

Gender Gaps in Politics

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Thanks to my amazing co-authors!



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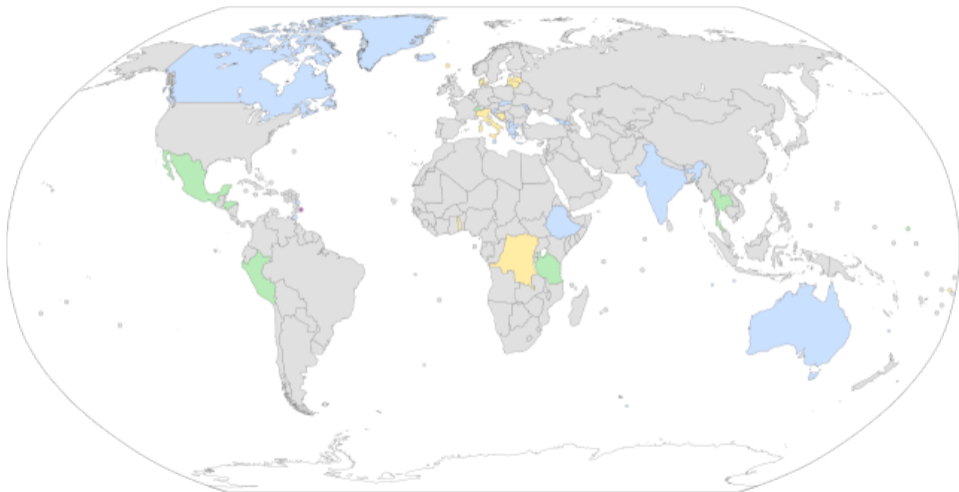


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Women in power in politics

- ▶ Positive trend but still few women in politics, particularly at the top
- ▶ Europe (41 countries, (Ceciarini, 2019)):
 - ▶ 29% councilors, 27% of MPs
 - ▶ 15% mayors, 12% Prime ministers
- ▶ Never female US President. First female Swedish prime minister in 2021

Countries with female head of government or head of state



Outline for this lecture

- ▶ Three largely intertwined questions:
 - A. What are the causes for the under-representation of women in politics?
 - B. Should we be concerned about it?
 - C. What policies can be used to close the gender gap?

A. What are the causes for the under-representation of women in politics

1. Gender gaps in political ambition
2. Voters' bias
3. Parties' bias

Are women less willing to become politicians? (1/2)

- ▶ Is politics a 'greedy' job?
 - ▶ high-paying, high-pressure roles that demand workers be available at unusual times outside their contracted hours (Goldin, 2021)
- ▶ Women shying away from competition?(Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007)
 - ▶ Preece and Stoddard, 2015: priming individuals to consider the competitive nature of politics has a strong negative effect on women's interest in political office, but not on men's interest
- ▶ Gender differences in self-confidence
 - ▶ Exley and Nielsen, 2024: 'The Gender Gap in Confidence: Expected but Not Accounted For'
 - ▶ Fox and Lawless, 2004: Women are significantly less likely than men to view themselves as qualified to run

Are women less willing to become politicians? (2/2)

- ▶ Lack of encouragement
 - ▶ Fox and Lawless, 2004: Women are far less likely than men to be encouraged to run for office (parents, peers, social norms)
- ▶ Higher cost for women in power
 - ▶ Folke and Rickne, 2020: being elected mayor or parliamentarian doubles the probability of divorce for women, but not for men
- ▶ Gender inequalities are self-reinforcing
 - ▶ Lack of role models (Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2007)
 - ▶ Women are more willing to lead female- than male-majority teams (Born, Ranehill, and Sandberg, 2018)
 - ▶ Sexual harassment more likely in male-dominated industries and firms (Folke and Rickne, 2022)
 - ▶ Nevenka Fernandez: first plaintiff to win a sexual harassment suit against a politician in Spain (2002)

Discrimination by voters and/or parties (1/4)

