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Quotas and affirmative action: Understanding group-based outcomes and attitudes

Thekla Morgenroth | Michelle K. Ryan

University of Exeter

Correspondence
Thekla Morgenroth, Psychology, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK.
Email: t.morgenroth@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract

More and more countries are adopting quotas to increase group-based equality in the boardroom and the political sphere. Nevertheless, affirmative action in general and quotas in particular remain a highly controversial subject—eliciting negative reactions from privileged groups, while support among minority and lower-status groups is generally higher. Focusing on gender, we take a broad approach to the topic and discuss (a) the effects of quotas and affirmative action on the under-representation of minority groups and on perceptions of their competence, (b) the effects of quotas and affirmative action on organisational performance, and (c) predictors of attitudes towards affirmative action and quotas. We conclude that the benefits of quotas outweigh their costs and that they are an effective way of tackling group-based inequality. We also discuss strategies that can be used to elicit more support among those groups that are particularly critical of quotas.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, there have been visible changes to educational and workplace equality. In relation to gender, in most Western countries, approximately half of all higher education students are women (European Commission, 2013; Kena et al., 2015), as are half the workforce (European Commission, 2013; United States Department of Labor, 2015). However, despite these gains, women remain clearly under-represented in many highly paid and prestigious professions, such as surgery (ACS Health Policy Research Institute, 2010) or law (National Association of Law Professionals, 2015) as well as in positions of influence and power such as politics (Bergh, 2009) or executive leadership (Sealy, Doldor, & Vinnicombe, 2016).

It thus appears that something more than current anti-discrimination policies is needed to bring about change. It is clear that it is not just a matter of time before individuals from minority groups trickle through the pipeline. Rather, due to bias and discrimination, and not unrelatedly, personal decisions, members of minority groups and women continue to "leak" from the pipeline at all levels (e.g., Chesler, Barabino, Bhatia, & Richards-Kortum, 2010; Sheltzer & Smith, 2014). Many argue that the solution to this persistent inequality is the introduction of strong and proactive affirmative action policies such as quotas (Blackhurst, 2014; Chan, 2014; Gill, 2014), that is, setting numerical

requirements (usually between 20% and 50%) regarding the representation of minorities in hiring, promotion, university admittance, or political representation.

However, affirmative action in general, and quotas in particular, are an incredibly controversial subject. While some argue that quotas are the most effective way to overcome the under-representation of minority groups (e.g., Blackhurst, 2014; Chan, 2014; Gill, 2014), others—in particular those in position of power (e.g., Whites, men, those with high socio-economic status)—fear that affirmative action policies will (a) provide unfair advantages to minority groups (e.g., Bonde, 2011; Tuffy, 2011), (b) result in lower organisational performance (e.g., Bonde, 2011), and (c) cause further stigmatisation of those benefitting from such policy (e.g., Cullen, 2014). All of these effects could, it is argued, lead to negative long-term effects and *worsen*, rather than improve, intergroup relations and equality.

Arguably one of the most rigorous policies to date is the Norwegian gender quota law. In 2003, Norway became the first country to introduce sanctions against publicly listed companies that failed to have women (or indeed men) make up at least 40% of board members within 5 years. Despite initial backlash from business representatives, the proportion of women on the boards of Norway's publicly listed companies increased from 12% in 2005 to 40% in 2009 (Storvik & Teigen, 2010). Today, the initiative is generally seen as very successful and is widely supported in Norway, even by former critics. An extension of the law to other types of companies is being discussed.

Despite this apparent success, there is still opposition to quotas, primarily on the basis of a lack of meritocracy and state intervention (see Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006). Thus, it is important to consider the empirical evidence on the effects of quotas on (a) the representation of minority groups, (b) those thought to benefit most directly (minority group members), and (c) the organisation implementing the policy. It is also important to understand when and why the resistance to quotas arises.

In this paper, we will shed light on these questions in turn. While we are primarily interested in the effects of quotas, we believe that much can be learned from focusing on affirmative action more broadly. We will therefore discuss evidence from politics, education, and the workplace and incorporate findings not only on group-based quotas themselves but also on more general affirmative action interventions. In the first part of this paper, we will review research on the effects of quotas and other affirmative action policies. The second part will be dedicated to exploring factors that may influence group-based attitudes towards quotas. We will end by discussing the practical implications of the research and future research directions.

