Female Electoral Quotas and Closing the Gender Gap in Political eNGAGEMENT

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**Introduction**

Throughout history different groups in societies all over the world have had their political rights legally oppressed by dominant groups. While such legal restrictions have ceased in many countries, dominant groups may still suppress the political rights of subordinate groups through informal social, political and economic channels (Mansbridge 1999, 639). This has led governments to take “affirmative action” to attempt to make equality a reality instead of waiting to see if inequalities correct themselves over time through socioeconomic changes. Regarding women as a subordinate group, one common affirmative action policy throughout the world is female electoral quotas (hereafter referred to as “quotas”). According to Htun and Jones (2002), quotas have “been perhaps the most radical and intensely debated reform in the area of gender equality in the past 50 years.” Quotas are “deeply controversial” due to competing principles of gender equality, different ideas about political representation, and various beliefs about gender in relation to other political identities (Krook, Lovenduski, and Squires 2009, 787).

Different forms of quotas have diffused rapidly around the world in the past several decades, and as of 2009, over 100 states had such policies (Krook, Lovenduski, and Squires 2009, 781). But, what exactly are quotas? Although they vary across societies, the literature recognizes a typology of quotas which includes reserved seats, legislated quotas, and voluntary party quotas. Reserved seats quotas hold reserved seats for women in elected bodies that men are not eligible to contest. Legislated quotas require parties to run a certain number of female candidates and require parties to alternate gender on their party list in proportional representation systems. In both of these types the governments sanction non-compliance to varying degrees, and quota policies can apply to bodies elected at the national and sub-national levels. In voluntary party quotas, parties have their own policy about the number of female candidates they will run, party list composition, and sanctions for non-compliance (Krook, Lovenduski, and Squires 2009, 784).

The literature on quotas focuses on three major issues: the form quotas take, the reason for their adoption, and the variation in their effects (Krook, Lovenduski, and Squires 2009, 781). Within the literature on the variation of their effects, two principal effects are examined: the effect of quotas on female representation in elected bodies and the effect of quotas on the political attitudes and behaviors of female citizens. The purpose of this study will be to examine the relationship between quotas and the gender gap in political attitudes and behaviors of citizens.

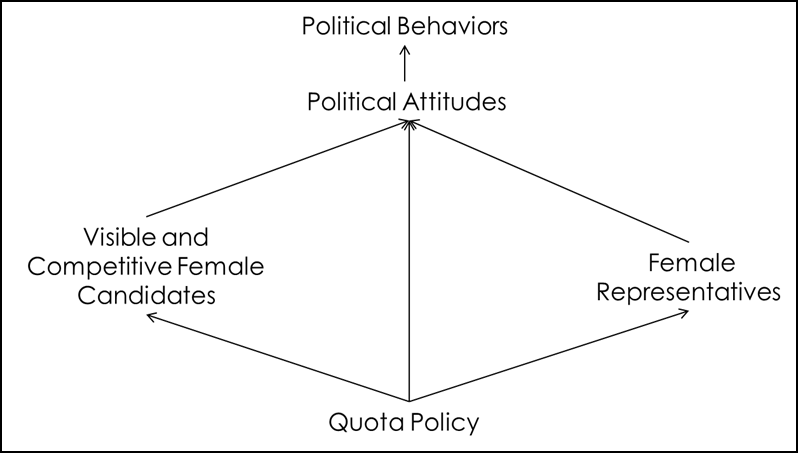
**The Causal Model**

The research on the relationship between quotas and female citizens political attitudes and behaviors stems from the argument that quotas are intended to increase the political engagement of all female citizens and not just increase the number of women in elected bodies (Zetterburg 2009, 715). The literature uses such words as female political advancement, engagement, involvement or participation in order to refer to the general concept of closing the gender gap in the political realm. After all, female political engagement is a relevant topic due to the acknowledgement that women are less politically engaged than men despite their equality according to the law (Atkeson 2003, 1053).

The concept of political engagement is broken down into the study of attitudes and behaviors. Females’ political attitudes and behaviors have been studied independently from each other, but attitudes are also positively correlated with behaviors which is important for women’s empowerment (Zetterburg 2009, 719). This study draws on gender and politics literature and political representation literature as well as the quota literature to explain the causal link between quotas and female citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors. This is because theory that can explain this relationship is not always specified in the context of quotas.

