

Gender Economics

Session 7

Political Economy

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Sciences Po Menton



Motivation

Why Gender and Political Economy?

- Persistent gender gaps in political representation worldwide
- Women implement different policies

Core Mechanisms

- **Representation:** More women in office \Rightarrow policies better reflecting women's preferences.
- **Role Model Effect:** Female politicians increase women's political engagement.
- **Voter Bias:** Discrimination or stereotype-driven beliefs influence electoral outcomes.
- **Institutional Change:** Quotas and leadership may shift long-run social norms.

Question

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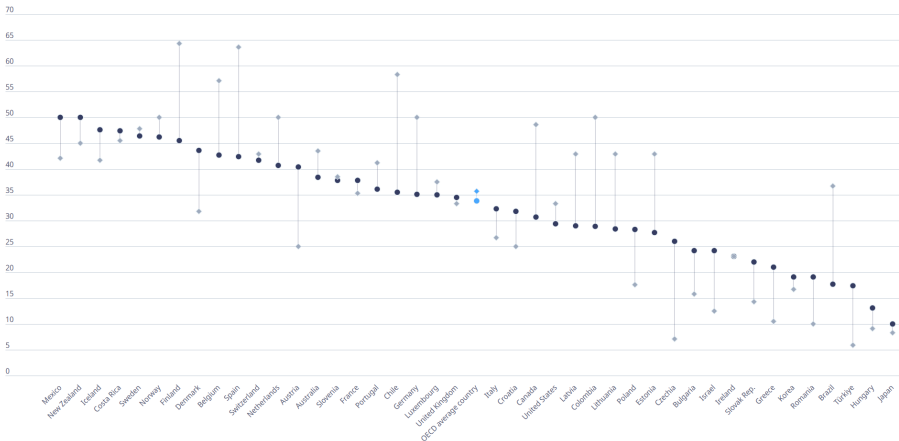
XZQQMN

Women in Politics - OECD Data

Women in politics

% of women, 2023

● in parliament ◆ in ministerial positions

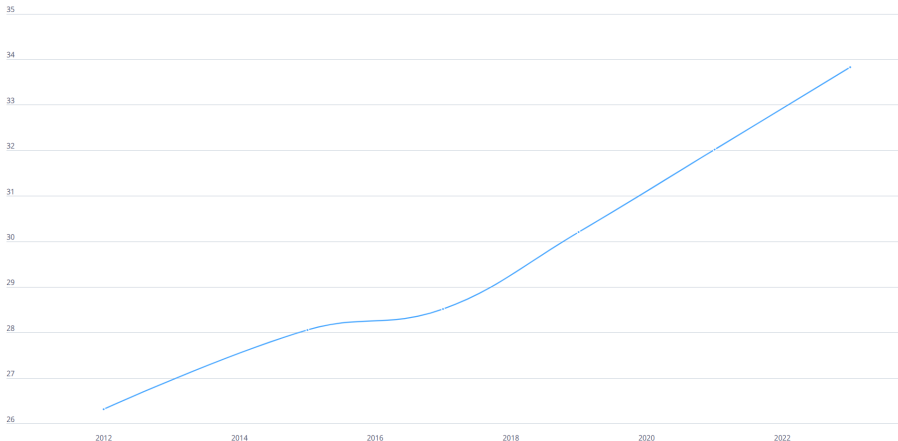


Women in Politics - OECD Data

Share of women in lower or single houses of parliament

In %, as of 1st of January

--- OECD



What is a Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD)?

- **Quasi-experimental** approach exploiting institutional thresholds.
- Very common in **Political Economy**:
 - ▶ Gender quotas often apply only when population, council size, or party list exceeds a threshold.
 - ▶ Gender-based policies may target specific eligible groups (e.g., districts, villages).
- Allows us to **estimate causal effects** without randomized experiments.

How it works:

- Compare units just **above** and just **below** the cutoff.
- These units are assumed to be similar except for treatment status.

Gender Quotas: Types

- **Reserved Seats** — India, Rwanda

- ▶ A certain proportion of seats in the legislature are explicitly reserved for women.
- ▶ Women compete only among themselves for these reserved seats.

- **Candidate Quotas** — Italy, France

- ▶ Parties are required to include a minimum percentage of women among their candidates.
- ▶ Women compete in open elections, but quotas apply at the candidacy stage.

- **Parity Laws** — Spain, Belgium

- ▶ Require gender parity, often close to 50

Goals

- Improve descriptive representation.
- Influence policy and voter perceptions.

Question

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Gender Quotas and the Quality of Politicians

Gender Quotas and the Quality of Politicians (Baltrunaite et al., 2014)

Question: Do gender quotas affect the quality of elected politicians?