2 | THE EFFECTS OF QUOTAS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Any discussion about quotas and affirmative action policies should be based on a thorough understanding of the effects these policies have, both on those thought to benefit from the policies as well as the organisation as a whole. We will examine each of these groups in turn.

2.1 | Do quotas and affirmative action change representation?

Quotas and other affirmative action policies aim to address the under-representation of minority groups. Thus, the first and most important question is whether affirmative action initiatives are effective in reaching such goals. The short answer to this is: Yes, they are. An abundance of studies demonstrate that quotas and other affirmative action policies are effective in increasing (a) the number of women holding political office in a variety of countries (e.g., Bonomi, Brosio, & Di Tommaso, 2013; Darhour & Dahlerup, 2013; De Paola, Scoppa, & Lombardo, 2010; Jones, 2009; Meier, 2004; Paxton, Hughes, & Painter, 2010; Tripp & Kang, 2008), (b) the proportion of women on company boards (e.g., Sabatier, 2015; Storvik & Teigen, 2010; Wang & Kelan, 2013), (c) the number of ethnic minorities in higher education (e.g., Alon & Malamud, 2014; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003; Fischer & Massey, 2007), and even, (d) the number of men opting to take paternity leave (Arnalds, Eydal, & Gíslason, 2013; Brandth & Kvande, 2009).

The longer answer is that the relative success of any given initiative is likely to be more complex and include direct effects of the policies themselves as well as indirect effects, for example, of the increased availability of role models. We will consider both of these effects in turn.

2.1.1 | Direct effects of quotas and voluntary targets on representation

Studies demonstrate that the effectiveness of quotas and more voluntary targets, set by organisations themselves, is dependent on a number of factors. For example, although voluntary targets can increase the number of women in political offices (Davidson-Schmich, 2006), targets become much less effective if not enforced by sanctions. For example, Storvik and Teigen (2010) argue that it was the extreme sanctions, including forced dissolution of the company, associated with the Norwegian quota law that made it so effective. Similarly, a number of studies from the political domain demonstrate that voluntary targets do not necessarily increase the number of women holding political office (Gray, 2003; Miguel, 2008). Nevertheless, voluntary targets can be effective under certain circumstances. Studies from politics suggest that voluntary targets are generally most effective when the party who sets them is liberal rather than conservative, when the area is urban rather than rural, when the area is predominantly non-Catholic, and when the country in question is not post-communist (Bonomi et al., 2013; Davidson-Schmich, 2006; Fallon, Swiss, & Viterna, 2012). In other words, where people are more likely to be supportive of affirmative action in general, voluntary targets work better.

It is also important to ask whether quotas can have additional effects. For example, can gender quotas at board level facilitate gender equality throughout the company hierarchy? In Norway, Wang and Kelan (2013) found that the quota led to an increase of women in the most senior leadership positions of board chair and CEO—positions that were not directly targeted by the law. In addition, a critical mass of women on boards (i.e., at least three women) was in turn positively associated with the appointment of a female board chair or CEO. The latter point demonstrates that it is important to aim high when it comes to quotas. If women are only "tokens"—meaning the presence of only one or two women on a board—women may have a difficult time breaking the glass ceiling.

Seierstad and Opsahl (2011), however, argue that while the Norwegian quota has helped women break the glass ceiling, this is true mainly for a small number of women who serve on multiple boards and possess high levels of social capital. The authors do, however, concede that this may be a temporal, short-term effect of the law and that with time, more women may be able to follow in the footsteps of these so-called "Golden Skirts." Similarly, Bertrand, Black, Jensen, and Lleras-Muney (2014) suggest that while Norway's quota has had some positive effects—such as reducing the gender pay gap within boards and leading to more qualified women being appointed to boards—the overall impact on women in business was rather insignificant. They find no evidence of the greater representation of women on boards "trickling down" to other management levels or having an impact on the gender wage gap more generally. The authors also find little evidence that the quota led to more women enrolling in business degrees, despite the fact that women are aware of the law and believe that it will give them a better chance at success.

Another important issue is whether the positive effects of quotas and affirmative action policies are temporary or whether increased representation remains once the policy is removed. Evidence from Italy, where a gender quota of 33% women on all political party lists was in place for only 2 years (1993–1995), demonstrates that the increased representation of women can last more than 10 years after quotas have been removed (De Paola et al., 2010). Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande, and Topalova (2009) found similar results in India, where voting districts that had been randomly assigned to being mandated to have a female leader for 10 years were more likely to vote for a female leader in the following election compared to districts with no such mandate. This persistence is especially important as it suggests that quotas can be used as a temporary intervention to instil long-term cultural change.