So, how can quotas increase the political attitudes and behaviors of female citizens? According to the causal model (refer to Figure 1) I developed from the works of Atkeson (2003), Lawless 2004, Mansbridge (1999), Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007, and Zetterburg (2009), the quotas increase visible and competitive female candidates and female representatives in elected bodies. Then the quota itself, visible and competitive female candidates and female representatives increase women’s political attitudes, which in turn, increases their political behaviors. But, how exactly does this work?

**Figure 1: Causal Model**

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The model for how quotas can affect female citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors can be applied to any historically subordinate social group, but here it will be applied to women. According to Zetterburg (2009), quotas can impact female citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors through signal – sometimes called cue – effects and role model effects (716). Both of these elements are based on a psychological approach in that they rest on the assumption that individual characteristics and the environment affect individual attitudes and behavior and (Atkeson 2003, 1041; Zetterburg 2009, 718).

According to the signal effect, groups that have been historically excluded from the political process have a psychological barrier to participation due to the continued dominance of the historically more powerful group in government, despite legal equality (Atkeson 2003, 1041). Women have traditionally been excluded from political decision making and therefore believe that they are not fit to participate in politics; that they are subjects and not citizens (Atkeson 2003, 1043; Mansbridge 1999, 649; Zetterburg 2009, 716). Signal theory holds that a lack of women in government sends a signal to women that they should not participate in politics while the presence of women in government sends a signal to female citizens to participate in politics (Atkeson 2003, 1041; Mansbridge 1999, 628). In the case of quotas, not only is the quota policy itself sending this signal, but the increase in female candidates and representatives as a result of the quota sends this signal as well.

Regarding the quota policy itself, the theory of signal effects is derived from the theory of interpretive effects in the analysis of public policy (Zetterburg 2009, 716). According to this theory, “policies convey meaning and information to citizens, helping citizens to interpret the world around them and providing them with arguments that they use in their shaping of identities and preferences” (Zetterburg 2009, 716). Furthermore, “policy design shapes citizen’s psychological predisposition to participate in public life” (Zetterburg 2009, 716). By legitimizing female political leadership, quota policies themselves increase female citizens internal efficacy; the self-perception that they are competent to participate (Lawless 2004, 84; Zetterburg 2009, 716). Internal efficacy can then lead to women actually participating in political life. Keep in mind that the signal effect through policy rest on two assumptions: women are aware of the law and interpret it in the suggested way. For example, quotas will not have positive effects on women’s internal efficacy if they interpret the law as symbolic (Zetterburg 2009, 717).

Quotas also affect female citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors through increasing the number of female candidates in elections. Atkeson (2003) argues that the presence of visible and competitive female candidates in an election affects female citizen’s political attitudes and behavior. Female candidates are more likely to campaign on issues relevant to women (Atkeson 2003, 1043). Furthermore, when female candidates are visible and competitive in an electoral race, the race is more likely to focus on issues relevant to females (Atkeson 2003, 1045). Because both of these factors bring women’s issues to the political sphere, women are more likely to become interested in politics, increase their knowledge on politics, and participate in political life.

Quotas not only increase the number of female candidates in an election, but they also increase the number of female representatives in elected bodies, which can affect the political attitudes and behaviors of female citizens. First, female representatives can increase female citizens’ political efficacy. Female representation increases females’ internal efficacy because seeing other women in government makes them feel competent to participate in politics (Lawless 2004, 84). Furthermore, it increases female citizens’ external efficacy. When there is a history of distrust of the government by a subordinate group, increased representation by that group in government increases the group’s trust in government and the perception of the government as legitimate (Atkeson 2003, 1043; Lawless 2004, 84; Mansbridge 1999, 628; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007, 921). The other aspect of external efficacy, sense of government responsiveness, is affected because women perceive women in government as responding to their needs (Atkeson 2003, 1043; Lawless 2004, 84). However, this also relies on female citizen’s knowledge of the government’s response to women’s issues (Mansbridge 1999, 651). As with female candidates, when female representatives do actually address women’s issues, women become more interested in politics, which leads to an increase in knowledge of politics and to political participation.

