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Ndayiragije, Réginas; Vandeginste, Stef; Meier, Petra

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# Women's Descriptive Representation in Burundi: The Mixed Effects of Gender Quotas

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Réginas Ndayiragije<sup>1</sup> , Stef Vandeginste<sup>1</sup> ,  
and Petra Meier<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Building on original data collected for the period between 2001 and 2020, this article contributes to the research on the effectiveness of gender quotas. It does so, first, by looking into the salience of ministerial portfolios allocated to women, and, secondly, by examining the spillover effect of the gender quotas in positions where they do not apply. We find that the implementation of gender quotas gradually resulted in women being assigned to high-salience ministerial portfolios. Also, gender quotas have produced mixed results in positions where they are not mandated. These findings can be explained mobilising a multi-perspectival argument that takes into account the history of gender quotas adoption in Burundi, the specific political context of their implementation, as well as an interpersonal resources perspective.

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## Keywords

Burundi, gender quotas, spillover effects, consociationalism, descriptive representation

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Development Policy, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

## Corresponding Author:

Réginas Ndayiragije, Institute of Development Policy, University of Antwerp, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium.

Email: [reginas.ndayiragije@uantwerpen.be](mailto:reginas.ndayiragije@uantwerpen.be)



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## Introduction

From a women's political participation perspective, the last years have seen, across the globe, a constant and remarkable diversification of political elites (Nyrup et al., 2023). This diversification largely resulted from a surge in gender quotas. Over the last three decades, more than 100 countries have adopted gender quotas in their legislative institutions (Hughes et al., 2019).

This paper adds to research on the effects of quotas on women's sustainable representation, the latter referring to "substantial numerical political representation of women, freed of the risk of immediate major backlash" (Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013: 139–140). It investigates whether the gender quotas affect informal political practices such as gendered patterns of portfolio allocation, or trigger a spillover effect in positions and/or institutions where they are not mandated. These are legitimate questions as far as gender quotas' objectives are concerned. Indeed, if women's presence in politics matters, *where* exactly they participate is equally vital (Guariso et al., 2018). There is an increasing positive association between women's descriptive representation and pro-women policies (Franceschet et al., 2012). Although women's representation in government and parliament makes a substantial difference, limiting the analysis to those positions would be erroneous, as politically appointed staff also influence policy-making and implementation processes (Taflaga and Kerby, 2020).

Focusing on Burundi as a case study, this research analyses the effects of gender quotas on women's descriptive representation. We first assess whether a political system exposed to an increased presence of women in government also diversifies the range – that is, traditionally the so-called feminine versus masculine ministerial portfolios and/or high salience versus low- or moderate-salience ministerial portfolios – of cabinet positions assigned to women. Second, we examine whether gender quotas produce a spillover effect in positions where they are not mandated.

For several reasons, Burundi is an interesting case to study gender quotas' effects. The country has adopted a broad and legally binding quotas policy. Gender quotas in parliament and in government were incorporated in the 2005 and 2018 Constitution and in the electoral legislation adopted on that basis. Burundi also developed a co-optation mechanism to "correct" electoral results in case they deviate from the quotas (Vandeginste, 2022). Furthermore, Burundi stands out as having one of the highest shares of women in parliament. The country ranks twenty-eighth on the worldwide political empowerment metric (WEF, 2015). Finally, the quotas have been in place for nearly two decades, which allows for an analysis over time.

Our contribution is threefold. First, while other research on gender quotas' spillover effects has focused on legislative institutions (e.g. Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013), we investigate the effect of gender quotas in the executive. By so doing, we contribute to understanding an under-researched phenomenon. We lack, for instance, reliable information on the extent to which gender quotas are used in the executive, and whether and how they contribute to overall women's descriptive representation. Second, by investigating the effects of gender quotas in appointed senior positions, we expand the literature on

the effects of gender quotas on women's sustainable representation. Third, although both gender quotas and power-sharing are part of the contemporary normative framework of conflict resolution (Byrne and McCulloch, 2018), their interaction is understudied.

The paper draws on original empirical data collected for the period between October 2001 and June 2020. Using the official *Bulletin Officiel du Burundi* (BOB), in which legislation and important administrative regulations and decisions are published, we collected data on cabinet member appointments as well as on other senior positions.

Our findings depart from conceptions that have so far equated the so-called feminine ministerial portfolios with less powerful ministerial portfolios. While indeed we found that high-salience ministerial portfolios are gendered, ministerial portfolios traditionally assigned to women can also be highly salient in certain contexts. Another key finding is that gender quotas resulted in mixed effects. In some positions, we observe a clear gradual spillover effect, while there is no effect in other positions. We argue that the mixed effects of gender quotas in Burundi are shaped by the history of their adoption as well as by the political context of their implementation.

## Gender Quotas and Women's Descriptive Representation

Gender quotas are the most effective strategy to fast-track women's descriptive representation and normalise and legitimise women's presence in the public sphere (Franceschet et al., 2012). Gender quotas in candidates' nomination and selection for legislatures have proven to be the mainstream strategy to increase women's role in governance (Hughes et al., 2017). These quotas aim at increasing women's representation and have predominantly targeted electoral political bodies. The scholarship on gender quotas is – not surprisingly – focused on quotas in legislatures, on women's electability and advancement of women's interests (e.g. Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013).

Scholars have considered the amplification of women's access to political office and centres of power as the primary objective of gender quotas (Meier, 2008). Assessing gender quotas against this objective, researchers have pointed at mixed results. On the one hand, the last two decades, which saw a proliferation of gender quotas, have been marked by a sustained increase in the number of women appointed to ministerial office (Kroeber and Hüffelmann, 2022). As of 2018, twenty-four countries were credited for having some sort of gender quotas in government (Herrera, 2018). On the other hand, despite this increase in women's descriptive representation in government, the process of cabinet formation has remained overwhelmingly tainted with a "gendered pattern" (Lee and McClean, 2022). "High salience" ministries have largely remained closed for women (Krook and O'Brien, 2012). Conversely, ministries that generally have under their purview policy areas that are considered low salience are often attributed to women. In the end, stereotypical, gendered practices of ministerial portfolio allocation create a vicious circle. The more women are assigned to the so-called low-value portfolios, the more this reinforces the prejudice that they are unable to handle a high-value ministry (Kroeber and Hüffelmann, 2022).