However, there is also evidence demonstrating that the representation of minority group members may decrease immediately after the cessation of affirmative action policies. For example, Garces (2013) investigated the effects of U.S. higher education affirmative action bans—either through voter-approved referenda or through executive decision—on the number of ethnic minority students. They concluded that banning affirmative action policies immediately decreased the number of minority group members in higher education, particularly in STEM fields.

The extent to which the effects of quotas and affirmative action policies last beyond their immediate implementation may depend on the way in which they are removed. The banning of policies through a voter referendum implies strong opposition—a political stance that may go hand in hand with higher levels of prejudice, as we will discuss below. Other factors influencing the long-term effectiveness of quotas may include whether the policy targets entrance into a field or more senior positions within a field, which are more visible and may have additional beneficial long-term effects via more indirect routes such as role modelling.

2.1.2 | Quotas and role models

The increased number of members of minority groups in certain positions (e.g., women in leadership positions) increases the availability of role models which can in turn translate into motivational outcomes (e.g., Blanton, Crocker, & Miller, 2000; Lockwood, 2006; Morgenroth, Ryan, & Peters, 2015). One study directly demonstrating this effect comes from India, where Beaman, Duflo, Pande, and Topalova (2012) examined the effect of quotas on girls' aspirations and educational attainment. In districts which had quota-appointed female leaders, girls had higher aspirations and better educational outcomes compared to districts with no quote law in place (and the leader was male). Similarly, Gilardi (2015) found that the presence of a female candidate in Swiss municipal elections encouraged other women to run for office. However, this is particularly the case the first time a woman runs for office in a given area, suggesting that role models might be of particular relevance when they serve as trailblazers who demonstrate that a goal is indeed attainable for members of one's group.

However, the role model literature more broadly indicates that female role models will not automatically inspire other women to follow in their footsteps. A range of factors, such as the attainability of the role model, affect how effective they are in increasing motivation and changing goals (see Morgenroth et al., 2015). Indeed, research indicates that role models that are dissimilar, and whose success likely seems less attainable, can *deflate* role aspirants' career goals (Asgari, Dasgupta, & Stout, 2012). What is seen as attainable and similar will of course vary between role aspirants, and thus, a small group of highly successful women is unlikely to inspire all women. Particularly, role aspirants with intersecting minority identities such as women of colour or women from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to benefit from female leaders, as their identities are less likely to be represented.

Quotas have the potential to change this issue in two ways. First, they increase the numbers of women in leadership, making diversity among them more likely. Additionally, quotas could target multiple under-represented groups such as women *and* people of colour. However, the literature on intersectional invisibility indicates that women with intersecting identities, such as women of colour, might be overlooked nevertheless, with one policy increasing the number of White women and the other increasing the number of men of colour as they are more prototypical of their respective groups (i.e., Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Research by Seierstad and Opsahl (2011) supports this claim by showing that quotas may (at least initially) only benefit a very small, elite group of women. Thus, while quotas have the potential to increase the number of role models for women, it is unlikely that they will benefit *all* women equally, unless steps are taken to ensure diversity of female leaders.

It is important to note that quotas might affect the effectiveness of role models as they are only when these women are seen as having achieved their success through effort and skill, rather than through luck or the actions of others (McIntyre, Paulson, Taylor, Morin, & Lord, 2010). Thus, women are unlikely to be motivated or inspired by female leaders if they believe that they only got to where they are because of preferential treatment.

2.1.3 | Summary of section

Quotas and other affirmative action policies are demonstrably effective in increasing the representation of minority group members. However, the effectiveness of quotas and the persistence of this effect depend on whether they are voluntary, the nature of the sanctions, as well as cultural factors. In general, factors that are positively associated with stronger support for affirmative action policies are positively associated with their effectiveness.

While the primary purpose of quotas and affirmative action policies is an increase in numbers, are such policies also beneficial for those for whom quotas are designed to help? Or are there unintended consequences as some fear, either for beneficiaries or for organisational performance? Evidence on these questions is also mixed.

2.2 | Do quotas and affirmative action have unintended negative consequences for their beneficiaries?

