Women Opposition Leaders: Pathways, Patterns, and Performance

Edited by Sarah C. Dingler, Ludger Helms, and Henriette Müller

cogitatio

Table of Contents

Politics and Governance is an internationally peer-reviewed open access journal that publishes significant and cutting-edge research drawn from all areas of political science.

Its central aim is thereby to enhance the broad scholarly understanding of the range of contemporary political and governing processes, and impact upon of states, political entities, international organisations, communities, societies and individuals, at international, regional, national and local levels.

cogitatio

www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance

Editorial

Women Opposition Leaders: Conceptual Issues and Empirical Agendas

Sarah C. Dingler [1], Ludger Helms [1,*], and Henriette Müller [2]

[1] Department of Political Science, University of Innsbruck, Austria
[2] Division of Arts & Humanities, New York University Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

* Corresponding author (ludger.helms@uibk.ac.at)

Abstract
This thematic issue provides the first comprehensive overview of women opposition leaders and their performance. Setting the stage for a new research agenda, this editorial piece integrates theoretical and empirical insights at the intersection of three distinct research areas: political opposition, political leadership, and gender and politics. It discusses various notions of opposition leaders and identifies three main lines of inquiry: (a) career pathways and trajectories, (b) patterns of selection and de-selection, and (c) the actual and perceived performance of women's oppositional leadership. Applying a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches, this collection of original articles captures the diversity of women opposition leaders, their career trajectories, and their exercise of leadership across different political regimes and world regions.

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Women Opposition Leaders: Pathways, Patterns, and Performance" edited by Sarah C. Dingler (University of Innsbruck), Ludger Helms (University of Innsbruck), and Henriette Müller (New York University Abu Dhabi).

1. The Three Sources of a New Agenda

This thematic issue combines several areas of international political research that have risen to major prominence in recent years into a novel and increasingly important agenda. The first of those areas concerns political oppositions, which, following Dahl's seminal work from the 1960s (Dahl, 1966), has been rediscovered more recently and developed into a complex field now covering both democratic and autocratic regimes (Helms, 2021, 2022). There is an increasing awareness that the quality of democracy rests to a considerable extent on the state of the political opposition and that even the performance of regimes beyond liberal democracy is to a large degree shaped by political oppositions of various natures.

The second growth sector of recent political research with immediate relevance for the research gathered in this thematic issue relates to political leaders and leadership. There are both scholarly reasons and real-world triggers, including a global trend towards personalization and constant calls for more and better leadership, that have given rise to a full-blown research paradigm centering on leaders and leadership in comparative perspective (see, e.g., Foley, 2013; Helms, 2012; Rhodes & 't Hart, 2014). While many contemporary scholars tend to conceive of leadership as a complex social relationship between "leaders" and "followers," rather than something "leaders do," few if any would deny the importance of leaders for the cause of leadership. Recent chapters of political leadership research have come to focus on issues of leaders' performance (see, e.g., Müller, 2020; Strangio et al., 2013), yet questions of leadership selection, de-selection, and succession have remained crucially important subjects in their own right (Helms, 2020a).

This is particularly true if political leaders and leadership are looked at from a gender perspective, which

marks the third major area of research to which this thematic issue's agenda is dedicated to. While gender is, by definition, about more than women, and not all gender research is of a feminist nature, feminist perspectives on women in politics have long marked the core of gender research in political science. Perhaps ironically, many key works in that field have focused on women leaders—or their conspicuous absence, for that matter—in the executive branch, which has been early on identified as "arguably the most masculine" political territory of all (Jalalzai, 2008, p. 209). There is now a burgeoning literature on women presidents and prime ministers, women cabinet ministers, and leading women executives at the supranational and international levels (see, e.g., Annesley et al., 2019; Haack, 2022; Jalalzai, 2013; Krook & O'Brien, 2012; Martin & Borelli, 2016; Müller & Tömmel, 2022; Müller-Rommel & Vercesi, 2017). Also, apparently driven by the increasing politicization of this issue, in many countries the share of women government ministers and political chief executives has significantly risen in recent years.

In light of these dynamics and developments, which could be expected to have prompted a real blossom of comparative political research into women opposition leaders and oppositional leadership, it is remarkable to see that issues of women leaders and leadership relating to political opposition have continued to be largely ignored. There is some isolated work on women opposition leaders or, strictly speaking, on how women get to power within their respective parties (see, e.g., Beckwith, 2015; Clemens, 2006), but its scarcity only underscores the need for a much more comprehensive exploration of a complex and fascinating topic. The fact that this occasional work has tended to focus on individual opposition leaders, such as Margaret Thatcher or Angela Merkel, who eventually became long-term prime ministers or chancellors respectively, testifies to the particular "spell" that executive power has had on the community of gender scholars, just as on many scholars pursuing other approaches.

2. Conceptual Issues

There are quite a few challenges of comparative political research in this field, some of which start right at the level of conceptualizing "opposition leaders." Obviously, the origin of the term and concept is the British Westminster democracy, with its strictly parliament-centered tradition of politics and governance (and its more particular tradition of an opposition with a capital "O"). In British politics, opposition leaders are not only parliament-based actors, they are also party leaders by definition. The leader of the largest non-governing party in the House of Commons is the Leader of the Official Opposition, or simply the Leader of the Opposition, being entitled to a public salary in addition to their salary as a member of parliament (MP), and to several other public resources. There can be no more telling proof of

the conception of the political opposition as an alternative government in waiting. The particular nature of the Leader of the Opposition in the British House of Commons corresponds with his or her exposed status in the parliamentary procedure. Key elements of the parliamentary process at Westminster, such as the Prime Minister's Question Time, have long turned into an organized showdown between the prime minister and his or her direct adversary, the Leader of the Opposition (Serban, 2021).

Strictly speaking, even British Leaders of the Opposition are not the chair of their parliamentary party group, which is a separate and distinct position. In some party government regimes that have historically been inspired by the British model, the close integration of party and parliamentary leadership positions is not a defining feature of opposition leaders at all. Especially in multi-level systems with territorially complex party organizations, the offices of party leader and parliamentary party group leader are often held by two different individuals, and party leaders do not necessarily always hold a seat in the national parliament. In those regimes, the closest equivalent to a British Leader of the Opposition is the parliamentary party group leader of the largest party in parliament, rather than the party leader. Further, again, in contrast to the classic power-concentrating arrangements of Westminster systems, there has been a growing trend towards establishing "dual leaderships," involving two co-leaders, both at the level of the party and parliamentary party leadership, and often also with an emphasis on ensuring gender parity at the top (see, e.g., Campus et al., 2022). Some countries, such as Germany, have even known a more advanced form of leadership dispersion with an occasional separation of party leader, parliamentary party group leader, and top contender for the post of head of government—referred to as "chancellor candidate" in the German context (Helms, 2020b)—performing distinctive functions and roles that are all concentrated in the hands of a classic British-style Leader of the Opposition. Both in political theory and constitutional practice, more dispersed notions of parliament-based opposition leaders can be imagined. As several contributions to this thematic issue suggest (de Vet & Devroe, 2023; Tripp, 2023), to some extent all MPs can be considered political leaders, with opposition MPs standing out as actors that share in the role of parliamentary opposition leader.

Even if the focus is on party-based forms of political opposition, which has, ever since Dahl (1966, p. 33), been widely considered to mark the single most important and effective form of political opposition in many regimes, it is to be acknowledged that there are numerous parties not enjoying parliamentary representation. To the extent that opposition parties are conceptualized as non-governing parties, those parties are genuine opposition parties that form part and parcel of the "opposition landscape." Indeed, one of the key developments of recent decades concerns the significant increase not

just of different political and social movements, but also of opposition parties located and operating from beyond the parliamentary arena (Best, 2013).

That said, even the nature of some non-governing parties represented in parliament as genuine opposition parties have been occasionally challenged, both in political and scholarly terms. Some scholars hold reservations about parties that fail to be recognized by other parties as being equal members in the "alternation game" (i.e., possessing the perceived potential to govern and/or to form part of a coalition government). This corresponds with political dynamics in some countries where established democratic parties have sought to keep such "pariah parties" away from positions of status and power. However, at least at the level of scholarly research on opposition parties, the emerging mainstream is marked by notions of opposition parties in democratic contexts that include various types of "anti-system parties" (Zulianello, 2018). More than that, there is an apparent willingness to set aside established distinctions between opposition and resistance. In fact, as foreshadowed in the work by Brack and Weinblum (2011), opposition has increasingly emerged as the new "generic term" for different actors and activities challenging governments and power-holders by various means.

More important still, in the more recent literature the concept of political opposition is no longer being used for studying politics in democratic regimes only. Following powerful suggestions by Blondel (1997) and others, many scholars have come to agree that there can be manifestations of political opposition even in the absence of the principle of legitimate opposition, although this involves, in some cases at least, the danger of "conceptual stretching" (Helms, 2022). The reasons for extending the term "political opposition" to protesters and dissidents operating under autocratic rule apparently include the intention to acknowledge them as valuable and honorable political actors that often put their very lives on the line for the sake of freedom and democracy. That said, not all opposition parties in autocratic contexts are supporters of democracy, and there is a notable share of opposition parties that are eventually co-opted by the regime (Helms, 2022). More specifically, some of the most prominent political figures widely referred to as "women opposition leaders" in current media reporting relate to non-parliamentary political actors, including "independent candidates" and other civil society actors, from established autocratic regimes—such as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Veronika Tsepkalo, and Maria Kolesnikova in Belarus. As Tsikhanouskaya's case suggests, this initially little institutionalized role can even be combined with a status of being in political exile, and further strengthened abroad (Jalalzai & Jurek, 2023).

Yet, even in some of the most established democracies, opposition leaders are difficult to identify. This is true in particular for many presidential or separation-of-powers systems. Take, for example, the US: In the political science literature, presidents operating under "divided government" have occasionally been conceptualized as "opposition leaders" (Crockett, 2000). Perhaps closer to political reality, most observers of US politics would agree that, during the Trump years, the closest equivalent to an opposition leader in parliamentary democracies was Nancy Pelosi, the leading Democrat in the House of Representatives. However, during the second half of the Trump administration (2019–2021), Pelosi was the majority leader, not the minority leader, in the House of Representatives (thanks to the turn to a divided government following the 2019 mid-term elections). Also, and very much in line with the established conventions of US politics, she did not become Trump's key challenger in the 2020 presidential campaign. While political opposition in the US is indeed "ubiquitous," as Nelson Polsby once famously suggested (Polsby, 1997, p. 511), there is, even in an era of advanced party polarization and cohesion, no institutionalized party-based political opposition performing the role of an "alternative administration" (in terms of people and policies), and no proper "opposition leader," for that matter.

