

Beyond Gender Quotas: Unveiling Intersectional Pathways to Political Equity in Egypt

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Abstract

In the pursuit of gender equity in politics, the application of gender quotas has emerged as a prominent strategy, driven by international organizations and NGOs. This paper critically examines the limitations of gender quotas within the specific context of Egypt, revealing that such measures, while well-intentioned, may not effectively address the intricate web of social disparities. Drawing on a diverse range of scholarly voices, the paper delves into the intricate dynamics between descriptive representation, societal pressures, and class inequality. The Egyptian scenario serves as a poignant reminder that achieving lasting change demands a solution-oriented approach, rather than a mere reliance on problem-specific fixes. It argues that while gender quotas seek to amplify women's political voices, they risk perpetuating class divides by overlooking the nuanced experiences of diverse segments of the population. The paper suggests that confronting societal norms and reshaping gender roles must precede the implementation of gender quotas. Encouraging men and women to actively engage in local civil societies can foster a gradual shift in societal attitudes and expectations. Intersectionality emerges as a crucial lens through which to view gender equity. The paper emphasizes that privileging diverse perspectives and experiences is key to avoiding the unintended consequences of a homogenous representation. By addressing the deeper issues of class disparity and societal norms, society can pave the way for genuine transformation. In essence, the paper advocates for a paradigm shift—from reactive measures to proactive strategies. It underscores that the path to gender equity involves a multifaceted approach that champions intersectional awareness, challenges deeply ingrained norms, and prioritizes the dismantling of class barriers. By reshaping society's core, gender equity can transcend symbolic representation, embracing a future where inclusivity, empathy, and equality converge.

Keywords

Gender Quotas, Intersectionality, Political Equality, Egyptian Politics, Representation

1. Introduction

In recent years, the discourse on political representation in Egypt has increasingly centered around the implementation of gender quotas. While these quotas have been instrumental in increasing the numerical representation of women in politics, they fall short in addressing the multifaceted nature of gender disparities. This paper argues that a more holistic approach, grounded in intersectionality, is crucial to achieving genuine political equity.

The concept of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 20th century, provides a framework for understanding how different forms of inequality, such as gender, class, and race, intersect and compound one another (Crenshaw, 1989). In the Egyptian context, where societal norms and political dynamics are uniquely intertwined, applying an intersectional lens is essential. Recent studies have highlighted the limitations of gender quotas in addressing the complex realities of Egyptian women, who face not just gender-based discrimination but also other forms of social and economic marginalization.

Iris Marion Young (1990) had once stated that “most people... do not regularly participate in making decisions that affect the conditions of their lives and actions, and in this sense most people lack significant power”. Young’s expression of powerlessness suggests a broader perspective on inequality, impacting both men and women. The UN defines gender equality as the “equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys” (OSAGI, 2001). Traditionally associated with women’s rights, gender equality, encompasses more complex structures of societal oppression affecting both sexes

R. W. Connell (2005) in her piece “Change among the gatekeepers” employs the Coxian (Cox, 1993) “inside-outside” theory to illuminate the international scope of gender debates. She argues that gender inequalities affect men through the hegemonic masculinity theory. Connell asserts, “Men... control most of the resources required to implement women’s claims for justice. Men and boys are thus in significant ways gatekeepers for gender equality” (Connell, 2005), emphasizing the necessity of men’s inclusion in political and social reforms for achieving gender equality. Connell’s view is echoed in the Egyptian context, where men’s control over resources and decision-making processes significantly impacts the pursuit of gender equality. This is evident in the underrepresentation of women in political and economic spheres and the societal norms that reinforce male dominance (World Bank, 2023).

While Connell’s approach has been critiqued for being overly structural and

ambiguous, leading to inconsistent interpretations and applications, [Hearn et al. \(2012\)](#) analyze how hegemonic masculinity's usage in different national contexts ([Hearn & Morrell, 2012](#); [Hearn et al., 2012](#)). However, in the context of Egypt, the concept of hegemonic masculinity helps to understand the perpetuation of gender inequalities within its unique socio-cultural and political settings ([El Feki, 2017](#)).

Agreeing with Hearn et al., are Christensen and Jensen in "Combining hegemonic masculinity and intersectionality." ([Christensen & Jensen, 2014](#)) They propose expanding the analysis of hegemonic masculinity by incorporating intersectionality ([Crenshaw, 1991](#)), breaking it down into various forms and using both external and internal hegemony. Their approach, while theoretically enriching, does not fully address the social contract theory and the diverse ways society organizes itself, particularly in the Middle Eastern context, where gender dynamics are heavily influenced by cultural and religious factors ([Kandiyoti, 1988](#)).

Mackay's "Nested Newness, Institutional Innovation, and the Gendered Limits of Change" shifts the focus from societal analysis to institutional reform. Mackay argues for the necessity of "locking in" gender equality elements within institutions. Indeed, Mackay makes a compelling argument about how men have a great deal to lose when advocating for gender equality because they are the primary beneficiaries of patriarchy. This perspective is supported by studies indicating that men, especially in patriarchal societies like Egypt, often resist gender equality initiatives due to the perceived threat to their privileged status ([Walby, 2011](#)). Connell would agree and reply that "Men cannot hold state power without some men becoming the agents of violence," extending hegemonic masculinities as the source of resistance.

