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How women's incumbency affects future elections: Evidence from a policy experiment in Lesotho

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ABSTRACT

How do women incumbents affect women's future electoral success? Using causal evidence from a government-initiated policy experiment in Lesotho, in which districts reserved for women village councilors were first randomized and then withdrawn, we find that women win more frequently in previously reserved areas after the policy's removal. We present evidence that this effect is driven by incumbent women's electoral success in formerly reserved districts, as well as by *new* women candidates who are more likely to win in the absence of incumbent men. This occurs for two reasons: (1) new women candidates have more success against incumbent women than incumbent men and (2) women incumbents run for reelection less frequently than incumbent men, leaving more open seats. Contrary to previous work, we find no evidence that women incumbents increase the number of new women candidates in their districts, increase the vote share new women candidates receive, or increase party support for new women candidates. These findings suggest that, at least in the short term, women's incumbency affects subsequent patterns of women's representation by disrupting patterns of male incumbency rather than changing voters' or parties' demand for women candidates.

1. Introduction

One of the persistent causes of women's underrepresentation in national and subnational governments is incumbency advantage in male-dominated legislatures. When incumbents have an electoral advantage, the overrepresentation of men perpetuates their electoral dominance (Schwindt-Bayer, 2005; Shair-Rosenfield & Hinojosa, 2014). In contrast, breaking up patterns of male incumbency has the potential to increase both the supply of and demand for women candidates. When women win political office, they may enjoy the electoral benefits of incumbency, increasing the supply of highly electable candidates (Bhalotra, Irma, & Lakshmi, 2017). Women officeholders may also act as role models, increasing the future supply of new women candidates in their own districts (Bhavnani, 2009) or in neighboring races (Gilardi, 2015; Shair-Rosenfield, 2012). Women representatives may also affect citizens' or parties' demand for women candidates by challenging gender stereotypes about the appropriateness of women in politics (Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2009), giving new information about women's ability to govern (Alexander, 2012; Bhavnani, 2009), and engaging more women citizens in the political process (Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2012).

We add to this literature by testing a new argument: women incumbents create an electoral environment more conducive to women's future electoral success. This may, of course, occur if incumbent women continue to hold their seats, but also, importantly, when they do not. We posit that *new* women candidates are more likely to successfully challenge incumbent women than incumbent men. Put conversely, incumbent men are the least likely group to be replaced by a new woman candidate. Further, gender differences in the decision to re-contest create a greater number of open districts in areas previously held by incumbent women. Women's incumbency, then, affects women's future representation by allowing an electoral environment more friendly to new women candidates, who either compete against women incumbents or in open seats, but do not have to compete against incumbent men.

We provide causal evidence on the effects of women's incumbency through a randomized policy experiment with local-level single-member-districts reserved for only women candidates in the southern African nation of Lesotho. This policy was initiated by the Government of Lesotho for one electoral cycle between 2005 and 2011, and was then repealed. Using data from the 2011

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elections, we find that women are significantly more likely to win in districts previously reserved for women representatives – an effect size of 10 percentage points or a 33 percent increase. We attribute this finding to incumbency patterns in areas previously reserved by the quota. First, the quota benefitted women incumbents in previously reserved areas, who in the next election held twice as many seats as incumbent women in unreserved areas. Second, the quota benefitted new women candidates who were more successful at challenging women incumbents in formerly reserved areas than incumbents in unreserved areas. Finally, women incumbents in previously reserved areas re-contested less frequently to the benefit of new women candidates, who could compete for a greater number of open seats. We find no evidence that women incumbents increased the number of new women candidates in their districts, increased the average vote share women candidates received, or increased the backing women candidates received from competitive political parties.

Our findings relate to a similar government-initiated policy experiment with subnational districts reserved for women village council leaders in India. Research from India suggests women village leaders increase citizens' and parties' demand for women candidates (Beaman et al., 2009, Beaman, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2010, 2012; Bhavnani, 2009). Our evidence points in a different direction: quotas increase women's representation once they are withdrawn by eliminating races with incumbent men in the subsequent election. We estimate which component of our treatment effect stems from incumbent women's electoral success and which stems from the success of new women candidates in previously reserved districts. In combination, these findings have important implications for representation theorists, as they suggest that women's initial presence in politics leads to their continued presence by limiting the power of incumbency in male-dominated legislatures rather than immediately changing citizens' and parties' demand for female representation.