- ▶ Discrimination hard to measure
- ▶ World Value Survey (WVS, 2017-2020), in Western Europe typically less than 20% of survey respondents express agreement with the statement “Men make better political leaders than women do”
- ▶ Indirect evidence: votes received and parties nominations
- ▶ Mixed evidence:
 1. Esteve-Volart and Bagues, 2012: Voters prefer female candidates in Spanish Senate elections
 2. Bagues and Campa, 2020: No evidence of discrimination in Spanish local elections
 3. Le Barbanchon and Sauvagnat, 2022: Voters' biased against women in French parliamentary elections

Discrimination by voters and/or parties (2/4)

Esteve-Volart and Bagues, 2012: 'Are women pawns in the political game? Evidence from elections to the Spanish Senate'

- ▶ Open list system, candidates ordered alphabetically by party, order in the ballot helps, gender quotas
- ▶ Two main findings:
 1. Conditional on position in the ballot and party, female candidates attract more votes than male candidates
 2. Absence of political competition worsens the quality of the positions to which female candidates are assigned

⇒ Evidence consistent with party-level discrimination

Discrimination by voters and/or parties (3/4)

Bagues and Campa, 2020, 'Women and power: Unpopular, unwilling, or held back? A Comment'

- ▶ How do voters' react when gender quotas are introduced?
- ▶ Quota forces some lists (*male holdouts*) to increase their share of women from previous election
 - if voters prefer men, male holdouts' relative electoral performance should worsen
- ▶ The quasi-experiment: Quotas in 2007 in large municipalities in Spain; compare the electoral results of parties affected by the quota in quota (large) and non-quota (small) municipalities
 - ⇒ Result: no (significant) impact on voters → voters not biased against female candidates

Discrimination by voters and/or parties (4/4)

Le Barbanchon and Sauvagnat, 2022, 'Electoral competition, voter bias, and women in politics'

- ▶ French parliamentary elections, parties required to select female candidates in some constituencies due to gender quotas.
- ▶ Unfavorable voters' attitudes toward women and local gender earnings gap correlate negatively with the share of female candidates in Parliamentary elections.
- ▶ Female candidates obtain fewer votes in municipalities with higher gender earnings gaps
- ▶ Parties facing gender quotas select male candidates in the most contestable districts.

B. Should we be concerned about women's under-representation in powerful positions?

1. Fairness

2. Efficiency argument

- ▶ Bertrand (2019): “All should agree that an economy that is tapping into a limited pool (men) to find its leaders must be operating inside the efficiency frontier.”
- ▶ Baltrunaite et al., 2014: Gender quota ↑ **municipal councilors' education**
- ▶ Besley et al., 2017: Social democratic party in Sweden adopts “zipper quota”; ↑ **competence of male politicians**; resignation of male mediocre leaders (“the crisis of the mediocre man”)
- ▶ Bagues and Campa, 2021: in Spain quotas did not increase councilors education

3. Representativeness

Should we be concerned about women's under-representation in powerful positions?

1. Right and fairness
2. Efficiency argument
3. Representativeness
 - ▶ Especially relevant for elected organizations/political institutions
 - ▶ Gender differences in preferences over policy \Rightarrow Male-dominated organizations do not adequately represent women's preferences

The representativeness argument: what is the evidence?

Women appear to have different preferences than men:

- ▶ Bagues and Campa, 2020b: Spain, survey; women more likely than men to report that unemployment, pensions, education, the status of the health system, drugs, youth problems, violence against women, women's problems in general, and social issues are a main concern to them. Differences in general are small
- ▶ Funk and Gathmann, 2015: Switzerland, reported voting behavior in referenda; women show less support for increasing retirement age, nuclear energy, the military; more support for environmental protection, healthy life-style, equal rights for women, assistance to disabled
- ▶ Lott and Kenny, 1999 USA, extension of suffrage to women: immediate increases in state government expenditures and revenue and more liberal voting patterns for federal representatives

