Making Institutions and Context Count: How Useful Is Feminist Institutionalism in Explaining Male Dominance in Politics?

Melinda Adams, James Madison University
Michal Smrek, Uppsala University, Sweden

doi:10.1017/S1743923X18000156

While the same formal candidate selection rules are generally in place throughout a state, there is often intracountry variation in male descriptive overrepresentation. To explain this variation, scholars cannot focus exclusively on women (e.g., how do women respond to formal institutional opportunities?) or femininity (e.g., how do norms governing appropriate female behavior affect women's odds of being selected as a candidate?). Rather, scholars must attend to the ways that informal norms regarding masculinity operate across space and time within a country. Drawing on the insights of feminist institutionalism, this essay examines two intracountry sources of variation in candidate selection: the spatial urban-rural divide and temporal differences between first-time recruitment and renomination. While the formal candidate selection rules are uniform, informal institutions vary depending on where and when we look, leading to different levels of male overrepresentation.

SPATIAL INFORMALITY

Candidate recruitment and selection play out differently in urban and rural areas. The strength of clientelism, variation in regional expectations regarding the role of a member of parliament (MP), and regionally variable levels of openness to outsiders can contribute to higher levels of male overrepresentation in rural settings.

Feminist institutionalism provides scholars with useful tools for studying variation in male overrepresentation. This approach emphasizes how the interplay of formal rules and informal practices creates different opportunities for women and men by prescribing acceptable masculine and feminine forms of behavior, rules, and values (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015). Since understandings of masculinity and femininity differ regionally, the nature of these double binds and their implications for male and female representation also differ.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000156 Published online by Cambridge University Press

One of the most common manifestations of this interplay is clientelism. In countries where formal political institutions produce high levels of uncertainty, actors draw on clientelist ties to counteract that uncertainty. Clientelism creates an electoral context that requires significant material and psychological resources. MPs are expected to meet constituents' private needs, increasing the financial burden on MPs and the need to build effective political networks. Given power hierarchies in existing political systems, men benefit from turning to other men for this material support, while women must build networks that include men to obtain necessary resources. In situations of uncertainty where high levels of trust are necessary, individuals have incentives to seek out support from those similar to them. Thus, men bond with other men, and women look to other women (Bjarnegård 2013). Through these mechanisms, clientelism, which is often stronger in rural areas, reinforces male overrepresentation (Lindberg 2010).[1]

Another intersection between formal rules and informal norms is associated with voters' and party selectors' expectations regarding desirable legislator qualities. Constituents' expectations regarding the role of a legislator differ spatially, with rural areas sometimes placing greater emphasis on roles that are more difficult for women to fulfill. In Ghana, for example, rural constituents are more likely to expect MPs to serve as the head of a family, a role that is associated with heavy financial responsibilities — helping constituents pay for school fees, health care, weddings, funerals, and so on (Lindberg 2010). Though family structures are changing, the head of a family is still generally considered a masculine role. "Big man" politics creates a paternal order that is difficult for women to enter. Broader gendered norms, such as expectations regarding domestic responsibilities, caregiving roles, and gendered perceptions of specific professions contribute to differential access to financial resources and political networks, making it more difficult for women to fulfill the roles associated with an MP.

A third factor contributing to greater male overrepresentation in rural areas is the demographic profile of rural and urban constituencies. Although formal institutions are usually designed uniformly, there is often considerable regional diversity that invites different informal practices. Urban areas are generally more diverse than rural ones, and urban constituents tend to

1. It is important to acknowledge that clientelism exists in urban areas as well, and in some contexts, clientelism may be stronger in urban constituencies than in rural ones. Jeffrey Paller (2014) documents the importance of political clientelism in a primary campaign in Accra, Ghana.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000156 Published online by Cambridge University Press

place less emphasis on being a "son of the soil" (i.e., an indigene of that particular constituency). Formal candidate selection rules often specify residency requirements. Informal norms are often more stringent, with parties privileging candidates with long-standing ties in the community. Urban areas sometimes demonstrate a greater openness to outsiders.[2] In Ghana, few MPs (less than 10%) represent constituencies located in regions different than their birth region; however, the constituencies where outsiders are able to win are disproportionately urban.

