

Gender and Political Representation

Session 9: Institutional Fixes

Mirko Wegemann

Universität Münster
Institut für Politikwissenschaft

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What we did last week...



Figure: Source: [Wikipedia](#)

What was last week's story?

What we did last week...

- we zeroed in on the candidate selection pool which is heavily skewed towards men
- we discussed what might cause the 'lack in ambition'
- we focused primarily on household factors that shape women's decision to enter politics but also acknowledged other factors (such as the political environment)

Plan for today

We are entering the final bloc of our seminar:

1. we have established crucial concepts in the study of gender in politics
2. we have identified cultural and institutional causes of women's under-representation in politics
3. in the following three session, we will evaluate the efficiency of tools developed to mitigate male bias in political representation

Today: institutions – not as barriers but facilitators of women's representation

Everything lost?

"Is this really the case? Is the history of women one of Sisyphean struggle against odds that remain constant and overwhelming? Not quite. [...] Although the result is not a steady move toward equitable treatment of women, it is a world in which progress is certainly sufficient to justify optimism." (Jamieson 1995, p. 7)

The idea of feminist institutionalism

As we have seen before, institutions are both *gendered* and *gendering* (Mackay 2011).

- existing norms in societies influence how institutions are gendered (e.g. the plough)
- the rules of the game shape whether politics reinforce gender inequalities (e.g. voting systems)

Institutions can also be re-gendered, which requires the work of policy entrepreneurs that strategically suggest changes towards more gender equality

The idea of feminist institutionalism

'Sexist and undemocratic': Pregnant MEPs demand ability to vote on maternity leave

The European Parliament has no official procedure to permit parental leave and remote voting.

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Figure: A call for a gender-sensitive EP, Source: Politico

The idea of feminist institutionalism

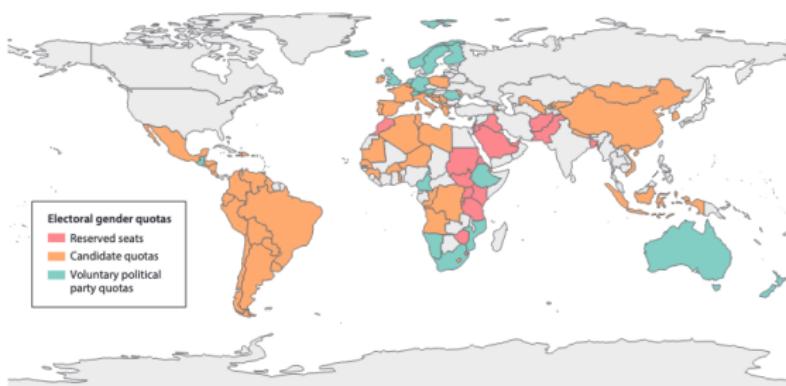


Figure 1

Map of countries that have adopted electoral gender quotas. Countries are coded as having a voluntary party quota if the total number of adopting parties amounts to at least 30% of the legislature. Two countries—Rwanda and Mauritania—have both reserved seat and candidate quotas, coded here as having the latter. Data are from Hughes et al. (2017a), Clayton & Zetterberg (2018), and International IDEA (2020).

© Marina and Johanna: what's the effect of quotas on gender representation?

The idea of feminist institutionalism

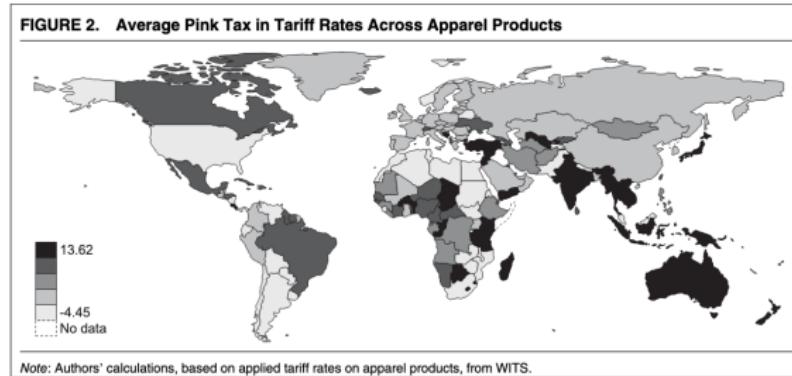


Figure: Another map, another story (Betz, Fortunato, and O'brien 2021)

© Theresa: What do Betz, Fortunato, and O'brien (2021) show, how does it relate to Clayton (2021)?

Survey on the reading



Direct Democracy and Women's Political Engagement

Before we start with the reading by Kim (2019), please split into two groups.

