

Gender and Political Representation

Session 10: Role Models

Mirko Wegemann

Universität Münster
Institut für Politikwissenschaft

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Last week...

- Simone Wendland visited us
- We discussed how women's representation and the backlash against it might refer to material grievances
- We briefly debated her experiences about gender inequalities in politics

Plan for today

1. Reflection on last session
2. Course evaluation
3. How role models shape women's political representation.
4. This is the second last substantive session: we will discuss more general ideas relating to your term paper
 - what (good) research questions are
 - what a good argument is composed of

Last session

- Your take-aways?
- What worked well?
- What could be improved in future sessions?

Course evaluation

Some weeks ago, you should have received the course evaluation for this seminar, please complete this survey now.

Angela Merkel alone among world leaders



Figure: Picture taken at the G7 summit in Japan 2016 ([Source: Wikimedia](#))

The idea of critical mass

- More women in politics → tipping points
- if women remain highly under-represented, they serve as tokens (heightening relevance of group membership)
- if women (and other marginalized groups) reach a critical mass, they can forge intra-group coalitions and bolster groups' interests (Kanter 1977)

Evidence on the critical mass

Table 2

Applied to mentoring program (1 = yes, 0 = no); “could see myself running for office in a few years” (0–4 scale); 95% confidence intervals in brackets; generalized difference estimator for ITT (Aronow and Middleton, 2013)

	Applied to mentoring program	Political ambition
	ITT	
Control mean	0.02	0.35
Effect of invitation	−0.01	−0.16
	[−0.03, 0.01]	[−0.37, 0.06]
Covariate-adjusted	−0.01	−0.13
	[−0.03, 0.01]	[−0.29, 0.03]
Blocks	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	612	450

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

What do Foos and Gilardi (2020) investigate and find? (@Lucy and Christof?)

Prominent Role Models

- **Research Question:** Does a woman's ascension to a prominent political office cause other women to enter politics?
- **Main Argument:**
- **Data and Method:**
- **Results:**
- **Implications:**

Prominent Role Models

Ladam, Harden, and Windett (2018) refer to the conceptualization referred to by Pitkin (1967):

- expectation: descriptive representation leads to substantive representation
- focus on *symbolic representation*: if women feel represented, this increases their aspirations to pursue a political career

Dissecting their argument

Reminder: Theories consist of four components:

1. **Expectations:** An expected relationship between X and Y
2. **Causal mechanisms:** Theoretical reasoning of why X leads to Y
3. **Assumptions:** Underlying (untested) claims of how subjects behave
4. **Scope conditions:** Limits in the applicability of the theory

In two groups, dissect the argument by Ladam, Harden, and Windett (2018) into these four parts. [10 minutes]

Dissecting their argument

1. **Expectations:** The presence of high-level female politicians increases the number of female candidates.
2. **Causal mechanisms:**
 - 2.1 **Symbolic** signal to other women that success in politics is possible → self-efficacy
 - 2.2 Increased size of **recruitment** pool for party leaders (women politicians encourage other female candidates)
 - 2.3 A hidden third mechanism?
3. **Assumptions:**
 - Humans as social beings: decisions are informed by other people
 - Here: Aspiring female politicians base their decision to run on other female candidates
 - Visibility of female politicians

Dissecting their argument

4. Scope conditions:

- As the theory depends on visibility, expectation only applies to high-level offices. (Question by **Friederike**?)
- High-level female politicians only serve as a tipping point for those women with high likelihood of running

Dissecting their argument

“a woman’s winning a major office carries greater weight than women’s winning lower-level offices because it places a woman in a position of major power and garners more public attention.” →
Could there be an **alternative expectation**?

Data and Method

They use information on state-level candidates from the “State Legislative Elections Returns” dataset.

- includes data on all states in the U.S. from 1978-2012
- they infer the gender of a candidate by their name (@Paulina?)
- different measures being used:
 1. share of female candidates
 2. share of female candidates by chamber
 3. share of female election winners

What is, as usual, the problem in identifying the causal relationship between female role models and the share of female candidates?

Data and Method

High likelihood of endogeneity: more female candidates → more role models? Confounding factors?

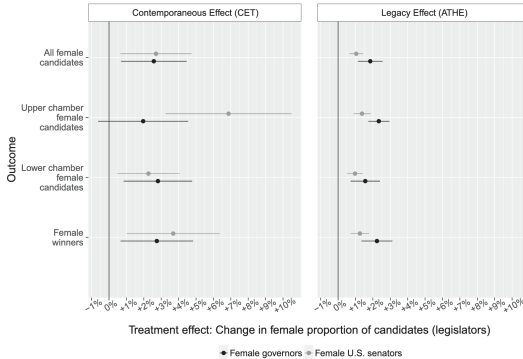
They deal with it in a time-series, cross-sectional design

- simply including controls may not work because some of them might be affected by the presence of a role model themselves (cf. *post-treatment bias*)
- Two-step approach
 1. Modelling the likelihood of a female governor/senator in office (e.g. regional peculiarities, history of a female governor in office, state citizen and government ideology, female sociopolitical subculture)
 2. Using "corrected version" as IV on the outcomes of interest

Data and Method

3. they then obtain a 'contemporaneous treatment effect' and an 'average treatment history effect' (*what's the difference?*)

Findings



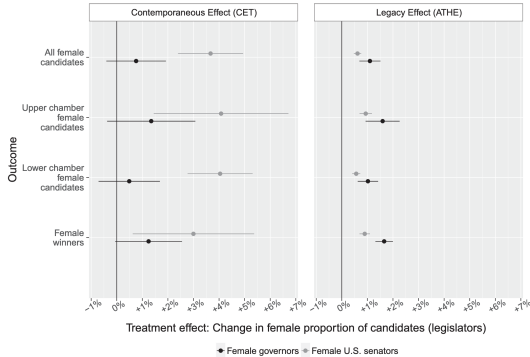
What's supported by the evidence, what's not?