A more optimistic perspective, advanced by theorists of the “political elite hypothesis,” contends that, over time, gender quotas influence both the supply and demand sides of women as political candidates, and thus a shift in policy areas where women are appointed (O’Brien and Rickne, 2016). Expanding the “eligibility pool” of potential ministers (Annesley, 2015), gender quotas are said to trigger an upsurge in the number (Siaroff, 2000) and the salience (Kroeber and Hüffelmann, 2022) of ministerial portfolios assigned to women. In addition, the more women are appointed to government, the higher the chances that they are promoted to higher salience portfolios. Indeed, empirical evidence has shown that experience plays an important role in ministers’ upward mobility for men and women (Lee and McClean, 2022). Also, women promoted to the highest positions help increasing the overall political representation of women through the recruitment of women political personnel (Kerevel, 2019).

Other literature nuances this optimism, however. To explain why gender quotas may fall short of their immediate targets, Bjarnegård and Zetterberg advance two mutually reinforcing perspectives – one psychological, the other procedural. If women generally occupy less prestigious portfolios, this reality owes much, first, to gender-based prejudices that gatekeepers – party leaders and cabinet makers – hold against women, and, second, to the specifics of political nomination processes (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2011), which generally relegate women to a *de facto* outsider status (Martinez-Canto and Verge, 2023). Political career makers do not entrust women with important political positions, because they consider it a strategic miscalculation for two reasons. First, voters supposedly hold negative stereotypes towards women (Bateson, 2020). Second, because women as a group do not represent a major threat to regimes survival, cabinet makers do not feel the need to entrust them with important positions (Nyrup et al., 2023). Even when gender quotas result in women being appointed to high-salience ministerial positions, there is a risk that over time, following Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2016), women are again relegated to tokenistic positions. Hence, as gender quotas do not directly address the structural causes and political processes that exclude women from political life, they may fail to provide women with opportunities and tools to renegotiate the(ir) public sphere (Meier, 2008).

Gender-based stereotypes in politics are stubborn (Dingler and Kroeber, 2022). Where gender quotas are adopted in post-conflict, male-dominated, and consociational political contexts, even more caution is required. While post-conflict gender quotas can be empowering in the short run, their merits in long-term empowerment are disputed (Webster et al., 2019). Second, in contexts like Burundi, where politics is “an overwhelmingly male preserve” (Bentley and Southal, 2005: 153), descriptive representation has been an end in itself. Increasing the number of women in state institutions allows for the two functions of descriptive representation: redistribution and recognition (Meier, 2008). Third, and more theoretically, it has been argued that there is a “conceptual misalignment between gendered understandings of conflict and the consociational model” (Kennedy et al., 2016: 619). This misalignment might result in women’s political marginalisation in consociational power-sharing. The latter, a political engineering that ensures that politically salient social identities are represented in state institutions, is arguably

gender-blind in both theory and practice (Byrne and McCulloch, 2017). It inhibits “effective political representation for those whose primary political identities do not align with the societal divisions it seeks to ameliorate” (Kennedy et al., 2016: 619). Specifically, when fragmentation follows ethnic lines and ethnicity is determined according to a patriarchal logic, this negatively affects the level of women’s representation (McCulloch, 2020).

Our literature review does not reveal any major difference between democracies and autocracies when it comes to the use of gender quotas and their impact on sustainable representation. Gender quotas do not represent a survival risk to autocratic regimes. Such regimes may even gain from their gender-friendly policies (Tripp, 2023). Autocracies heavily dependent on international aid routinely utilise gender quotas as a window-dressing strategy to attract international funding despite their democratic governance shortcomings (Kroeger and Kang, 2022).

### *Women’s Descriptive Representation in Burundi*

Post-independence Burundi has been marked by a long history of exclusionary politics (Dunlop, 2021; Lemarchand, 2002). From the abolition of the Burundian monarchy on 28 November 1966 to June 1993 (male) Tutsi military officers from the southern part of Burundi monopolised all state institutions. This exclusive rule disenfranchised many citizens, including women: from 1962 to 2000, women’s representation in government hardly reached 10 per cent at its maximum.

In October 1993, some four months after his election to the presidency, Melchior Ndadaye (a Hutu from the now central Gitega province) was assassinated by members of the Tutsi-dominated armed forces. This unleashed a civil war with important ethnic dimensions. The Arusha peace negotiations (hereafter APRA) that took place from 1998 to 2000 were oriented towards a power-sharing deal between Tutsi and Hutu political elites. Theoretically, they also offered an opportunity to tackle the historical problem of women’s political exclusion and marginalisation. The APRA introduced a consociational power-sharing political system that “includes a host of references to women, indicating a deliberate attempt to mainstream references to women (...)” (Anderson, 2010: 4).

The Constitution of 18 March 2005 – and of 7 June 2018 – imposed gender quotas (at least 30 per cent of women) in both chambers of the parliament and in ministerial positions. After the 2005 elections, compared to the transition period (2001–2005), women’s representation substantially increased (Nanourou and Wilson, 2014). The gender quotas success at the level of parliament is, inter alia, due to detailed legal implementation arrangements. First, the electoral legislation required that, out of four top-ranked candidates on a blocked electoral list, at least one is a woman. Since 2019, one out of three top-ranked candidates must be a woman. The electoral commission, an administrative organ, and the constitutional court, a judicial organ, are legally empowered to reject electoral lists that violate this requirement. Secondly, in case an insufficient number of women are elected, the electoral commission co-opts an additional number of MPs to reach the 30

per cent minimum. This is done for gender and ethnic quotas. Thus, in the Burundi case, gender quotas “benefit” from the enforcement mechanism that was designed for ethnic quotas under the country’s post-conflict consociational power-sharing institutions (Vandeginste, 2022). While legal enforcement mechanisms have been put in place for gender quotas at the level of parliament, this is not the case at the level of the government. Cabinet formation is left to the full discretion of the president. Neither the electoral commission nor the constitutional court intervene. Furthermore, gender quotas were not used for other institutions such as provincial governorship and parastatals (enterprises co-owned by the state). For CEOs of parastatals as well as key functions within ministerial cabinets and provincial governor positions, the president appoints *officially* upon the recommendation of the ministers who hierarchically supervise the appointee. This implies that the gender quotas at cabinet level might – at least potentially – produce a spillover effect as the 30 per cent of women in government are among the actors who nominate candidates for these top positions.