Finally, our research adds to the substantial literature on the effects of women's increased presence in African national and subnational legislatures. Women's parliamentary representation on the African subcontinent has doubled in the last fifteen years and tripled in the last twenty-five in large part due to the rapid diffusion of electoral gender quotas across the region (Kang & Tripp, 2018; Tripp & Kang, 2008). Although less reliable data is available at the subnational level, electoral gender quotas are also increasingly emerging in local governments. For instance, in addition to Lesotho, in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region alone, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Tanzania have all implemented high-impact gender quotas in local councils in the last twenty-five years, and women's representation in local government subsequently averages over 40 percent in these five countries. In response to this phenomenon, an abundance of research has documented the effects of women's increased representation across the subcontinent, with most studies focusing on the potential implications for the substantive representation of women's interests in the policy-making process (Atanga, 2010; Bauer & Britton, 2006; Bauer, 2012; Clayton, Josefsson & Wang, 2017; Clayton, Josefsson, Mattes & Mozaffar, 2018; Goetz & Hassim, 2003; Tamale, 1999; Tripp, 2000). Other work from African cases points to the symbolic effects of women officeholders, which may increase the political efficacy and engagement of women citizens (Barnes & Burchard, 2012; Burnet, 2011). Yet, despite the changing composition of African legislative bodies, to date little work has explicitly examined how women's presence in political decision-making affects the electoral environment faced by new women candidates.

2. The lasting effects of women's representation: previous explanations

Previous research suggests several ways women's presence in politics may affect subsequent elections. First, incumbents typically have distinct electoral advantages, such as increased name recognition, political experience, party support and access to political networks and resources (see Matland & Studlar, 2004). Incumbency retention in male-dominated legislatures, then, serves as an institutional barrier to the electoral success of new women candidates (Murray, 2008; Schwindt-Bayer, 2005). Conversely, when women fill incumbent seats, they likely experience similar advantages. Further, incumbency may particularly benefit women candidates if voters and parties penalize inexperienced women more than inexperienced men. If men appear more *prima facie* electable than women because voters and parties have historically associated men with leadership, a term in office could provide voters and parties evidence that a particular woman incumbent can effectively govern (see Shair-Rosenfield & Hinojosa, 2014).

The literature on women's descriptive representation also suggests women incumbents affect the political behavior of other relevant political actors. First, women incumbents may compel new women candidates to compete by acting as role models, inspiring other women to enter the political fray or if new women candidates perceive races against incumbent women as less challenging than races against incumbent men (Bhavnani, 2009; Palmer & Simon, 2005). This claim, however, is somewhat contested in the literature. Recent studies have found that women incumbents do not affect the entry of new women candidates in their own electoral districts (Bhalotra et al., 2017; Ferreira & Gyourko, 2014), and mixed evidence that women incumbents compel new women candidates to compete in nearby or lesser races (Broockman, 2014; Gilardi, 2015; Ladam, Harden, & Windett, 2018).

Women incumbents can also affect the behavior of party leaders. Because political parties typically act as gatekeepers in the political recruitment process, securing competitive party backing is often a necessary step in a successful candidacy (see Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2015; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2016; Hinojosa, 2012; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Women's incumbency, then, may increase women's descriptive representation by mitigating bias among political party elites who control candidate selection at the local level, as women incumbents may demonstrate to party leaders that women can effectively govern (Bhavnani, 2009; Caul, 1999; Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Shair-Rosenfield, 2012). Distinct from theories that highlight how incumbency affects the party support of a particular incumbent woman, this line of research emphasizes how women officeholders cause parties to update their beliefs about the electability or governing capabilities of women candidates in general.

Additionally, the presence of women incumbents may reduce gender bias among voters. By challenging the historically constructed belief that women hold a socially inferior place to men, exposure to women incumbents may reduce citizens' taste-based discrimination or cause voters to update their beliefs about the abilities of women to effectively govern (Alexander, 2012; Shair-Rosenfield, 2012). Further, whereas risk-adverse voters may not have voted for women candidates in the past because they did not know whether women could perform as well as men, a woman incumbent may give voters new information about women representatives' potential competence. Finally, exposure to women incumbents may challenge citizens' implicit gender biases which stem from the historical association of men as effective leaders (Beaman et al., 2009; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Yet, importantly, not all research suggests women's presence in politics will positively affect women's electoral success in future

elections, particularly when women are elected through electoral gender quotas. For instance, research from Senegal finds that women elected through quotas are perceived as less competent than their male counterparts, and are often viewed as surrogates for influential men (Beck, 2003). Specific to the Lesotho case, Clayton (2015) shows that women elected through the reserved district quota experienced significant backlash in the form of decreased political participation by women constituents, likely stemming from the perceived illegitimacy of the quota policy. Finally, women may have negative experiences while running for and occupying political office, including gendered verbal or physical abuse (see, e.g., Bawa & Sanyare, 2013; Krook, 2017; Tamale, 1999), and observing this may deter future women from entering the political fray. In sum, while on balance most research suggests increases in women's numeric representation will have positive downstream effects on the subsequent election of future women candidates, the evidence is far from unanimous and suggests important contextual differences, a point we return to in our discussion.

3. Gender and incumbent competition

We theorize that the presence of women incumbents may affect next-election outcomes in two ways previously not considered in the literature. First, new women candidates may be more competitive against incumbent women than incumbent men. Second, women incumbents may run for re-election less frequently than incumbent men, allowing more open seats and a less competitive environment for new candidates. In both instances, by ensuring the absence of an incumbent man, women's incumbency creates an electoral environment more conducive to the success of new women candidates. We detail each of these consequences of women's incumbency in turn.