Context:

- 1993-1995 Italian Law introducing gender quotas in local elections.
- Quotas required that no more than two-thirds of candidates could be of the same gender.

Dataset:

- Administrative data from Italian municipalities (1985-2009).

Gender Quotas and the Quality of Politicians (Baltrunaite et al., 2014)

Design: Difference-in-Differences

- Treatment: Municipalities that held elections during quota period.
- Control: Municipalities that did not.
- Outcome: Average years of education of elected councilors.

Effect of Gender Quotas:

- Increase of 0.12 to 0.24 years of education for elected politicians.
- Driven by:
 - ▶ Higher share of women (who are more educated).
 - ▶ Reduction in low-educated men.
- No evidence of negative selection.
- Effects persistent in the long run.

Let the Voters Choose Women (Baltrunaite et al., 2019)

Research Question:

Does double preference voting conditioned on gender, coupled with gender quotas, increase female representation in politics?

Context:

- Double preference voting: voters can give two preference votes if they vote for candidates of different gender.

Data:

- Municipal elections (2013–2015) in Italy, municipalities under 15,000 inhabitants

Empirical Strategy:

- Sharp Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) around the 5,000-resident threshold.
- Comparison of treated (above 5,000) vs. control (below 5,000) municipalities.

Let the Voters Choose Women (Baltrunaite et al., 2019)

Main Findings:

- The share of female councilors increases by **18 percentage points** in treated municipalities.
- Change driven primarily by an increase in **preference votes** for female candidates.
- No evidence of pre-existing trends or sorting at the threshold.
- Spillover: slight increase in preference votes for women even in higher-level elections.

Interpretation:

- Voters are not fully biased against women.
- Changing voting rules can effectively promote female political representation without negative selection.

Question

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Gender Quotas and the Crisis of the Mediocre Man (Besley et al., 2017)

Research Question: Do gender quotas affect the competence of elected politicians?

Context:

- 1993: Swedish Social Democratic Party implements a *zipper quota* (alternating male-female on ballots).

Data:

- Administrative and electoral data (1982–2014) covering 290 municipalities.
- Competence measured via earnings & Cognitive and leadership scores from military enlistment tests (for men).

Empirical Strategy:

- Difference-in-Differences exploiting variation in quota exposure across municipalities.

Gender Quotas and the Crisis of the Mediocre Man

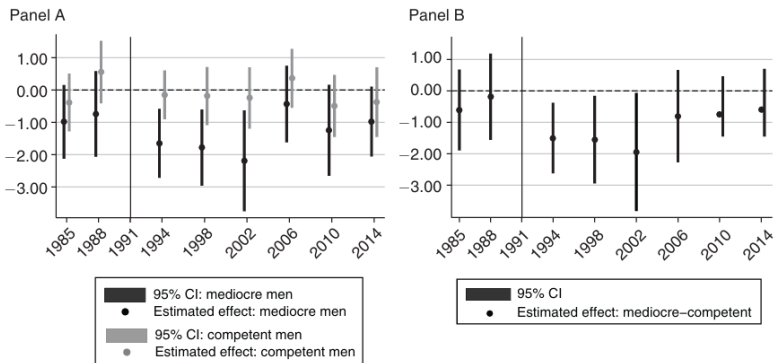


FIGURE 6. EFFECT OF THE GENDER QUOTA ON SURVIVAL RATES OF COMPETENT AND MEDIOCRE MALE LEADERS

Gender Quotas and the Crisis of the Mediocre Man

Results:

- Quota increased the competence of elected male politicians
- No reduction in female competence
- Effect driven by:
 - ▶ Replacement of mediocre male leaders.
 - ▶ More competent leaders selecting more competent followers.

Interpretation:

- Quotas can act as a mechanism to overcome *mediocrity traps* created by internal party politics
- Competence and representation need not trade-off.

Women as Policy Makers

Research Question: Do female leaders make different policy choices compared to male leaders? ([Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004](#))

Context:

- 1993 Indian constitutional amendment: random reservation of 1/3 of village council (GP) presidencies (Pradhans) to women.

Data:

- Original survey data on 265 Village Councils (West Bengal and Rajasthan).
- Info on public good investments, complaints, demographics.

Empirical Strategy:

- Exploit random assignment of gender quotas as a natural experiment.
- Compare investments in public goods between reserved and unreserved GPs.

Women as Policy Makers

Main Findings:

- Female-led GPs invest more in infrastructure aligned with women's preferences.
 - ▶ **West Bengal:** More investment in drinking water and roads.
 - ▶ **Rajasthan:** More investment in drinking water, less in roads (matching gendered complaint patterns).
- Female Pradhans increased women's political participation.
- No evidence of inferior performance, despite concerns about lower political experience.

Interpretation:

- Gender affects policy outcomes when women hold decision-making positions.
- Supports models where leaders' identity matters beyond voter preferences.