While ethnic quotas currently face an uncertain future, gender quotas are not contested at the time of writing. Under the 2018 constitution, the Senate is requested to evaluate, by 2025 at the latest, whether there is a need to maintain the ethnic quotas. Influential political actors within the dominant party CNDD-FDD have spoken out against them (Ndayiragije and Vandeginste, 2023). That is not the case for gender quotas.

## Data and Methods

Our data collection is based on the appointment decrees – published in the official monthly gazette (BOB) – of ministers, senior president’s advisors, provincial governors, the three most prominent ministerial positions within ministries (chiefs of staff, permanent secretaries, ministers’ assistants), and CEO of parastatals. These are the most coveted positions because they confer important social prestige and material benefits. For all of these positions, data collected cover the period from 30 October 2001 to 28 June 2020. This timeframe goes from the appointment of the first interim government appointed on the basis of the APRA to the 2020 elections, organised on the basis of the new 2018 Constitution.

For parastatals, we included main banks and companies for which the Burundian state is either the sole owner or the main shareholder. CEOs of these institutions are appointed by the president. We also considered social security institutions and some state entities that play an important role in the national economy (e.g. Burundian Revenue Authority, the Central Bank, etc.). For each individual sampled, we systematically recorded their ethnic identification, province of origin, region, party affiliation, gender, and the date of their appointment and the date when their function ended. To determine appointees’ gender, we relied on gendered prefixes used before individual names (see also Taflaga and Kerby, 2020). In some rare cases where non-gendered prefixes were used (e.g. Dr.) in the appointment decree, we considered whether their first name is a common name for men or women.

To analyse evolution over time, we distinguish between the transition period and the post-transition period, which comprises three legislatures (2005–2010, 2010–2015, and 2015–2020). Each legislature is a unit of analysis. Indeed, even when the same political party remains in power, a new legislature generally comes with a new political agenda and new priorities, which can have implications on the distribution of positions. Because ministerial durability is arguably determined, *inter alia*, by gender (Lee and McClean, 2022), we also include replacements and new appointments of ministers during a legislature. So, in order to take into account the ministerial incumbency duration, we calculated our data in position-years.

As we are interested in both the number of positions and the salience of ministerial portfolios allocated to women, we determined the salience of each ministerial portfolio allocated to women. To do so, we adopted an expert survey method. We recruited fourteen experts, twelve elite actors with hands-on experience of Burundian politics, and two independent senior national political analysts. The experts attributed a numerical value to each ministry, from one (minimal value) to five (maximum value), and explained why they assigned that value. Following Warwick and Druckman (2006), we eventually considered the mean value for each ministerial portfolio as its salience value. Thereafter, following Bego (2014), we coded all ministries into three categories: high-salience portfolios, moderate-salience portfolios, and low-salience portfolios. We used the top third of ranking scores as the cutoff value for high salience. A ministry that has been expanded or dismembered can belong to two different categories.

To determine whether there is interrater reliability and interrater agreement, we ran a two-way random effects model in SPSS, which allows to measure raters' consensus and consistency (LeBreton and Senter, 2008). Based on the 95 per cent confidence interval, the ICC estimate = 0.959, which is considered an indication of high absolute consensus and relative consistency in experts' ratings. More importantly, the experts agreed on the main criteria to determine ministerial portfolio salience in Burundi: the extent to which a ministry is a central element in the strategy to gain or retain power (see also Ndayiragije and Vandeginste, 2023). Are also considered high salience the ministries that control the budget (Ministry of Finance) or play a key role in fundraising (notably the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) are also considered high salience. Our findings on Burundi thus confirm research conducted elsewhere (e.g. Krook and O'Brien, 2012). However, our findings deviate from others in one major respect: some ministries often ranked as moderate salience, such as the Ministry of Education, Agriculture, and Health (Goddard, 2019; Krook and O'Brien, 2012), are considered high salience in Burundi. We thus challenge the association of ministries typically assigned to women such as health and education with lower salience. In Burundi, as one of the poorest countries in the world and thus strongly aid-dependent, these ministries are among the biggest recipients of international donor funding. Thus, they concentrate a bulk of public procurement contracts and ensure that state spoils are directed to relevant political clients.

While we used a customised ranking for salience, we followed Krook and O'Brien (2012: 846) for the feminine versus masculine categorisation of ministerial portfolios, in line with other authors (see e.g. Kroeber and Hüffelmann, 2022). When a



Burundian ministerial portfolio falls in two categories (e.g. commerce/masculine and tourism/neutral), the first department named in the appointment decree determines its classification. In case of a portfolio with two departments, one not classified by Krook and O'Brien and the other classified, we coded it based on the classified department. Ministerial portfolios that do not fall in any of the categories by Krook and O'Brien were coded as unclassified. Table 1 shows all ministerial portfolios classified by gender traits and salience.

Interviews with leaders of women organisations and political actors in Burundi and in exile informed our data analysis. The identification of informants was purposive. Based on preliminary findings, we conducted follow-up interviews with some of the twelve experts with a political background. We also interviewed two civil society activists leading women's organisations and three provincial representatives of the ruling party, CNDD-FDD, to better understand the appointments' process. Because the internal functioning of the party is largely shrouded in secrecy, we contacted three interlocutors with whom we worked in the past in other contexts. Their description corroborated the writings of other high-ranking insiders (e.g. Nkurunziza, 2019).

## Findings

We first present the findings regarding the evolution of (high salience) ministerial portfolio allocation, before turning to our findings on women's (under)representation in positions not subject to gender quotas.

