect on women's substantive representation is the importance of parties in the nomination process and their lack of commitment to promoting the quota system where women are sometimes described as "orphaned" or at the "discretion" of political parties (Gajanayake 2022; Jayasinghe). Due to the lack of party involvement for women's participation, women are said to rely on NGO and local civil society organisations support (ibid.) The former commissioner of elections also questions whether the quota system will lead to "real women's participation" (Deshapriya 2022), pointing to the lack of internal democracy within male dominated parties. Lack of internal democracy is said to be a result of parties not functioning as institutions and instead

being "under the influence of individuals" with a top-down structure – putting political aspirants "at the mercy" of one party leader (Peris 2022). Whilst to win, the popularity of that leader reflects on the party's candidates (ibid.). This underlines the importance of connectivity to the party leadership for nominations and to be put in a fortunate electoral district. As a result of low internal democracy, few of the political parties are willing to support or give "any chance for women" (Gajanayake 2022), resulting in women not being given candidacy and politics remaining a masculine space. This was a recurring theme during the interviews and is criticised as being one of the main barriers for women's effective political representation. However, there are conflicting ideas about this with Fernando proposing that the quota encouraged parties to go beyond their familial ties, stating that a large number of women that were grassroots activists and other active women, for the first time, got the opportunity to enter politics.

Nepotism and tokenism – the practise of only making a symbolic effort – is also prevalent within Sri Lankan politics (Gajanayake 2022) where some elected female members are described as acting like "statues" (Deshapriya 200). Within the PR system, a "reasonable number" of women are said to have been added to the list only to fulfil the nomination requirement, rather than being added for their political interest or qualities (ibid.) – such as a politician's wife, sister or other relatives. This kind of nepotism has led to male politicians hindering their participation. Gajanayake also adds that women elected through tokenism are "undermining the rest", both aspiring and active politicians. This has a negative effect on substantive representation and questions who they represent and more importantly what kind of politics or non-politics they adhere to. However, despite early signs of this group not asserting their place in politics and actively engaging with the council, some women, despite their questionable entrance, have since they came to office grown (ibid.). It can also be argued that this issue is an infant problem of the quota system where parties in the 2018 local government election were also described as unprepared in facing the new electoral rules demanding a large increase in women (WMC 2021, p. 12; Peris 2022). With descriptions of parties finding it difficult as within their party structure "they always maintained men as potential candidates" (Peris 2022).

5   Conclusion

The theoretical expectations of this essay suggests that gender quotas promote substantive representation through changing the disposition of representatives in decision-making positions, thus suggesting a link between descriptive and substantive representation. For the quota to have a gendered effect on the latter, Phillip's politics of presence theory should hold. Whilst the interview process gave evidence of women having a closer connection to their constituents and setting a more gender inclusive agenda, there were also questions marks raised by corruption and lack of political literacy which suggested that female are no different than their male counterparts. Other barriers for women's substantive representation that were identified throughout the interview process were: patriarchy, women's economic dependence and the quota design and nomination process itself.

Sri Lanka's patriarchal society was one of the barriers identified as disrupting the chain of representation. Despite the quota being in place, barriers to enter such as women facing multiple spheres – including domestic work responsibilities – and families and husbands hindering women due local governments bad reputation were identified. However, and despite of this, an attitudinal change can be seen, owed to the quota. The second barrier discussed, insufficient allowance in local governments and women's economic dependence – both obstructing women's entrance into politics – still persists despite the quota implementation. However, there are signs of the barrier for nominations to have been lowered. The third barrier identified as obstructing the link between descriptive and substantive representation was corruption, with accounts of criticism towards politicians doing executive work; resulting in bribes and commission for procurements. However, to what extent this one effects women's substantive representation was contested. Furthermore, there were signs of the quota surpassing the fourth barrier of low political literacy as it encourages the entrance of women into politics and improving their political skills. However, there are also records of women reacting and thinking very similar to their previous examples – questioning whether substantive representation will prevail. The quota design in itself also questions whether substantive representation is viable. With the 2018 election resulting in the majority of women representing opposition parties, followed by less resources and legitimacy problems. The nomination process also underlined the parties definitive role as a barrier to women's participation.

Finally, to answer the research question, the quota system is yet to change Sri Lankan political culture and long-rooted gender norms. The quota has had positive effects on descriptive representation. However, in spite of the quota implementation and my attempts in asking open-ended questions; there were almost no signs of

substantive representation as *outcome.* Regardless a lack of feminisation of policy making, there were several accounts of women changing the policy agenda, thus descriptive representation having an effect on substantive representations as *process*. However, these findings and the politics of presence theory as discussed in the previous paragraph, were heavily contested by the multiple barriers politicians face. This suggest that country-specific context is a major determinant to what extent quota implementation addresses widespread structural inequalities and underrepresentation of minority groups, in opposition to the belief that women's issues are universal. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that the quota has only been in place for four years and its effects and success – or lack thereof – cannot be fully evaluated and as described by Wängnerud: substantial change cannot be expected just because women are in decision making positions to a greater extent than before (2009, p. 59) or on a more positive note: "politics is a continuous contestation" (Peris 2022).

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