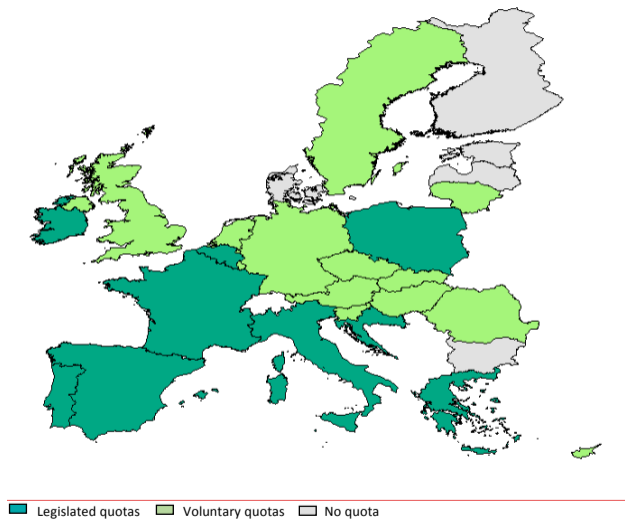
Do differences in preferences translate into different policy decisions?

- ▶ Do women in politics make different choices than men? 2 types of studies:
 1. Gender quotas
 - ▶ Caveat: target lower positions
 2. close elections
 - ▶ Caveat: compensating differentials (Marshall, 2024)
- ▶ In the context of Western countries, most studies tend to find no significant difference (e.g. Ferreira and Gyourko, 2014; Bagues and Campa, 2021), but more time might be needed

C. What is the role of policy?

- ▶ Many countries worldwide have adopted quotas to close the gender gap in political institutions:
 - a. mandated representation
 - b. candidate gender quotas

Electoral quotas in EU



Source: www.quotaproject.org (IDEA, Inter-Parliamentary Union and Stockholm)

What do we know about quotas?

- ▶ They tend to increase women's representation in political office if they are properly designed (strategic positioning, “zipper” quota or double-preference system preferable)
- ▶ Effects above and beyond the quota mandate? Plausible given recent evidence of “gendered group dynamics”. Mixed evidence from different contexts (India, Sweden vs. Italy, Spain, Portugal, France)
- ▶ Response from voters important to consider, it might amplify or diminish the quota impact. No evidence that voters respond to quota (Bagues and Campa, 2018; Besley et al., 2017)
- ▶ Policy changes hard to measure. Also not obvious what should be the size of the mandated increase in female representation to achieve policy change. Too little evidence from Western democracies to draw conclusions
- ▶ No evidence that “quality” of politicians deteriorates. On the contrary!

Kansikas and Bagues, 2024, 'Can term limits accelerate women's access to top political positions?'

- ▶ Quotas typically target lower level positions
- ▶ Problem: trickle-up effect seems to be very slow
- ▶ Other policy that might favor women's access to top positions: term limits
 - ▶ Leaky pipeline
 - ▶ **Pipeline is long**: prolonged tenures in top level positions delay the access of younger cohorts
- ▶ Example:
 - ▶ US Senate: strong incumbency effect, no term limits, average age 64
 - ▶ Most presidential candidates were previously senators
- ▶ Would there be more women in the US senate if there were term limits?

Kansikas and Bagues, 2024, 'Can term limits accelerate women's access to top political positions? Quasi-experimental evidence from Italy'

- ▶ Evidence from local elections in Italy.
 - ▶ Extension of term limits from 2 to 3 five-year terms:
 - ▶ 2014: Municipalities with less than 3,000 inhabitants
 - ▶ 2022: Municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants
- ▶ Context:
 - ▶ Steady increase in female representation at the grassroots level but with large heterogeneity across municipalities.
 - ▶ Large statistical power: +4,000 municipalities over three decades
- ▶ Difference-in-differences and Discontinuity-in-differences:
 - ▶ Control group: Slightly larger municipalities not affected by the reform
 - ▶ Control and treatment groups similar in levels and in dynamics prior to the policy change
- ▶ Some empirical challenges:
 - ▶ 3,000 and 5,000 population thresholds are used for other policies (e.g. salaries, gender quotas)