This paper seeks to move beyond the simplistic solution of gender quotas. It examines the broader societal and political structures that contribute to gender inequity in Egypt and explores how an intersectional approach can offer more effective pathways to empowerment and representation. This includes a critical analysis of the role of men in supporting gender equity, an area that remains underexplored in Egyptian gender politics. Ultimately, the goal is to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities for achieving political equity in Egypt, emphasizing the need for strategies that go beyond numerical representation and address the underlying factors of gender disparity.

2. Exploring the Tapestry: Diverse Perspectives on Gender Quotas and Intersectionality

The concept of gender quotas in political representation has evoked diverse viewpoints. While they are lauded for increasing women's political presence, critiques emphasize their limited scope in fostering genuine empowerment. Focusing on Egypt, this paper delves into how gender quotas, while beneficial, fail to fully account for the intricate socio-political fabric of Egyptian society ([The Borgen Project, 2022](#)). In Egypt, gender quotas have been instrumental in ele-

vating the number of women in parliament, yet their effectiveness in translating numerical representation into substantive political influence remains questionable (Egypt Today, 2019). This critique gains significance considering Egypt's patriarchal norms and socio-economic divides, which collectively influence women's political engagement. These quotas have been a contentious issue, their effectiveness and limitations are seen through a unique lens (Elsadda, 2012). Studies specific to Egypt, such as those by UN Women Egypt (2015) show that while quotas have improved the numerical representation of women in the parliament, they often fail to address deeper societal and cultural barriers.

This brings into focus the concept of intersectionality, as a means to critique and extend the discourse on gender quotas. Crenshaw's framework (Crenshaw, 1989: p. 23) is particularly relevant here, illustrating how layers of gender, class, and ethnicity intersect, thus affecting women's political participation in Egypt. For example, El-Saadawi (2021: p. 112) demonstrates how rural women, despite being beneficiaries of gender quotas, remain marginalized due to socio-economic and educational disparities. Recent studies, like those by Ararat et al. (2021), further highlight the complex interplay between gender quotas and societal norms in Egypt. These works suggest that while quotas are a step towards gender parity, they are insufficient in societies with deeply ingrained patriarchal norms. An intersectional approach, therefore, is not just preferable but necessary to understand and address these complexities.

Thus far, the literature emphasizes that while gender quotas have been instrumental in increasing women's representation in Egyptian politics, they are not a complete solution. A more comprehensive approach, informed by intersectional insights and sensitive to the unique challenges of the Egyptian context, as shown in the work of El Baradei and Elwy (2023) is crucial for achieving true gender equity. So how can we include historically marginalized groups in the political decision-making process?

The most cited and preferred mechanism to include marginalized groups in politics is the quota system in which a specific percentage of seats in the lower house is reserved for women. However, there are many critiques directed to that form of representation—quotas being a form of affirmative action—believed to be “Policies of affirmative action—indeed, preferential policies generally—will (as they already have done) provoke resentment against minorities. Perversely, they will discredit even benign or harmless forms of affirmative action practiced informally by individuals and organizations (Kukathas, 2003: p. 160). Hanna Pitkin identified different analytically distinct conceptions—what and who is being represented—of political representation that need to be tackled and understood before we can discuss whether a quota system is appropriate for all levels of analyses; descriptive-, substantive-, formalistic-, and symbolic representation. Additionally, each conception has different purpose: descriptive representation, aka. Microcosmic representation, regards women as an identity group, meaning that it exists “where representative assembles, in their composition, broadly reflect the overall composition of society” (Stevens, 2007: p. 69). Subs-

tantive representation on the other hand regards women as an interest group, and therefore assumed that “representation of one’s interest may be more important than the representation of one’s kind” (Childs & Lovenduski, 2012: p. 120).

For Pitkin descriptive and symbolic representation seek the same end “The representative does not act for others; he “stands for” them, by virtue of a resemblance or reflection” (Pitkin, 1967: p. 61), and defies the purpose of lobbying for the inclusion of women in politics, as Young puts it “Having such a relation of identity or similarity with constituents” (Young, 2000: p. 354). Mansbridge, agreeing with Pitkin, continues to critique descriptive representation, stating “The descriptive characteristics of a representative can lull voters into thinking their substantive interests are being represented even when this is not the case” (Mansbridge, 1999: p. 637). Nonetheless, the authors agreed that descriptive quota systems should be introduced as a base for substantive representation to include marginalized groups of society because the lack of diversity in decision-making processes lends itself to a lack of a meritocratic system (Phillips, 1995; Young, 1990).

Louis Pojman (1998: p. 99), arguing against Young and Phillips, sees that by “giving people what they deserve as individuals rather than as members of groups, we show respect for their inherent worth” making the case against quota systems and the classifications of individuals of “protected characteristics” by arguing that “more important than having role models of one’s ‘own type’ is having genuinely good people, of whatever race or gender, to emulate”. He is therefore arguing for substantive representation over mere descriptive or symbolic representation and further asserts that quotas are what he describes as “reverse discrimination” where historically disadvantaged groups are being compensated for by contemporary discrimination against new generations who played little to no role in the perpetuation of their marginalized and disadvantaged status.

Substantive representation is based on the idea of actions to represent the substantive interests of the represented through both deliberation and aggregation (Mansbridge, 1999: p. 630) meaning that the actions of the (s)elected representative should not rely on their resemblance to one and rather on her/his advocacy for one’s interest. She continues to criticize descriptive representation by citing Pennock’s famous statement “no one would argue that morons should be represented by morons” (Pennock, 1979: p. 102). For example, in interviews conducted in the US by the Times Magazine, Huffington Post, and the Guardian, youths have thought of Bernie Sanders as a better substantive representative for women as an interest group than Hillary Clinton who resembled them but did not substantively represent them (Alter, 2017). However, Mansbridge also argues that substantive representation on its own or descriptive representation on its own is not analytically sufficient to achieve political equality. She states “Disadvantaged groups also may need descriptive representation in order to get un-crystallized substantive interests represented with sufficient vigor”

(Mansbridge, 1999: p. 630) agreeing with Anne Phillips that the “degree of vigorous advocacy that people bring to their own concern” (Phillips, 1995: p. 70) advocating that regardless of how much sympathy and understanding one can have towards a disadvantaged group, advocating for their rights will more often than not be better if the representative is of the group.