In this regard, the transnational political system of the European Union shares more with the US than with the parliamentary systems operated by most of its member states at home. Despite the successive de facto parliamentarization of the European Union, peculiarities remain, specifically but not only at the intersection of political oppositions in the member states and at the European level, which continues to be marked by a conspicuous lack of structural and functional integration (Helms, 2008; Mair, 2007). Specifically, there are no parliament-driven changes of personnel and power in the European Commission, and top political executives at the EU level are not normally recruited from amongst the parliamentary party group leaders in the European Parliament. Still, there are obviously chief representatives of the different party groups in the European Parliament that can be meaningfully referred to as parliamentary leaders, and some of them are indeed committed to challenging and opposing the Commission in a more than purely situational manner (Carlotti, 2020; Müller & Pansardi, 2023; Salvati, 2021).

3. Methodological Challenges and the Agenda of This Thematic Issue

As our observations above suggest, there is a wide variety of actors that can be reasonably referred to as opposition leaders. There is no need to press for a unitary definition applicable to different types of regimes. Indeed, there tend to be different kinds of opposition leaders, in particular parliament-based and extra-parliamentary ones, even within a given regime, and the relationship between party or parliamentary and political movement opposition leaders marks an item worth studying in its own right. This has increasingly come to be acknowledged even in a classic "parliamentary state" (Judge, 1993) as the UK (see, e.g., Bailey, 2014). Party

and movement relations, and distinct power-challenging alliances comprising different civilian collective actors, tend to be of even greater relevance in many developing countries (Bermeo & Yashar, 2016).

The methodological challenges of studying women opposition leaders are very similar to those identified for women executive leaders (Elgie, 2020). One major challenge relates to the small number of women opposition leaders, which largely precludes the use of statistical approaches, and frustrates many comparative research ambitions (see, however, Dingler & Helms, 2023). Other challenges correspond closely with what has been prominently referred to as the need to identify and uncover the hidden "double standards" haunting women leaders in other positions and areas. More than that, what Beckwith (2020, p. 134) has noted for many endeavors in feminist executive research is true also for the field of research on women opposition politicians and leaders: Indeed, some of the most provocative yet intriguing research questions "derive from sexist assertions," namely that women political leaders "are not as 'meritorious' as their male counterparts."

This thematic issue advocates a broad conceptualization of women opposition leaders, and women oppositional leadership for that matter, that can capture the many diverse real-world manifestations of this phenomenon in different types of political regimes. We are interested in (a) career pathways and trajectories, (b) patterns of selection and de-selection, as well as (c) the actual and perceived performance of women opposition leaders. Specifically, we were keen to gather a set of articles representing not just a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches but also different regions of the world, suitable to inspire future context-sensitive and comparative work. Nevertheless, as political research in this particular area is still very much in its infancy, this collection can only mark the outset of a long journey through largely unchartered territory.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Annesley, C., Beckwith, K., & Franceschet, S. (2019). *Cabinets, ministers, and gender*. Oxford University Press.

Bailey, D. (2014). Contending the crisis: What role for extra-parliamentary British politics? *British Politics*, *9*(1), 68–92.

Beckwith, K. (2015). Before prime minister: Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, and gendered party leadership contests. *Politics & Gender*, *11*(4), 718–745.

Beckwith, K. (2020). Feminist approaches to the study of political executives. In R. B. Andeweg, R. Elgie, L. Helms, J. Kaarbo, & F. Müller-Rommel (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political executives* (pp. 173–193). Oxford University Press.

Bermeo, N., & Yashar, D. J. (Eds.). (2016). *Parties, movements, and democracy in the developing world*. Cambridge University Press.

Best, R. (2013). How party system fragmentation has altered political opposition in established democracies. *Government and Opposition*, *48*(3), 314–342.

Blondel, J. (1997). Political opposition in the contemporary world. *Government and Opposition*, *32*(4), 462–486.

Brack, N., & Weinblum, S. (2011). "Political opposition": Towards a renewed research agenda. *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, *1*(1), 69–79.

Campus, D., Switek, N., & Valbruzzi, M. (2022). *Collective leadership and divided power in West European parties*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Carlotti, B. (2020). *Patterns of opposition in the European Parliament: Opposing Europe from the inside?* Palgrave Macmillan.

Clemens, C. (2006). From the outside in: Angela Merkel as opposition leader, 2000–2005. *German Politics & Society*, *24*(3), 41–81.

Crockett, D. A. (2000). The president as opposition leader. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *30*(2), 245–274.

Dahl, R. A. (Ed.). (1966). *Political oppositions in western democracies*. Yale University Press.

de Vet, B., & Devroe, R. (2023). Gender and strategic opposition behavior: Patterns of parliamentary oversight in Belgium. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 97–107.

Dingler, S. C., & Helms, L. (2023). Parliamentary women opposition leaders: A comparative assessment across 28 OECD countries. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 85–96.

Elgie, R. (2020). Methodology and the study of the political executive. In R. B. Andeweg, R. Elgie, L. Helms, J. Kaarbo, & F. Müller-Rommel (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political executives* (pp. 186–206). Oxford University Press.

Foley, M. (2013). *Political leadership: Themes, context, and critiques*. Oxford University Press.

Haack, K. (2022). *Women's access, representation and leadership in the United Nations*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Helms, L. (2008). Parliamentary opposition and its alternatives in a transnational regime: The European Union in perspective. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, *14*(1/2), 212–235.

Helms, L. (Ed.). (2012). *Comparative political leadership*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Helms, L. (2020a). Leadership succession in politics: The democracy/autocracy divide revisited. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *22*(2), 328–346.

Helms, L. (2020b). *Spitzenkandidaten* beyond Westminster: Comparing German and Austrian chancellor candidates. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *73*(4), 808–830.

Helms, L. (2021). Introduction: The nature of political opposition in contemporary electoral democracies and autocracies. *European Political Science*, *20*(4), 569–579.

Helms, L. (2022). Political oppositions in democratic and authoritarian regimes: A state-of-the-field(s) review. *Government and Opposition*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.25

Jalalzai, F. (2008). Women rule: Shattering the executive glass ceiling. *Politics and Gender*, *4*(2), 205–231.

Jalalzai, F. (2013). *Shattered, cracked or firmly intact? Women and the executive glass ceiling worldwide*. Oxford University Press.

Jalalzai, F., & Jurek, S. (2023). The "accidental candidate" versus Europe's longest dictator: Belarus's unfinished revolution for women. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 119–129.

Judge, D. (1993). *The parliamentary state*. SAGE.

Krook, M. L., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2012). "All the president's men?" The appointment of female cabinet ministers worldwide. *Journal of Politics*, *74*(3), 840–855.

Mair, P. (2007). Political opposition and the European Union. *Government and Opposition*, *42*(1), 1–17.

Martin, J. M., & Borelli, M. (Eds.). (2016). *The gendered executive*. Temple University Press.

Müller, H. (2020). *Political leadership and the European Commission Presidency*. Oxford University Press.

Müller, H., & Pansardi, P. (2023). Women leading the opposition: Gender, rhetoric, and performance in the European Parliament. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 164–176.

Müller, H., & Tömmel, I. (Eds.). (2022). *Women and leadership in the European Union*. Oxford University Press.

Müller-Rommel, F., & Vercesi, M. (2017). Prime ministerial careers in the European Union: Does gender make a difference? *European Politics and Society*, *18*(2), 245–262.

Polsby, N. (1997). Political opposition in the United States. *Government and Opposition*, *32*(4), 511–521.

Rhodes, R. A. W., & 't Hart, P. (Eds.). (2014). *The Oxford handbook of political leadership*. Oxford University Press.

Salvati, E. (2021). Opposition parties in the European Parliament: The cases of Syriza, Podemos and the Five Star Movement. *The International Spectator*, *56*(1), 126–142.

Serban, R. (2021, July 22). 60 years of Prime Minister's Questions: Seven changes that shaped PMQs. *LSE British Politics and Policy*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/60-years-pmqs

Strangio, P., 't Hart, P., & Walter, J. (Eds.). (2013). *Understanding prime-ministerial performance: Comparative perspectives*. Oxford University Press.

Tripp, A. M. (2023). The instrumentalization of women opposition leaders for authoritarian regime entrenchment: The case of Uganda. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 152–163.

Zulianello, M. (2018). Anti-system parties revisited: Concept formation and guidelines for empirical research. *Government and Opposition*, *53*(4), 653–681.

About the Authors

Sarah C. Dingler is an assistant professor of empirical gender research at the University of Innsbruck. Her main areas of research include the analysis of political institutions and their effect on women's representation and the role of women as political actors in legislatures and the executive. Her work has been published, among others, in the *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Government and Opposition*, and *Politics and Gender*.

Ludger Helms is a professor of political science and chair of comparative politics at the University of Innsbruck. His research focuses on comparative political institutions, executive politics, political oppositions, and elites. He is the author of some 150 scholarly publications in those fields.

Henriette Müller is an assistant professor of gender, governance, and society at New York University Abu Dhabi. Focusing on gender and women's leadership, her research encompasses the comparative study of political leadership both at the national and international level, as well as across different political systems, and sociocultural contexts. Her work has appeared in *Hawwa Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, *Journal of European Integration*, *Politics and Gender*, *Politics and Governance*, and *West European Politics*.