One of the arguments frequently made against quotas is that they unintentionally lead to beneficiaries being perceived as less competent, both by others and by themselves, an outcome termed the "stigma of incompetence" (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992). For example, Garcia, Erskine, Hawn, and Casmay (1981) presented White participants with information about a male applicant for a graduate program at a U.S. university. All information about the applicant's qualifications was held constant, but he was described as being Hispanic (or not), and the university was described as being committed to an affirmative action policy or no such policy was mentioned. While university support for affirmative action had no effect on perceptions of the White applicant, it did alter perceptions of the Hispanic applicant, such that when the university was committed to affirmative action, he was perceived as less qualified (see also Heilman, 1994; Heilman et al., 1992; Heilman & Blader, 2001). However, evidence from field studies in which much more information about members of minority groups is available demonstrates that beneficiaries are not necessarily differentiated from their majority group counterparts (Kerevel & Atkeson, 2013; Zetterberg, 2008).

Self-perceptions of incompetence can also be seen in beneficiaries of affirmative action themselves (Heilman, Battle, Keller, & Lee, 1998; Heilman, Rivero, & Brett, 1991; O'Brien, Garcia, Crandall, & Kordys, 2010), but such perceptions only arise under very specific circumstances. Minority group members who are told that they were selected for a position because of an affirmative action policy see themselves as less competent (see Heilman et al., 1998). However, this effect disappears in ambiguous situations, for example, for White women who are told that an affirmative action policy exists, but not that they personally were selected because of it. Indeed, they, like their male White counterparts, see themselves as *more* competent when they believe that a quota policy is in place (Unzueta, Gutiérrez, & Ghavami, 2010; Unzueta, Lowery, & Knowles, 2008), most likely because they believe that the beneficiaries of the policy are women of colour and that they were selected *despite*, rather than because of, the policy.

Evidence further suggests that the negative effects on beneficiaries' self-perceptions of their abilities disappears in situations where more information about one's own qualifications is present—which is generally the case in the world outside the laboratory (see Crosby, Iyer, & Sincharoen, 2006). An interview study with women from Germany and India suggests that quotas can increase women's expectations of succeeding and their motivation and ambition (Geissel & Hust, 2005). This is important as minority group members will only attempt to enter a domain if they feel motivated to do so (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002)—and they are less likely to feel this way if they anticipate failure. Quotas and other affirmative action policies can positively influence minority members' expectations of success and hence not only increase their numbers in target positions, but also in the pool of applicants.

2.3 | Do quotas and affirmative action affect performance?

Another important issue is the effect quotas and other affirmative action policies have on the performance, both of companies and of those selected on the basis of the policy. Norwegian studies point towards both positive and negative effects of quotas. On the negative side, the law has led to boards of directors being younger and less experienced (Ahern & Dittmar, 2012) and a higher number of independent directors with no previous ties to the organisation (Bøhren & Staubo, 2015). These changes were associated with poorer company performance measured in terms of Return on Assets (Bøhren & Staubo, 2015), and short-term profit (Matsa & Miller, 2013). Ahern and Dittmar (2012) also demonstrate a unique drop in stock price and Tobin's Q (a stock-based measure of performance) in reaction to the official announcement of the law, but it should be noted that this is neither a reaction to the actual appointment of women through quotas nor a reflection of company performance. Moreover, the effects of the actual

appointment of women due to the law were particularly negative for companies with a low number of women on their boards before the law was introduced and thus had to make substantial changes to their boards. It seems likely that such an effect is only temporal, as these changes are only required once. Whether these effects persist over time remains to be seen.

The same is of course true for the positive effects of quotas. Positive effects include fewer workforce reductions (Matsa & Miller, 2013) and enhanced firm innovation, which is likely to increase company performance in the long run, in Norway (Torchia, Calabrò, & Huse, 2011) and an increase in company performance found in France (Sabatier, 2015), where a 40% female board member quota law was passed in 2011.

Studies of the qualifications of female politicians elected under a quota law in Italy suggests that those selected are not less qualified. Indeed, "quota woman" was *more* qualified than other politicians in terms of experience and more committed, indicated by lower rates of absenteeism (Weeks & Baldez, 2015), and more highly educated (Baltrunaite, Bello, Casarico, & Profeta, 2014). Similarly, data from Sweden suggest that quotas lead to more competent politicians being elected and that this effect is driven by mediocre men being replaced by highly competent women (Besley, Folke, Persson, & Rickne, 2017).