TEMPORAL INFORMALITY

Another dimension in which informal norms may play a role in bringing about different selection outcomes is renomination. In many ways, renomination is a more important step in one's political career than initial recruitment. It is here that the crucial decision about who should be allowed to become a senior politician is taken. While renomination may be a formality in some majoritarian systems, it is a challenging hurdle to clear in proportional systems, in which candidates need to secure a favorable ballot placement prior to every election.

Renomination is bolstered by the same institutional setup as initial recruitment: party recruiters use certain screening criteria to determine each aspirant's suitability for office. Research shows that these criteria appear to favor a particular candidate profile that mirrors party recruiters' own characteristics (Bjarnegård 2013). Consequently, men possessing certain traits form the most prevalent group among political novices. At renomination, however, party recruiters possess superior cues that allow them to estimate each aspirant's suitability for political office more accurately. As concrete legislative and electoral performance indicators are available, the influence of party recruiters' expectations of what constitutes a good legislator diminishes. These superior indicators leave less room for simplistic judgments fueled by prevailing masculine norms that help to determine which aspirant is desirable at first-time recruitment.

Although there is scholarly evidence that even these less arbitrary renomination proxies can still be discriminatory, it is reasonable to

2. Some urban constituencies are more demographically diverse than others, and there are informal norms that influence who is seen as eligible to contest urban constituencies. In 2015, the New Patriotic Party, one of two major parties in Ghana, considered adopting an affirmative action policy that would allow only those of Ga ethnicity to contest certain coastal constituencies in Greater Accra. The idea behind the policy was that the Ga, an ethnic group indigenous to Accra, were underrepresented in parliament as a result of migration to the capital city.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000156 Published online by Cambridge University Press

expect that they will be less discriminatory than initial selection attributes (Shair-Rosenfield and Hinojosa 2014). The less arbitrary the selection indicators, the more difficult it becomes to rely on informal information shortcuts that party recruiters use in initial recruitment (Bjarnegård 2013; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). While the latter are shown to unfairly facilitate male overrepresentation, the literature mostly agrees that this form of discrimination is subconscious rather than intentional (Bjarnegård 2013). By selecting candidates who are similar to them, party recruiters want to minimize the uncertainty surrounding political selection. Once more accurate selection proxies become available, we should expect to see fairer selection outcomes.[3]

Yet another reason for expecting less discrimination in renomination is the relative exposure of the process. In most political systems, political selections are conducted behind closed doors, far from voters and rank-and-file party members. While this is also the case at renomination, incumbent aspirants are public figures now, who are known among voters. This makes it more challenging for party selectors to apply arbitrary criteria when deciding on promotion unless they want to risk being perceived as unaccountable. Exposure thus limits the influence of clientelism that dominates initial recruitment. Past research shows that legislators who are popular among voters tend to be more disloyal in their voting and public remarks (Crisp et al. 2013). While such individuals would easily be eliminated from the pool at initial recruitment, their public profile makes it difficult to demote them at renomination.

Finally, candidate profiles that are overrepresented might, ironically, have a harder time clearing the renomination hurdle than the underrepresented ones. This is because party selectors are aware that they need to keep the ballot balanced, at least in multimember districts. An advantage at first-time recruitment may thus quickly turn into fierce competition for electable slots for those who share similar characteristics. In turn, the bonding capital between men that facilitated their entry into politics might become less of an asset as competition for limited ballot places heightens. Past research shows that the overrepresented legislators tend to turn disloyal to party bosses in their effort to differentiate themselves from their colleagues and attract preference votes, while the underrepresented groups, counter to what party recruiters are shown to

3. This begs the question of how underrepresented groups enter politics in the first place if the selection criteria disadvantage them. Past literature argues that the perceived need to have the ballot appear balanced drives party selectors to recruit some representatives of the underrepresented groups on the ballot (see Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000156 Published online by Cambridge University Press

assume, remain loyal (André et al. 2017). The more women (and other underrepresented groups) are allowed to amass political experience, the more their political performance may challenge the perceptions that male party selectors have about their electability, loyalty, and political competence. Thus, the insights party selectors draw from renomination may gradually spill over to first-time recruitment, challenging male overrepresentation in politics.