Article

Parliamentary Women Opposition Leaders: A Comparative Assessment Across 28 OECD Countries

Sarah C. Dingler * and Ludger Helms

Department of Political Science, University of Innsbruck, Austria

* Corresponding author (sarah.dingler@uibk.ac.at)

Abstract

While women have increasingly gained access to the position of opposition leader, we still know very little about their pathways to that office. Therefore, this article seeks to uncover the dynamics and patterns that shape the ascendency of women politicians to the office of opposition leader from a comparative perspective. In this article, opposition leaders are understood as the parliamentary party group leaders of the largest non-governing party in a given legislative assembly, which marks the closest equivalent to the Westminster understanding of leaders of the opposition that continues to dominate international notions of opposition leaders and oppositional leadership in parliamentary democracies. We draw on data from opposition leaders in 28 parliamentary democracies between 1996–2020 to identify opportunity structures that allow women opposition leaders to emerge across countries. In addition, we test how factors on the individual level (e.g., previous experience in party and parliament as well as in government) and at the party level (e.g., ideology) affect the likelihood that a parliamentary opposition leader is a woman. Our analyses demonstrate that the share of women in parliament significantly increases the likelihood that at least one of the parliamentary opposition leaders of the past 25 years was a woman. Moreover, opposition leaders in leftist parties are more likely to be women than their more rightist counterparts. Surprisingly, and contrary to our expectations, previous political experience does not shape the probability of women becoming opposition leaders. Thus, overall, the institutional and ideological contexts of selecting parliamentary opposition leaders seem to matter more than the experience and qualifications of individual candidates.

Keywords

career paths; gender; opposition leaders; parliaments; parties; women leaders

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, women have (more or less) continuously gained access to political leadership positions. Not only in governments, and governing parties for that matter, but also in opposition parties have women increasingly made their way to the top. The available literature reflects, however, only just about half of that empirical picture. While there is a burgeoning literature on women presidents, prime ministers, and women cabinet ministers (Annesley et al., 2019; Curtin et al., 2022; Jalalzai, 2013; Krook & O'Brien, 2012; Martin & Borelli, 2016; Müller & Tömmel, 2022; Müller-Rommel & Vercesi, 2017), comparative research on women opposition leaders has, with very few exceptions (e.g., Clemens, 2006) remained conspicuously scant. This situation is genuinely astounding, not only because opposition research has turned into a major growth sector of comparative political studies (see, e.g., Helms, 2022a), but also because issues of opposition would seem to possess a natural affinity with some of the most fundamental concerns of feminist political research. To fill that striking gap, this

article seeks to identify the factors that favour the emergence, or absence, of women opposition leaders across different democratic systems.

To begin, a conceptual note is in order: As the editorial piece to this thematic issue sketches out (see Dingler et al., 2023), there is a wide array of possible notions of opposition leaders, none of which can reasonably claim to be equally valid for all contexts. In this article, we define opposition leaders in the traditional Westminster sense where applicable, or as the parliamentary party group leaders of the largest non-governing party in a given legislative assembly. The latter notion is closely linked to the Westminster understanding of opposition leaders—marked by the combination of holding the party leadership of the largest non-governing party in parliament, and operating from the centre of parliament—which has strongly shaped international notions of opposition leaders and oppositional leadership in parliamentary democracies well beyond the world of Westminster. That said, there are several differences between leaders of the opposition in Westminster systems and their closest equivalents in other types of parliamentary regime. Most importantly, parliamentary opposition leaders, as defined above, can be but do not have to be their party's leader; the defining institutional feature is being the leader of the parliamentary party group. In many parliamentary democracies from beyond the Westminster family, the offices and roles of party leader and parliamentary party leader can be split up between two different politicians. Actually, either of the two positions can be divided between two persons, and indeed, dual leadership arrangements have become popular features of party politics across different regimes (Campus et al., 2021). One apparent major difference concerns the selection and selectorates of opposition leaders in Westminster-type and other types of parliamentary democracy. However, while it could be expected that the nature of leadership selection in parties and parliamentary party groups differ categorically, the differences actually tend to be moderate in constitutional practice. Indeed, in their major study of four Anglo-parliamentary democracies, Cross and Blais (2012) highlighted the conspicuously prominent role of the parliamentary party in party leadership elections, and in terms of intra-party power more generally. That is, while being party leaders rather than parliamentary party group leaders in name, party and opposition leaders in Westminster systems tend to be very much creatures of parliamentary party politics, thereby strongly resembling parliamentary party group leaders as opposition leaders as to be found in many parliamentary democracies beyond Westminster.

That said, there are other differences between Westminster and other types of parliamentary democracy. While leaders of the opposition at Westminster are the natural candidates for the premiership, this applies to a considerably lesser extent in many other parliamentary systems. Wholesale alternations in government tend to be rare outside the world of Westminster, and even in the event of a change of government opposition leaders can well find themselves and their party as a junior partner, rather than the dominant party, in a complex coalition government. This alters both the status and the task description of opposition leaders. Depending on the structure of the party system, occasionally even the leaders of truly major opposition parties may be figures with little to no chance to become a leading protagonist in the political executive—even when the composition of the government changes. This is true especially for many parties and parliamentary party leaders from so-called "pariah parties" (Moffitt, 2022) or "new challenger parties" (De Giorgi et al., 2021). In these cases, the office and role of opposition leader is much more that of a "chief attacker," rather than that of a "head of government in waiting," which may require fundamentally different qualities. Obviously, even in Westminster contexts, some leaders of the opposition can be unlikely future prime ministers. After devastating electoral defeats, and a party's recent fall from power after an extended term in office, leaders of the opposition cannot realistically hope to win the premiership anytime soon. Key tasks of the leader may then, at least temporarily, focus mainly on healing intra-party rifts and organizing intra-party reforms, rather than getting ready to govern the country.

For all those ambivalent features, the office and role of leader of the opposition in the parliamentary arena is invariably important across different parliamentary democracies. After all, the very idea of parliamentary government centres on the distinction between government and opposition. In the age of dramatically advanced levels of personalization of politics, this central element of parliamentary democracy has become increasingly personalized and leader-centred. In any case, it seems reasonable to assume that being an opposition leader is not just a unique and distinctive role, but also one gendered in unique and distinctive ways.

Given the striking lack of previous research on those issues, this article can only make the first steps towards understanding the politics of women opposition leaders. This journey has to begin with establishing under what circumstances women leaders of the opposition emerge, and where they have remained absent despite the growing alert to gender issues that have come to mark most parts of the democratic world.

Looking into 28 parliamentary democracies between 1996 and 2020, we, first, posit that the share of women in national legislatures affects the probability that at least one of the opposition leaders of the past 25 years was a woman. The larger the share of women MPs, the greater the pool of qualified candidates, and the lower the social barriers that women are likely to face on their way to leadership positions within their parliamentary party (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2009; Jalalzai, 2008). Second, we expect that opposition leaders in leftist parties are more likely to be women than

their rightist counterparts since they have more effective mechanisms in place to promote women, and higher incentives for a more balanced leadership structure that meets the expectations and demands of their supporters (e.g., Davis, 1997; Kittilson, 2011; Krook, 2009). Third, in line with key findings from the recruitment literature, we propose that women opposition leaders are likely to be more experienced and to hold higher qualifications than their male counterparts (e.g., Beckwith, 2015; Kroeber & Hüffelmann, 2021; Müller-Rommel & Vercesi, 2017) in order to keep widespread stereotypical reservations at bay and overcome the various obstacles they face. Based on unique data from 204 opposition leaders in 28 parliamentary democracies between 1996 and 2020, our analyses demonstrate that higher shares of women MPs do indeed provide favourable opportunity structures for women across countries. Moreover, the odds that an opposition leader is a woman tends to be higher in leftist than in rightist parties. Interestingly, however, the actual requirements for women opposition leaders do not seem to differ much from those of men. The findings from our inquiry—which marks the largest comparative study on women opposition leaders, and opposition leaders of whatever gender for that matter, yet—suggest that, for the career paths of senior opposition politicians, the respective nature of the parties is more important than the individual political experience of candidates. With these findings, we add to the quickly growing literature on women in political leadership positions by adding another nuance about the much-overlooked role of opposition leader. Overall, our results provide a reason for some optimism regarding the realization of more diverse forms of democratic government, since women opposition politicians do not seem to be held to higher standards—or at least not as far as the selection process is concerned. That said, even in the established representative democracies—where women have made major inroads in legislative and executive politics—biases against women do remain embedded in political parties.

In the next section, we provide a more detailed explanation of our guiding assumptions. This will then be followed by an empirical analysis of patterns of recruitment of 204 opposition leaders. The conclusion puts our findings in a broader context, highlights the implications of those findings, and identifies avenues for future research in that field.

2. Women Opposition Leaders: Opportunity Structures, Parties, and Candidates' Experience

Notwithstanding the major advances of the past, most political leadership positions remain men-dominated. There are still comparatively few women presidents, prime ministers, cabinet members, or party leaders across countries and political regimes. Research on political career paths and recruitment suggests that differences in opportunity structures across countries shape the possibility of women rising to top positions. In countries with favourable opportunity structures, party- as well as individual-level factors are crucial in determining who makes it to the top. In this article, we argue that similar conditions and patterns apply to women opposition leaders and that the share of women in parliament strongly shapes women's chances to become opposition leaders. Furthermore, in countries that have experienced the emergence of women opposition leaders, we expect party ideology as well as previous political experience to have been key factors shaping the likelihood that women, compared to men, become parliamentary party group leaders of the largest non-governing party in a given legislative assembly.

2.1. Rising to the Top: Opportunity Structures

In order to understand under which circumstances women are selected as opposition leaders, it is important to take into consideration political opportunity structures at the country level. One crucial factor shaping the likelihood of whether a woman becomes opposition leader is the share of women MPs in a given legislature. Since the typical career path of most opposition leaders includes longstanding experience as an MP, higher percentages of women in legislatures (with some women MPs being reelected to parliament) should gradually lead to a larger pool of reasonably experienced women candidates (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2009), who can successfully compete for the position of parliamentary party group leader.

