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**Title of project:** The impact of electoral gender quotas: The understudied behavioural dimension

**Project description for the general public**

The proportions of women in legislative bodies have traditionally been low; as of today, just under 24 percent of the members of national parliaments around the globe are women. This deficit of female political representation might have repercussions for policy directions pursued by respective states and thereby for our everyday life. This is because legislative bodies dominated by men may simply behave differently from their gender-balanced counterparts. Gender quotas are an institution designed to address the problem of insufficient presence of women in the political arena. Such regulations often guarantee that a certain proportion of candidates contesting elections are women. The proponents of such solutions assume that the mere fact that more women run in elections as candidates would eventually result in the gender composition of the emerging legislative bodies being less biased in favour of men. The effectiveness of such arrangements has been studied at times. However, the exact mechanisms through which they influence (or fail to influence) women's political representation remain severely understudied. Bluntly put, relevant research efforts have thus far tended to focus on the final outcomes of the processes discussed here rather than on those processes themselves.

The proposed research project aims to fill the aforementioned gap in our knowledge. It will study the elites' (parties') and voters' reaction to an introduction of gender quotas in the elections to the councils of Polish counties (Polish: *powiat*). It will also study the impact of gender composition of the aforementioned councils on the counties' structure of public spending. The elections to the councils of Polish counties constitute a laboratory-like setting whereby all the subtle mechanisms involved in the actual operation of gender quotas are directly observable and thus lend themselves to a fruitful scientific exploration. The proposed research will also rely on a range of modern social science research methods to make sure that the conclusions drawn in the course of the project are valid and sound. All in all, the project will advance our understanding of the influence quotas exert on the behaviour of politically relevant actors. From a broader viewpoint, it will contribute to the existing knowledge in gender and election studies on the borderline of several social science disciplines, such as political sociology, political science and political economy.