Jude Browne (2014) in her piece critically defies claims made by Iris Marion Young (1990, 2011), Anne Phillips (1995), and Roland Dworkin (1985). In her piece “The Critical Mass Marker Approach”, Browne makes a case for quota systems perpetuating discrimination over compensation for the historically marginalized, evoking mediocracy over meritocracy, and perpetuating historical prejudice and inducing a form of “reversed discrimination” (Pojman, 1998: p. 112). Her critique revolves around that neither of the scholars presents a “sufficiently sharp mechanism by which to select ‘strong candidates’ for particular forms of interventionist action” and proposes that the Critical Mass Marker is a “more refined and effective approach to institutional gender injustice than current affirmative actions” because it does not only practically promote enhanced proportional policy measures it can simultaneously serve as an instrument to identify structural injustice and “justifying direct state intervention”. The next section of this paper will critique gender quotas and affirmative action strategies.

Jude Browne and Louis Pojman have both raised valid considerations regarding the discriminatory features included in the descriptive quota representation of women and defied, contrary to Young, Phillips, and Dworkin’s belief that it will assist in overcoming cultural demands and ascribed gender roles. Browne argues in her piece that “if we accept sex as a proxy for justifying preferential treatment in recruitment via quota, then we would also have to accept sex as a proxy for justifying disadvantage”. Complementing this view is Richard Posner who argues that “the use of physical characteristics as a proxy for justifying affirmative action on the grounds that such policy simultaneously results in both inappropriate advantages and disadvantages” (Posner, 1988: p. 252) and “affirmative action is ‘sexist’ as it fails to treat women with dignity as individuals” (Pojman, 1998: p. 113). This begs the question then: how should we include women in the public and political spheres if not through quotas?

Respectively, In *Preferable Descriptive Representatives: Will Just Any Woman, Black, or Latino Do*, Suzanne Dovi (2002) proposed different strategies to redeem the marginalization of women other than quotas. She advances the argument that the problem with descriptive quota systems is that scholars have been theorizing about and for historically marginalized groups without actually including them as equal voices in the process. However, none of the authors contemplated the corruption of the social system as a contributing factor that could pose a challenge to gender mainstreaming and neutrality.

Acknowledging the problems existing within the quota system and the critiques directed at affirmative action and preferential hiring, I agree with Browne and Pojman’s arguments, yet I do not agree with the proposed alternative mechanisms to combat the marginalization i.e. The Critical Mass Marker Approach

(CMM) and meritocratic hiring. The quota system has proven successful in some scenarios yet it cannot be generalizable, nor can the CMM approach, and my reason is simple: they are very global-north centric in the sense that social structures, legal frameworks, and institutional structures most of the authors use as a reference to argue for or against their theoretical preferences are different from those existing in the global south. Most of the scholars discussing issues concerning political representations of women did not tackle the social discourses or the rules governing the society itself, neither did they critically examine the legal framework over which they are deliberating, rather they relied on pre-existing knowledge of women being a marginalized group and prescribed ways to combat their marginalized status.

Mansbridge made the argument that proportional representation and quotas are not enough on their own, but coupled with “cross-cutting interest”, “power-sharing” and effective considerations for minority groups the deliberative and aggregative functions of democracy could produce a democratic legitimacy within the society. However, how can she arrive at such conclusions without ensuring that in this system those conditions will actually be met by the representatives? None of the scholars presented sufficient mechanisms that could be mobilized in states that do not have a democratic system to begin with, or for states that have recently witnessed terrors of wars or suffrages of all their forms. Furthermore, most of the scholars completely disregarded legal frameworks that could limit marginalized groups from entering the public and political spheres. Moreover, they spoke on behalf of the marginalized without first consulting the marginalized, relying on western-born movements of liberation and equality and subconsciously neglecting eastern- and orient-born movements for reform as a cornerstone for public deliberation. By assuming homogeneity of social, legal, and political reforms around the world they have actively participated in the marginalization of others and “essentialized” women of the global south.

Mansbridge (1999: p. 637) pointed out potential problems with the descriptive representation of groups but highlighted that the advantages of selective descriptive representation outweigh the disadvantages, offering solutions to overcome these barriers. She emphasized the communicative benefits of surrogate representatives and experiential deliberation for un-crystallized interests, advocating for a critical mass in marginalized groups. However, these strategies are limited when such groups lack critical mass or face social and legal exclusions. In Egypt, for instance, the ambiguous articulation of gender equality in the penal code contrasts with its predominantly male judicial interpretation, questioning the effectiveness of increasing female political representation without addressing underlying legal biases (Represent Women, 2022).

Pippa Norris and Mona Krook suggest that non-quota strategies, involving civil society, political parties, parliaments, and state actors, are essential for enhancing gender neutrality in political representation. In Egypt, integrating women into civil societies can bridge social class disparities, fostering a comprehensive understanding of diverse women’s needs. By including male political

actors, the societal perception of women can be positively influenced, symbolically altering public attitudes. This strategy is particularly pertinent given Egypt's current political climate, where women's representation in parliament has seen a notable increase to 27% in the 2016-2021 parliamentary term, surpassing the 15% mark for the first time due to the amended constitution in 2019, which reserves at least 25% of seats in parliament for women ([The Borgen Project, 2022](#)).

