

Kerryn Baker (2019). *Pacific women in politics: Gender quota campaigns in the Pacific Islands*. Honolulu HI: University of Hawaii Press. 198pp. ISBN: 978-0-8248-7259-5. US\$65.45.

Gender balance in politics has been a longstanding issue that has attracted considerable scholarly attention over recent decades. Well-documented barriers include gendered stereotyping, traditional attitudes and economic constraints that preclude women's representation in parliament on an equal footing to men. This is also the case in the Pacific, which has amongst the lowest representation of women in politics in the world. Indeed, Pacific states – including Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu – currently have no women in parliament. In order to address this several Pacific Island states have made headway by implementing quotas designed to increase the number of female MPs. These temporary special measures have been contentious. Kerryn Baker's new book seeks to document and explain the politics behind these recent interventions.

When women are so under-represented in Pacific parliaments, how do political actors make sense of attempts to alter this imbalance? This question is asked at the outset of this book which seeks to highlight the goals, pressures and dilemmas of gender quota campaigns. The book presents the steps taken recently towards gender quotas in selected Pacific Island states and territories: Bougainville, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, PNG and Samoa.

The book breaks new ground through its engagement with interpretive methodology to capture the practical realities of the implementation of quotas in different Pacific Island countries. This interpretive methodology is central to the study, with the author recognising the importance of hearing from those impacted by the implementation themselves. This is rich data; and also a very practical source for argument and counter argument. This is an innovative look beyond the facts of quotas in an understudied region. What grounds the author's argument are the opinions and attitudes of Pacific Islanders on the contentious issue of gender-driven quota introductions in their countries and their perception of success.

The book thus reinforces the heterogeneity of the Island Pacific and is dismissive of the manner in which such a sprawling and diverse region is often essentialised and lumped together into a single and unidimensional category by those who are not familiar enough with the clear differences between the region's various island states and territories.

This richly crafted book will be of interest to scholars and practitioners working in at least three key areas; Pacific scholars, scholars of women's leadership or representation, as well as development scholars and practitioners. Of course, it will also be a rich guide for other places that have not yet gone down the quota path, who can learn from the lessons and prepare the arguments for and against based on a practical experience. The book is organised into parts according to country and approach. It covers the debate over: (1) having a legislative safety net to elect women in the event they are not elected outright; (2) the reserved seats debate, which is about reserving a number of seats for women; and (3) parity laws and campaigns, which are about ensuring gender balance. In addition to the six chapters, replete with illustrations, the book contains insightful notes and a thorough bibliography of great assistance to other scholars. The use of visual materials is instructive. For example, cartoons from local newspapers represent how quota campaigns have shaped and reflect public opinion. Questions in cartoons, such as 'who will weed the garden?', reflect the reaction against changes to culturally entrenched notions about Pacific women's traditional customary roles and social norms.

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Baker's treatment of this topic is merely an opening statement, and definitely not the last word. She argues that future academic work would need to go beyond merely counting the countries and setting out campaigns, and explore the views and interpretations of those actors at the centre of government and the multiple or varying readings of what they have achieved. Details of each jurisdiction are complemented by Baker's reflections on the very meaning of success and areas of future scholarship. Potential future editions of this book will hopefully record the successes of a burgeoning wave of campaigns throughout the region, influenced by these early success stories. As an example, after campaigns and petitions for quotas split opinion in Vanuatu, it would be worth exploring whether the *Vot Women 2020* campaign in Vanuatu to improve women's representation in Parliament, and the success of sub-national level quotas in that country, have had any appreciable influence at national level.

Ultimately, Baker concludes that what is needed is a broader understanding of the very notion of 'success'. As Baker argues, 'to understand how success is defined in different contexts is to understand more comprehensively how and why gender quotas are adopted in the Pacific region and more broadly'. In PNG, for example, the efforts were unsuccessful on one measure, since no women were elected. However, the actors involved did think that the initiative had been fruitful and useful in the raising of general public awareness about the debate surrounding women's representation in politics.

By bringing together the various interpretations of campaigns, quotas, polices and representation, this book offers a valuable record of the state of quota campaigns in the Pacific. *Pacific women in politics* will become a new baseline: future researchers and advocates will be able to look back to see just how much progress has been achieved.

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