In addition, the share of women in a legislature is a predictor for the exposure to women politicians. A more diverse legislature in terms of gender distribution also signifies a "general openness of a political system to women's participation" (Jalalzai, 2008, p. 213) that should translate into fewer barriers for women to advance to political leadership positions. Under these circumstances, women should face less prejudice concerning their ability to lead a parliamentary party group, since women in electoral office accustom their party colleagues to the idea of women as political leaders (Alexander, 2015; Alexander & Jalalzai, 2020). Some scholars argued that there might be a "critical mass" phenomenon at work (see Dahlerup, 1988); i.e., (only) from a certain number or share, the representation of women in parliament tends to make a real difference in terms of public policies as well as for legislatures as a workplace (see O'Brien & Piscopo, 2019). However, it has remained contested as to what share of women MPs actually marks that critical threshold, if it exists at all (see, e.g., Childs & Krook, 2008). This notwithstanding, empirical studies on the selection of party leaders and cabinet ministers provide ample evidence that in democracies with more gender-equal legislatures women are more likely to raise to different types of leadership positions (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2005; Goddard, 2019a; Reynolds, 1999; Verge & Astudillo, 2019). Following this line of argument, we expect to find

that a higher share of women legislators provides better opportunities for women to become parliamentary party group leaders of the largest opposition party:

> H1: The higher the share of women MPs in a legislature, the more likely a woman is to become opposition leader.

2.2. Rising to the Top: Party-Level Factors

While favourable contexts at the national level can provide opportunity structures for women, party politics is a crucial—in parliamentary democracies arguably the single most important—factor shaping political careers. Parties are powerful gatekeepers to leadership positions in government. This is true not just for both male and female career politicians (see, e.g., Dowding & Dumont, 2008); at least in parliamentary democracies, it is the parties that make and break the careers even of non-partisan "technocrats" as well (see Helms, 2022b). The literature on recruitment and gender also emphasizes the importance of intra-party dynamics for the career advancement of women. Women's successful political careers are shaped by favourable conditions within their party, for example, during crises (e.g., Beckwith, 2015), when the position seems to be particularly unattractive (O'Brien, 2015). In a similar vein, party ideology is a crucial determinant of women's representation, with left parties being more responsive to group representation demands and more "women-friendly" than rightist parties (Caul, 2001; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). Intra-party mechanisms that can enhance women's access to positions of power, such as parliamentary quotas or women's networks, typically tend to exist in left-wing rather than in more rightist parties (Davis, 1997; Kittilson, 2011; Krook, 2009). These mechanisms, in turn, should increase the supply of women able and willing to advance to influential positions within their respective parties. In addition to the supply of women candidates, the ideological orientation of the parties should also shape the demand for women leaders. Parties should be interested in being responsive to their voters' attitudes, e.g., with regard to their issue attention or responsiveness to voters' policy priorities (Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2016; Klüver & Spoon, 2016). Since voters of leftist parties tend to have more progressive gender attitudes, matters of gender equality should be salient for them and they should thus also have a higher incentive to see a woman being selected as the parliamentary party group leader and possible opposition leader.

Most of the literature supposes that rightist parties are reluctant to select women for leadership positions and that leftist parties appoint more women ministers (Claveria, 2014; Goddard, 2019b; Reynolds, 1999). Thus, we argue that both the demand for women parliamentary party group leaders and the supply of qualified women candidates to fill this post is higher in leftist parties:

> H2: Opposition leaders are more likely to be women in leftist than in rightist parties.

2.3. Rising to the Top: Individual Level Factors

Political resources such as political experience, party office-holding, and connections to political insiders are very likely to increase a candidate's chances of becoming a parliamentary party group leader. Typically, both women and men leaders have longstanding seniority in public or party offices. Yet, men and women might still benefit differently from political resources. Men tend to profit from homosocial capital like trust, "in-group" networking, and linkage to party selectors. High-trust networks remain closed to women since they usually form during exclusive social activities and events to which women often do not have access (Annesley et al., 2019, p. 29; Annesley & Gains, 2010; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2013). Given that parliamentary party group leaders need to enjoy high levels of trust, the absence from these inner circles is likely to generate doubts concerning women's trustworthiness and loyalty. It can thus be plausibly argued that women have to be exceptional and better qualified than their male counterparts to compensate for the lack of male homosocial capital. Recent research on ministerial career paths in 28 European countries demonstrates that career paths continue to be gendered, with men rising to influential ministerial positions (e.g., resourceful portfolios) with a lot less experience than women (Kroeber & Hüffelmann, 2021). In addition, gender and political recruitment studies argue that the career profiles of women ministers and prime ministers are different and often exceptional; they specifically tend to be marked by higher levels of experience in other political offices compared to their male colleagues (e.g., Jalalzai, 2013; Müller-Rommel & Vercesi, 2017; Verge & Astudillo, 2019). In addition to that, even if the overall number of women as party leaders increases, they tend to meet higher demands (O'Brien, 2015), and once in office need to perform better in elections than their male colleagues in order to survive (O'Brien et al., 2015). Beyond the level of party leaders and executives, such as when running for legislative office, evidence suggests that women tend to be better qualified than men (for an overview see Bauer, 2020). Based on these considerations, we expect that women have more political experience in parliament, at the party level, and as government ministers than men in becoming opposition leaders:

> H3: Women are more experienced and better qualified than men on becoming opposition leaders.

3. Empirical Strategy

To test these propositions, we follow a two-stage strategy. In a first step, we examine opportunity structures of women to become opposition leaders across countries.

In the second step, we investigate which factors explain the presence of women opposition leaders in countries that have had at least one woman opposition leader between 1996 and 2020. To this end, we collected biographical data on 204 opposition leaders in 28 OECD countries. The focus on OECD countries allows studying democracies that outperformed other world regions concerning women's representation in top positions. In addition, all these countries are established parliamentary democracies in which the role of opposition leader is normatively acknowledged and usually important in both constitutional theory and practice, even in the absence of British-style adversary politics. Our choice of countries is characterized by a broad variation in the key variables of interest, while institutional and socioeconomic contexts across the countries covered remain comparable. Thus, they provide ideal testing grounds for a large-scale comparison and possess broad generalization potential.

3.1. Dependent Variable

In line with our conceptualization of opposition leader, we include parliamentary party group leaders and, in Westminster systems the party leaders of the biggest non-governing party in parliament (who effectively lead their parties in the parliamentary process). This means that, for each country, we only have one observation at any given point in time (except if two individuals share the leadership position). Further, we only included opposition leaders that were in office for at least six months, since we expect the selection of interim party group leaders to follow its own logic. Based on this definition, we identified 204 opposition leaders in 28 OECD countries who were in office on 1 January 2000 or later (for a list of countries included see Supplementary File, Table A1). Since some of these opposition leaders took office before January 2000, their length of time in office determines the time span covered (1996–2020) in our analysis. For the first part of the analysis, our binary dependent variable captures whether a country has had a woman opposition leader (1) or not (0) during the 25 years under investigation. In the second stage, our dependent variable is the sex of the opposition leader in countries with at least one woman opposition leader during the investigation period, which takes the value 1 if the leader is a woman. We include all opposition leaders in these countries between 1996 and 2020; the sample incorporates 94 (74.60%) men and 32 (25.50%) women from 16 countries. This, in turn, means that in 12 out of our 28 countries no woman held the position of opposition leader. To ensure that this approach does not yield a selection bias, we ran a two-step Heckman correction model. As reported in the Supplementary File (Table A7), this alternative strategy does not alter our results, and since the lambda term does not reach levels of conventional levels of significance, we are confident that we do not face a selection bias.

3.2. Explanatory Factors

To test H1, the analysis comprises one explanatory variable: the mean share of women MPs in a country between 1996 and 2020 (as provided by Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). Furthermore, to test H2, we include the ideology of parties based on the Manifesto Project Database (Volkens et al., 2021) in the year of the start of the opposition role. If data for the exact same year when a candidate assumed office was not available, we used the closest year before the selection of the opposition leader. Finally, we include several variables that measure the political experience of the opposition leader: previous role as parliamentary party group leader (1 = yes), previous experience as government minister (1 = yes), party leadership experience (1 = yes), and time in office as MP in years (+1, lagged). All this information was retrieved from websites of parliaments and politicians or newspapers and measured at the time when a candidate took office in order to account for previous experience.

3.3. Control Variables

Beyond these explanatory variables, we control for numerous other factors that have been identified by previous research as affecting men's and women's career paths in politics. In the first part of the analysis investigating opportunity structures, we include the mean of women's labour force participation based on data from World Bank (2022a), as labour force participation is an established proxy for the status of women in a society, which can affect the likelihood of women to become leaders. We also account for the term length of a legislative term based on ParlGov (Döring et al., 2022), as shorter terms go hand in hand with higher turnover rates and thus might provide a more positive opportunity structure for women.

In the second step of the analysis, when tracing the effect of ideology and previous experience, we also account for several factors at the individual and party level. First, we include the age of the opposition leaders at the start of their tenure (based on our data). Second, we include a variable measuring the positions of gender equality of a respective party from the Manifesto Project Database (Volkens et al., 2021), as previous research has shown that more gender-equal parties are also more determined to promote women. Third, since women tend to be selected to party leadership positions in contexts of poor party popularity (Wiliarty, 2008), we include a measure designed to capture whether a party has lost seats in the election right before or at the time of the opposition leader's start in office based on ParlGov (Döring et al., 2022). We also include change in GDP growth to measure whether a country faces economic challenges (World Bank, 2022b). Fourth, we include variables measuring whether a party or country quota exists (based on Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). Finally, we also include country-fixed effects to model variation at the country level.

4. Analysis

At the first stage of the analysis, we inquire which factors positively shape opportunity structures allowing women opposition leaders to emerge across countries in order to test H1. In the second step, we analyze which party and individual-level factors enhance the likelihood that a woman becomes opposition leader.

4.1. Factors Providing Favorable Opportunity Structures

During this first stage of the analysis, we aim to shed light on the opportunity structures that allow women to become opposition leaders. In detail, we investigate the difference in the likelihood of a country having a woman opposition leader in order to test H1, which proposes that a higher share of women MPs marks a more favourable opportunity structure for women candidates. Table 1 and Figure 1 display a logistic regression model of country-level factors indicating the likelihood that at least one opposition leader was a woman. All coefficients display odds ratios. In line with our hypothesis, a higher share of women leads to higher odds that the country has witnessed a woman opposition leader. This effect reaches conventional levels of statistical significance ($p < 0.10$). For example, in a country with a mean share of 24% women MPs, such as Luxembourg, the probability that within the last 25 years one opposition leader was a woman is around 50%. By contrast, in a country with around 45% of women in parliament like Sweden, the likelihood that at least one of the opposition leaders was a woman reaches about 90% (Figure 1

displays these findings visually). It also demonstrates that we cannot make any predictions about the opportunity structure for contexts with very low numbers of women MPs, since in these contexts the effect is not statistically different from 0. Moreover, as Table A5 from the Supplementary File demonstrates, we cannot trace a critical mass of women MPs (e.g., 15% or 30%) needed to provide favourable opportunity structures for women seeking to advance to the top of the largest opposition party. The influence of women MPs hence seems to be more fluid than suggested by the advocates of the critical mass theory. Generally, these findings echo previous

Table 1. Logistic regression model of country-level factors on the likelihood that at least one opposition leader was a woman.