First, we theorize that new women candidates will be more successful in races against incumbent women than in races against incumbent men. Competing against an incumbent man may be particularly hard for new women candidates if voters perceive women as having traits that are incongruous with political leadership. In such circumstances, a new woman candidate appears less *prima facie* electable and must run against an incumbent man who, because of his sex, has traits historically associated with leadership *in addition to* the advantages of incumbency. The new woman candidate is then at a disadvantage along two dimensions: biases associated with her gender and competing against an incumbent. In races against an incumbent woman, a new woman candidate will have the same perceived incongruity with political leadership, making the advantages of incumbency the only difference between the two. New men candidates do not face the same double electoral burden against incumbent men, rather their only difference is incumbency. When running against an incumbent woman, new men are disadvantaged by their lack of experience or resources, but this may be offset if voters have explicit or implicit preferences for male leadership. New women candidates in races against incumbent men, then, are in the most structurally disadvantaged electoral position. We thus hypothesize:

H1: New women candidates will be more successful against incumbent women than against incumbent men.

Second, we theorize that women incumbents affect next election outcomes if there are gender differences in the decision to run for re-election. The argument in the literature that comes closest to this claim is that of Schwindt-Bayer (2005), who finds that increased electoral turnover across 33 national legislatures is associated with higher levels of women's parliamentary representation. Here we build on this research to theorize how *gender differences* in electoral turnover affect subsequent patterns of women's descriptive representation. Incumbent women may choose to re-contest less frequently than incumbent men if they are relegated to less influential legislative positions or otherwise marginalized in legislative institutions. Research across a diverse set of cases has documented the many forms this marginalization may take. Women are often formally excluded from institutional power through limited access to party leadership positions (O'Brien, 2015) and less important committee and ministerial positions (Barnes, 2016; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer, & Taylor-Robinson, 2005). Informally, women face greater pressure to support party leaders (Cowley & Childs, 2003; Muriaas & Wang, 2012) and are less outspoken and more frequently ignored during policy debates than their male colleagues (Ahikire, 2003; Clayton, Josefsson, & Wang, 2014). Such experiences may compel women legislators to re-contest less frequently either because their work experiences are less enjoyable or if formal and informal exclusion decreases their legislative effectiveness, making re-election more difficult.

Whereas most studies on gender and legislative marginalization are based on research from national legislatures (but see Ahikire, 2003; Mbatha, 2003), there are reasons to believe women may be even more constrained in sub-national governments. In their influential volume on women in African politics and policymaking, Goetz and Hassim (2003, p. 21) put forward two reasons women's marginalization may be more intense at the local level. First, traditional leaders, who typically hold patrilineal claims to authority, often repress women's public engagement more forcefully in local decision making. Second, local politics is typically more removed from domestic or transnational women's movements, who are better able to provide support for women representatives at the national level (see Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga, & Mungwa, 2008). The former appears to be particularly constraining to women councilors in Lesotho. In a series of focus groups conducted in Lesotho two years after the reserved district quota was adopted, women councilors relayed that "at best there is a lack of support and at worst obstruction by chiefs" (Morna & Tolmay, 2007, p. 117). This particular form of marginalization likely compelled women incumbents to re-contest less frequently, which, somewhat counterintuitively, may have been to the benefit of new women candidates who could compete for a greater number of open seats.

Thus previous theories of women's marginalization in legislative politics from a broad set of cases and specific to local governance in Lesotho suggest women incumbents may choose to re-contest less frequently than men. In such instances, there should be greater electoral turnover in districts previously held by women. Relative to districts with incumbent men, then, these open districts have a higher likelihood of electing new women candidates. That is, whereas open seats benefit all new candidates, both men and women, women's electoral success in these races still will be higher than in districts with incumbent men. This leads to our second hypothesis:

H2: Incumbent women re-contest less frequently than incumbent men, allowing more competitive races for new women candidates *relative to races with incumbent men.*

4. The context: Lesotho's subnational gender quota

We examine the next-election effects of women's incumbency through a government-initiated nationwide policy experiment in the southern African nation of Lesotho, a small ethnically-homogenous mountain kingdom entirely surrounded by South Africa. A constitutional monarchy, the country is ruled by King Letsie III, but governed by a democratically elected lower parliamentary house. Lesotho gained independence in 1966, and for 45 years after independence, the nation suffered political instability, violence, and military control. The country returned to civilian rule and regained relative political stability in 1998, and since this time elections have been generally considered free and fair.