The other way quotas can close the gender gap in politics is through the role model effect. First, successful quotas increase the number of female candidates and representatives in elected bodies. Then, these women can be role models for other women by showing them that they can participate in politics (Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007, 921; Zetterburg 2009, 717-8). This affects female citizens’ political attitudes and increases their likelihood to participate. According to the socialization hypothesis, the impact of the role model effect is greater on younger women because they are more susceptible to the influence of role models. This is because younger women are in the process of learning about the political world and their role in it while older women have more established behavior. (Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007, 924) Remember that the role model rests on a two key assumptions. First, that the quota is effectively implemented so that female candidacy or representation does increase, and second, that women actually share the same identity which gives them common interests (Mansbridge 1999, 637; Zetterburg 2009, 718).

**Past Findings**

The majority of works on quotas have been case studies, especially regarding Asian states, but there have also been comparative studies that focus on Latin America and the West (Krook, Lovenduski, and Squires 2009, 782). In addition, there have been several cross-national studies that include the Middle East and Eastern Europe in their analysis (Tripp and Kang 2008, 342). Past findings on elements of this theory have mixed results, perhaps because they test different aspects of the causal model, assess different countries and regions, and use different methodologies.

In American elections, Atkeson (2003) finds that women are more likely to be internally efficious, discuss politics, and participate in politics when electoral races have visible and competitive female candidates. In a study of Europe, Wolbrecht and Campbell (2007) find that in countries with more female representatives in the national lower legislative house that women are more likely to discuss politics and engage in various forms of political activity. They also find that younger women are even more likely to engage in political activity than older women. In a cross-national study, Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005) find that countries with more female representatives tend to have increased confidence in the legislature by female citizens. Take into account that none of these results are in the context of quotas, but of the theory that links quotas to female citizens’ attitudes and behaviors through female candidacy and increased female representation. However, case studies of quotas have generally found that quotas increase women’s contact with their representatives to discuss issues of importance to them (Zetterburg 2009, 719).

On the other hand, Lawless (2004) finds no relationship between increased female representation and female citizens’ political efficacy or different forms of political activity in the United States. Zetterburg (2009) finds no relationship between quotas and female citizens’ political trust, knowledge, interest, party or campaign activities, political contacts, and protest activities in Latin America. However, he concedes that this could be due to that fact that party nominations in Latin America are centralized and informal, and that leaders may pick women they know over more qualified women with stronger political support. Some, such as Mansbridge (1999), contest the theory that women share common interests based on their group identity.

No one argues for or finds a negative relationship between quotas and women’s political attitudes and behaviors. However, there are several rival explanations for what causes increase in women’s political attitudes and behaviors. Reverse causation is always a concern in any relationship; that increased positive attitudes and behaviors cause the adoption of quotas. Araújo and García (2006) find that women’s social movements in Latin America caused the adoption of quotas. This is because women in Latin America generally participate in politics through social movements due to the male domination of political parties (Araújo and García, 2006).

The primary rival explanation is that socioeconomic development increases the adoption of quotas and decreases the gender gap in positive attitudes and behaviors (Baldez 2004; Inglehart and Norris 2003). Following the modernization school of thought, a better quality of life can increase everyone’s political participation. Additionally, socioeconomic development allows people to pay attention to immaterial values such as gender equality. Inglehart and Norris (2003) find that decreased gender gaps in protest participation are caused by such cultural changes. Another rival explanation that explains both effects is state structure. Inglehart and Norris (2003) find that democracy decreases the gender gap in participation in protests.

Although this area of study is relatively new, the literature so far offers a variety of empirical designs. Nonetheless, this does not mean that past methodologies are without their limitations. First and foremost, it is difficult to generalize the results of case studies to larger populations and to control for competing variables (Zetterburg 2009, 715). While authors claim that the results of comparative studies can be generalized to other regions, this assertion is questionable until work on other regions or more cross-regional analysis is done. There are also some limitations in studying the effects of quotas and that may make the results of past studies invalid. There is a lack of longitudinal data, and it is possible that some variables have not been examined that may have an effect on the outcome of quotas, such as elite behavior. In the end, it is also possible that in regions where quotas are newer that not enough time has passed to assess the results (Zetterburg 2009, 723-5).