Findings

Generally,

- female role models increase the share of women in politics, in both chambers
- effect strength similar for both chambers (lower house not a major moderator)
- on average, one female governor/senator leads to seven more female candidates in a state election
- the effect is strongest whenever a woman enters a high-level office for a first time and declines afterwards

Findings



Effects on neighbouring states: which mechanism does this evidence support?

Findings

- **Research Question:** Does a woman's ascension to a prominent political office cause other women to enter politics?
- **Main Argument:** Presence of female politicians in high-level offices leads to more women running for (low-level) offices
- **Data and Method:** Data on state- and top-level candidates in the U.S. (1978-2012), reweighted to estimate a causal effect
- **Results:** High-level female politicians successfully signals other women to consider pursuing a political career
- **Implications:**

What we've learned today...

- we talked about the idea of the 'critical mass'
- we saw an empirical test of how female legislators can serve as role models for other female politicians
- on a more general level, we discussed good research questions and learned how to de-compose an argument into its different parts

To prepare for the week after next...

- Next week will be our final substantive session on cultural conditions
- Main reading:
 - **Robinson AL and Gottlieb J (2021)** How to Close the Gender Gap in Political Participation: Lessons from Matrilineal Societies in Africa. *British Journal of Political Science* **51** (1), 68–92. ISSN: 0007-1234, 1469-2112. DOI: [10.1017/S0007123418000650](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000650)
- Complementary reading
 - **Pérez EO and Tavits M (2019)** Language Influences Public Attitudes toward Gender Equality. *The Journal of Politics* **81** (1), 81–93. ISSN: 0022-3816. DOI: [10.1086/700004](https://doi.org/10.1086/700004)

To prepare for the week after next...

- **Marx P (2025)** Is There a Backlash Against Identity Politics? Experimental and Focus Group Evidence on the Conflict Over Gender-Neutral Language in Germany. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140251328038. ISSN: 0010-4140, 1552-3829. DOI: [10.1177/00104140251328038](https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140251328038)
- **Hetjens D and Hartmann S (2024)** Effects of Gender Sensitive Language in Job Listings: A Study on Real-Life User Interaction. *PLOS ONE* **19** (8), e0308072. ISSN: 1932-6203. DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0308072](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0308072)

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

Literature

-  **Broockman DE (2014)** Do Female Politicians Empower Women to Vote or Run for Office? A Regression Discontinuity Approach. *Electoral Studies* **34**, 190–204.
-  **Foos F and Gilardi F (2020)** Does Exposure to Gender Role Models Increase Women's Political Ambition? A Field Experiment with Politicians. *Journal of Experimental Political Science* **7** (3), 157–166.
-  **Hetjens D and Hartmann S (2024)** Effects of Gender Sensitive Language in Job Listings: A Study on Real-Life User Interaction. *PLOS ONE* **19** (8), e0308072.
-  **Kanter RM (1977)** Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women. *American Journal of Sociology* **82** (5), 965–990.

Literature

-  **Ladam C, Harden JJ, and Windett JH (2018)** Prominent Role Models: High-Profile Female Politicians and the Emergence of Women as Candidates for Public Office. *American Journal of Political Science* **62** (2), 369–381.
-  **Marx P (2025)** Is There a Backlash Against Identity Politics? Experimental and Focus Group Evidence on the Conflict Over Gender-Neutral Language in Germany. *Comparative Political Studies*, 00104140251328038.
-  **Pérez EO and Tavits M (2019)** Language Influences Public Attitudes toward Gender Equality. *The Journal of Politics* **81** (1), 81–93.
-  **Pitkin HF (1967)** *The Concept of Representation*. University of California Press, 1967.
-  **Powner LC (2014)** *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. CQ Press, 2014.

Literature



Robinson AL and Gottlieb J (2021) How to Close the Gender Gap in Political Participation: Lessons from Matrilineal Societies in Africa. *British Journal of Political Science* **51** (1), 68–92.

Excursion: On formulating research questions

Different questions, different goals

1. Should women represent women?
2. What would have happened to *Roe vs. Wade* if Hillary Clinton won the U.S. presidential elections in 2016?
3. How has the implementation of gender quotas developed over the last 10 years?
4. How does direct democracy affect women's turnout?

Which type of questions do these examples pose?

Excursion: On formulating research questions

1. Should women represent women? → Normative questions
2. What would have happened to *Roe vs. Wade* if Hillary Clinton won the U.S. presidential elections in 2016? → Hypothetical questions
3. How has the implementation of gender quotas developed over the last 10 years? → Descriptive questions
4. How does direct democracy affect women's turnout? → Causal-explanatory questions

For your term paper, you should focus on the latter, **causal explanatory questions**.

Excursion: On formulating research questions

How does a good research question look like?

Excursion: On formulating research questions

Powner (2014) lists some **dos** and **don'ts** in drafting research questions. **Dos**

- start with a puzzle for which there's no good answer available (on a subject you know already)
- a question should have a question mark (e.g., *how...?* or *why...?*)
- highlights the outcome, not the causes (these will be nevertheless important later!)
- relate to theory

Excursion: On formulating research questions

Don'ts

- ...have a clear, even tautological answer
- ...focus on a single case (do not use proper nouns, like states or persons in the research question, they should be more general)
- ...translate the relationship into empirical indicators in the question (e.g., talk about attitudes on gender equality, not attitudes on the question whether men and women should have equal rights on the labour market)