1. Group A reads the introduction of the article by Hainmueller and Hangartner (2019)
2. Group B reads the introduction of the article by Boudreau and MacKenzie (2025)

What's their verdict on direct democracy?

Direct Democracy and Women's Political Engagement

Direct democracy...

- may lower the threshold for discriminatory preferences: no accountability (Hainmueller and Hangartner 2019)
- makes citizens dependent on high-quality information; if absent, process could be less transparent and feel less tangible (lower levels of political efficacy)

Which value does Kim (2019) see in direct democracy?

Direct Democracy and Women's Political Engagement

- **Research Question:** How does direct democracy affect political participation of women?
- **Main Argument:**
- **Data and Method:**
- **Results:**
- **Implications:**

Three implications of direct democracy



Figure: The three faces of direct democracy

Three implications of direct democracy

1. *signalling effect* denoting that concerns are taken seriously
2. *information provision*: more information on more tangible political decisions
 - reduce gender gap in political participation
3. durable effects on resources
 - spill-over to adjacent fields of participation

Three implications of direct democracy

- **Research Question:** How does direct democracy affect political participation of women?
- **Main Argument:** Direct democracy reduces the gender gap in political participation and encourage women to participate more frequently in politics.
- **Data and Method:**
- **Results:**
- **Implications:**

Data and Method

What is the problem when analysing the effect of institutional reform on political participation? How does Kim (2019) solve it?

Data and Method

In Sweden, the Swedish central government decided that municipalities should transition towards a representative governing system to improve policy output

- only few municipalities followed suit
- Swedish government made the change compulsory for municipalities above 1,500 inhabitants
- Kim (2019) can take use of this reform and compare the turnout in parliamentary elections between municipalities below and above 1,500 inhabitants

Does comparing these municipalities raise any other concerns, e.g. with regard to urban/rural differences (@Vincent?)

Data and Method

No, because we are only comparing municipalities just above and below the threshold → they should be very similar in other aspects

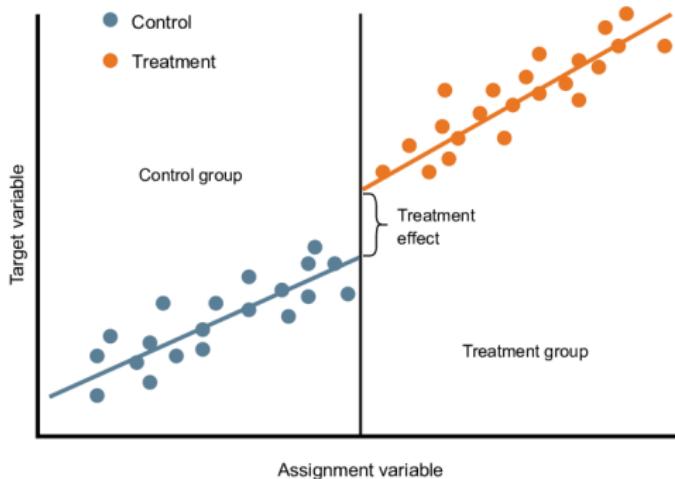


Figure: The idea of regression-discontinuity designs ([source](#))

Data and Method

TABLE 1 Number of Observations by Institution Type

	Direct Democracy	Representative Democracy
Population _{t-1} ≤ 1,500	9,234	1,459
Population _{t-1} > 1,500	0	5,891
Total	9,234	7,350

Figure: Municipalities with and without direct democracy after the reform

What becomes evident?

Data and Method

- **Research Question:** How does direct democracy affect political participation of women?
- **Main Argument:** Direct democracy reduces the gender gap in political participation and encourage women to participate more frequently in politics.
- **Data and Method:** Fuzzy regression-discontinuity that identifies the effect of direct democracy on the gap in political participation between men and women
- **Results:**
- **Implications:**

Findings

TABLE 2 The RD Effects of Direct Democracy

	(1) Women's Turnout (%)	(2) Men's Turnout (%)	(3) % Votes Women Cast
Bandwidth			
[1, 500 ± ...]	291	388	278
Direct Democracy	3.946 (0.950)	3.517 (0.643)	1.854 (0.314)
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Covariates	✓	✓	✓
Number of Municipalities	549	679	533
Number of Observations	2,792	3,705	2,679

Note: Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

How can we interpret these results?

Findings

TABLE 3 The Effect of Women's Participation in
Direct Democracy on Women's
Subsequent Electoral Participation

	(1) Women's Turnout, (%)	(2) Men's Turnout, (%)	(3) % Votes Women Cast, t
Women's Participation in DD _{t-1}	-0.250 (0.162)	-0.328 (0.121)	-0.059 (0.057)
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
County Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓
Observations	214	214	214
R ²	0.535	0.558	0.249
Adjusted R ²	0.507	0.532	0.208

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

...and what does Kim (2019) find out regarding spill-over effects?