As can be seen, there is no consensus in the literature on the relationship between quotas and women’s political attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, the causal link between quotas and female citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors is complex and different parts of it do not rely on the same assumptions. One could derive a variety of hypotheses that would test different aspects of this theory or develop an elaborate series of hypotheses to test the model as a whole. Due to a lack of resources and data, the purpose of this project is neither. The nature of this project is to make some broad claims about the effects of quotas on a comprehensive set of female citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors across societies and over time.

**Hypothesis**

H1: Female electoral quotas decrease the gender gap in citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors, all other things equal.

H0: There is no relationship between female electoral quotas and the gender gap in citizens attitudes and behaviors.

**Methodology**

This study is a response to Zetterburg’s (2009) study of the effects of quotas on female citizen’s political attitudes and behaviors in Latin America. His study is the first and only of this kind that the author is aware of. Zetterburg (2009) claims that his results can be generalized to other regions, and this study will test this claim in Sub-Saharan Africa. This study is modeled similarly to Zetterburg’s (2009), but with some methodological improvements that better capture the phenomenon. While Zetterburg uses data from one year and lags it, this study will use four sets of data that spans a 10 year period. Because this paper seeks to examine changes in female citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors over time, a pooled time series multi-variate regression analysis will be used. The time series will include 1999-2001, 2002-4, 2005-6, and 2008-9.

**Population and Sample**

Studies on the relationship between quotas and attitudes and behavior have focused on the U.S., Europe, and Latin America. While there are a few cross-regional studies and case studies outside of this area, to the author’s knowledge, there are no comparative studies on Sub-Sahara Africa. Therefore, the population of this study is 20 Sub-Sahara African democracies (refer to the appendix for countries). Keep in mind that quotas are not relevant in societies without elections.

Additionally, focusing on developing countries, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa, is more relevant to this research question because of the economic concept of catch-up growth. This concept proposes that developing countries experience economic growth faster than developed countries because the developed countries have already invested in creating the technology necessary for growth. When applied to other areas, this logic holds that because the idea of female participation in politics has already been established, developing countries will implement it faster. In other words, it took hundreds of years for Western societies to recognize women’s right to participate in politics and for women to actually begin to and increase their levels of participation. Because this idea already exists, developing countries do not have to invest the time in creating the idea and they can implement it quicker than their developed counterparts.

**Model Specification**

No one, to the author’s knowledge, has attempted to specify the relationship between quotas and female citizen’s political attitudes and behaviors over time. Theoretically, one would expect a dramatic increase in women’s attitudes and behaviors immediately following the quota and within the first few election cycles as there are more female candidates and more women elected to office. Decreasing marginal gains would be expected in women’s attitudes and behaviors as women candidates and representatives increase and approach parity with male candidates and representatives. As parity is reached, parity is also expected in the political attitudes and behaviors of citizens, which indicates that female’s political attitudes and behaviors level off.

Although this theoretical relationship represents a logarithmic function, a linear regression equation will be used to approximate it:

Y’ (gender gap in political attitudes and behaviors) = a0 + b1(female electoral quotas) + b2 (years since quota began) + b3(income) + b4(education) + b5(democracy) + b6(gender equality) + e

**The Independent Variable**

The independent variable of this study is female electoral quotas. The literature does not indicate that different types of quotas have independent effects on female citizen’s political attitudes and behaviors. It does indicate that compliance may have an effect, and one would expect the number of the quota to have an effect as well. However due to a lack of data, this variable will be treated as a dichotomy. States with quotas will be coded as 1 and states without them will be quoted as 0. The number of years since the quota has been implemented will be controlled for. If a quota has been in place for a long period of time, we would not except to see a decrease in the gender gap.