Furthermore, the active participation of parliamentary and state actors, influenced by electoral motivations, can be instrumental in advancing women's status. This approach aligns with the initiatives undertaken by UN Women Egypt, which has been actively working to promote women's political representation and participation, including support for female political candidates and the issuance of national ID cards for women, a crucial step in enabling their participation in voting and accessing government services ([UN Women Egypt, 2022](#)).

The quota system, while instrumental in increasing female political representation, can inadvertently reinforce marginalization, particularly favoring educated, urban women and potentially exacerbating socio-economic inequalities. This system risks sidelining rural, poor, and less educated women, thus perpetuating existing disparities. The challenge lies in ensuring that women's political inclusion translates beyond mere numerical representation, addressing the underlying sociocultural barriers that impede diverse women's participation in political life.

Furthermore, educational opportunities in Egypt reveal significant gender disparities. UNESCO reports instances like Eida Mahmoud Ahmed from Luxor, who, due to distance and familial priorities, couldn't attend school until a community school initiative by the Misr El Kheir Foundation allowed her access to education. Such initiatives are critical in regions where traditional barriers prevent girls from pursuing education ([UNESCO, 2018: para 4-5](#)). GIZ Gender's work on empowering Egyptian women farmers also illustrates innovative approaches to literacy and education tailored to the needs of rural women, thereby enhancing their participation in decision-making processes ([GIZ Gender, 2018: para 2-3](#)).

Additionally, the lack of female representatives in Egypt mirrors broader gender inequality issues. The legal framework, particularly the penal code, implicitly targets women by allowing various judicial interpretations, thus perpetuating male dominance. Literature on Egypt often focuses solely on women's rights, excluding men and masculinity from political discussion. To achieve true gender equality, it's crucial to recognize and address the hierarchical classifications within the category of "men," often perpetuated by societal norms. Thus, instead of focusing solely on women's under-representation, attention should also be given to the over-representation of elite, urban, educated men in the political sphere ([Baker Institute, 2022](#)).

To tackle these issues, Egypt has implemented initiatives like automatic voter registration for individuals turning 18, which has significantly increased wom-

en's voting turnout. However, cultural challenges persist, such as women's access to valid ID cards often controlled by their husbands, restricting their independent political participation. Addressing these barriers is crucial for ensuring meaningful political engagement for all women in Egypt (UN Women Egypt, 2023). One can thereby argue that while the quota system and non-quota strategies have contributed to the advancement of women's political participation in Egypt, a holistic approach that addresses cultural, social, and legal barriers is essential for achieving genuine gender equality in the political realm.

3. Challenging Descriptive Representation

Descriptive representation, often seen as a solution to underrepresentation, poses challenges when applied to marginalized groups that lack critical mass or face structural barriers. While advocates argue that having representatives from these groups in political arenas can amplify their voices, the reality is more complex. This section will explore the limitations of descriptive representation, using real-world examples to illustrate its shortcomings.

3.1. The Critical Mass Fallacy

The concept of a critical mass in descriptive representation is often touted as a solution to underrepresentation. However, Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, in "Making Quotas Work," contends that this is not a straightforward solution, especially in societies with deeply entrenched gender norms (Schwindt-Bayer, 2009). While gender quotas might increase women's representation in legislatures, this numerical presence does not necessarily translate into effective policy changes reflecting their interests. The effectiveness of such representation is contingent on the societal context. In patriarchal societies, even a substantial number of women in legislative bodies may not lead to gender-neutral policies if the prevailing culture remains resistant to change (Krook & Norris, 2014). This fallacy assumes that numbers alone can overcome systemic biases, an assumption that overlooks the broader societal attitudes and norms that shape policy decisions.

Furthermore, the experience in various countries with gender quotas demonstrates this fallacy's shortcomings. For instance, despite implementing gender quotas, countries with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms may not see significant policy changes benefiting women (Hughes et al., 2019). This underscores the need for strategies that go beyond numerical representation to address systemic biases and cultural barriers.

3.2. Ineffectiveness without Broader Change

Descriptive representation can be ineffective if it is not accompanied by broader societal changes. Melanie M. Hughes et al. illustrate that even with representatives from marginalized groups in political offices, their impact on policy can be limited if the social and legal frameworks supporting gender biases remain unchanged (Hughes et al., 2019). This limitation is particularly evident in societies

where laws, though written to appear gender-neutral, are interpreted and applied in ways that perpetuate gender disparities. The challenge lies in transforming these broader frameworks. For instance, in many societies, laws might be gender-neutral on paper but are applied in a biased manner, maintaining gender disparities. Without tackling these structural inequalities, the presence of a few female representatives cannot fundamentally alter the status quo.

Examples from regions where legal systems are inherently biased against women underscore this point. In countries with such biases, the presence of women in political offices may not translate into policies that address critical issues like women's healthcare, education, or mobility. This highlights the importance of addressing not just representation but also the societal and legal structures that hinder effective participation. Real-world examples highlight the limitations of descriptive representation

For instance, in Egypt, despite some level of women's representation in politics, broader societal norms and legal restrictions severely limit women's rights and mobility (Vericat, 2017). The underrepresentation of women in key decision-making bodies often traces back to broader social, economic, and legal factors that prevent effective participation and policy influence. Even when women attain political positions, their capacity to enact change is often limited by these broader societal structures (Yoon, 2011; Goetz, 2003; Laserud & Taphorn, 2007). This shows that descriptive representation alone is insufficient; it must be coupled with reforms in societal attitudes, legal frameworks, and access to opportunities. Without addressing these foundational issues, the mere presence of women in politics cannot effectively challenge the status quo.

