

# Gender and Political Representation

## Session 6: Institutions

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## Plan for today

In the next couple of sessions, we will shift our focus from the roots of gender norms to the contemporary causes of female under-representation in politics. Today, we will...

1. ...understand the meaning of institutions in politics
2. ...learn how institutional arrangements, such as the electoral system, shape female representation in politics
3. ...discuss how introductions in political science are designed

## What we did last week...

- Conceptualizing social norms
- Empirical focus on cultural transmission of gender norms

Short summary?

# Mechanism

*Cultural transmission is the process of acquisition of behaviors, attitudes, or technologies through imprinting, conditioning, imitation, active teaching and learning, or combinations of these.*

(Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1982, p. 19)

# Types of Transmission



(a) Teacher

(b) Peers

(c) Family

Figure: Forms of cultural transmission

*How did these cultural institutions affect transmission of gender norms in the case of the plough?*



## What is an institution?

*What do we mean when we talk about institutions?*

## What is an institution?

“Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North 1990, p. 1).

They differ in various aspects...

- formal vs. informal (written vs. customs)
- created vs. evolving (Constitution vs. common law)

Institutions are not organizations (groups of individuals pursuing similar goals) but they shape how organizations function.

# Electoral systems

*A large body of research in comparative politics finds that proportional representation (PR) electoral systems are more favorable to women's representation than majoritarian systems.*

**Why?**

## Electoral systems

According to Paxton, Hughes, and Painter li (2010)

- in single-member districts, decision to nominate women as candidates is a zero-sum game (women against men)
- plurality systems emphasize personalized campaigns that might reinforce gender stereotypes
- multi-member districts in proportional systems pressure parties to present gender-balanced lists

## The readings - by their introduction

*We split the class again in two: Group A reads the introduction by Smith et al. (2025), group B the introduction by Thesen and Yildirim (2023). Form pairs. Go through each paragraph of the introduction. Which function does it take?*

## The readings - by their introduction

Now, join the group and try to reply to the summary scheme, solely by the introduction. Can you obtain all information from there?



Figure: Mindmap on <https://flinga.fi/s/FNA9TUE>

## Guiding questions in group work

In your groups, discuss the following aspects of the paper:

- Which role do institutions play for gender representation?
- Which cases does the article study, what are their strengths and weaknesses? (relating to questions by Paul, Wiebke, Karen)
- How does the article model the argument empirically, what are the challenges of the empirical strategy?
- Findings and implications
  - For **group A**: The study shows that women cannot climb the career ladder → Do you agree? Why? Why not?
  - For **group B**: The study shows that women's representation is more progressed in the UK → Do you agree? Why? Why not?

# Argument



What's the matter with the ladder?

# Argument

## Main argument:

- proportional electoral systems still contain **majoritarian offices** at the local level
- for instance, in local politics, mayors are usually elected by plurality vote
- party organizations implement plurality investiture for leadership positions
- *cascade effect of majoritarian stepping stones* → lack of experience at the local level disadvantages women's career progression

## Data and Method

Their study focuses on **Norway**

- Norway as particularly advanced in terms of gender equality
- Experience on local level relevant but not formally required for MP or ministerial positions
- National election system: PR

## Data and Method

Analysis based on several data sources:

- Merged data on election outcomes and politicians' backgrounds
- All candidates, their local and national election results and their biographies from 1921-2021 (n=68,207) → *is it really from 1921-2021?*
- In addition to proportional elections: mayoral positions from 1971 onwards (N=5,987)

## Data and Method

Two analytical stages:

1. Is there an over-representation of men in majoritarian positions? → descriptive analysis
2. Are majoritarian positions stepping stones for future national careers? →

$$Y_{rpmdt} = \gamma_{pdt} + \beta_r + \lambda_r \text{Woman}_{rpmdt} + u_{rpmdt}$$

# Findings

**FIGURE 2. Men's Overrepresentation in Majoritarian Positions Over Time**

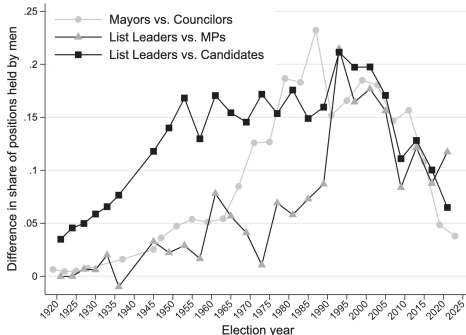


Figure: Men's overrepresentation in majoritarian positions (Smith et al. 2025, p. 9)

# Findings

**FIGURE 3. The Differential Effect of Local List Rank, and Becoming Mayor, on Running and Winning in Future National Elections, 2003–2011**

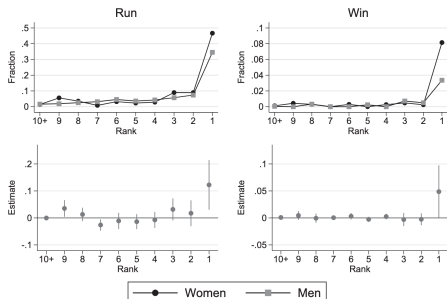


Figure: Majoritarian positions and future career progression (Smith et al. 2025, p. 11)

What becomes evident from this picture?