Looking at affirmative action more broadly, studies show that affirmative action policies are positively related to stock performance (Bellinger & Hillman, 2000; Wright, Ferris, Hiller, & Kroll, 1995). These findings are particularly interesting in light of the findings by Ahern and Dittmar (2012) reported above. Organisations may benefit from voluntarily adopting targets and affirmative action policies while quotas mandated by law may be less beneficial, at least short-term and in relation to their stock performance.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the most problematic consequences of mandatory quotas on company boards is a potential drop in stock prices and stock-related measures of company performance—although the evidence is mixed. However, two questions remain. First, is this effect due to the board's actual performance or due to outwards perception? If the former were the case, we would expect an equal effect on accountancy-based measures (see, for example, Haslam, Ryan, Kulich, Trojanowski, & Atkins, 2010). While we do see this to some extent, it seems to be the case primarily for companies that made extreme board changes in a short time period. We further argue that attitudes towards gender diversity in general, as well as towards quotas and other affirmative action policies in particular, are an important determinant of investor reactions to the appointment of women to boards. The next section examines the predictors of attitudes towards quotas and other affirmative action policies and how these may be influenced.

3 | WHAT PREDICTS ATTITUDES TOWARDS QUOTAS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?

As we noted above, softer affirmative action policies are more effective when attitudes towards them are generally positive. Unfortunately, in many countries, this is not the case (e.g., Allen & Dean, 2008; Harrison et al., 2006). Nevertheless, attitudes towards quotas vary systematically between different groups and based on different variables.

3.1 | Attitudes and group membership

Perhaps the most obvious influence on attitudes towards affirmative action is group membership—whether or not one belongs to the group who will benefit. Research demonstrates two distinct findings. First, those who do not benefit from the affirmative action policy (e.g., men, Whites) are less supportive of the policy (Harrison et al., 2006; Kane & Whipkey, 2009; Levi & Fried, 2008; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006; Moscoso, García-Izquierdo, & Bastida, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2010; Oh, Choi, Neville, Anderson, & Landrum-Brown, 2010). This makes intuitive sense, as these policies can be perceived to harm one's own group. Indeed, evidence suggests that the anticipated effects for those from groups not targeted may be more important than those who are. For example, Lowery et al. (2006) found that

the attitudes of White participants were dependent on whether they thought an affirmative action policy would have negative consequences for their own group, particularly for those highly identified with their race. Similarly, O'Brien et al. (2010) found that majority group members were more likely to voice "concerns" about the minority group being stigmatised by the policy when it was framed as negatively affecting their own group, compared to when it was framed as having no consequences. The framing had no effect on the degree to which they voiced objections based on fairness or meritocracy. These findings indicate that such "concerns" for the targets of quotas and other affirmative action policies should be evaluated critically when coming from members of advantaged group.

Second, research demonstrates that being a member of a disadvantaged group can determine attitudes towards quotas and affirmative action policies targeting *other* disadvantaged groups. Kane and Whipkey (2009) demonstrated that support for gender-based affirmative action is not only predicted by gender, but also by being an ethnic minority or being of lower education (see also Faniko, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Buschini, & Chatard, 2012), such that minority group members are more likely to report supportive attitudes. These differences are particularly pronounced for strong policies such as quotas (see Harrison et al., 2006). These findings are important, as those who have the power and opportunity to shape affirmative action policies (i.e., the highly educated, men, and ethnic majorities) are the least likely to support them, especially those policies that are the most effective in addressing the under-representation of stigmatised groups: quotas.

3.2 | Sexism, racism, and guilt

A number of studies show, perhaps unsurprisingly, that negative attitudes towards affirmative action are associated with more general sexist attitudes (Harrison et al., 2006; Tougas, Crosby, Joly, & Pelchat, 1995) and racist attitudes (Harrison et al., 2006; James, Brief, Dietz, & Cohen, 2001; Mack, Johnson, Green, Parisi, & Thomas, 2002; Shteynberg, Leslie, Knight, & Mayer, 2011), particularly for modern forms of sexism and racism. For example, Shteynberg et al. (2011) demonstrated that White U.S. participants high on modern racism (i.e., the belief that racial minorities are not disadvantaged in society) also had more negative attitudes towards race-based affirmative action. This association was partly explained by the extent to which individuals perceived such policies as fair. In relation to gender, Kane and Whipkey (2009) found that modern sexism (i.e., the belief that women do not face discrimination) predicted negative attitudes towards gender-based affirmative action. Interestingly, more old-fashioned forms of sexism (e.g. whether women were seen to be unsuited for politics) did not predict negative attitudes. These exemplary results were confirmed in a meta-analysis by Harrison et al. (2006).