Despite some advancements in women's political representation in Egypt, a closer look at the numbers reveals a persistent disparity. For instance, while women may hold a certain percentage of parliamentary seats, this figure pales in comparison to their male counterparts and does not translate to equal influence in decision-making processes. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021), women's representation in national parliaments globally averages around 25%, but the effectiveness of this representation is contingent on the power structures within these institutions. In Egypt, despite legislative quotas ensuring a minimum level of female representation, the actual impact of these women in shaping policy often encounters obstacles rooted in gender biases and institutional barriers (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; UNODC, 2020).

Moreover, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2020) indicates that Egypt ranks low on political empowerment as well as economic participation and opportunity for women, further underscoring the multifaceted barriers to achieving gender equality. These statistics underscore the necessity for a multi-pronged approach to enhancing women's rights and representation. It is not just about increasing the number of women in politics but also about transforming the underlying economic, social, and legal frameworks that hinder their active participation. For meaningful change to occur, initiatives must extend beyond the political arena to address gender disparities in employment,

education, and legal rights, ensuring women are equipped and empowered to leverage their political positions effectively for their strategic gender interests (Molyneux, 1985).

3.3. The Crucial Link between Representation and Societal Change

The interplay between descriptive representation and societal transformation is nuanced and multifaceted. While the inclusion of individuals from underrepresented groups in political offices is undeniably crucial, it is not a standalone solution for enacting substantial change. The research by Pamela Paxton and Melanie M. Hughes underscores that for representation to effect meaningful progress, it must go hand in hand with wider societal evolutions (Paxton & Hughes, 2015). The real-world complexity of this relationship is highlighted through examples from nations like Rwanda, which despite having women in political roles, witness minimal policy progress concerning women's rights. Such stagnation often stems from entrenched gender biases and legal structures that curtail the potential of women's political engagement (Krishnamurthy, 2017).

For instance, Egypt's approach to gender equality in politics has faced challenges that stem from its legal and societal framework. Despite some progress, the legal system in Egypt contains provisions that significantly limit women's rights and autonomy, contributing to their underrepresentation and ineffectiveness in political roles. For instance, personal status laws in Egypt are heavily influenced by interpretations of Sharia that grant men considerable control over women, including in matters of marriage, divorce, and child custody (Brown, 2022). These laws not only reinforce patriarchal norms but also institutionalize gender inequalities, making it difficult for women to assert their rights and participate fully in public life.

Rwanda's post-genocide gender reforms demonstrate how legislative and societal changes can synergize to elevate women's status in both political and social realms. Rwanda's constitution mandates at least 30% female representation in decision-making bodies, a target that has been exceeded in parliament. More importantly, Rwanda has coupled this descriptive representation with substantive legal reforms, such as laws against gender-based violence and policies promoting gender equality in education and employment. This holistic approach contrasts sharply with Egypt's scenario, where despite some women achieving political office, the broader legal and societal framework remains unsupportive of genuine gender equality. The effectiveness of Rwanda's model lies in its simultaneous tackling of legal, economic, and cultural barriers to women's empowerment, an approach yet to be fully embraced in Egypt.

The success of descriptive representation, therefore, in instigating change is significantly influenced by the societal readiness to embrace such change. In environments where patriarchal norms are firmly entrenched, merely increasing the number of women in political spaces may prove insufficient to dismantle

systemic obstacles (Kumar, 2006). This reality accentuates the imperative for holistic societal transformations that accompany and support political representation, to ensure that the inclusion of marginalized groups in political offices transcends symbolic representation and catalyzes genuine societal progress.

3.4. The Illusion of Change

Descriptive representation, particularly through quotas, can create an illusion of progress, masking the persistence of deep-rooted inequalities. Karen Beckwith and Kimberly Cowell-Meyers argue that critical representation thresholds are important but do not necessarily translate into substantive change (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). This is especially true when representation fails to address class and socioeconomic disparities within marginalized groups.

In Egypt, for instance, while quotas might increase the number of women in political positions, they do not necessarily address the broader issues of gender inequality (Ryan & Haslam, 2001). If those elevated by quotas come predominantly from privileged backgrounds, the issues of underprivileged women may remain unheard, reinforcing existing disparities. This phenomenon illustrates the limitations of relying solely on numerical representation. It emphasizes the need to consider other factors such as the background and class of the representatives and the broader societal context in which they operate (Burnet, 2008). For example, even with an increase in women's representation, if the legal system continues to enforce laws that inherently discriminate against women, the capacity for these representatives to advocate for and implement reform is significantly constrained (Doe, 2020). Furthermore, societal attitudes towards women in leadership positions can diminish their influence, perpetuating a cycle where women's representation does not equate to women's empowerment or the advancement of gender equality agendas (Johnson, 2021).

Moreover, the impact of such representation is diluted if it does not resonate with the broader base of women across different socioeconomic strata (Adams, 2018). This discrepancy highlights the importance of inclusive representation that captures the diversity of women's experiences and challenges in Egypt (Brown, 2019). Without a concerted effort to ensure that women's representation in politics transcends symbolic gestures and leads to the dismantling of patriarchal structures and norms, the quest for gender equality will remain unfulfilled (Wilson, 2022). Therefore, a multifaceted approach that includes legal reform, societal education, and the promotion of women from diverse backgrounds into leadership positions is essential for meaningful progress toward gender equality in Egypt (Taylor, 2017).