	Model 1
% women MPs (mean)	1.1311*
	(0.0738)
% women lab force part (mean)	0.9112
	(0.0612)
term length	0.6128
	(0.5295)
Constant	94.6311
	(554.3903)
Observations	28
R^2	0.1194

Note: Logistic regression displaying odds ratios with * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.
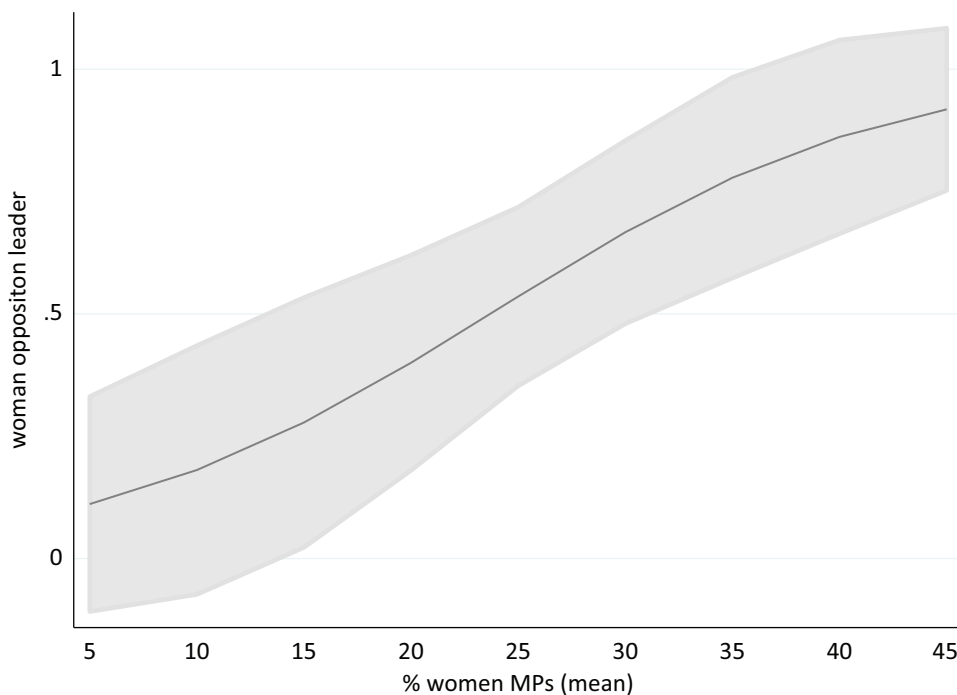

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of the share of women in parliament on the likelihood that at least one opposition leader was a woman with 95% confidence intervals.

research on executives and party leaders contending that the share of women positively affects the pool of suitable candidates, and exposure to women political actors reduces barriers for them to become political leaders (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2005; Goddard, 2019b; Reynolds, 1999; Verge & Astudillo, 2019). Turning to the control variables, neither women's labour force participation nor the length of the legislative term significantly affect the structural opportunities for women candidates and thus the likelihood of a country to have witnessed a woman opposition leader in the past quarter of a century.

4.2. Party Identification and Political Experience of Opposition Leaders

In this second step, we reduce our sample to countries in which at least one opposition leader since 1996 was a woman in order to make predictions about the party and individual-level factors that shape women's and men's chances to become the parliamentary party group leader of the largest opposition party. Thus, we now work with 130 observations (i.e., Table 2 and Figure 2 provide the results of a logistic regression of party- and individual-level factors on the likelihood that the opposition leader is a woman).

In line with H2, the chances for women to become opposition leader decrease with a more rightist ideology of the party (with higher values of the right-left index signifying more rightist positions). This effect reaches conventional levels of statistical significance ($p < 0.01$). Even if we use different operationalization strategies to measure left-right ideology (e.g., a dichotomously variable instead of a continuous measure), these findings remain robust (see Supplementary File, Table A6). Figure 2 displays this effect visually. Interestingly, the effect vanishes

Table 2. Logistic regression of party and individual-level factors on the likelihood that the opposition leader is a woman.

	Model 2
Explanatory variables	
MP (years +1 logged)	0.5591
	(0.2098)
parl. group leader (years +1 logged)	1.2847
	(0.4852)
party leader (1 = yes)	0.9776
	(0.8320)
government minister (1 = yes)	1.5065
	(0.8797)
left-right ideology	0.9423***
Control variables	
age	0.9973
	(0.0322)
double candidacy	1.8792
	(3.0514)
equality	0.7824**
	(0.0792)
party quota	1.9762
	(1.5185)
seat loss	0.9999
	(0.0076)
legislative quota	0.9159
	(1.4853)
change in GDP growth	0.9501
	(0.1397)
Constant	1.9515
	(4.6678)
Observations	130
R^2	17.03

Note: Logistic regression with country-fixed effects and robust standard errors displaying exponentiated coefficients with * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.
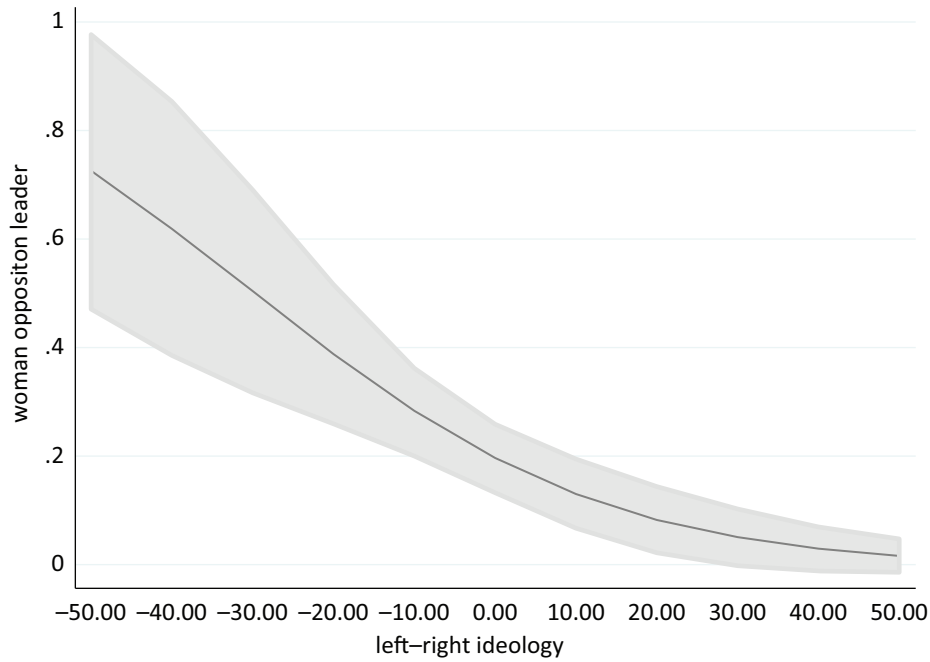
Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of left-right placement of parties on the likelihood the opposition leader is a woman with 95% confidence intervals.

for parties at the very right of the political spectrum. It could be plausibly contended that some rightist parties employ women leaders in a strategic attempt to soften their profile and increase their appeal for less radical sections of possible supporters, but we cannot make any empirically proven statements about the likelihood that parliamentary party group leaders of these parties are women, or why. The overall findings are, however, clearly in line with previous research on party leaders and executives, which shows that leftist parties are more likely to select women for high leadership positions (Claveria, 2014; Goddard, 2019b; Reynolds, 1999).

Finally, looking at individual-level factors in Table 2, we see that—importantly—none of the variables measuring experience before becoming opposition leader has an effect on the chances of women winning that office compared to men. As Tables A4 through A7 in the Supplementary File show, men and women opposition leaders do not have significantly different career paths and even once we include different measurements of the variables, such as years in a government position or as parliamentary party group leader, these results do not change. Thus, we have to reject H3, which predicted that women are held to higher standards in the selection process than men and that women opposition leaders need more experience to be considered eligible. Our results hence challenge findings from recent research on candidates running for chief executive positions at the national or regional level (e.g., Verge & Astudillo, 2019). One reason for this might be that we only measure men and women who succeeded in becoming opposition leaders; yet, with our data, we cannot make any predictions about whether contenders for this position had similar qualifications or not.

Turning to our control variables, we observe that neither age nor seat losses of a party, and neither the existence of a dual leadership structure or quotas have any significant effect on the likelihood of the opposition leader being a woman. The only control variable that has a significant effect is a variable measuring parties' stance on equality matters. In line with prominent theoretical expectations, the more equality-oriented a party is, the more likely is the opposition leader to be a woman. The results of additional models including factors that might also affect the likelihood that the opposition leader is a woman are reported in Table A5 in the Supplementary File. Controlling for contextual factors that might shape incentives of leading opposition parties (e.g., GDP growth, unemployment rates, the gender of the head of government) does not substantively alter our findings.

Overall, our two-step analysis demonstrates that favourable opportunity structures provided by higher seat shares of women in legislatures allow women to become opposition leaders. Those men and women that make it to the top are not as different as previous research led us to expect; by contrast, they have similar levels of experience in relevant leadership positions. However, with regard to ideology, opposition leaders are more likely to be women in more leftist parties. It remains to be studied if and how women's leadership performance in opposition parties differs from that of men. What we know is that, on average, the tenures of women leaders of the opposition were about 2.5 months shorter than those of their male counterparts in the countries concerned. Some women—most prominently Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel—became longstanding and powerful heads of government, while

many others had considerably less successful trajectories. In any case, it is important to note that the length of tenure as opposition leader (measured as time in office) allows for fundamentally different interpretations. Specifically, unlike a short-term premiership, a notably short stint as leader of the opposition does not necessarily signal weakness, under-performance, and/or a loss of power—it may equally well indicate just the contrary. For example, New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern advanced to the premiership in 2017 after less than three months as leader of the opposition to become the country's most popular prime minister in a century.