In 2005, similar to other African nations at the time and in part guided by international organizations and the Southern African Development Community, Lesotho began a protracted process of decentralization. At this time, the Ministry of Local Government divided the country's ten main local administrative districts into 129 newly created community councils. Each community council was divided into 9 to 15 single-member electoral divisions (EDs), each of which elected a community councilor through a first-past-the-post election. Although the fiscal authority devolved to the local councils in Lesotho has not been as extensive as the decentralization process in other African countries, the 2005 law vested the councils with significant new authority. The community councils are charged with village level maintenance issues such as land allocation, livestock grazing rights, managing the local water supply, and maintaining village markets and local roads (Clayton, 2014; Shale, 2004). The councilors elected from each electoral division represent the villages in their ED at community council meetings, which meet at least once a month.[1]

The electoral divisions are relatively small, with constituencies consisting on average of around 600 adults over the age of 18. Before each council meeting (*pitso*), each councilor customarily has a separate meeting with residents from the villages in his/her electoral division. The small district size means that councilors are very well known in their communities. In citizen surveys we conducted in early 2014 in approximately 100 electoral divisions across the country, over 90 percent of respondents could easily recall the names of both their current and previous councilors.

The experimental nature of the 2005 local council quota law was as follows: Between 2005 and 2011, the Local Government Elections Act required that 30 percent of all newly created single-member electoral divisions be reserved for only women councilors. Women still competed with other women in these EDs, but men were not allowed to compete. Lesotho's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) assigned the all-women constituencies randomly across the newly-created councils (SADC, 2011, p. 59).[2] Importantly, women also won in EDs that were not reserved by the quota. In total during this period, quota-elected women held 29.1 percent of community councilor positions, non-quota-elected women held 26.3 percent, and men held 44.6 percent.[3]

Local candidate recruitment in Lesotho, as in many other hybrid democracies, is characterized by informal rules and opaque selection procedures. Candidates are generally nominated at the village level, and lists of names are submitted to ED-wide selection committees associated with each of the main political parties. These committees consist of established party members from the constituency, often including the district's member of parliament, if he or she is a party member. The party selection committees in each ED review the list of names and select one candidate to represent the party in the upcoming election. These committee-level decisions typically rest on opaque criteria, and allow local party elites to act as gatekeepers in determining the supply of electable candidates.[4] Given the restrictions on party affiliation per ED, close to half of all candidates in the 2011 elections ran as independents. Men candidates were significantly more likely than women candidates to run as independents (53 percent vs. 41 percent, difference significant at $p \leqslant 0.001$ in a two-tailed t-test). This discrepancy may be based on candidates' accurate knowledge of the electorate. Whereas only 11 percent of successful women candidates ran as independents, 24 percent of successful men candidates ran without a party affiliation ($p \leqslant 0.001$ in a two-tailed t-test), suggesting that women's electoral success had a greater dependence on political party backing. Further, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), Lesotho's then-ruling party, dominated the 2011 local elections, with affiliated candidates winning 64 percent of the total EDs. The electoral advantage accrued by running on the ruling party ticket also appears to be gendered. Of successful women candidates, 78 percent ran on an LCD ticket, but only 56 percent of successful men candidates ran with a ruling party affiliation ($p \leqslant 0.001$ in a two-tailed t-test).

Importantly for this research, in 2011, the electoral division and community council borders were significantly re-drawn. We collected data from Lesotho's Independent Electoral Commission in Maseru on the boundaries for the EDs in 2005 and 2011. For each ED in 2005 and 2011, the IEC maintains a list of villages contained within each ED along with each village's voting population. We match each village in 2011 with its 2005 ED boundaries, and merge these data with separate data from the IEC that lists the quota reservation status of each ED in 2005. From this information, for each 2011 ED, we generate a variable that measures whether the majority of the ED's population lived in an area that was reserved by the quota during the previous election cycle.[5]

The Lesotho case provides important methodological advantages and allows us to causally identify the effects of women's incumbency on both the supply of and demand for women candidates in future elections. Related to parties' and voters' demand for women candidates, the randomization of the women-only constituencies alleviates problems that are difficult to avoid with observational work, namely that women representative typically emerge from electorates that already hold egalitarian attitudes about the capabilities and appropriateness of women in politics. That the quota reserved electoral divisions at random allows us to causally identify how the presence of a quota-elected woman incumbent affects parties' and voters' evaluations distinct from conditions that would lead to a greater number of women in politics in the absence of a quota. The same conditions allow us to identify how the presence of women incumbents affects the likelihood that new women candidates will stand for future elections, as well as the electoral success of new women candidates, across pre-existing electoral climates.

Finally, the Lesotho case adds to the vast literature that has emerged from a nearly identical government-initiated policy

[1] Before independence, Lesotho had a well-developed and active system of elected district councils with considerable responsibility and legislative power over a range of local issues. In 1968, these bodies were shut down when they became centers of political resistance to the military regime. This pattern played out several times during Lesotho's long period of political instability: the national government would devolve fiscal and administrative powers to regional or local authorities and partisan political conflicts would escalate through these bodies, leading to their ultimate dissolution (Ferguson, 1990, p. 241). Yet in the recent democratic period of political stability, the community councils appear to be serving their intended administrative function, and there have not been reports of political contention with the capitol (Morna & Tolmay, 2007).

[2] Despite the 30 percent legal requirement, only 29.1 percent of EDs were selected for reservation.

[3] We use the 2004 Afro-Barometer survey to verify that the characteristics of EDs that were reserved a year later are comparable with EDs that went unreserved. We measure balance for both individual and village-level variables. Overall, the reserved and unreserved EDs are comparable across observable characteristics, leading us to the conclusion that the quota was successfully randomized (see also Clayton, 2014, 2015).