## Findings

- Men are over-represented in majoritarian positions on a local level.
- These experiences are indispensable for future career progression.
- For women, these experiences are even more important than for men.

# Findings

**TABLE 1. Effects of Gender, Seniority, and Top-Rank Position on Cabinet Appointment**

	(1) All	(2) All	(3) MPs	(4) MPs	(5) MPs
Woman	0.007** (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)	0.067*** (0.026)	0.022 (0.036)	0.028 (0.045)
Seniority	0.017*** (0.002)	0.017*** (0.003)	0.027*** (0.007)	0.027*** (0.008)	0.031*** (0.008)
List position 1	0.181*** (0.016)	0.163*** (0.018)	0.164*** (0.022)	0.167*** (0.030)	0.156*** (0.029)
Seniority · Woman		-0.002 (0.004)		-0.000 (0.017)	-0.001 (0.017)
List position 1 · Woman		0.065** (0.042)		0.063 (0.058)	0.067 (0.057)
High education					0.145*** (0.030)
High education · Woman					-0.024 (0.049)
Mean of outcome var.	0.026	0.026	0.168	0.168	0.168
R-squared	0.14	0.15	0.08	0.11	0.14
Observations	16090	16090	2069	2069	2069

Figure: Seniority vs List Position (Smith et al. 2025, p. 13)

## Implications

*What's your reading of this study? Hopeful or pessimistic?*

## Implications

The study authors conclude: *it's both!*

- **pessimistic** since even PR systems pose majoritarian barriers to female participation
- **optimistic** since parties partly tried to account for that (voluntarily)

## It's a wrap...

- **Research Question:**
- **Main Argument:**
- **Data and Method:**
- **Results:**
- **Implications:**

# Electoral Systems and Gender Inequality in Political News

*What can we learn from the second reading by Thesen and Yildirim (2023)?*

## Argument

Remember Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes (2007)? How do the demand- and supply-side explanations she identifies as explanations for women's underrepresentation in politics refer to Thesen and Yildirim (2023)?

## Argument

- **demand-side explanation:** lower interest in female voices (discrimination by voters)
- **supply-side explanation:** female politicians less often claim space in media

*And how do electoral institutions play into that?*

## Argument

Electoral institutions lead to different media logics:

- plurality systems have single-member districts; proportional systems have multi-member districts
  - MMD creates gendered hierarchies
  - Supply-side argument: in MMD media chooses between various candidates of one party (male bias of journalists reinforced)
  - Demand-side argument: in MMD, due to demand-side barriers, female candidates feel less need to compete for news coverage
- Less presence of female candidates in news media in proportional systems

## Data and Methods

It's Norway again... They compare Norway with the UK - two different electoral systems that differ also regarding gender equality. They argue “an opposite ranking—where the UK was more gender equal than Norway—would have been of greater concern to our conclusions.”.

**Why?**

## Data and Methods

- Norway is already gender-equal: we would expect the media logic to follow suit
- Every difference we observe is actually a conservative estimate: in other MMD systems (like the Netherlands), the effect may be even more pronounced

## Data and Methods

They rely on three data sources:

1. biographical data from politicians
2. newspaper data
3. parliamentary speeches

What do they use these sources for?

## Data and Methods

1. biographical data from politicians: mainly for district identification
2. newspaper data: 3.2 million news articles from the six newspapers for the period 2000–2015/16 → dependent variable
3. parliamentary speeches → as a control variable: legislative speech activity for each MP

Which other crucial variables do they use?

## Data and Methods

If they compared only the UK and Norway, their results would be based on two cases. To maximize variation, they look into within-country variation:

- *relative distance to capital*
- *district size (in seats)*
- many other control variables to reduce omitted variable bias

## Data and Methods

*“The point is that a null finding in a multivariate analysis is not necessarily tantamount to gender equality”* → What do Thesen and Yildirim (2023) mean by that sentence?

## Findings

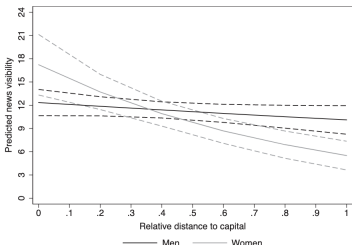
**TABLE 4. Predicted News Visibility of MPs by Gender, United Kingdom and Norway**

	United Kingdom	Norway
Men	11.6	17.4
Women	11.4	10.8
Difference	0.2	6.6***

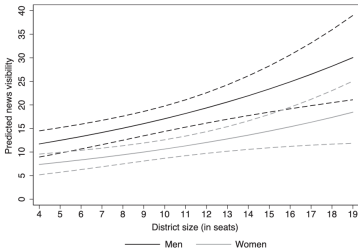
*Note:* \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Figure: Main results on gendered news appearances (Thesen and Yildirim 2023, p. 586)

# Findings



(a) UK



(b) Norway

Figure: Within-country analysis by Thesen and Yildirim (2023)

What do both Figures illustrate?