5. Conclusion

This study marks, to our knowledge, the largest comparative study on women opposition leaders as yet, and parliamentary opposition leaders more generally, covering 28 OECD parliamentary democracies over nearly three decades. Based on the conceptualization of opposition leader as the parliamentary party group leader of the largest non-governing party, our findings reveal that in countries with more gender-equal parliaments, the probability that a woman reaches this leadership position raises. It seems that only if a sufficient pool of qualified candidates exists and social barriers are reduced through exposure to women's political actors, women stand a reasonable chance to become opposition leaders. The debate about when, exactly, the pool of women is sufficiently large and when (institutional) practices indeed become more open to the successful ascendency of female candidates to leadership positions remains unsettled (Bratton, 2005; Childs & Krook, 2008; Dahlerup, 1988). Furthermore, in countries where women have made it to the top, leftist parties, when being the largest non-governing party in parliament, are more likely to have a woman as parliamentary party group leader than rightist parties under the same conditions. Probably, their commitment to gender equality and the respective measures in place, combined with the demand of their voters, positively affect their willingness to select a woman for this post. Interestingly, and contrary to what much of the literature on recruitment suggests (e.g., Jalalzai, 2013; Müller-Rommel & Vercesi, 2017; Verge & Astudillo, 2019), the chances that an opposition leader is a woman are not shaped by previous experience. Thus, apparently, women do not seem to be held to higher standards, or at the least not concerning the selection process for leadership positions in opposition. Overall, party ideology thus seems to be more important than personal experience for women on their possible rise to the position of opposition leader. With these findings, this article not only breaks new ground by focusing specifically on leaders of the opposition; it also contributes at least indirectly to the burgeoning literature on women presidents and prime ministers, woman cabinet ministers, as well as leading woman executives at the supranational and international lev-

els (Annesley et al., 2019; Curtin et al., 2022; Haack, 2022; Jalalzai, 2013; Krook & O'Brien, 2012; Martin & Borelli, 2016; Müller & Tömmel, 2022; Müller-Rommel & Vercesi, 2017)—simply because many, if obviously by no means all (Helms, 2020), top executive careers in politics start in opposition. That said, we have to keep in mind that our analyses only cover successful candidates, i.e., those who have made it to the top. Future research may want to consider also those candidates that presented their candidacy for the position of parliamentary party group leader but eventually failed to be elected, in order to shed light on how women fare compared to their direct competitors.

Further, that leftist parties in opposition are more likely than centre-right parties to be led by women, while many women prime ministers in Europe have come from centre-right (see Müller-Rommel & Vercesi, 2017) or right-wing parties (Beckwith, 2022), points to the complexity of political careers and power structures in many representative democracies. This begs for more research on gendered careers specifically applying a government and opposition perspective. Another key question that could and should be addressed by future research concerns the idea that men and women opposition leaders might perform—and be perceived—differently once in office. Existing literature leads us to expect that women face additional obstacles even after having gained political office (e.g., O'Brien et al., 2015). It would be fascinating, and important, to uncover patterns of longevity, electoral, and political performance of women opposition leaders compared to men. Addressing these issues in a systematic way would allow us to understand how and to what extent women can influence political outcomes in their role as opposition leaders, and whether they face additional challenges and barriers when it comes to keeping that office.

Beyond the selection and performance of opposition leaders, future research should investigate the consequences of women's access to opposition leadership for the wider cause of women's representation. More research is needed to determine whether women in these critical positions are more likely, for example, to select women as influential committee chairs or for other prestigious positions. Finally, future studies could shed light on the link between women opposition leaders and the substantive and symbolic representation of women. Indeed, women opposition leaders would appear to have the potential to serve as "critical actors" whose influence may be crucially important to women's policy representation and political empowerment, and the quality of democratic governance more generally.

References

Alexander, A. C. (2015). Big jumps in women's presence in parliaments: Are these sufficient for improving beliefs in women's ability to govern? *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, *35*, 82–97. https://doi.org/10.21423/awlj-v35.a122

Alexander, A. C., & Jalalzai, F. (2020). Symbolic empowerment and female heads of states and government: A global, multilevel analysis. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *8*(1), 24–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1441034

Annesley, C., Beckwith, K., & Franceschet, S. (2019). *Cabinets, ministers, and gender*. Oxford University Press.

Annesley, C., & Gains, F. (2010). The core executive: Gender, power and change. *Political Studies*, *58*(5), 909–929. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2010.00824.x

Bauer, N. (2020). *The qualifications gap: Why women must be better than men to win political office*. Cambridge University Press.

Beckwith, K. (2015). Before prime minister: Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, and gendered party leadership contests. *Politics & Gender*, *11*(4), 718–745. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X15000409

Beckwith, K. (2022). Becoming prime minister: Women and executive power in EU member states. In H. Müller & I. Tömmel (Eds.), *Women and leadership in the European Union* (pp. 173–193). Oxford University Press.

Bratton, K. A. (2005). Critical mass theory revisited: The behavior and success of token women in state legislatures. *Politics & Gender*, *1*(1), 97–125.

Campus, D., Switek, N., & Valbruzzi, M. (2021). *Collective leadership and divided power in West European parties*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Caul, M. (2001). Political parties and the adoption of candidate gender quotas: A cross-national analysis. *The Journal of Politics*, *63*(4), 1214–1229.

Childs, S., & Krook, M. L. (2008). Critical mass theory and women's political representation. *Political Studies*, *56*(3), 725–736. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00712.x

Claveria, S. (2014). Still a "male business"? Explaining women's presence in executive office. *West European Politics*, *37*(5), 1156–1176. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.911479

Clemens, C. (2006). From the outside in: Angela Merkel as opposition leader, 2000–2005. *German Politics & Society*, *24*(3), 41–81.

Cross, W., & Blais, A. (2012). Who selects the party leader? *Party Politics*, *18*(2), 127–150. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068810382935

Curtin, J., Kerby, M., & Dowding, K. (2022). Sex, gender, and promotion in executive office: Cabinet careers in the world of Westminster. *Governance*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12667

Dahlerup, D. (1988). From a small to a large minority: Women in Scandinavian politics. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *11*(4), 275–298.

Davis, R. H. (1997). *Women and power in parliamentary democracies: Cabinet appointments in Western Europe, 1968–1992* (Vol. 2). University of Nebraska Press.

De Giorgi, E., Dias, A., & Dolný, B. (2021). New challenger parties in opposition: Isolation or cooperation? *Parliamentary Affairs*, *74*(3), 662–682. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsab025

Dingler, S. C., Helms, L., & Müller, H. (2023). Women opposition leaders: Conceptual issues and empirical agendas. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 80–84.

Döring, H., Huber, C., & Manow, P. (2022). *ParlGov 2022 release*. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/UKILBE

Dowding, K., & Dumont, P. (2008). *The selection of ministers in Europe: Hiring and firing*. Routledge.

Escobar-Lemmon, M., & Taylor-Robinson, M. M. (2005). Women ministers in Latin American government: When, where, and why? *American Journal of Political Science*, *49*(4), 829–844. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2005.00158.x

Escobar-Lemmon, M., & Taylor-Robinson, M. M. (2009). Getting to the top: Career paths of women in latin american cabinets. *Political Research Quarterly*, *62*(4), 685–699.

Franceschet, S., & Piscopo, J. M. (2013). Sustaining gendered practices? Power, parties, and elite political networks in Argentina. *Comparative Political Studies*, *47*(1), 85–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013489379

Goddard, D. (2019a). Entering the men's domain? Gender and portfolio allocation in European governments. *European Journal of Political Research*, *58*(2), 631–655. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12305

Goddard, D. (2019b). Examining the appointment of women to ministerial positions across Europe: 1970–2015. *Party Politics*, *27*(4), 631–643. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068819878665

Haack, K. (2022). *Women's access, representation and leadership in the United Nations*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Helms, L. (2020). Heir apparent prime ministers in Westminster democracies: Promise and performance. *Government and Opposition*, *55*(2), 260–282. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2018.22

Helms, L. (2022a). Political oppositions in democratic and authoritarian regimes: A state-of-the-field(s) review.

Government and Opposition. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.25

Helms, L. (2022b). Why do parties select non-partisan ministers? The paradox of ministerial selection in Austria. *Representation*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2022.2111598

IDEA. (2022). *Gender quota database* [Data set]. https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/database

Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2022). *Women in national parliaments. World average* [Data set]. http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm

Jalalzai, F. (2008). Women rule: Shattering the executive glass ceiling. *Politics & Gender*, *4*(2), 205–231.

Jalalzai, F. (2013). *Shattered, cracked, or firmly intact? Women and the executive glass ceiling worldwide*. Oxford University Press.

Kittilson, M. C. (2011). Women, parties and platforms in post-industrial democracies. *Party Politics*, *17*(1), 66–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809361012

Klüver, H., & Sagarzazu, I. (2016). Setting the agenda or responding to voters? Political parties, voters and issue attention. *West European Politics*, *39*(2), 380–398. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1101295

Klüver, H., & Spoon, J. J. (2016). Who responds? Voters, parties and issue attention. *British Journal of Political Science*, *46*(3), 633–654. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123414000313

Kroeber, C., & Hüffelmann, J. (2021). It's a long way to the top: Women's ministerial career paths. *Politics & Gender*, *18*(3). https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X21000118

Krook, M. L. (2009). Beyond supply and demand: A feminist-institutionalist theory of candidate selection. *Political Research Quarterly*, *63*(4), 707–720. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912909336275

Krook, M. L., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2012). All the president's men? The appointment of female cabinet ministers worldwide. *Journal of Politics*, *74*(3), 840–855. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381612000382

Martin, J. M., & Borelli, M. (2016). *The gendered executive*. Temple University Press.

Moffitt, B. (2022). How do mainstream parties "become" mainstream, and pariah parties "become" pariahs? *Government and Opposition*, 57(3), 384–403. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.5

Müller, H., & Tömmel, I. (2022). *Women and leadership in the European Union*. Oxford University Press.

Müller-Rommel, F., & Vercesi, M. (2017). Prime ministerial careers in the European Union: Does gender make a difference? *European Politics and Society*, *18*(2), 245–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2016.1225655

Norris, P., & Lovenduski, J. (1995). *Political recruitment: Gender, race and class in the British parliament*. Cambridge University Press.