CONCLUSIONS

In this essay, we have tried to show that feminist institutionalism, with its emphasis on the interactions between formal rules and informal practices and the implications of this interplay on both men and women, provides useful tools for studying spatial and temporal variation in male overrepresentation. What appears to be a uniform selection and recruitment process might be very different depending on where and when we choose to examine it. While the formal rules are generally the same across a country and from one election to the next, informal norms vary across space and over time as these two dimensions invite very different strategies that help to "grease the wheel" of formal institutions.[4] Failure to look at informal candidate recruitment and selection practices and how these practices tend to favor men impedes our understanding of the causes of male overrepresentation.

Melinda Adams is Professor of Political Science at James Madison University: adams2mj@jmu.edu; Michal Smrek is a doctoral student in the Department of Government and Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden: michal.smrek@statsvet.uu.se

REFERENCES

André, Audrey, Sam Depauw, Matthew S. Shugart, and Roman Chytilek. 2017. "Party Nomination Strategies in Flexible-List Systems: Do Preference Votes Matter?" *Party Politics* 23 (5): 589–600.

Bjarnegård, Elin. 2013. *Gender, Informal Institutions and Political Recruitment: Explaining Male Dominance in Parliamentary Representation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bjarnegård, Elin, and Meryl Kenny. 2015. "Revealing the 'Secret Garden': The Informal Dimensions of Political Recruitment." *Politics & Gender* 11 (4): 748–53.

4. Of course, in some cases, formal rules change but informal practices remain the same. See, for example, Mackay (2014).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000156 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Crisp, Brian F., Santiago Olivella, Michael Malecki, and Mindy Sher. 2013. "Vote-Earning Strategies in Flexible List Systems: Seats at the Price of Unity." *Electoral Studies* 32 (4): 658–69.
Lindberg, Staffan I. 2010. "What Accountability Pressures Do MPs in Africa Face and How Do They Respond? Evidence from Ghana." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 48 (1): 117–42.
Mackay, Fiona. 2014. "Nested Newness, Institutional Innovation, and the Gendered Limits of Change." *Politics & Gender* 10 (4): 549–71.
Norris, Pippa, and Joni Lovenduski. 1995. *Political Recruitment: Gender, Race and Class in the British Parliament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Paller, Jeffrey W. 2014. "Informal Institutions and Personal Rule in Urban Ghana." *African Studies Review* 57 (3): 123–42.
Shair-Rosenfield, Sarah, and Magda Hinojosa. 2014. "Does Female Incumbency Reduce Gender Bias in Elections? Evidence from Chile." *Political Research Quarterly* 67 (4): 837–50.
Siavelis, Peter M., and Scott Morgenstern. 2008. *Pathways to Power: Political Recruitment and Candidate Selection in Latin America*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

(De)constructing the Masculine Blueprint: The Institutional and Discursive Consequences of Male Political Dominance

Natalie Galea, University of New South Wales
Barbara Gaweda, Institute of International Relations

doi:10.1017/S1743923X18000168

Men are overrepresented in most legislatures of the world. However, in parliaments in which women reach a "critical mass" or even approach parity with men in terms of numbers, they still must contend with and adapt to the symbolic representation of men. Using the cases of the Australian and Polish parliaments, we point to the need to deconstruct the parliamentary standard by shifting the theoretical and empirical focus from women's disadvantage in politics to problematizing men's advantage and power (Eveline 1994, 1998; Murray 2014). Rather than placing the problem and solution with women, we address the practices that maintain men's unearned power, or privilege. Privilege is the "systematically conferred advantages" that individuals enjoy by virtue of their membership of a dominant social group (Bailey 1998, 109). Institutions in the form of taken-for-granted practices and gendered discourses embed a "masculine blueprint" in political institutions that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000156 Published online by Cambridge University Press