**Rival Independent Variables**

*Income*. According to Baldez (2004) and Inglehart and Norris (2003), a better quality of life increases everyone’s political participation and allows people to pay attention to immaterial values such as gender equality. Income per capita, which will be retrieved from the International Monetary Fund, will be used to measure this concept and the concept of modernization in general. There are many indicators that could be used to capture modernization. Income per capita is the one indicator that is most representative of modernization because according to modernization theory, economic development precedes all other aspects of development. Furthermore, it is not volatile from year to year like some other economic indicators that are commonly used such as Gross National Product (GDP).

*Education*. Education is also a measure of modernization theory but it could have independent effects on political attitudes and behaviors from income, although the two are highly correlated. It is generally acknowledge that education has a positive relationship with political attitudes and behaviors. Literacy rates, which will also be taken from the International Monetary fund, will be used to measure education and literacy itself may be considered a prerequisite to political engagement.

*Democracy*. Higher levels of democracy are also attributed to causing increased political participation of all citizens, again including females (Inglehart and Norris 2003). This study uses the Polity score of a country at each point in the time series. Freedom House is not used because it includes civil liberties in its measurements which may include gender equality as a factor which is part of the dependent variable. Polity scores are solely based on democratic institutions which do not conflict with the dependent variable. A minimalist definition of democracy is of better use in this study due to the low development of Sub-Saharan Africa and the fact that regime change is common.

*Gender Equality*. Zetterburg (2009) points out that gender equality is an important variable to control for. The gender gap in political attitudes and behaviors may decrease due to the overall increase of gender equality in society. Data on gender equality will be taken from the United Nation’s Gender Inequality Index which uses a comprehensive set of factors to determine a gender inequality score for a society.

**The Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable is the change in the gender gap of political attitudes and behavior between female and male citizens. Zetterburg (2009) analyzes the absolute level of female citizen’s political attitudes and behaviors which may not always differ from men’s. Survey data from Afrobarometer will be used to measure a comprehensive set of political attitudes and behaviors including: interest, knowledge, efficacy, trust, involvement in civil society, discussion, contact, participation in protest or demonstration activities and voting (refer to the appendix for survey questions). Voting and participation are two political behaviors that have not been considered in the literature.

All responses for males and females will be averaged for each country to convert each attitude and behavior from an ordinal variable to an interval one. Then, the female average will be subtracted from the male average, and this number is the gender gap. Finally, the gap will be converted to a percentage, to make all of the dependent variables uniform due to the different ranges in the survey responses.

**Results**

The results of this paper will be presented at the conference.

**Implications**

Keep in mind that the results of this study cannot prove causation, but merely suggest it or prove correlations. This project can only make a contribution to the quota literature and cannot give any definitive answers. If the goal of a government, society or individuals is to close the gender gap in women’s political attitudes and behaviors, this study will assist in the assessment of the best way to accomplish this. If societies with quotas show a decrease in the gender gap in political attitudes and behaviors, all other things being equal, then this adds to a body of evidence that suggests that quotas are an effective policy. If not, this adds to the body of evidence suggesting that the best way to increase women’s political attitudes and behaviors is perhaps by improving economic conditions and increasing democratic standards for everybody.

**Appendix**

The following is a list of the countries, the years the survey was taken, and the survey questions for each dependent variable for each round of the survey. Each dependent variable was converted from an ordinal to an interval level variable by aggregating the male and female means from each country. Then, the male mean was subtracted from the female mean, and divided by the range of the responses in order to produce uniformity across dependent variables, to produce the gender gap. If there is more than one question, they were averaged to obtain a more comprehensive measure of the variable. The data entered for every variable is taken from the year corresponding to the year the survey was taken in every country. All responses that were “don’t know” (9), “missing” (-1), or where the respondent “refused to answer” (998) were excluded from the sample.

**Round 4 (2008-9)**

*Cases.* Benin (2008), Botswana (2008), Burkina Faso (2008), Cape Verde (2008), Ghana (2008), Kenya (2008), Lesotho (2008), Liberia (2008), Madagascar (2008), Malawi (2008), Mali (2008), Mauritius (2008), Mozambique (2008), Namibia (2008), Nigeria (2008), Senegal (2008), South Africa (2008), Tanzania (2008), and Uganda (2008), Zambia (2009), and Zimbabwe (2009) (Afrobarometer, “Countries and Rounds”).