*Gender Quotas and (High Salience) Ministerial Portfolios Allocation.* Though we are primarily interested in the women's share of high-salience ministerial portfolios, we first need to check whether the gender quotas for cabinet positions have been respected since their introduction. Figure 1 shows that gender quotas in government – a minimum of 30 per cent of women as per the 2005 and 2018 Constitution – have indeed been respected for the period between August 2005 and June 2020. This marks a considerable improvement compared to the transition period. Indeed, although the transitional government included twice the number of women compared to the last pre-APRA government, this was only roughly one-third of the number of female ministers in the first post-conflict government (11 per cent versus 31.1 per cent, see Figure 1). Although the APRA had called for a more ambitious gender inclusion policy during the transition period, neither the APRA nor the transitional constitution of October 2001 had imposed quotas or a clear benchmark to be reached nor put in place any enforcement mechanism. The evolution of women's level of presence in the Burundi government clearly confirms how – contrary to hard quotas – vaguely formulated objectives of gender inclusion yield modest results on the ground (see also Paxton and Hughes, 2015). In other words, post-2005 quotas were indeed considerably more effective in fast-tracking descriptive representation of women in the executive.

In addition, a T-test run to compare the mean value of ministerial portfolios allocated to men and ministerial portfolios reveals that, for the entire period covered by this

**Table I.** Overview of Ministerial Portfolio Allocation (2001–2020).

Type of portfolios	Women	Men	Total
<b>Before gender quotas formalisation (2001–2005)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Feminine portfolio</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>High Salience</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
Education	0	4	4
Health	0	2	2
<b>Low Salience</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>
Social action and women promotion	4	0	4
Vocational education	0	2	2
Youth and Sports/Culture	0	3	3
Fight against HIV	2	2	4
<b>Masculine portfolios</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>High Salience</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>
Defense	0	3	3
Foreign affairs	0	2	2
Home affairs and Public security/Home security	0	6	6
Finance	0	3	3
<b>Moderate Salience</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
Transport, Public works, and Procurement and Telecom	0	2	2
Agriculture and Livestock	0	2	2
Commerce and Industry	0	3	3
Communication and government spokesperson	0	3	3
<b>Low Salience</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Labour and Social security	0	2	2
<b>Neutral portfolios</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>High Salience</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Justice	0	3	3
<b>Moderate Salience</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>
Civil service	0	3	3
IDPs and Economic recovery	1	0	1
Energy and Mines	0	4	4
Environment, Tourism, and Regional planning	0	1	1
Planning, Development, and Economic recovery	2	2	4
Public works (and Procurement)	0	4	4
Regional development/planning (Environment and Tourism)	0	8	8
IDPs Relocation and Refugees repatriation	1	0	1
<b>Low Salience</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Human rights, Institutional reforms, and Parliamentary affairs	0	3	3
<b>Unclassified</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

(Continued)

Table I. (continued)

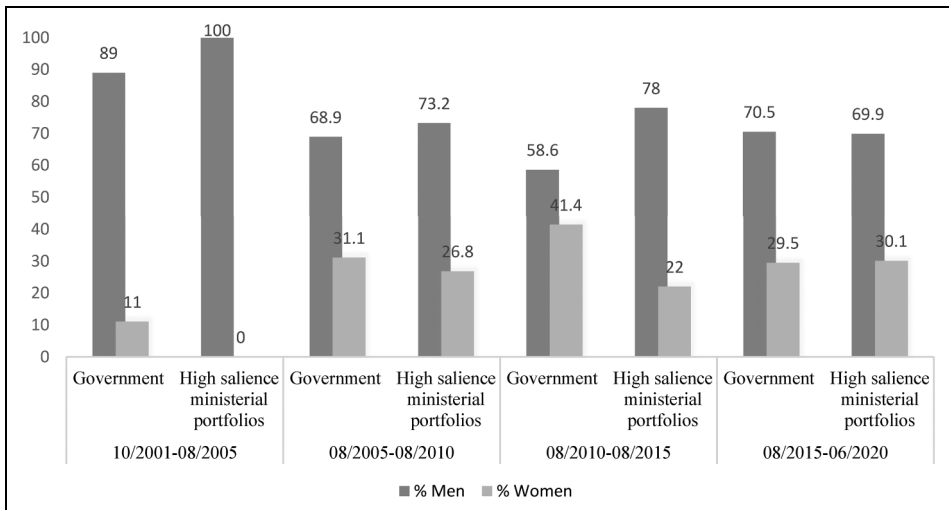
Type of portfolios	Women	Men	Total
<b>High Salience</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Good Governance, State Inspection, and Privatisation (State ministry)	0	1	1
<b>Moderate Salience</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Mobilisation for peace	0	3	3
<b>Gender quotas adoption and enforcement (2005–2020)</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Feminine</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>High salience</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>
Education and Culture/Scientific research/Vocational education	2	2	4
Public Health (and fight against HIV)	4	3	7
<b>Moderate salience</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>
Higher education and Scientific research	0	4	4
Primary and secondary education/Vocational training	2	2	4
<b>Low Salience</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>
Human rights, Social affairs, and Gender (and national solidarity)	4	1	5
Primary and secondary education (deputy minister)	0	1	1
Youth and Sports (and Culture)	0	4	4
Youth, Technology and Communication	1	0	1
Fight against HIV	2	1	3
<b>Masculine</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>High Salience</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>29</b>
Defense	0	3	3
Finance	2	2	4
Finance and Planning (and Budget and Development cooperation)	1	4	5
Foreign affairs (and International cooperation)	1	6	7
Home affairs (and local development/public security/citizenship training/ emergency preparedness)	0	10	10
<b>Moderate Salience</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>32</b>
Communication/Information, Parliamentary affairs and Government Spokesperson/Communication and Media	1	4	5
Agriculture and Livestock	1	4	5
Commerce and Industry (and Tourism)	7	3	10
Post, Technologies, Information, Communication and Media	0	1	1
Transport, Public works and Procurement, Telecom (and Regional planning)	4	7	11
<b>Neutral portfolios</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>High Salience</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>
Justice	4	3	7
Environment, Agriculture, and Livestock	0	1	1
<b>Moderate Salience</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>39</b>
Civil service (Labour and social security)	3	2	5