Main results

- ▶ Longer term limits postpone the access of younger cohorts, which tend to be more feminized
 - ▶ \uparrow Older and more experienced mayors
 - ▶ \downarrow Female mayors ($\beta=4-10$ p.p., wrt 15% baseline)
- ▶ In which circumstances can term limits foster female representation?
 - ▶ Effect increasing in the share of women at lower levels of the hierarchy
- ▶ Mechanism:
 - ▶ Replacement ✓
 - ▶ Selection ✗
 - ▶ Knock-on effects ✗

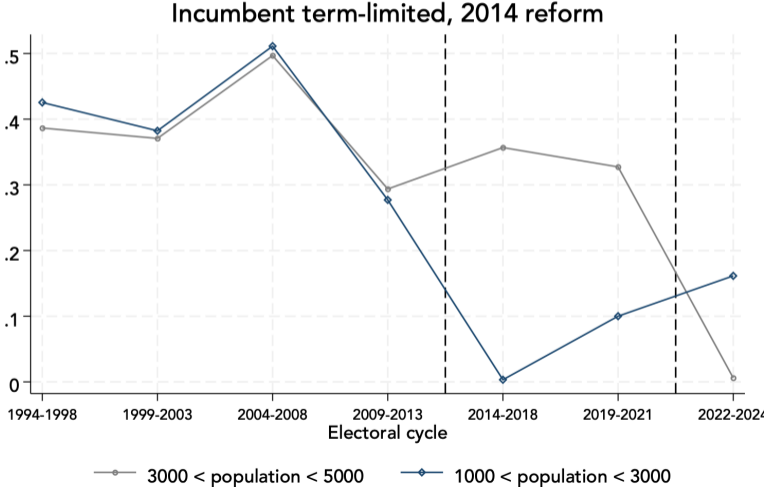
Difference-in-differences

Treatment and control groups

- ▶ 2014 reform:
 - ▶ Treatment group: $1,000 < \text{population} < 3,000$ ('small' municipalities)
 - ▶ Control group: $3,000 < \text{population} < 5,000$ ('medium' municipalities)
 - ▶ Up to 2022, when second reform affects the control group
- ▶ 2022 reform:
 - ▶ Treatment group: $3,000 < \text{population} < 5,000$ ('medium' municipalities)
 - ▶ Control group: $5,000 < \text{population} < 7,000$ ('large' municipalities)

In municipalities where term limits are extended, incumbents are not term-limited.

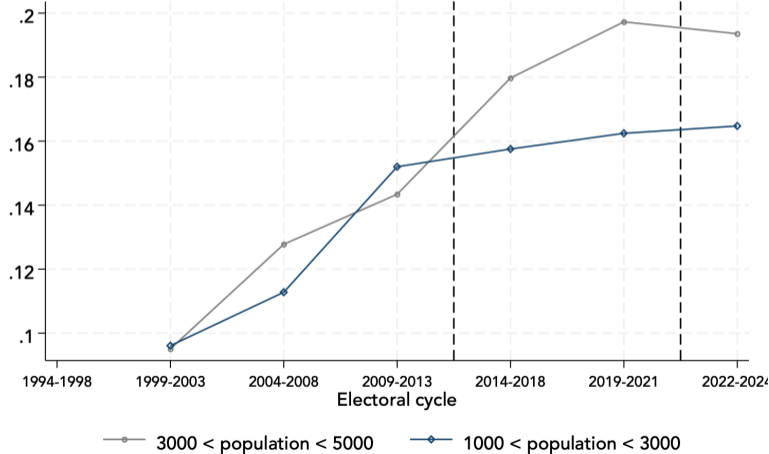
$$\beta_{DID}^{2014} = -0.32 \text{ (s.e.} = 0.01\text{)}; \beta_{DID}^{2022} = -0.36 \text{ (s.e.} = 0.06\text{)}$$



In municipalities affected by the reform the share of female candidates stagnates, while in the control group it keeps growing