Female Leadership and Aspirations

Research Question: Does exposure to female political leaders affect gender gaps in aspirations, education, and time allocation for adolescent girls?

Beaman et al. (2012)

Data:

- 495 villages in Birbhum, West Bengal, India.
- Surveys of 8,453 adolescents (11-15) and their parents.
- Collected information on aspirations, education, and time use.

Empirical Strategy:

- Exploit random reservation of village council presidencies (Pradhans) to women.
- Compare villages with 0, 1, or 2 cycles of exposure to female leaders.
- Focus on changes in gender gaps.

Female Leadership and Aspirations

Main Findings:

- **Aspirations:** Gender gap in aspirations reduced by 25% (parents) and 32% (adolescent girls) after two female leader cycles.
- **Educational Outcomes:** Gender gap in education closed; girls catch up with boys in school enrollment and literacy
- **Time Use:** Girls reduced time on domestic chores by 18 minutes daily
- No change in labor market or school infrastructure: results point to a **role model effect**.

Interpretation:

- Female political leadership can shift gender norms and improve human capital outcomes through aspirational channels.

Future female participation (Bhalotra et al., 2018)

Research Question:

Does women's electoral success promote future female political participation?

Data:

- 3,473 constituencies from 16 Indian states (1980–2007)
- Candidate-level data, voter turnout, and constituency demographics
- No quotas at the state assembly level.

Empirical Strategy:

- Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) using close mixed-gender races
- Compare future female candidacy between constituencies where a woman barely won vs. barely lost.

Future female participation (Bhalotra et al., 2018)

Findings:

- **Incumbency:** Female winners are more likely to re-contest, driving an increase in female candidacy.
- **No Spillover:** No increase in new female candidates or neighboring constituencies.
- **Backlash Effect:** In gender-biased states, female victory reduces entry of new female candidates.
- Similar pattern for Muslim candidates, suggesting institutional barriers not specific to gender.

Interpretation:

- Female electoral success boosts incumbency but does not ease entry barriers.
- In highly biased environments, success may discourage future female candidacy.

Female Leadership and Fiscal Policy

Research Question: Does the gender of elected mayors affect corruption, patronage, campaign financing, and reelection outcomes? ([Brollo and Troiano, 2016](#))

Data:

- 723 Brazilian municipalities (2000 & 2004 elections) with mixed-gender close races.
- Objective corruption data from random audits (CGU program).
- Employment data (permanent and temporary hires).
- Campaign contributions, transfers, health, and education data.

Empirical Strategy:

- Sharp Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) using close elections.
- Compare municipalities where a woman barely won to those where a man barely won.

Female Leadership and Fiscal Policy

- **Corruption:** Female mayors are 29–35% less likely to be involved in corruption
- **Patronage:** Female mayors hire fewer temporary employees (proxy for clientelism)
- **Campaign Contributions:** Women attract 30–55% fewer campaign donations
- **Reelection:** Female mayors are 20 percentage points less likely to be reelected
- **Public Goods:** Female mayors attract more discretionary transfers and improve health outcomes (prenatal care).

Interpretation:

- Female mayors reduce clientelism and corruption but face electoral penalties.

Voting Technology and Political Representation (Fujiwara, 2015)

Research Question: Does the introduction of electronic voting (EV) improve political responsiveness and health outcomes?

Data:

- Brazilian state elections (1994–2002).
- Voter registration, electoral outcomes, health expenditures, prenatal visits, and infant health.

Empirical Strategy:

- Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) exploiting a cutoff at 40,500 registered voters.
- Difference-in-Differences using staggered adoption across states.

Voting Technology and Political Representation (Fujiwara, 2015)

Findings:

- Electronic voting reduced residual (invalid) votes by 10%.
- Reduced invalid votes (especially among less educated voters)
- Politicians became more responsive to the preferences of these newly effective voters
- Shifted state spending towards health (by 3.4 percentage points).
- Improved prenatal care (7 p.p. more prenatal visits) and reduced low birthweight among poor.

Interpretation:

- Enhanced political participation can lead to improved public goods provision.
- Mechanism: Enfranchisement of marginalized groups reshapes policy priorities.

Gender and Cast (Clots-Figueras, 2011)

Research Question:

How does the gender and caste of politicians affect public goods provision, laws, and expenditures?

Data:

- Panel data from 16 major Indian states (1967–2000).
- Data on elected state legislators, budgetary allocations, public goods, and laws.
- Separate identification for general and low-status Castes female legislators.