(Continued)

**Table I.** (continued)

Type of portfolios	Women	Men	Total
Decentralisation and regional development/institutional reforms	0	3	3
EAC affairs	4	0	4
Energy and Mines	0	1	1
Good governance and planning/Planning and Economic recovery	1	4	5
Local development	1	2	3
Public works and Procurement	0	4	4
Regional cooperation (and EAC affairs)	0	2	2
Regional planning, Environment, and Tourism	1	3	4
Water, Energy and Mines	0	4	4
Water, Environment, regional and urban planning	0	5	5
<b>Low Salience</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Local development (deputy minister)	0	1	1
Planning (deputy minister)	0	1	1
Public works and Procurement (deputy minister)	0	1	1
<b>Unclassified portfolios</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Moderate Salience</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
Good Governance (and Privatisation)	0	8	8

Source: Authors' compilation.



**Figure I.** Men and Women in Government and with High-Salience Portfolios (2001–2020, in % in Minister-Year).

Source: Authors' Compilation.

research, women's ministerial portfolios have in average a salience value of 3 (0.7 SD) against 3.3 (0.8 SD) for ministerial portfolios allocated to men. This difference is statistically significant at 95 CI.

Before gender quotas formalisation in the constitution, the salience value for ministerial portfolios allocated to women was 2.4 (0.5 SD) and 3.3 (0.9 SD) for ministerial portfolios allocated to men. With gender quotas, ministerial portfolios allocated to women scored in average 3.1 (0.7 SD) while ministerial portfolios allocated to men had a salience value of 3.4 (0.7 SD). Although in both the two cases the difference between ministerial portfolios allocated to women and ministerial portfolios allocated to men is statistically significant at 95 CI, the adoption of gender quotas resulted in an increased salience of 0.7 points in average for positions held by women.

Looking into the ministerial portfolios, the adoption of gender quotas resulted in 14 women and 34 men (out of 157 ministers) appointed to high-salience ministerial portfolios (see Table 1), thus a probability of 0.09 to be appointed to a high-salience ministerial portfolios for women and 0.22 for men, implying that a man minister appointed in government has 2.4 times higher chances to land a high-salience ministerial portfolio.

Figure 1 illustrates the temporal evolution of gendered access to high-salience portfolios. It shows that with the substantial increase in women's presence in government (after 2005), the share of women in high-salience ministerial portfolios also considerably increases. An important milestone is even reached in 2015–2020, when the representation of women in high-salience ministerial portfolios reaches the level of their share in overall cabinet positions. A close scrutiny of these results reveals a number of interesting realities.

First, a huge progress has been made in the last fifteen years. Between 2001 and 2005, not a single woman controlled a high-salience ministry. They were mostly confined to low and moderate salience – and feminine or neutral – ministries such as the ministry in charge of women's affairs/gender or repatriation (see Table 2). This underrepresentation was probably due to the fact that the cabinet formation was a purely male business. Indeed, during the transition period, it was mostly decided by members of the political parties' directorates, all of whom were men presenting themselves as representatives of their ethnic groups. This resonates with the argument that women have less access to high-salience portfolios because they are rarely leaders of ethnic groups (Ariolla and Johnson, 2014).

Second, the gender quotas have, in the short run, allowed for a diversification of ministerial portfolios allocated to women. While between October 2001 and August 2005, not a single woman was appointed to a masculine portfolio (cf. Tables 1 and 2), the situation changed with the adoption of gender quotas. Of sixty-one individuals assigned to masculine ministerial portfolios, seventeen (27.9 per cent) – a level of representation that approximates their constitutionally guaranteed share in government – were women. More interestingly, between 2005 and 2010, they were even assigned to the Ministry of Finance and Foreign Affairs, two portfolios labelled as masculine and high salience (see Table 2). In the following legislatures, although women could access to some of the moderate- and low-salience ministerial portfolios traditionally considered

**Table 2.** Ministerial Portfolios Allocated to Women (2001–2020).

Ministerial portfolio	Tenure	Salience	Gender categorisation
<b>Before gender quotas formalisation (10/2001–08/2005)</b>			
Social action and Women's empowerment	30/10/2001–30/08/2005	Low	Feminine
Fight against AIDS	30/10/2001–30/08/2005	Low	Feminine
Refugees and IDPs repatriation	30/10/2001–30/08/2005	Moderate	Neutral
Planning, Development, and Reconstruction	30/10/2001–30/08/2005	Moderate	Neutral
<b>After gender quotas formalisation (08/2005–06/2020)</b>			
2005–2010 legislature			
Foreign affairs and International cooperation	31/08/2005–29/01/2009	High	Masculine
Finance	13/09/2006–13/07/2007 & 14/11/2007–29/08/2010	High	Masculine
Justice	13/09/2006–14/11/2007	High	Neutral
Health and Fight against AIDS	16/07/2007–14/11/2007	High	Feminine
EAC affairs	29/01/2009–29/08/2010	Moderate	Neutral
Commerce and Industry	31/08/2005–13/09/2006 & 14/11–2007–29/01/2009	Moderate	Masculine
Land Management, Tourism, and Environment	31/08/2005–14/11/2007	Moderate	Neutral
Planning, Development, and Reconstruction	31/08/2005–13/09/2006	Moderate	Neutral
Transport, Post, and Telecoms	13/09/2006–13/07/2007	Moderate	Masculine
Parliamentary affairs, Communication, and Government spokesperson	13/02/2007–29/11/2009	Moderate	Neutral
Deputy minister /AIDS (Health)	14/11/2007–29/01/2009	Low	Feminine
Labour and Social Security	29/01/2009–29/08/2010	Moderate	Masculine
Human rights, Gender, and solidarity	31/08/2005–29/08/2010	Low	Feminine
National Solidarity, Repatriation, and Gender	13/07/2007–29/08/2010	Low	Neutral
2010–2015 legislature			
Justice	29/08/2010	High	Neutral
Health and Fight against AIDS	29/08/2010–24/8/2015	High	Feminine
National Solidarity, Repatriation, and gender	30/08/2010–7/11/2011	Low	Feminine
Solidarity, Human rights, and gender	18/02/2014–24/08/2015	Low	Feminine
Agriculture and Livestock	29/08/2010–24/08/2015	Moderate	Masculine