Findings

- **Research Question:** How does direct democracy affect political participation of women?
- **Main Argument:** Direct democracy reduces the gender gap in political participation and encourage women to participate more frequently in politics.
- **Data and Method:** Fuzzy regression-discontinuity that identifies the effect of direct democracy on the gap in political participation between men and women
- **Results:** Direct democracy increases female political participation but does not spill-over into other forms of participation
- **Implications:**

And now?



Figure: Before Kim (2019), Source [ch.ch](#)

Question by Bennett: How would direct democracy affect political engagement today?

And now?

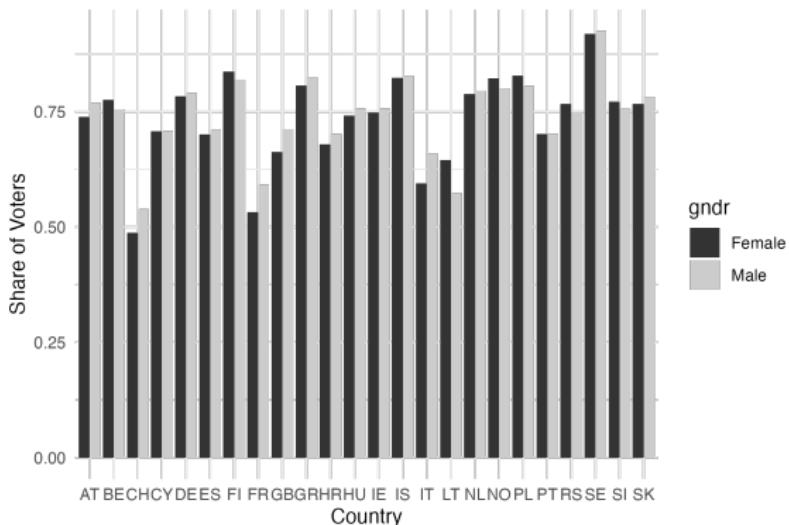


Figure: Turnout by gender based on European Social Survey, own visualisation

And now?

For example, 57% of men were in favour of the proposal to expand the motorway network. In contrast, only 38% of women were in favour. Two-thirds of men voted in favour of the health bill, compared to only 46% of women.

Figure: A gender divide in direct democracy ([Source: swissinfo.ch](#))

Implications and alternative explanations

- **Research Question:** How does direct democracy affect political participation of women?
- **Main Argument:** Direct democracy reduces the gender gap in political participation and encourage women to participate more frequently in politics.
- **Data and Method:** Fuzzy regression-discontinuity that identifies the effect of direct democracy on the gap in political participation between men and women
- **Results:** Direct democracy increases female political participation but does not spill-over into other forms of participation
- **Implications:** Institutional design can have unintended consequences for women's representation in politics

What we've learned today...

- we introduced the idea of feminist institutionalism
- discussed different measures on how institutions can facilitate female participation
- learned what a regression discontinuity (RDD) design is
- ...and how we can critically evaluate arguments

To prepare for the week after next...

- next week, there is no session (Whitsun Holidays)
- the week after next, we'll speak about another factor of the political environment that might positively shape women's political representation: role models
- Main reading:
 - **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. ISSN: 1540-5907. DOI: [10.1111/ajps.12351](https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12351)
- Complementary reading

To prepare for the week after next...

- **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. ISSN: 2052-2630, 2052-2649. DOI: [10.1017/XPS.2019.21](https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2019.21)

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

Literature

-  **Betz T, Fortunato D, and O'brien DZ (2021)** Women's Descriptive Representation and Gendered Import Tax Discrimination. *American Political Science Review* **115** (1), 307–315.
-  **Boudreau C and MacKenzie SA (2025)** Ballot Box Representation: Spatial Voting and the Effects of Information in Direct Democracy Elections. *Political Behavior* **47** (2), 711–736.
-  **Clayton A (2021)** How Do Electoral Gender Quotas Affect Policy? *Annual Review of Political Science* **24** (1), 235–252.
-  **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.

Literature

-  **Hainmueller J and Hangartner D (2019)** Does Direct Democracy Hurt Immigrant Minorities? Evidence from Naturalization Decisions in Switzerland. *American Journal of Political Science* **63** (3), 530–547.
-  **Jamieson KH (1995)** *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
-  **Kim JH (2019)** Direct Democracy and Women's Political Engagement. *American Journal of Political Science* **63** (3), 594–610.
-  **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.

Literature



Mackay F (2011) Conclusion: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism? *Gender, Politics and Institutions*. Ed. by ML Krook and F Mackay. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011, 181–196.