Group-based guilt on the other hand seems to be positively related to support for affirmative action policies. Iyer, Leach, and Crosby (2003) demonstrated that feelings of White guilt predicted the endorsement of "compensatory policies" such as quotas for African American students in higher education. Support for "equal opportunity policies" such as sending more representatives of universities to schools with a high number of African American students, however, was not predicted by guilt, but by group-based sympathy.

3.3 | Meritocratic beliefs

As noted above, one of the arguments most often cited in opposition of affirmative action policies and quotas is the claim that they give *unfair* advantages to minority groups, despite evidence that they may actually increase meritocracy (Besley et al., 2017). Studies demonstrate that attitudes towards affirmative action policy are influenced by the degree to which one believes that the world is meritocratic (i.e., the belief that individuals get what they have worked for) as well as the importance placed on meritocratic procedures (Islam & Zilenovsky, 2011; Kane & Whipkey, 2009; Meier, 2008). Meier demonstrated that even a decade after gender quotas had been implemented in the Flemish political system, men were still strongly opposed to them. This opposition was partly due to explanations of the under-representation of women. While most women believed that women got fewer chances in politics, men disagreed with this statement. In line with meritocratic beliefs, men believed that women were under-represented

in politics because they did not fight hard enough for their positions, while the majority of women did not agree with this statement.

Evidence from experimental studies back up this claim. Faniko et al. (2012) demonstrated that those who were highly educated demonstrated stronger support for a system in which everyone gets rewarded according to their individual performance (the importance of meritocracy), which in turn increased their opposition to the policy. Similar effects have been found for constructs closely related to meritocratic beliefs such as stratification beliefs (i.e., beliefs that wealth and power is distributed because of the actions of individuals or because of structural mechanisms; Kane & Whipkey, 2009) and system justification beliefs (i.e., the belief that the current system is fair; Phelan & Rudman, 2011).

Other studies suggest that meritocracy is also an important factor in determining how those who may benefit from affirmative action policies react to their implementation. For example, Islam and Zilenovsky (2011) found that when women believed that a gender affirmative action policy was in place they expressed less desire to lead. However, this was only the case for those who perceived the policy as unfair and unmeritocratic.

Taken together, affirmative action policies, particularly strict ones such as quotas, are often seen as the antithesis of meritocratic principles, particularly by those who believe in a just world. For those potentially benefitting from the affirmative action policy, the effect goes beyond feelings of unfairness, such that it may negatively impact on their attitudes towards the domain in question. We would add that such objections often presume that existing practices, under which minority groups continue to be under-represented, are meritocratic, an assumption with which we would vehemently disagree. Indeed, Crosby et al. (2003), argue that affirmative action actually promotes meritocratic, fair procedures—an argument which we will come back to when discussing practical implications.

4 | FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

We have discussed a variety of important findings regarding quotas and affirmative action more broadly. However, there are questions which remain unanswered and to which future research should attend. First, it is important to investigate the long-term effects of quotas, both on organisational performance and on the representation of members of minority groups. Evidence is mixed, and the conditions under which quotas result in the best performance and sustained representation are unclear. This is particularly the case for boardroom quotas, which are relatively new, but which more and more countries are implementing. Longitudinal studies would be ideal to track their developments over time.

Moreover, we have argued that broad support is essential, not only from those who benefit from affirmative action policies but also from those who have the power to implement them. In the next section, we recommend different strategies to increase support for quotas, but research should investigate whether these strategies are indeed effective. This should be done using both experimental research and field studies.

Lastly, issues of intersectionality have largely been ignored in the literature affirmative action. Future research should investigate how individuals with intersecting identities are affected by quotas. For example, are the benefits of gender quotas limited to White, middle- and upper-class, heterosexual, able-bodied women? Does the stigma of incompetence affect women of colour more than White women as they, theoretically, tick multiple "quota boxes"? These issues need to receive more attention.

5 | PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Taken together, our review of the research suggests that while quotas and other affirmative action polies are broadly effective at achieving their aim of increased equality, their effectiveness is contextual and their implementation may results in unintended consequences. Thus, when designing and implementing affirmative action policies, policymakers should consider a number of important points based on the evidence.