(Continued)

**Table 2.** (continued)

Ministerial portfolio	Tenure	Saliency	Gender categorisation
Public works and Equipment	29/08/2010–7/11/2013	Moderate	Masculine
Public works, Transport, and equipment	18/02/2014–24/08/2015	Moderate	Masculine
East African affairs (Regional)	10/05/2012–24/08/2015	Moderate	Neutral
Primary education	01/02/2013–24/08/2015	Moderate	Feminine
Commerce, Industry, and Tourism	18/02/2014–24/08/2015 & 18/05/2015–24/08/2015	Moderate	Masculine
2015–2020 legislature			
Health	25/08/2015–18/04/2018	High	Feminine
Education	25/08/2015–18/04/2018	High	Feminine
Justice	25/08/2015–28/06/2020	High	Neutral
EAC affairs	25/08/2015–28/06/2020	Moderate	Neutral
Commerce, Industry, and Tourism	28/08/2015–18/04/2018	Moderate	Masculine
Culture and Sport	18/04/2018–28/06/2020	Low	Feminine
Youth, Post, Communication, Media, and EAC affairs	18/04/2018–28/06/2020	Moderate	Feminine

Source: Authors' compilation.

masculine, they were, however, systematically excluded from masculine high-saliency ministerial portfolios (see Table 2). Women have not (yet) been in charge of the Ministry of Defense, Security, and Home Affairs.

For the period covered by this research, the allocation of high-saliency ministerial portfolios, especially masculine high-saliency portfolios, remained gendered. In fact, six women and five men were appointed to feminine high-saliency ministerial portfolios (Table 1). A woman appointed in government between 2005 and 2020 had a 0.04 probability to land a feminine high-saliency portfolio, while a man had a 0.03 probability. On the other hand, of twenty-nine ministers appointed to masculine high-saliency portfolios, four (13.8 per cent) were women. This implies that the probability for a woman, appointed in government between August 2005 and June 2020, to land a masculine high-saliency portfolio was 0.03 against 0.16 for a man appointed during the same period. That is, a woman appointed in government had 5.3 times lower chances to land a high-saliency masculine position. All these findings conform to a gendered pattern identified elsewhere (e.g. Kroeber and Hüffelmann, 2022).

Even during the 2015–2020 legislature, which saw an increase in women's representation in high-saliency ministerial portfolios (see Figure 1), they were also kept away from the Ministry of Finance and Foreign Affairs, ministries they had been assigned to back in 2005. They were mostly confined to social ministries traditionally assigned to women, but some of which are considered highly salient in Burundi. It is, however,

intriguing that, while the ruling party remained the same from 2005 to 2020, the diversity of high-salience ministerial portfolios allocated to women in 2005 when the CNDD-FDD got to power decreased afterwards. Drawing inspiration from the existing literature and the political evolution of the last years, we suspect that it was due to a readjustment of the ruling party's strategies and priorities. In fact, ruling regimes seeking international reputation increase the political role of women (Bush and Zetterberg, 2021). The CNDD-FDD, a former rebel movement inheriting a devastated country, was in need of international support, and may have instrumentalised women's appointments to high-salience portfolios out of opportunism. That may well explain why, between 2005 and 2007, women were not only appointed to high-salience ministerial portfolios but also more generally seemed to play an increasingly important role in post-war Burundian politics. They occupied prestigious positions such as the second vice-president of the Republic (Alice Nzomukunda and Marina Barampama) and speaker of the National Assembly (Immaculée Nahayo). Nzomukunda openly opposed the party's governance style from the very start. In 2007, both Nahayo and Barampama challenged the ruling party by supporting Hussein Radjabu, the dissident CNDD-FDD secretary general, in his confrontation with Pierre Nkurunziza, the then president of Burundi. From that early experience, the ruling party may well have learnt that women were not "submissive" (enough) to a party that was used to military discipline, and eventually decided to assign them to less important positions. A civil society activists we interviewed confided:

Back in 2005, we were very optimistic. Looking at positions allocated to women, they were empowered to play an important role. However, things were reversed when the CNDD-FDD realized women are not manipulable as men. We, women, we do not indulge in petty politics to attract favours. Our maternal instinct inclines us to have a high sense of general, non-partisan, interests. That explains why, after women in important positions spoke their minds against the autocratic turn the country was taking, they were swiftly removed from their positions. (Interview with a women SCO leader, January 2022)

Another possible reason relates to the political context that prevailed between 2010 and 2020. The regime had taken an autocratic turn, and the CNDD-FDD was confronted with internal contestation and external criticism. A poor governance record as well as Nkurunziza's third term ambitions in 2015 fuelled these contestations. Faced with this threat, the CNDD-FDD retreated to its original support base, mostly men, high-ranking military officers congregated in "the club of Hutu generals" (Rufyikiri, 2017). This new power configuration relegated women to an outsider status.