[4] Interview with Ntolo Lekau, Assistant Country Director, Lesotho Gender Links, interview by author, Maseru, Lesotho, August 24, 2015.

[5] In 2011 the reserved district quota was replaced by a new quota which adds additional seats to existing community councils. These seats, however, are widely considered redundant because they are not tied to electoral constituencies. Crucial to the conclusions we draw below, the new quota does not appear to have affected the number of women who compete for and win the regular constituency seats. In the first elections after decentralization in 2005, woman candidates won 37 percent of seats in unreserved EDs, and, in 2011, new women candidates won 36 percent of seats in which the incumbent did not re-contest. New women won in 36 percent on previously unreserved EDs and 37 percent of previously reserved EDs. The new quota, then, does not appear to have affected the rate with which women candidates compete for constituency-based councilor seats.

experiment in India. Perhaps most clearly, it provides a second casually-identified case to examine whether and how these findings generalize to a different setting. Comparing results from the two cases also allows us to examine how the subtle policy differences between the two cases speak to important claims and scope conditions in theories of gender and descriptive representation. Two points here are noteworthy. First, the Lesotho policy experiment lasted one electoral term and was then removed. This allows us to identify the immediate and short-term effects of women's incumbency on next-election outcomes. In India, the policy experiment has been in place in most states since the early 1990's. In the research most similar to ours from India, Bhavnani (2009) examines the effects of India's quota policy several electoral cycles after the initial reservations, in which most districts have received the treatment of women's representation during at least one electoral cycle. Second, India's quota is rotating, which changes the electoral calculus of incumbents in important ways. For instance, a woman elected through a quota may be encouraged to step down and "wait her turn" until the next reservation cycle. Similarly, parties might have less pressure to field women candidates in unreserved areas if they are required to do so in reserved areas. Indeed, in India, as in many cases with reserved seat quotas, women seldom win unreserved seats. Lesotho's one time quota and subsequent withdrawal allows us to examine how a quota-supplied term in office affects "normal" next-election outcomes in the absence of a longstanding quota policy.

5. Results: how women's incumbency affects future electoral outcomes

To begin, we visualize our main results in Fig. 1, which displays the percentage of 2011 councilors by gender and incumbency status in both previously reserved (left panel) and unreserved (right panel) electoral divisions. Table 1 reports our main findings: we report the quota's average treatment effects (ATEs) as differences in the 2011 election outcomes based on the ED's former reservation status. To begin, we find that the quota significantly increased women's representation after it was withdrawn. Women councilors won at higher rates in previously reserved EDs, winning 30 percent of seats in areas that were not previously reserved by the quota and 40 percent of seats in areas that were reserved; a 33 percent treatment effect that is statistically significant below the 0.01 level.[6] We now turn to examining *how* the quota affected various components of the electoral process that might explain this significant and substantial treatment effect.

First, we find that women's descriptive representation is higher in previously reserved EDs in part due to quota-elected women incumbents who decided to re-run in the 2011 elections. This component of the treatment effect, however, is quite small. As shown in Fig. 1, women incumbents who won in the 2011 elections represent only 4.5 percent of the total seats won in previously reserved areas. Yet, in previously unreserved EDs the percentage is smaller still: in these areas, incumbent women only account for 2.1 percent of the 2011 councilor positions.

Why is this? Notably, women incumbents in previously reserved EDs run approximately half as frequently as councilors in previously unreserved EDs. Some leverage in understanding this re-running gap can be gained from examining observational differences between men and women incumbents in unreserved areas. While women incumbents from previously reserved areas re-ran in 17 percent of the 2011 EDs (see Table 1), women incumbents from unreserved areas re-ran in 28 percent of EDs in 2011, and men incumbents re-ran in 42 percent of the total races. This suggests that part of an incumbent's decision to re-run is due to gender differences, but that serving in a previously reserved area may have limited women incumbents' desire to run for re-election.[7] In sum, even though incumbent women re-run less frequently in previously reserved areas than both incumbent men and incumbent women in unreserved areas, the greater *absolute* number of women in previously reserved areas (100 percent vs. 37 percent of seats) leads to small, but significant gains in women's representation in the 2011 elections.

Above we theorized that a lack of incumbent men would also benefit new women candidates in previously reserved areas in two ways. Our first hypothesis contended that new women candidates may be more likely to win against incumbent women than incumbent men. The quota allows a novel test of this. The difficulty in observationally assessing differences is the success rate of new women candidates in races against incumbent women versus incumbent men is that electorates that are more favorable to a candidate of a particular gender at one point in time are also more likely to elect a candidate of that gender in the future. This observation is borne out in our data: in previously unreserved areas, new women candidates beat incumbent men in only 16 percent of races, whereas they beat incumbent women in 45 percent of races.