## Findings

- large gender gap for both countries in the UK and Norway (why for both?)
- stronger relative gap in Norway
- the more a system moves from MMD to SMD, the more gender equal the media landscape

## Implications and advancements?

**Question by Théa:** What are the broader democratic implications if women politicians become less willing to seek media attention due to these costs?

## Implications and advancements?

How can we make sense of the second reading if relating it to Smith et al. (2025)?

## Implications and advancements?

Combining Smith (2025) and Thesen (2023)?

- Maybe news appearance at the local level (or local candidates' news attendance on national level) would have been more relevant to the research query

**Question by Johanna and Julika:** At what point do institutional incentives interact with informal norms and expectations to reproduce inequality? How can social norms be changed?

## Other institutions

How to alleviate unequal patterns of participation? One institutional solution: **compulsory voting**

- “compulsory voting is a particularly effective method to achieve high turnout-in spite of generally low penalties (comparable to a fine for parking violations), lax enforcement (more lenient than the enforcement of parking rules), and the secrecy of the ballot which means that an actual vote cannot be compelled in the first place.” (Lijphart 1997, p. 2)

Could compulsory voting also affect the gender gap in turnout?

## Other institutions

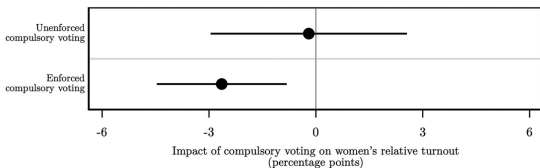


Figure: Effect of compulsory voting on turnout by enforcement mechanism (Singh 2025)

How can we explain this?

## What we've learned today...

- we defined institutions...
- ...and discussed examples on how they might matter for gender equality
- ...with two empirical applications on how the electoral system may matter

## To prepare for the session in two weeks...


- Next week, there are Whitsun holidays
- The week after, we'll discuss the role of the voters, the demand side, on gender inequalities in political representation
- Main reading:
  - **Anderson-Nilsson G and Clayton A** (2021) Gender and Policy Persuasion. *Political Science Research and Methods* 9 (4), 818–831. ISSN: 2049-8470, 2049-8489. DOI: [10.1017/psrm.2021.4](https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2021.4)
  - **Breyer M** (2024) Backlash or Progressive Mobilization? Voter Reactions to Perceived Trajectories of Women's Representation. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140231223745. ISSN: 0010-4140, 1552-3829. DOI: [10.1177/00104140231223745](https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140231223745)

## To prepare for the session in two weeks...





- Complementary readings
  - **Alexander A, Charron N, and Off G (2024)** For Every Action a Reaction? The Polarizing Effects of Women's Rights and Refugee Immigration: A Survey Experiment in 27 EU Member States. *European Journal of Political Research* 63 (4), 1557–1577. ISSN: 1475-6765. DOI: [10.1111/1475-6765.12664](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12664)
  - **Bauer NM and Carpinella C (2018)** Visual Information and Candidate Evaluations: The Influence of Feminine and Masculine Images on Support for Female Candidates. *Political Research Quarterly* 71 (2), 395–407. ISSN: 1065-9129, 1938-274X. DOI: [10.1177/1065912917738579](https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917738579)

Thank you for your attention!  
Any further questions?





## Literature

-  **Alexander A, Charron N, and Off G (2024)** For Every Action a Reaction? The Polarizing Effects of Women's Rights and Refugee Immigration: A Survey Experiment in 27 EU Member States. *European Journal of Political Research* **63** (4), 1557–1577.
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-  **Breyer M (2024)** Backlash or Progressive Mobilization? Voter Reactions to Perceived Trajectories of Women's Representation. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140231223745.
-  **Cavalli-Sforza LL et al. (1982)** Theory and Observation in Cultural Transmission. *Science* **218** (4567), 19–27.
-  **Lijphart A (1997)** Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma. *The American Political Science Review* **91** (1), 1–14. JSTOR: 2952255.
-  **North DC (1990)** *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

## Literature

-  **Paxton P, Hughes MM, and Painter li MA (2010)** Growth in Women's Political Representation: A Longitudinal Exploration of Democracy, Electoral System and Gender Quotas. *European Journal of Political Research* **49** (1), 25–52.
-  **Paxton P, Kunovich S, and Hughes MM (2007)** Gender in Politics. *Annual Review of Sociology* **33** (Volume 33, 2007), 263–284.
-  **Singh SP (2025)** Compulsory Voting Increases Men's Turnout Most. *American Journal of Political Science* **n/a** (n/a).
-  **Skorge ØS (2023)** Mobilizing the Underrepresented: Electoral Systems and Gender Inequality in Political Participation. *American Journal of Political Science* **67** (3), 538–552.

## Literature

-  **Smith DM et al. (2025)** Hidden Majoritarianism and Women's Career Progression in Proportional Representation Systems. *American Political Science Review*, 1–19.
-  **Thesen G and Yildirim TM (2023)** Electoral Systems and Gender Inequality in Political News: Analyzing the News Visibility of Members of Parliament in Norway and the UK. *American Political Science Review* **117** (2), 575–590.