First, policymakers need to establish which outcomes they value the most. The appropriateness of a given policy depends on its aim. For example, when the primary goal is to increase the representation of a particular group quickly and effectively, mandatory quotas are without doubt the best option. On the other hand, when trying to avoid negative outcomes such as the resistance to the initiative itself, "softer" forms of affirmative action might be more appropriate. Moreover, when strict policies such as quotas are chosen, specific percentages need to be decided. It is important that minorities become more than just "tokens" (Kanter, 1977). For stereotypes and prejudice to change —and for quotas to become redundant—minority group members need to make up a substantial number in any given context. Similarly, the positive effects of role models can only be realised if a diverse group of potential role models is available (see Morgenroth et al., 2015). This also means that it may be beneficial not only to target the most senior positions but also to ensure that role aspirants have role models at all career stages.

It is also important to take support for the policy into consideration. While members of majority groups might object, we argue that this should certainly not justify the status quo. Indeed, this resistance may be precisely a protest against losing privilege. However, it is important to keep in mind that negative attitudes towards the policy might also negatively impact the targeted group. It is therefore beneficial to gain support before implementing a policy. A number of studies examine how support can be garnered and negative outcomes reduced. First, the framing of the policy plays an important role. Awad (2013) demonstrates that the same policy can lead to quite different reactions based on whether it is labelled as "affirmative action" or as "promoting diversity." When the latter was the case, African Americans were stigmatised less by others, particularly by White men and conservative participants—whose support may be hardest to gain in the first place. Similarly, Murray (2014) argues it might be beneficial to frame quota-like policies as focussing on men's over-representation and the consequence of relying on a talent pool that is too narrow.

It is also important to make structural discrimination visible to alter beliefs in a just world (e.g., Kane & Whipkey, 2009; Phelan & Rudman, 2011). Son Hing, Bobocel, and Zanna (2002) demonstrated that providing information about ways in which minority group members were often discriminated against increased support for an affirmative action policy among participants with a high preference for merit-principles. However, Harrison et al. (2006) showed that resistance to such policies was only reduced when the under-representation was attributed to discrimination. It should also be kept in mind that making discrimination visible can negatively affect targets' ability beliefs and well-being, particularly when this discrimination is perceived as widespread and unlikely to change (Schmitt, Branscombe, & Postmes, 2003; Stroebe, Dovidio, Barreto, Ellemers, & John, 2011).

Another potential way to gain the support is to highlight ways in which the policy still relies on, and—more importantly—fosters meritocratic decisions. People generally dislike the idea of others being selected solely based on their group membership (e.g., Crosby et al., 2003). However, most affirmative action policies do include merit as an important factor (e.g., to hire a woman only if a female and a male candidate are equally qualified) and are thus compatible with the ideal of merit-based assessment (Crosby et al., 2003). However, if these merit-based criteria are not emphasised, people overlook them, leading to negative outcomes such as stigmatisation of the targets of the affirmative action policy (Heilman et al., 1998).

It can also be argued that affirmative action policies actually increase the fairness of decisions. Crosby et al. (2003) argue that decisions made without affirmative action policies in place are never completely objective. These decisions are affected by biases and prejudice and therefore often result in unfair decisions. Moreover, minority group members often face additional barriers such as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), meaning that even the score of standardised, "objective" test scores does not necessarily reflect skills and ability of majority and minority members in the same way. Only policies which explicitly take these factors into consideration can therefore be considered fair and meritocratic.

Based on the evidence reviewed in this paper, we argue that the benefits of affirmative action policies far outweigh their negative effects. We suggest that quotas and other affirmative action policies should be seen as a first mandatory step to catalyst voluntary, lasting change, not only in the representation of minority group members but also in intergroup culture, prejudice, and attitudes.

ORCID

Thekla Morgenroth http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9876-5017

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Thekla Morgenroth is a Research Fellow in Social and Organisational Psychology at the University of Exeter. Their research focuses on gender stereotypes and norms and how they affect women and men themselves as well as the evaluation of men and women in the workplace and in other domains such as gaming and sexuality.

Michelle Ryan is a Professor of Social and Organisational Psychology at the University of Exeter, UK, and a (part-time) Professor of Diversity at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. She was recently awarded a European Research Council Consolidator Grant to investigate how context constrains women's careers choices. With Alex Haslam, she has uncovered the phenomenon of the glass cliff, whereby women (and members of other minority groups) are more likely to be placed in leadership positions that are risky or precarious. Research into the glass cliff was named by the New York Times as one of the top 100 ideas that shaped 2008.

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