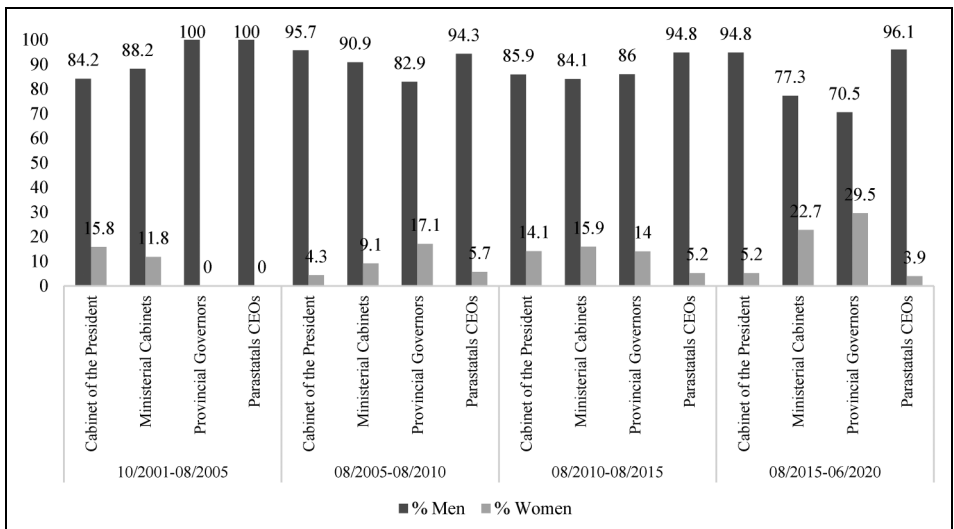
The 2015 *imigumuko* (i.e., insurgency) has learnt us some hard lessons. We understood the need for a rigorous candidates' screening. We now trust individuals with a strong ideological education (...) individuals who have "swallowed the '*ibanga*' (i.e., the secret)". (conversation with a provincial secretary of the CNDD-FDD, March 2022)



**Gender Quotas and Spillover Effect.** Figure 2 presents the evolution of women’s descriptive representation between 2001 and 2020 in positions that are not regulated by gender quotas. These are the senior advisors to the cabinet of the president, the three most important positions (chief of staff, minister’s assistant, and permanent secretary) in ministerial cabinets, provincial governor positions, and parastatals’ CEOs.

The share of women in positions where gender quotas are not mandated is overall far below the 30 per cent applicable to government and parliament, except for provincial governor positions during the 2015–2020 legislature. There is no clear overall trend. By the 2015–2020 legislature, women’s share increased in senior ministerial cabinet positions as well as in provincial governor positions. However, this is not the case for CEOs of parastatals and senior presidential advisors.

The increase in number of women in provincial governor and permanent secretary and minister’s assistant positions between 2015 and 2020 raises the question whether this can presage a sustainable increase over time. A first indicator casting doubt on the durability of this upward trend is that women’s representation in provincial governorship after the June 2020 elections, a period not covered by this contribution, went down. Out of the eighteen provincial governors, only three (16.6 per cent) are women. A recent legal reform may well offer part of the explanation here. Since the entry into force of the 2018 Constitution, military officials can be appointed as provincial governors, which was not allowed under the 2005 Constitution. In 2020, newly elected president



**Figure 2.** Descriptive Representation in Positions Not Subject to Gender Quotas (2001–2020, in %).

Source: Authors’ Compilation.

Evariste Ndayishimiye appointed five (out of eighteen) provincial governors from the security forces, all men. Second, although women's representation within ministerial cabinet positions increased during the 2015–2020 legislature, a gap across positions remained. Women occupy 35.6 per cent in minister's assistant positions against 13.8 per cent in permanent secretary positions. Zooming in on high-salience ministries, women represented 20.9 per cent as ministers' assistants and only 6.4 per cent as permanent secretaries.

*Lessons From the Implementation of Gender Quotas.* Gender quotas have been respected in parliament and in government – where they are mandatory. This is in itself noteworthy because there is, in practice, no legal avenue to challenge the president in his attribution to appoint individuals to ministerial positions. We argue that compliance with the gender quotas in these institutions owes much to both the consociational design as well as the ethnic configuration in Burundi. First, gender quotas implementation has extensively benefited from measures and strategies that were introduced to operationalise ethnic power-sharing. These include closed electoral lists with both ethnic and gender quotas, the constitutionalisation of quotas, and co-optation mechanisms.

At the same time, however, concerning positions not regulated by gender quotas, our findings seem to be in line with the critique in the literature that consociational engineering is often gender-blind. Concerning positions not regulated by gender quotas, our study also seems to conform to a pattern, where, because consociational engineering considers conflict-generating social identities (generally ethnicity and religion) as the only relevant political fragmentation lines, there is a risk to overlook gender (Kennedy et al., 2016). Ethnicity – the main structuring feature of Burundian politics of the last decades – might have relegated other social identities to a lesser status, which may explain why gender quotas did not revolutionise Burundian politics. Also, given the magnitude of post-conflict challenges, international actors may have sacrificed – or eased their pressure on – a number of issues that were not considered as potentially jeopardising the outcomes of their state-building efforts (Burihabwa and Curtis, 2021b; Grauvogel, 2016). Thus, the increase in women's presence as a result of the gender quotas may have failed to produce a major spillover effect in positions where gender quotas do not apply probably because it was not considered a priority by both local and international actors.

In addition to this contextual explanation, other reasons inherent to constraints faced by women in politics in general and in Burundi, in particular, may well explain why gender quotas have produced mixed results. As has been found elsewhere (see Mufti and Jalalzai [2021] on Pakistan), women in Burundi are poorly networked. This needs to be placed in the broader context of the patronage system and other informal practices that regulate access to senior positions in Burundi. The post-transition period, coinciding with CNDD-FDD rule, has seen a patronage system that shapes “the distribution and allocation of key political positions, jobs, and financial contracts to ruling party members” (Wittig, 2016: 152). In practice, the CNDD-FDD has devised, in order to avoid the marginalisation of certain provinces and to expand the party's support base, complex

informal selection procedures of appointments to high stake positions. This strategy involves influential individuals hailing from provinces and municipalities and affiliated to the CNDD-FDD (Nkurunziza, 2019) and ultimately to the “system,” a term generally used to designate the group of former senior CNDD-FDD combatants, now in the army and police (Burihabwa and Curtis, 2021b). According to a CNDD-FDD official interviewed – his version corroborates the description by Nkurunziza (2019), a former CNDD-FDD cadre – any decision of appointment to an important (non-military) position follows the following procedure. On the instruction of the president, his chief of cabinet approaches the party leadership at national level, giving as much indications as possible in terms of the ethnic, provincial, and academic background of an ideal candidate. These guidelines are then transmitted to the party’s provincial secretary. The party leadership at the provincial level might need to consult a communal secretary. When in the province/municipality, there is an influential army/police general; he will have a say as well. This process ensures that the prospective candidate is validated by generals or other high-level party members from the province. Only then the candidate is requested to provide for a CV, and an appointment decree will follow if the presidential cabinet has no objection. If the candidate is rejected, the process is reactivated.