O'Brien, D. Z. (2015). Rising to the top: Gender, political performance, and party leadership in parliamentary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, *59*(4), 1022–1039. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12173

O'Brien, D. Z., Mendez, M., Peterson, J. C., & Shin, J. (2015). Letting down the ladder or shutting the door: Female prime ministers, party leaders, and cabinet ministers. *Politics & Gender*, *11*(4), 689–717. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X15000410

O'Brien, D. Z., & Piscopo, J. M. (2019). The impact of women in parliament. In S. Franceschet, M. Krook, & N. Tan (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of women's political rights* (pp. 53–72). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59074-9_4

Paxton, P., & Kunovich, S. (2003). Women's political representation: The importance of ideology. *Social Forces*, *82*(1), 87–113.

Reynolds, A. (1999). Women in the legislatures and executives of the world: Knocking at the highest glass ceiling. *World Politics*, *51*(4), 547–572.

Verge, T., & Astudillo, J. (2019). The gender politics of executive candidate selection and reselection. *European Journal of Political Research*, *58*(2), 720–740. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12312

Volkens, A., Burst, T., Krause, W., Lehmann, P., Matthieß, T., Merz, N., & Zehnter, L. (2021). *Manifesto Project dataset (version 2021a)* [Data set]. Manifesto Project. https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/datasets/MPDS2021a

Wiliarty, S. E. (2008). Angela Merkel's path to power: The role of internal party dynamics and leadership. *German Politics*, *17*(1), 81–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644000701855168

World Bank. (2022a). *Labor force participation rate* [Data set]. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS

World Bank. (2022b). *GDP growth (annual)* [Data set]. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG

About the Authors

Sarah C. Dingler is an assistant professor of empirical gender research at the University of Innsbruck. Her main areas of research include political institutions and their effect on women's representation and the role of women as political actors in legislatures and the executive. Her work has been published among others in the *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, *Political Research Quarterly, Government and Opposition* as well as *Politics and Gender*.

Ludger Helms is professor of political science and chair of comparative politics at the University of Innsbruck. His research focuses on comparative political institutions, executive politics, political oppositions, and elites. He is the author of some 150 scholarly publications in those fields.

Article

Gender and Strategic Opposition Behavior: Patterns of Parliamentary Oversight in Belgium

Benjamin de Vet * and Robin Devroe

Department of Political Science, Ghent University, Belgium

* Corresponding author (benjamin.devet@ugent.be)

Abstract
Studies on strategic parliamentary opposition often focus on broader behavioral patterns or party-level variation. This article analyzes differences at the individual level, more notably between male and female opposition members of parliament. Using rational-choice perspectives of opposition activity and theories of gendered political behavior, we hypothesize that female opposition members focus less on ideological conflicts (with or between coalition parties) and more on their party's core issues. Furthermore, we expect them to more frequently target female ministers, in part because of the nature of their respective portfolios. Our analysis of all parliamentary questions tabled by opposition members in the Belgian Federal Parliament between 2007 and 2019 (N = 48,735) suggests that female members of parliament seem more likely to focus on issues that are salient to their party and less on conflictual matters between coalition partners. These results provide new empirical insights into strategic opposition behavior and gendered differences in the legislature.

Keywords
Belgium; gender; opposition; parliamentary behavior; parliamentary questions

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Women Opposition Leaders: Pathways, Patterns, and Performance" edited by Sarah C. Dingler (University of Innsbruck), Ludger Helms (University of Innsbruck), and Henriette Müller (New York University Abu Dhabi).

1. Introduction

The right to publicly criticize and challenge the government, its actions, and policies is a fundament of democracy (Dahl, 1966). In the legislative arena, the opposition is indispensable. Its duty is to scrutinize executive agents to ensure that they meet their commitments to the public, that the country's policy needs are adequately addressed, and that voters are presented with a viable alternative and a meaningful choice during elections (Andeweg, 2013; Helms, 2008; Kreppel, 2014).

Although political opposition has long been understudied, there has been a marked increase in the number of studies on the topic in recent years (Helms, 2022). Empirical research into opposition behavior in the legislature often focuses on general patterns (e.g., conflictual versus cooperative strategies) or party-level variation, for instance between populist and mainstream parties

(Louwerse & Otjes, 2019) or between parties that are permanently in opposition and those for whom the opposition status is anticipated to be temporary (De Giorgi & Ilonszki, 2018; Tuttnauer, 2018). What remains underexposed so far are individual-level differences. Building on literature that highlights gendered differences in psychological traits, social norms, and political behavior (e.g., Eagly, 1987; Taylor-Robinson, 2017), this article examines the influence of gender on the opposition behavior of members of parliament (MPs). It focuses on male and female opposition MPs' use of parliamentary questions (PQs), as one of the most prominent individual tools through which opposition members interact with members of the political executive (Green-Pedersen, 2010; Russo & Wiberg, 2010).

Several studies show how MPs—including those of the opposition—use PQs strategically, for instance by signalling policy disagreement with a minister's policies, by

trying to reveal disunity and conflicts among coalition partners, or by raising attention to one's own policy priorities (Otjes & Louwerse, 2018; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011; Whitaker & Martin, 2021). However, simultaneously, substantial literature suggests that there are gendered legislative styles: Female politicians often tend to be more collaborative and consensus-seeking than their male counterparts, whereas men are more likely to have individualistic, competitive, and conflictual approaches (Barnes, 2016; Eagly, 1987; Krauss & Kroeber, 2021; Volden et al., 2013). This article argues that such nonconfrontational political styles might also come forward in female MPs' opposition behavior, and more specifically in their use of PQs. Building on insights from social psychology and previous work on gendered political behavior, we hypothesize that female opposition members will focus less on ideological conflicts (both with and between coalition parties) and more on the issues that are salient to their own party. Because MPs' issue specialization (Bäck & Debus, 2019; de Vet & Devroe, 2022) and ministers' portfolio allocations (Krook & O'Brien, 2012) often remain gendered, but also because female ministers might be more responsive to the speeches of female MPs (Blumenau, 2021), we additionally expect female MPs to more frequently target female ministers.

To test our hypotheses, we analyze data on all PQs tabled by opposition members in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives between 2007 and 2019 (N = 48,735). Governmental politics in Belgium is "extremely collective" due to its severely fragmented character and the high need for policy coordination (De Winter & Dumont, 2021). This also means that opposition strategies tend to be collective and that it is generally hard to discern a "leader of the opposition," like they are found in Westminster democracies (Dingler et al., 2023). Party group leaders—who are less powerful than extra-parliamentary party leaders in Belgium—do act as party groups' main spokesperson during important debates (e.g., on the government budget) but policy experts (i.e., MPs specializing in specific policy domains and committees) play an important role in the day-to-day scrutiny of cabinet ministers (de Vet, 2019). Furthermore, party group leadership remains a position that is still disproportionally taken up by male officeholders. Between 1995 and 2019, only 21.9% of the chambers' party group leaders were female, while women made up 30.6% of the parliament (de Vet, 2019, p. 121). For these reasons, this article examines the behavior of all women opposition members, rather than that of a single or a handful of female group leaders. The focus is thus on parliament-based opposition, by the collectivity of all female elected representatives.

We find some suggestive evidence that female MPs tend to focus more on the core issues of their party and less on intra-coalition disagreement compared to their male colleagues. We, however, do not find that female MPs focus less on ideological conflict with the responsible minister, nor that they target female ministers more

intensively. Although more research into such patterns in different institutional settings is needed, these findings have important implications for our understanding of individual-level differences in opposition behavior and the gendered nature of the parliamentary activity.

2. Theory and Hypotheses

Like all parties, opposition parties can be expected to strategically use their resources and parliamentary tools, to obtain their specific policy, vote, or office goals (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Some opposition parties, like those that wish to leave the opposition benches someday, might be less confrontational in terms of their voting behavior and oversight activity, to show their potential as a responsible and cooperative coalition partner. Others, that do not desire government participation, might be tempted to adopt more conflictual behavioral strategies, by focusing more on extensive and critical scrutiny and less on legislative cooperation, to increase their visibility to the electorate and publicly distance themselves from governmental policies (Andeweg, 2013; De Giorgi & Ilonszki, 2018; Louwerse & Otjes, 2019; Mair, 2014).

However, even when only looking specifically at scrutiny activities in the legislature, opposition parties may differ with regard to how oversight instruments like PQs are strategically used. Opposition parties might use PQs to criticize ministers of parties with strongly diverging ideological views to signal strong disagreement and discontent with that ministers' policies (Otjes & Louwerse, 2018). Or they might use PQs following a "divide and conquer" strategy aimed at exposing intra-coalition conflicts by questioning issues that divide majority parties to maximize tensions and cause coalition instability (Whitaker & Martin, 2021). Alternatively, some opposition parties might be less interested in exposing ideological conflicts with and between coalition parties, and subsequently their PQs may follow less of a confrontational logic and may be used more as a means to direct the executive's attention to issues that they themselves find important (Green-Pedersen, 2010; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011).

Although *collective* party strategies are important, especially in light of the strong influence of parties on MPs' activity, a lot of parliamentary tools—including PQs—may be deployed by the *individual* MP, whose work may also be guided by personal goals and preferences (Strøm, 1997). This article argues that MPs' gender might be an important but often overlooked individual-level characteristic that affects opposition behavior. Despite a growing numeric representation of women in legislatures, parliamentary procedures still often have gendered effects (de Vet & Devroe, 2022; Lowndes, 2020) and gender is known to influence various dimensions of parliamentary behavior (see Taylor-Robinson, 2017).

First of all, we expect that female and male opposition MPs may differ in the extent to which they adhere to more or less conflictual strategies. Previous research

highlights that women are more likely to display collaborative, compromise-oriented, and consensual behavior whereas men are more individualistic, aggressive, and competitive (Barnes, 2016; Eagly, 1987; Krauss & Kroeber, 2021; Volden et al., 2013). Both experimental work and qualitative research focusing on male and female political aspirants, candidates, and MPs show that women are generally more conflict-avoidant and risk-averse than men (Bauer & Darkwah, 2020; Kanthak & Woon, 2015; Preece & Stoddard, 2015). In part, such gender differences can be explained based on social role theories (Eagly & Karau, 2002) arguing that individuals adapt to societal expectations about appropriate behavior for men and women, which are shaped by the different roles they occupy in personal and family life, but also in a professional context (Eagly, 2007).