Empirical Strategy:

- Instrumental Variables (IV) using **close elections** between men and women

Gender and Cast (Clots-Figueras, 2011)

Main Findings:

- Female legislators invest more in primary education, health, and women's rights laws.
- **Caste matters:**
 - ▶ Low-Castes women favor redistributive policies (land reforms) and women-friendly laws.
 - ▶ General women prioritize higher education and reduce social expenditure.
- No evidence of universal female bias towards all women-friendly policies.
- Female legislators' policy impact varies strongly by their social identity (caste).

Interpretation:

- Identity effects in policymaking: both gender and caste influence policy.
- Female representation alone is not enough; who these women represent matters.

Does Politicians' Gender Matter?

Evidence from the literature:

- **Gendered effects:**
 - ▶ Chattopadhyay et al. (2004), Clots-Figueras (2011), Baskaran et al. (2023), Cavallini et al. (2024), Marchese et al. (2025)
- **Non-gendered effects:**
 - ▶ Weeks (2009), Baguès et al. (2021), Lippmann (2022), Carozzi et al. (2023)
- Most papers finding an effect focus on developed countries, where
 - ▶ Most policymaking occurs at **national level** with less room for discretionary change.
 - ▶ Harder to observe gender differences except in **specific sectors** (e.g., education, welfare)
 - ▶ Less room for improvement

Does Politicians' Gender Matter?

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Real-World Impact for Women

Policy and Outcome Effects for Women

Positive Effects:

- **Lower mortality** and improved public goods provision (**Bochenkova et al. 2023, Bhalotra, Clarke et al. 2023, Delaporte et al. 2024**)
- Reduction in **gender-based violence** in some settings.

Potential Negative Effects:

- In some contexts, **increased reported gender-based violence**:
 - ▶ Due to **better reporting** mechanisms
 - ▶ Or due to **backlash** (Iyer et al. 2012, Anukriti et al. 2024, Wen 2024).

Real-World Impact for Women

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Gender Interactions within Hierarchies (Gagliarducci and Paserman, 2012)

Research Question:

Do female mayors face higher instability due to gender dynamics within municipal councils?

Data:

- Administrative data on Italian municipal governments (1993–2003).
- Full information on mayors, council members, and government termination.

Empirical Strategy:

- Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) on close mixed-gender elections.

Gender Interactions within Hierarchies (Gagliarducci and Paserman, 2012)

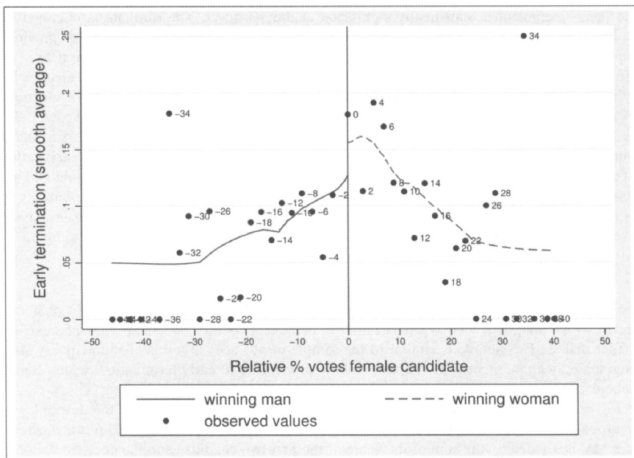


FIGURE 1

Early termination by margin of victory, mixed-gender races. *Note:* The solid line is a running-mean smoothing (least squares), separate on either side of the threshold

Gender Interactions within Hierarchies (Gagliarducci and Paserman, 2012)

Findings:

- Female mayors have a 3–5 percentage points higher probability of early termination.
- The effect is stronger:
 - ▶ When councils are entirely male.
 - ▶ In regions with traditional gender norms.
- No evidence of worse performance by female mayors.
- Effect driven by council resignations, not voluntary resignations.

Interpretation:

- Group dynamics and male-dominated councils reduce female leaders' tenure.
- Contributes to the understanding of underrepresentation of women in leadership.

Quotas and Political Engagement (Clayton, 2015)

Quotas and Political Engagement Research Question:

Do quotas for female representation increase women's political engagement?

Data:

- Randomized policy experiment in Lesotho
- 30% of electoral districts reserved for female councilors.
- Survey data on political engagement from women in reserved and unreserved districts.

Empirical Strategy:

- Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) exploiting random assignment of reserved seats.

Results

Findings:

- Quotas reduced women's political engagement (less interest, contact, participation)
- Not driven by candidate competence or observable characteristics
- Explained by negative symbolic reaction to the quota system
- No evidence of enhanced engagement via role model or policy representation channels

Interpretation:

- Design of quotas may backfire if perceived as illegitimate.
- Affirms that symbolic representation alone may not boost engagement.

Policy Implications

What Have We Learned?

- Gender quotas effectively increase female representation
- No evidence of decreased competence
- Female politicians implement different and often welfare-enhancing policies
- Long-run changes in norms and political engagement.

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