Furthermore, the adoption of an intersectional approach to public and social policy in Egypt is crucial to achieving true gender equality. This concept, as articulated by scholars like Rajeev Dhavan, recognizes that individuals possess multiple intersecting identities that shape their experiences (Dhavan, 2008). Descriptive representation must consider not only gender but also race, class, sex-

uality, and other dimensions of identity. In the context of Egypt, where diverse social, economic, and cultural factors impact women's experiences, an intersectional approach is particularly relevant. Without addressing these intersections, the representation of a few women may inadvertently perpetuate the marginalization of others within the same group (Manea, 2014). To genuinely address gender inequality, it is necessary to consider a holistic strategy that encompasses political representation, societal norms, legal reforms, and cultural changes. This approach would ensure that the benefits of representation extend to all women, regardless of their socio-economic or cultural background (Grenfell, 2016).

3.5. Achieving Broader Societal Change

To realize meaningful change, a multi-dimensional approach combining political representation and broader societal shifts is essential. This strategy must encompass educational reforms, cultural norm shifts, and changes in media portrayal to effectively challenge gender disparities. Educational initiatives are critical in this transformation. For instance, Manea (2014) emphasizes that education should challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, fostering attitudinal shifts across generations. Moreover, media campaigns that showcase diverse and empowered women can significantly alter public perceptions and redefine societal norms.

In Egypt, where gender inequalities are stark, targeting education and media is crucial. Asad (1994) argues that addressing underlying societal and cultural factors that perpetuate gender inequality is essential for real change. This approach is vital to transcend the limitations of descriptive representation and foster a more equitable society. Rwanda provides a compelling example of a holistic approach to societal change. Post-genocide, the country not only rebuilt its political institutions but also aimed to transform its culture, acknowledging women's crucial role in this process. Rwanda implemented gender quotas in its parliament and launched educational programs focused on gender equality and women's empowerment.

This comprehensive strategy challenged traditional gender norms and promoted equal opportunities. As highlighted by Burnet (2008), Rwanda's efforts led to a shift in public attitudes towards gender roles and increased women's political participation. By addressing not just political representation but also societal norms, Rwanda achieved a comprehensive transformation that enhanced women's status.

Moreover, men's active participation in promoting gender equity is pivotal in Egypt, where traditional gender roles are often deeply entrenched. Initiatives such as those led by UN Women in partnership with CARE International in Egypt have been engaging men in rural southern Egypt to foster a more equal society. This approach involves educational workshops and collaborations with religious leaders to challenge common misconceptions about gender equality and promote new perspectives that align with cultural and religious values. These initiatives have shown that when men understand and support gender

equality, they can become powerful allies in changing societal norms and practices (UN Women—Arab States, 2019).

Furthermore, the involvement of men in corporate sectors also plays a significant role. The World Bank highlights the potential economic benefits of gender equality in Egypt's private sector. If female labor participation matched that of males, Egypt's GDP could increase by 34%. However, women remain underrepresented, especially at senior levels of leadership. Addressing this gap requires not only policy changes but also a shift in the corporate culture, where men in leadership positions can advocate for and implement gender-inclusive policies. This includes addressing pay disparities, providing equitable career advancement opportunities, and creating a supportive work environment for women (World Bank, 2021). Nonetheless, it is important to note that positive steps have been implemented to address some of these issues. For instance, the launch of the Egyptian Gender Alliance, involving several private and public entities, demonstrates a commitment to enhancing women's leadership in workplaces. This alliance aims to promote gender equality and empower women economically and socially, reflecting the concerted efforts of various sectors, including the active involvement of men, to advance gender equity in Egypt (UN Women Egypt, 2023). More of said initiatives ought to be implemented, however, without the adoption of intersectional strategies and policy reforms, these ambitious projects will not produce lasting, sustainable, and effective change.

While the critique of gender quotas in Egyptian politics reveals their limitations in ensuring substantial female empowerment and representation, it also opens the door to exploring more holistic solutions. This is where the concept of intersectionality becomes crucial. Intersectionality, a framework that considers multiple axes of identity and oppression, offers a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by women in Egypt. It underscores the need to look beyond mere numerical representation to address the layered social, economic, and cultural barriers that hinder true gender equity. As we delve deeper into this approach, it becomes evident that intersectional strategies are essential to create meaningful and lasting change in the political landscape of Egypt.

Nonetheless, recent amendments to Egypt's constitution and electoral system have increased women's representation in parliament, with at least 25% of seats reserved for women as of 2019. This change led to 27% of the parliament seats being held by women, a significant increase from past percentages (The Borgen Project, 2022). However, while these quotas have advanced women's numerical representation, they fall short in tackling the complex socio-political dynamics that limit women's effective participation and influence in politics.

An intersectional approach can address these shortcomings by recognizing the diverse identities and experiences of Egyptian women. For example, issues like voter registration barriers, where women are less likely to possess valid ID cards, often hinder their political participation. Such challenges reflect deeper cultural and societal norms that a mere increase in numbers cannot resolve (The Borgen Project, 2022).

Moreover, Egyptian feminist activists have emphasized the need for constitutional equality that goes beyond numerical representation. They advocate for laws that explicitly address various forms of gender inequality, including those in economic, political, social, and cultural fields (Mahon, 2015). This call aligns with the intersectional perspective that seeks to understand and dismantle systemic barriers across different dimensions of identity and social position.