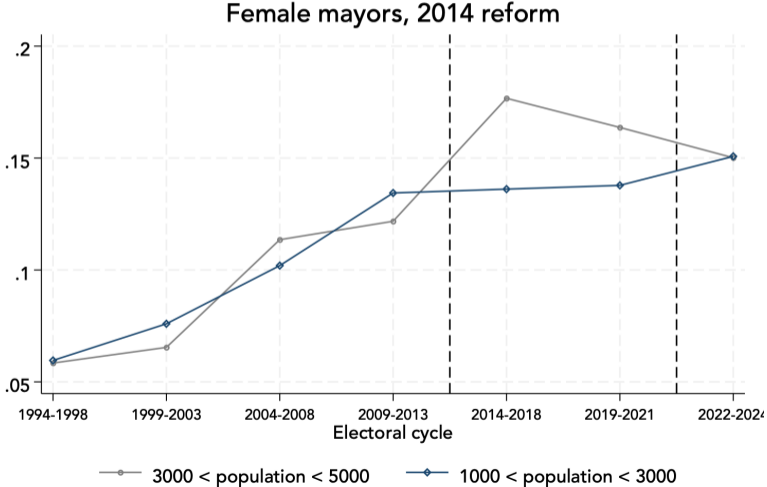
$$\beta_{DID}^{2014} = -0.02 \text{ (s.e.} = 0.01\text{)}; \beta_{DID}^{2022} = -0.08 \text{ (s.e.} = 0.03\text{)}$$

Share of female candidates, 2014 reform



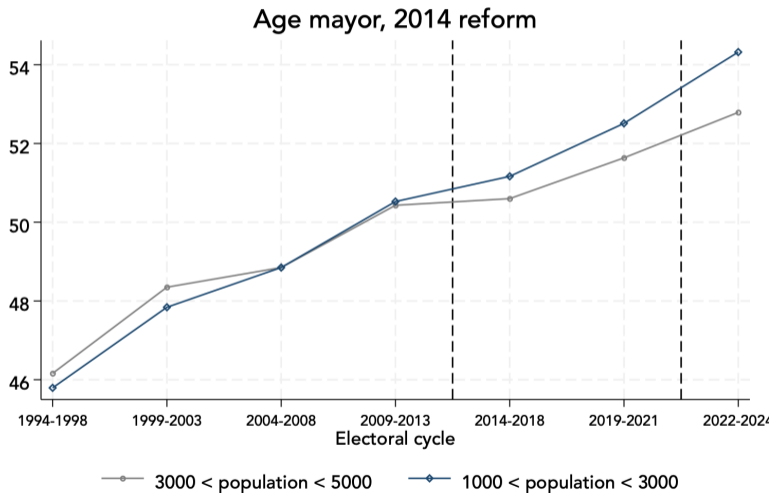
Similarly, the share of women among elected mayors slows down, compared to a steady increase in the control group.

$$\beta_{DID}^{2014} = -0.04 \text{ (s.e.} = 0.01\text{)}; \beta_{DID}^{2022} = -0.10 \text{ (s.e.} = 0.04\text{)}$$



Longer term limits lead to an increase in the age of mayors...

$\beta_{DID}^{2014}=0.86$ (s.e.=0.45); $\beta_{DID}^{2022}=0.65$ (s.e.=1.04)



Impact of 2014 reform, by share of women in previous executive councils

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Incumbent term-limited	Number candidates	Female candidates	Mayor re-elected	Years in council	Age mayor	Female mayor
Three terms	-0.33*** (0.01)	-0.05 (0.03)	0.02** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.53 (0.38)	-0.29 (0.46)	0.06*** (0.01)
Three terms X Women executive	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.20** (0.09)	-0.23*** (0.04)	0.11** (0.06)	0.99 (1.28)	3.32** (1.48)	-0.48*** (0.06)
Observations	13,964	13,934	13,933	13,964	13,969	13,969	13,969
Mean	0.252	2.405	0.189	0.408	13.02	51.53	0.166

Conclusion

- ▶ Term limits can help bridge the representation gap between entry-level and top-level political positions, especially in times of rapid societal change
 - ▶ Effective policy tool to address directly top-level political representation, without waiting for (possible / delayed) effects from entry-level policies
 - ▶ Particularly effective when growth rate in lower-level positions is high, and in the presence of quotas, suggesting complementarity

Thank You