For very sensitive and strategic positions, however, the president may directly consult the generals or/and the *conseil des sages* (the party’s “Council of the wise”). Decisions about these appointments, like any other strategic decision, are taken in informal circles comprising those known as party owners (*Bene umugambwe*) (Burihabwa and Curtis, 2021a). Women are not part of these circles. They are not represented in the *conseil des sages*, the “highest decision-making organ within the CNDD-FDD” (Ndikumana and Sebudandi, 2012: 40). Although, at the national level, two (out of six) party secretaries are women, they are not represented as party secretaries at the provincial (Ndikumana and Sebudandi, 2012: 40) and communal levels. No woman belongs to the circle of influential army and police generals. This is closely linked to the party’s history as an armed group with military cadres dominating civil ones (Burihabwa and Curtis, 2021a). Once in power, the CNDD-FDD has retained its war-like organisation (Van Acker, 2016). In this civil-military organisation that the CNDD-FDD has become (Rufyikiri, 2017), where repression has proven to be an important strategy of power conservation, women cannot shape the political space (*gupanga akarere*) as one CNDD-FDD official confided to us. This recalls the concepts of strategic and statistical discrimination earlier discussed. Loyalty as the main criterion for career advancement points to a pattern in political systems that heavily rely on coercion for their survival (see also Scharp and Gläbel, 2020). This strategy, which generally disenfranchises women, tilts the balance towards men who are perceived “readily available to occupy positions based on credible threats” (Nyrupe et al., 2023: 4).

Strategic discrimination, at least in our case, appears to be a consequence of the legacy of conflict, hindering women from becoming fully embedded in the crucial ruling structures of the party as well as in other (in)formal decision-making networks.

## Conclusion

This article set out to analyse whether gender quotas have enabled Burundian women to access high-salience positions within government, and whether the spirit of gender equality laid down in the APRA and the constitution has increased women's representation where gender quotas are not mandatory. While the quotas made a difference in terms of access to ministerial positions and (increasingly also) to high-salience ministerial positions, they had mixed further effects. Even when the women's share increases, most notably between 2015 and 2020, they are rarely appointed to the ministries generally considered as the core of government (defense, interior, finance, public security). The gendered pattern of ministerial portfolio allocation continued to prevail. In addition, in general, the 30 per cent minimum seems to constitute a glass ceiling for women's representation in government. Moreover, notwithstanding the differences across time and positions, gender quotas did not, in general, produce a major spillover effect in positions where they are not mandatory.

The reason for these mixed effects can be found in the particular history of their adoption and the political context of their implementation, whereby the consociational power-sharing model was both helpful but also limiting. Importantly, women have been excluded from crucial formal and informal networks, which deprive them from interpersonal resources, thus making them eternal outsiders as Martinez-Canto and Verge (2023) call them. The policy implication is that for gender quotas to be a really effective tool against women's political marginalisation, the historical dynamics, the broader political context, as well as the informal practices and networks that shape power dynamics must be taken into account. It involves a focus on the conditions, actors, and processes required to implement gender quotas, including more inclusive and transparent decision-making.

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## ORCID iDs

Réginas Ndayiragije  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8177-7054>

Stef Vandeginste  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2349-837X>

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## Author Biographies

**Réginas Ndayiragije** is a PhD candidate in Development Studies at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) and an associate researcher at the Institute of Development policy (IOB). His PhD research is interested in the bottom up and top down perspectives on power-sharing institutions in divided societies. Specifically, he investigates whether and how real-life power-sharing practices evolve over time and impact on citizens’ perceptions and experiences of political representation.

**Stef Vandeginste** is an associate professor at the Institute of Development Policy (IOB), University of Antwerp. He holds a PhD in Law and teaches in the advanced master programme on Governance and Development. His main research interests are power-sharing, transitional justice, political transitions and human rights, with a geographical focus on central Africa. He is also the chair of the IOB Great Lakes of Africa Centre. His latest research projects cover women’s rights protection and constitutionalism in Burundi, consociational power-sharing in Burundi and reparation for victims of sexual violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

**Petra Meier** is professor in Politics and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Antwerp (Belgium). She is a political scientist specialised in gender issues, and studies the (re)presentation of gender and other social markers in politics and policies, with a focus on the (re)production of (in)equality. Recent projects and publications cover anti-gender movements, the erosion of democracy, democracy in federal political systems, the consequences of populism for processes of political representation, authenticity in politics, the symbolic representation of gender, the implementation of gender quotas by political parties, and intersectional approaches to policies and policy-making.

## **Die Frauenquote in Burundi: Die unterschiedlichen Auswirkungen von Geschlechterquoten**

### **Zusammenfassung**

Auf der Grundlage von Originaldaten, die für den Zeitraum zwischen den Jahren 2001 und 2020 erhoben wurden, leistet dieser Artikel einen Beitrag zur Forschung über die Wirksamkeit von Geschlechterquoten. Dies geschieht zum einen durch die Untersuchung der Bedeutung der an Frauen vergebenen Ministerämter, und zum anderen durch die Untersuchung des Spillover-Effekts der Geschlechterquoten in Positionen, in denen sie nicht gelten. Wir stellen fest, dass die Einführung von Geschlechterquoten allmählich dazu geführt hat, dass Frauen mit hochrangigen Ministerämtern betraut wurden. Außerdem haben die Geschlechterquoten in Positionen, in denen sie nicht vorgeschrieben sind, zu unterschiedlichen Ergebnissen geführt. Diese Ergebnisse lassen sich damit erklären, dass die Geschichte der Einführung von Geschlechterquoten in Burundi, den spezifischen politischen Kontext ihrer Umsetzung sowie eine Perspektive der zwischenmenschlichen Ressourcen berücksichtigt.

### **Schlagwörter**

Burundi, Geschlechterquoten, Spillover-Effekte, Konsoziationismus, deskriptive Repräsentation