*Political Interest*. “How interested would you say you are in public affairs?”: “not at all interested” (0), “not very interested” (1), “somewhat interested” (2), “very interested” (3) (Carter 2010, 12).

*Political Knowledge.* “Can you tell me the name of: your member of parliament? your country’s minister of finance (10)?”: “know but not remember” (1), “incorrect guess” (2), “correct name” (3) (Carter 2010, 21-22). In this case “don’t know” (9) was recoded as 0 which made the range 3 instead of two.

*Political Efficacy.* “In your opinion, how likely is it that you could get together with others and make: your elected local government councilor listen to your concerns about matters of importance to the community? your member of parliament listen to your concerns about matters of importance to the community?: “not likely at all” (0), “not very likely” (1), “somewhat likely” (2), “very likely” (3) (Carter 2010, 15). “How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?: members of parliament and elected local government councilors (13)?”: “never” (0), “only sometimes” (1), “often” (2), and “always” (3) (Carter 2010, 28-29).

*Political Trust*. “How much do you trust each of the following, or haven’t you heard enough about them to say?: the president, parliament, and your elected local government councilor?”: “not at all” (0), “just a little” (1), “somewhat” (2), “a lot” (3) (Carter 2010, 25-26).

*Civil Society*. “Now I am going to read you a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, or not a member: some other voluntary association or community groups.”: “not a member” (0), “inactive member” (1), “active member” (2), “official leader” (3). “Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?: attended a community meeting”: “would never do this” (0), “would if I had the chance” (1), “once or twice” (2), “several times” (3), “often” (4) (Carter 2010, 14).

*Political Discussion.* “When you get together with your friends and family, would you say you discuss political matters (5)?”; “never” (0), “occasionally” (1), and “frequently” (2) (Carter 2010, 12).

*Political Protests*. “Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?: attended a demonstration or protest”: “would never do this” (0), “would if I had the chance” (1), “once or twice” (2), “several times” (3), “often” (4) (Carter 2010, 14).

*Voting*. “With regard to the most recent national election, which statement is true for you?” This analysis only used the responses “you decided not to vote” (2; recoded as 0) and “you voted in the elections” (1) (Carter 2010, 15). All other responses indicated that the individual was too young to vote or that the individual was prevented from voting by some means. Although being prevented from voting is an important issue in a democracy, level of democracy is not the dependent variable that is being measured. Therefore, this analysis included responses that indicates whether an individual made the conscious choice to vote or not which indicates the political behavior of voting. Not voting will be recoded as 0.

*Political Contact*. “During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views?: a local government councillor, a member of parliament”: “never” (0), “only once” (1), “a few times” (2), “often” (3) (Carter 2010, 15-6)

**Round 3 (2005-6)**

*Cases.* Benin (2005), Botswana (2005), Cape Verde (2005), Ghana (2005), Kenya (2005), Lesotho (2005), Madagascar (2005), Malawi (2005), Mali (2005), Mauritius (2005), Mozambique (2005), Namibia (2005), Nigeria (2005), Senegal (2005), South Africa (2006), Tanzania (2005), and Uganda (2005), Zambia (2005), and Zimbabwe (2005) (Afrobarometer, “Countries and Rounds”).

Questions will be added before the conference.

**Round 2 (2002-4)**

*Cases.* Botswana (2003), Cape Verde (2002), Ghana (2002), Kenya (2003), Lesotho (2003), Malawi (2003), Mali (2002), Mauritius (2005), Mozambique (2002), Namibia (2003), Nigeria (2003), Senegal (2002), South Africa (2002), Tanzania (2003), and Uganda (2002), Zambia (2003), and Zimbabwe (2004) (Afrobarometer, “Countries and Rounds”).

Questions will be added before the conference.

**Round 1 (1999-2001)**

*Cases.* Botswana (1999), Ghana (1999), Lesotho (2000), Malawi (1999), Mali (2001), Mauritius (1999), Namibia (2000), Nigeria (2000), South Africa (2000), Tanzania (2001), and Uganda (2000), Zambia (1999), and Zimbabwe (1999) (Afrobarometer, “Countries and Rounds”).

Questions will be added before the conference.

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