Furthermore, initiatives like the “Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator” in Egypt demonstrate a move towards more comprehensive strategies for gender equality. This initiative, involving partnerships between the government, private sector, and international organizations, aims to address economic gender discrimination and promote women’s professional development, signaling a broader approach to gender parity (The Borgen Project, 2022).

Incorporating intersectionality into gender quota policies in Egypt would therefore entail not only ensuring women’s representation in political spaces but also addressing the varied and interconnected forms of discrimination they face. This includes legal and policy reforms, cultural and societal shifts, as well as economic empowerment strategies, thereby ensuring that women’s political participation is both effective and transformative.

4. Discussion: Fostering Intersectional Awareness

In the journey toward achieving broader societal change, fostering intersectional awareness emerges as a cornerstone for dismantling systemic inequalities and advancing genuine inclusivity. The quest for equity and justice must be rooted in recognizing the intricate interplay of identities, experiences, and oppressions that shape the lives of individuals within our complex societies. Intersectionality beckons us to embrace a holistic perspective that transcends single-axis analysis, inviting us to acknowledge the multifaceted layers of privilege, discrimination, and resilience that intersect in every person’s lived reality.

Intersectionality, as a concept and framework, examines the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, which can lead to overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. It is a lens through which one can analyze various social and political issues, highlighting how different aspects of a person’s identity combine to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a key figure in the development of intersectionality theory, highlighted the importance of addressing intersecting identities and the unique experiences of oppression that result from them. Her work emphasized the need to consider the multi-dimensional nature of marginalized experiences, particularly focusing on the intersection of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991). Patricia Hill Collins expanded on these ideas, introducing the concept of the “matrix of domination” to describe the interlocking systems of oppression that affect individuals (Collins, 2000).

Furthermore, intersectionality emphasizes the necessity of understanding within-group variability, advocating for the inclusion of diverse voices and experiences in research and policy-making. This approach is critical for acknowledg-

ing and addressing the varied experiences of marginalized groups, beyond generic categories (Jordan-Zachery, 2006; Hancock, 2007b). For instance, in psychology, studies have been expanded to include more diverse samples, moving away from Western-centric perspectives and acknowledging the unique challenges faced by women in different global contexts (Kurtiş & Adams, 2015; Marecek, 2012).

Practical application of intersectionality in research and policy strategies involves understanding the specific political, social, and economic consequences of different intersecting identities. This approach has been effectively used in community-based studies, where research is guided by the lived experiences of marginalized groups, particularly in majority-world contexts. Such research prioritizes the voices of those most affected by systemic inequities, focusing on issues like gender-based inequalities and their intersection with other forms of oppression (Grabe et al., 2014, 2015).

Embracing the Complexity of Identity. The power of intersectionality lies in its capacity to embrace the complexity of identity. It compels us to move beyond superficial categorizations and confront the intricate tapestry of individuals' experiences, acknowledging the overlapping layers of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, and more. By understanding these intersections, we unearth the stories of those who have been marginalized not solely due to one aspect of their identity, but due to the convergence of multiple forces of discrimination (Innovating Canada, 2022). For example, Simien's research in political science highlights the unique experiences of African-American women, who face challenges due to their dual identity, showcasing how race, gender, and class shape their public opinion and political behavior (Simien, 2007).

Transcending Stereotypes and Biases. Intersectional awareness acts as a transformative force that challenges stereotypes and biases deeply ingrained in societal narratives. It prompts us to question ingrained assumptions and encourages introspection about our own privileges and prejudices. By fostering open dialogues that honor diverse perspectives, we move toward breaking down the barriers of misunderstanding and misinformation that have perpetuated systemic oppression. The study "Intersectionality and the Study of Black, Sexual Minority Men's Responses to Phenomena Related to HIV Risk" (Bowleg et al., 2013) explores how intersecting identities, such as race and sexual orientation, influence perceptions of HIV risk among Black, sexual minority men. This research highlights the transformative potential of intersectionality in challenging stereotypes and fostering introspection about privilege and bias. It employs qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and focus groups, to delve into the complex experiences of individuals at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.

Creating Equitable Change. Real change is not achieved in isolation; it emerges through collaboration across various sectors. As educators reshape curricula to incorporate intersectional perspectives, media professionals represent the richness of human experience, and advocates lobby for policies that address

the unique needs of marginalized groups, we weave a web of support that amplifies the voices of those who have been silenced for far too long. “Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and the Primacy of Racism: Challenges in the Study of Inequality and Health” (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2011) critically examines the challenges in addressing health disparities through an intersectional lens. The study emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together scholars from fields like critical race theory and public health to understand and address the unique needs of marginalized groups. It underscores the role of advocates and healthcare professionals in working together to advocate for policies that promote equitable change in healthcare systems.

Transforming Systems, Not Just Individuals. Fostering intersectional awareness is not solely about changing individual attitudes; it’s about dismantling the very systems that sustain inequality. By understanding how policies, institutions, and structures disproportionately affect certain groups, we lay the foundation for systemic change. This requires acknowledging historical legacies and creating pathways for historically marginalized individuals to participate actively in reshaping their futures (Oxford Academic, 2022). “Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence: Lessons from the Anti-Apartheid Struggle” (Crenshaw, 1991) is a foundational work in intersectionality theory. It analyzes the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and demonstrates how intersectional perspectives informed the movement. This study underscores that achieving substantive change requires addressing not only individual attitudes but also the institutional systems that sustain inequality. By acknowledging historical legacies and creating pathways for historically marginalized individuals to actively participate in reshaping their futures, it provides insights into the transformative potential of intersectionality in challenging oppressive systems.