Using the causal identification allowed by the policy experiment, we see that new women candidates beat incumbents in previously reserved areas in 27 percent of races and only in 16 percent of races in previously unreserved areas. Because of the small number of incumbent women who re-contested in previously reserved areas ($n = 41$), this eleven percentage point difference does not reach traditional significance levels ($p = 0.14$). It is of course possible that incumbents in previously reserved areas are weaker than incumbents in unreserved areas. Yet, the electoral success of new men candidates suggests otherwise. In races in which incumbents re-contest, new men candidates win at similar rates in formerly reserved versus unreserved areas (46 percent vs. 43 percent, $p = 0.65$). These findings lend support to our first hypothesis: new women candidates fare better when running against incumbent women than when running against incumbent men.

Our second hypothesis contended that incumbent women may be less likely to run for re-election than incumbent men, leaving more open seats in areas previously held by women. We find considerable support for this hypothesis. Table 1 reveals that incumbents in previously reserved areas run for re-election in 17 percent of races, while incumbents in unreserved areas run for re-election in 37 percent of races, the latter predominately driven by incumbent men who re-contest in 42 percent of races (difference between previously reserved and unreserved EDs is significant at $p \leqslant 0.001$). As a result, incumbent men account for 14 percent of the total seats held in previously unreserved areas, compared to women's 2 percent (see Fig. 1). Because men re-contest more frequently than women in either reserved or unreserved areas, electoral turnover is lower in areas with incumbent men. Put another way: when men enter politics, they are less likely than women to leave. Part of the quota's effect in increasing women's descriptive representation, then, was through increasing the number of seats not occupied by an incumbent.

In sum, new women candidates were more successful against incumbents and were able to compete for a greater number of open seats in previously reserved areas, leading to an increase in *new* women councilors in 2011 in these areas. Returning to Table 1

[6] The IEC lists the gender associated with each winner, and our research assistant in Lesotho coded the gender associated with each candidate's name. We list-wise delete EDs for which we could not definitively identify the 2005 reservation status, leaving us with approximately 95 percent of the total number of EDs in Lesotho ($n = 897$).

[7] Previous work finds citizens evaluate the performance of quota-elected and non-quota elected representatives similarly (Clayton, 2015, p. 355).

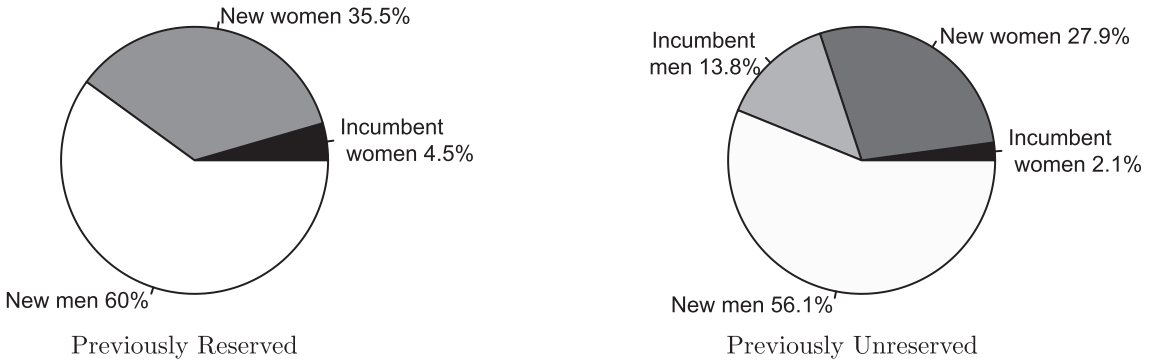

Fig. 1. 2011 councilor characteristics by 2005 reservation status.

Table 1
2011 election results, based on majority 2005 reservation status. $n = 897$ (245 reserved, 652 unreserved).

	Mean prev. reserved	Mean prev. unreserved	ATE (95 percent CI)	p-value (2-tailed)
Total Sample:				
% women winners	**0.400**	**0.301**	**0.099** (0.028, 0.301)	0.006
% incumbent ran	**0.167**	**0.368**	**−0.168** (−0.261, −0.141)	⩽0.001
% incumbent won	**0.045**	**0.159**	**−0.114** (−0.146, −0.070)	⩽0.001
% new woman won	**0.355**	**0.279**	**0.076** (0.007, 0.145)	0.032
% new man won	0.600	0.567	0.033 (−0.040, 0.105)	0.379
Mean total candidates	5.380	5.485	−1.04 (−0.477, 0.269)	0.562
Mean women candidates	2.118	2.149	−0.030 (−0.294, 0.177)	0.792
Mean new women candidates	1.890	2.041	−0.151 (−0.294, 0.177)	0.185

Average treatment effects (ATEs) with significance of $p < 0.05$ indicated in **bold**.

and Fig. 1, we see that new women councilors account for 36 percent of councilor positions in previously reserved areas, but only 28 percent in unreserved areas (difference significant at p = 0.03), whereas we do not find a statistical difference in the emergence of new men councilors (60 percent in formerly reserved areas vs. 57 percent in unreserved areas, p = 0.38).

5.1. Testing previous explanations

Previous research suggests women incumbents may affect next election outcomes by changing the behavior of other politically relevant actors in their communities. To begin, women incumbents may inspire new women to compete in previously reserved electoral divisions. Table 1, however, reveals no differences in the average number of candidates, the average number of women candidates, or the average number of new women candidates between previously reserved and previously unreserved electoral divisions. Quota-elected councilors do not appear to have compelled more women to compete in previously reserved EDs after the quota was withdrawn.[8]

We do find some evidence that the quota affected women's independent candidacy: new women candidates were slightly less likely to run as independents in previously reserved areas (42 percent vs. 37.7 percent in previously (un) reserved areas, p = 0.09 level, see Table 2). Table 2 also reveals a small descriptive difference between formerly reserved and unreserved EDs in ruling party (LCD) backing for women candidates, but this difference fails to achieve conventional significance levels (22.4 percent vs. 19.8 percent in (un) reserved areas, p = 0.23). That these differences are generally not significant and small in magnitude suggests that party recruitment is unlikely the main driver of the quota's effect on future levels of women's descriptive representation. Lastly, we find no evidence that exposure to women councilors decreased voter biases against new women candidates. New women candidates receive similar vote shares in areas that had been previously reserved by the quota (17 percent v. 16 percent, p = 0.21), suggesting that, on average, Lesotho's quota did not change citizens' general preferences for women candidates (see also Clayton, 2018).

To summarize our findings: The random assignment of Lesotho's subnational quota allows us to causally identify the effects of women's incumbency on next election outcomes. The quota increased women's subsequent representation by 10 percentage points after it was withdrawn. We attribute part of this treatment effect to the increased supply of women incumbents in previously reserved areas who held twice as many seats as women incumbents in previously unreserved areas. Adding to the literature, we also find that the absence of incumbent men in previously reserved areas allowed more new women candidates to win both against incumbent women and in open seats. We note that incumbency retention rates in Lesotho are significantly lower than those often associated with elections in advanced

[8] Related to potential spillover effects, we unfortunately do not have the type of spatial data that would allow us to test for the quota's effects in neighboring districts.

Table 2
2011 election results for new women candidates, based on majority 2005 reservation status. n = 1887 (509 reserved, 1351 unreserved).

	New women candidates previously reserved	New women candidates previously unreserved	ATE (95 percent CI)	p-value (2-tailed)
Total Sample:				
% Independent	0.377	0.420	−0.044 (−0.092, 0.007)	0.094
% LCD	0.224	0.198	0.028 (−0.016, 0.067)	0.206
% of total vote	0.170	0.159	0.012 (−0.006, 0.029)	0.207

Average treatment effects (ATEs) with significance of $p < 0.05$ indicated in **bold**.

industrialized democracies (Schwindt-Bayer, 2005, p. 230), suggesting the incumbency effects produced by the quota would be stronger still in areas in which incumbency advantages are more pronounced. We find little evidence that the quota increased the number of women candidates in future elections or increased parties' or voters' demand for new women candidates.

6. Discussion: learning from the Lesotho case

Lesotho's policy experiment allows us to observe next-election outcomes in the absence of male incumbency. We find women incumbents increased future levels of women's descriptive representation both because new women candidates fare better in races against incumbent women than incumbent men and because women incumbents re-contest less frequently, leaving more open seats for new women candidates. How might these findings generalize to other cases?

To begin, above we theorized that new women candidates face a particular disadvantage in races against incumbent men due to biases associated with their gender *and* the difficulties of challenging an incumbent. We find it very plausible that this phenomenon exists in other cases given that in most societies women's social roles are incongruous with public perceptions of who should lead. Whereas we do not have direct evidence of this mechanism, future research could test its empirical implications through respondents' evaluations of randomized candidate profiles which vary gender and incumbency.

We have reason to believe the second component of our treatment effect – the decision of incumbent women to re-contest less frequently than incumbent men – likely also generalizes to other cases, but may be particularly pronounced in the case of Lesotho. Perhaps most importantly, quota-elected women may have different ambitions or incentives to re-contest than either men or women elected without quotas. For instance, it is possible that women who stood in the 2005 elections in reserved areas only ran because of the quota, perhaps due to pressure from their political parties who needed to field local women candidates.[9] Another possibility relates to the quota policy itself. If women were perceived as less legitimate politicians due to the way in which they were initially elected (see Clayton, 2015), quota-elected women might have had less interest in re-running, either because their experience in office was less enjoyable or out of the belief that they would not be reelected. Yet recall that even in unreserved areas, incumbent women re-contested significantly less frequently than incumbent men (28 vs. 42 percent), providing some observational evidence that this trend is not entirely specific to elections through quotas.

The decision not to run for reelection might also reflect the complex status of women in Sesotho society.[10] That women won a considerable number of local councilor seats in electoral divisions that were not reserved by the quota law in 2005 is indicative of their position as *de facto* community leaders. Yet, until 2006, women were afforded the same legal status as minors under the legal authority of their fathers, husbands, or sons, and were not allowed to apply for credit or make financial transactions on their own authority until 2008 (SADC, 2013, p. 42).