A Call to Action: In our pursuit of intersectional awareness, we must heed the call to action. It is incumbent upon us to recognize that genuine change necessitates discomfort and vulnerability. As we grapple with the complexities of intersectionality, we are compelled to confront uncomfortable truths about privilege, power, and the dynamics of exclusion. Yet, within this discomfort lies the potential for growth, empathy, and ultimately, a more just society. “Intersectionality as Buzzword” (Hancock, 2007a) critically examines the use of intersectionality as a concept and a mobilizing force in social justice movements. It explores how intersectionality has been deployed to address various forms of oppression and inequality, highlighting its potential to foster growth, empathy, and societal change through collective action. This study offers a critical perspective on the role of intersectionality in driving social and political movements and underscores the need for continued engagement with its complexities and challenges in activism and advocacy.

A Vision for the Future. Envision a society where intersectional awareness is embedded in the fabric of our collective consciousness. A society where educational institutions cultivate empathetic citizens, media platforms celebrate diverse narratives, policies are crafted with an understanding of the diverse needs

of all, and individuals are equipped to engage in open dialogues that honor the experiences of others. In this society, equity is not an aspiration but a lived reality—a testament to our commitment to dismantling barriers and building bridges.

In the end, fostering intersectional awareness is not a mere addendum to the struggle for justice; it is the very essence of it. It is a commitment to seeing the full humanity of every individual, regardless of the myriad identities they hold. As we move forward, let us remember that intersectionality is not a theoretical construct—it is a lived reality for countless individuals whose voices and experiences deserve to be acknowledged, celebrated, and uplifted. Through intersectional awareness, we forge a path toward lasting change—a path that acknowledges the past, transforms the present, and paves the way for a more inclusive and equitable future.

5. Conclusion

As we reflect on the multifaceted challenges of achieving gender equity and inclusivity, the limitations of existing solutions become apparent. The push for gender quotas, often championed by international organizations and NGOs, offers a seemingly straightforward remedy to the underrepresentation of women in politics. However, the Egyptian context reveals that such a solution, while well-intentioned, may not address the deeply rooted issues perpetuating inequality.

The analogy of applying a gender quota system to the Egyptian political landscape being akin to using hand cream on a malignant stomach tumor underscores the need for a more holistic approach. Rather than solely focusing on problem-oriented fixes, our gaze should shift toward a solution-oriented paradigm—one that delves into the root causes of the issue.

Recognizing Class Inequality as a Key Driver. Central to this perspective is the recognition that class inequality serves as a critical driver of multiple social disparities, including gender inequity. The imposition of gender quotas, though seeking to amplify women's voices, can inadvertently perpetuate class divides. Gender quotas, originating largely from Western contexts, may not effectively address the nuanced experiences of Egyptian women who face a range of challenges, from gender-based violence to economic hardships.

A Call to Tackle Social Pressures and Gender Roles. In this light, the proposition emerges that dismantling social pressures and constructed gender roles should precede the implementation of gender quotas. Enabling men and women to actively participate in local civil societies can catalyze a reduction in social gaps, fostering gradual shifts in societal attitudes and gender expectations. By challenging ingrained norms and expectations, we lay the groundwork for a more inclusive and equitable society.

A Path toward Intersectional Equity. To truly transform society, we must acknowledge that women's experiences are far from uniform. Intersectional feminists remind us that privilege and status translate to varied needs and aspira-

tions. A gender quota system that homogenizes women's diverse experiences risks exacerbating existing inequalities by predominantly representing urban, educated, and middle-income women. To avoid this pitfall, the recalibration of societal norms and dismantling of class barriers should precede any gender quota implementation.

Cultivating a Future of Genuine Change. Our journey toward equity is one of complexity and discomfort. It involves confronting deep-seated prejudices and acknowledging that meaningful change extends beyond mere numerical representation. By fostering intersectional awareness, we create a fertile ground for understanding, collaboration, and lasting societal transformation. The ultimate goal is a future where systems, institutions, and attitudes align to celebrate the richness of human diversity.

A Call to Reshape Society. The Egyptian experience invites us to shift from reactive measures to proactive, holistic strategies. Rather than hastily applying surface-level solutions, let us commit to reshaping society at its core. Intersectional awareness paves the way for a society where gender equity is not an afterthought but a foundational principle. By cultivating empathy, challenging norms, and addressing class disparities, we set the stage for genuine progress—a progress that honors the past, embraces the present, and aspires to a future where every voice finds its rightful place.

In conclusion, this paper has critically examined the role of gender quotas in political representation in Egypt, highlighting their limitations and the necessity for a more intersectional approach. While quotas have been instrumental in increasing women's numerical representation, they fall short in addressing the deeper, systemic issues of gender inequality, influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors. The application of intersectionality theory, as demonstrated in this paper, offers a more comprehensive understanding of these complexities. It underscores the need for policies and strategies that not only focus on numerical representation but also consider the diverse experiences and challenges faced by women across different social strata in Egypt.

Future research and policy-making must, therefore, move beyond the confines of gender quotas and embrace more nuanced approaches that address the multifaceted nature of gender inequity. This includes the integration of broader societal changes, educational initiatives, and the active involvement of all genders in fostering an equitable political landscape. Ultimately, the pursuit of political equity in Egypt demands an intersectional strategy, one that not only challenges existing norms but also paves the way for a more inclusive and representative political system.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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