Scholars have credited this dual status of Basotho women to migrant labor patterns that have defined economic life in Lesotho for the last century (Ferguson, 1990; Murray, 1977). For most of the 20th Century, women were dependent on remittances from absent husbands working in South African diamond, gold, and coal mines. At the height of Basotho migrant labor in South Africa in the mid to late 20th century, women were effective managers of 70 percent of village households (Murray, 1977, p. 86) Historically, then, most women have been economically dependent on men who are not actually present to enforce their economic and social dominance. This particular structure of Sesotho life may explain apparent contradictions in women's status. In 2003, more than half of all women (and more women than men) agreed that women should continue to be held to traditional laws and customs rather than enjoy equal rights with men. Yet, two years later, women won close to 40 percent of community council seats in *unreserved* electoral divisions in open competition with men; a rate much higher than women's representation in the majority of local governments worldwide. This is in line with women's dual status for more than a century: women continued their *de facto* role as community managers, while maintaining traditional beliefs that reinforce men's role as economic providers.

This understanding of women's place in Sesotho society may also shed light on why women ran for re-election less frequently than men. In 2005, the authority granted to local councilors was largely unknown given that the positions were new. It is certainly possible that as men realized that these positions held actual authority, particularly the ability to allocate livestock grazing rights alongside local chiefs, women were encouraged to step down (see Clayton, 2014). That is, as council positions became less about day-to-day village-level management and more about the highly political issue of communal grazing, women were discouraged from continuing in village leadership. And, at the same time, increased retrenchment of Basotho men from South African mines meant more men were coming home to reclaim their authority as village leaders (see Fogelman, 2016). Outside of the Lesotho case, this suggests women may be pushed out of politics as positions become more formalized or gain significant authority. Strategies to limit the advantages accrued to men incumbents, then, may be particularly important in these settings.

And what to make of our null findings regarding the quota's effect on voters' and parties' demands for women candidates? Importantly, our findings here stand in contrast with a vast literature from a similar policy experiment in India. Indeed, findings from India suggest that quota-elected women village leaders compel new women candidates to run for office and reduce public

[9] Election patterns, e.g. number of candidates, turnout, etc., between reserved and unreserved EDs are observationally very similar in 2005 (Clayton, 2015, p. 355).

[10] Sesotho refers to the language and customs of the Basotho people, the primary ethnic group that resides in Lesotho.

gender biases (see Beaman et al., 2009, 2010, Beaman, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2012; Bhavnani, 2009). One of the key differences between the two cases is the amount of time the respective quota policies have been or were in place. Research from India suggests that citizens must be exposed to quota-elected women village leaders for two electoral cycles (ten years) before gender biases decrease (Beaman et al., 2009, 2012). In line with this evidence, Clayton (2018) finds that six years of exposure to quota-elected councilors in Lesotho did not change citizens' explicit or implicit gender biases in the aggregate. In combination, results from the two cases suggest that women's incumbency works in the short term by increasing the supply of women incumbents and decreasing the advantages accrued to incumbent men, while exposure to quota-elected women officeholders works in the long term by increasing party gatekeepers' and voters' demand for women candidates. Thus, our results suggest that Lesotho's quota policy served as an initial jump start in women's numeric representation, which may have substantial downstream effects well after the policy's removal.

7. Conclusion: gender and incumbency

The randomized and *do novo* nature of the reserved district quota and is subsequent removal after one term provides a novel assessment of the lasting effects of women's incumbency. We use the government-initiated policy experiment to gain leverage on the puzzle of women's underrepresentation, a nearly universal feature of national and subnational governments worldwide. Our findings suggest that women's incumbency affects next-election outcomes through mechanisms related to the supply of women incumbents rather than by increasing parties' or voters' demand for women candidates after exposure to quota-elected women councilors for six years. Our treatment effect consists of two parts: the electoral success of women incumbents in previously reserved areas and the electoral success of new women candidates. The former has clear policy implications and suggests that women's presence in political decision-making increases when they are able to get a foot in the political door. Put another way, intuitively, the overrepresentation of men perpetuates men's dominance in politics. This finding suggests effective policies to increase women's representation include those which usher new cohorts of women into political office, such as term limits, temporary gender quotas, funding for women candidates, or strategies that encourage women to run for open seats (see Baldez, 2006; Bjarnegård, 2013; Kayuni & Muriaas, 2014; Murray, 2014; Shair-Rosenfield, 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, 2005).

The second component of our treatment effect, higher electoral turnover for women incumbents, is normatively problematic in its own right, as it suggests women may be being pushed out of politics, particularly as positions accrue greater authority. This finding also has negative implications for the ability of women to form political networks and advance through their parties' hierarchies. Yet, little work has systematically examined whether formal or informal marginalization leads to gender differences in incumbents' decisions to re-contest. We hope future work can continue to examine how marginalization affects the leaky pipeline of women in politics.

Conflict of interest statement

None.

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