Translated to the political sphere, Krauss and Kroeber (2021) find support for the proposition that women adopt more consensual political styles, as they find that cabinets with a higher proportion of female ministers face lower risks of early cabinet termination due to internal conflicts. Moreover, research on electoral campaigns shows that women are less likely to resort to negative campaigning strategies and personal attacks than male candidates (Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2017; however, see Walter, 2013). In the specific context of legislatures, female rhetorical styles are considered to be less aggressive, more inclusive, and more cooperative than male speech patterns (Karpowitz et al., 2012). Volden et al. (2013), furthermore, find that minority-party men often choose to obstruct policymaking and help ensure policy gridlock in congress, while minority-party women are more driven to bring about social change and likewise are more willing to make compromises to facilitate such change. When asked about gendered legislative styles, Childs (2000, p. 68) finds that women legislators point to alternate ways of operating compared to a dominant male approach, focusing less on a government-opposition confrontational logic and more on "cooperation, teamwork, inclusiveness, consultation, and a willingness to listen." Likewise, Barnes (2016) highlights that female representatives, across a variety of political settings, exhibit a higher likelihood of collaboration to maximize their policy impact and to circumvent a marginalized status within political institutions. Lastly, using longitudinal data on Belgium, Croatia, and the UK, Poljak (2022) finds that women are less likely to resort to attacks (towards individual ministers, MPs, parties, the government, etc.) or to use incivility in their parliamentary speeches compared to male MPs.

Taken together, we expect to see a translation of gendered political styles in the degree and extent to which opposition members use confrontational strategies. We expect that female opposition members focus less on ideological conflicts, both with and between coalition parties (Otjes & Louwerse, 2018; Whitaker & Martin, 2021).

H1: Female opposition MPs target ideologically distant ministers to a lesser extent compared to male opposition MPs.

H2: Female opposition MPs ask fewer PQs when intra-coalition disagreement is larger compared to male opposition MPs.

At the same time, it makes sense for opposition parties to not only focus on policy conflicts but also to draw attention to their policy priorities and topics on which they have a strong reputation (Petrocik, 1996). Opposition MPs, in other words, are expected to ask more PQs related to policy areas of higher salience to their own party (Green-Pedersen, 2010; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011). We expect that female members of the opposition will focus less on policy conflicts with and within the governing coalition due to being more conflict-avoidant and consensus-oriented (Kanthak & Woon, 2015), but alternatively, we do expect them to focus more on their own party's core issues and strengths. This expectation is, furthermore, supported by literature stressing that women tend to show more loyalty to the party than men (Cowley & Childs, 2003; Thames & Rybalko, 2011). Female MPs are less likely to "rebel" (Cowley & Childs, 2003) which might also imply that women are more inclined to focus their work on those issues that are of paramount importance to the party.

H3: Female opposition MPs table more PQs on issues that their own party finds important compared to male opposition MPs.

Lastly, we expect that MPs' gender will not only influence their strategies on which issues to focus on but also on whom to target their PQs. This can be linked to both studies on (the effects of) female leadership in legislative settings (Blumenau, 2021) and to the nature of portfolio allocations (Krook & O'Brien, 2012) and female MPs' issue specialization. For the former, studies on the appointment of female cabinet members in the UK highlight that female ministers behave in a systematically different manner towards female MPs than male ministers by being more responsive to female MPs' speeches, thereby promoting a debating culture that is more conducive to the participation of other female MPs. For the latter, Bäck and Debus (2019) find, in their comparative study covering seven European legislatures, that female MPs deliver significantly fewer speeches and especially when debates cover topics that can be described as "masculine," even though these effects vary considerably across countries. In Belgium, de Vet and Devroe (2022) conclude that female and male MPs emphasize different policy agendas and that this is particularly visible during plenary sessions.

These differences in issue specialization are not only rooted in the marginalization of women in politics, structural constraints, or the preferences of women for certain policy areas (Krook & O'Brien, 2012, p. 842), but

they are generally also explained by theories of political gender stereotypes and gender role incongruity (Bäck & Debus, 2019; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Female MPs would deliver fewer speeches focusing on policy areas that can be characterized as "hard" (e.g., Finance, Defense, Foreign Affairs) and that reflect men's stereotypical strengths (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2009; Krook & O'Brien, 2012; Lawless, 2004). Although gendered patterns in the ministerial selection are changing, a similarly continued underrepresentation can also be uncovered in the distribution of minister portfolios (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2005; Goddard, 2019; Krook & O'Brien, 2012), also in the specific context of Belgium (Dumont et al., 2008). Even though research shows how gender role incongruent behavior might negatively affect female MPs' career prospects (e.g., in terms of ministerial appointments; Baumann et al., 2019) which could lead to frustrations and more critical behavior towards male office-holders in hard domains, we hypothesize that female opposition MPs more often target female ministers compared to male MPs, due to generally persistent parallel patterns in parliamentary issue specialization and ministerial portfolio allocation, and female ministers being more responsive to the speeches of female MPs.

H4: Female opposition MPs target female ministers more often compared to male opposition MPs.

3. Data and Method

These hypotheses are tested using data on MPs' questioning behavior in the Belgian Federal Chamber of Representatives. Belgium is a typical case of a party-centered parliamentary system with fragmented multiparty coalitions and disciplined majority parties (De Winter & Dumont, 2021). Like elsewhere, opposition members in the Belgian lower house have multiple oversight tools at their disposal to control the cabinet, signal concern, and convey alternative policy views (de Vet & Devroe, 2022; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011; Wauters et al., 2021). Together with the fact that Belgium has a comparatively high number of female elected officials, ranging between 35% and 40% in the research period under study (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019), this provides us with a good case to test our hypotheses.

Our dataset encompasses detailed information (e.g., author, title, type, date, targeted minister, meeting, etc.) on all PQs tabled during the 2007–2010, 2010–2014, and 2014–2019 legislative terms. The focus is on opposition behavior, so PQs that were posed by majority MPs or that were tabled during periods of "current affairs" during which a resigning caretaker cabinet was active are omitted from the analyses. Because we rely on secondary data sources to determine ideological positions (Chapel Hill Expert Survey; Bakker et al., 2020) and issue saliency (MARPOR data; Volkens et al., 2019), we additionally exclude independent MPs and MPs from two smaller parties (Parti Populaire and Front National) from the analysis. This leaves us with data on 194 MPs (74 women and 120 men) of 21 opposition party groups during three consecutive coalition cabinets (see Table 1).

The analyses primarily focus on opposition members' use of *oral* PQs during *plenary sessions* (N = 2,140). Unlike *written PQs* (N = 27,559), which are much more prone to the effects of having diligent staff members, oral

Table 1. Opposition parties in the sample.

Government	Opposition parties	
	Name	Party family
Leterme I–II/Van Rompuy (2008–2010) *Christian democrats, liberals, and (francophone) social democrats*	Ecolo/Groen	Greens
	sp.a	Social democrats
	N-VA	Regionalists
	LDD	Libertarian
	Vlaams Belang	Radical right
Di Rupo I (2011–2014) *Christian democrats, liberals, and social democrats*	Ecolo/Groen	Greens
	N-VA	Regionalists
	FDF	Regionalists
	LDD	Libertarian
	Vlaams Belang	Radical right
Michel I (2014–2018) *Liberals, Flemish regionalists, and (Flemish) Christian democrats*	Ecolo/Groen	Greens
	CdH	Christian democrats
	PS/sp.a	Social democrats
	FDF	Regionalists
	PTB	Radical left
	Vlaams Belang	Radical right
	Vuye & Wouters	Regionalists

PQs require a clear personal engagement: Legislators need to be physically present to read out the question and respond to the minister's oral answer. In addition, strategic opposition considerations are expected to be most pronounced in PQs posed during weekly plenary "Question Time," due to their more mediatized character and due to the scarcity of plenary speaking time (Rasch, 2011). In the Supplementary File, however, we also report analyses of MPs' use of *oral PQs during committees* (N = 19,036) since these PQs may be more representative of MPs' day-to-day (specialized) work in parliament.

To analyze how many PQs MPs direct to which minister and why, the data are restructured into a dyadic dataset that contains each possible combination of MP-to-ministerial department as the unit of analysis (see Proksch & Slapin, 2011). Accordingly, this brings the number of observations to 4,268 (194 MPs × 22 ministerial departments). The dependent variable measures how many PQs each MP asked a specific ministerial department. Because this count variable is over-dispersed (see Figure 1), we fit negative binomial regression models. Zero-inflated models that additionally correct for the high number of zero values in the dataset (e.g., due to MPs specializing in specific policy domains) provide highly similar results and are reported in the Supplementary File (Table A3).

As for the independent variables, a measure of *ideological distance* (H1) is included using Chapel Hill Expert Survey data (Bakker et al., 2020). Based on these expert estimates of party positions, the absolute difference was calculated between the author's and the targeted minister's party on the policy dimension that closest corresponds to the respective ministerial portfolio

(for the coding of ministerial portfolios, see Table A2 in the Supplementary File). Similarly, the *ideological disagreement between coalition partners* (H2) is computed by calculating the absolute difference between the two coalition parties with the highest and the lowest Chapel Hill Expert Survey value on that policy dimension. The *issue saliency* (H3) an opposition MP's party attaches to a ministerial department is coded using MARPOR data (Volkens et al., 2019). This measure indicates to what degree parties emphasize specific policy areas in their election manifestos at a given point in time. Table A2 in the Supplementary File provides more detailed information about the coding of ministerial departments. A fourth independent variable is a dummy that indicates whether a *female minister* (H4) headed the ministerial department in that term. Interaction effects between these variables and legislators' gender (1 = *female MP*) should reveal whether male and female politicians behave differently as strategic members of the opposition.

The models include several control variables. At the individual level, a dummy variable indicates whether the MP was a permanent member of the standing committee that monitors the ministerial department, to account for MPs' policy specialization. We also coded the time MPs served during that term (in years), their tenure (the number of years since the MPs first entered a regional or federal parliament), and whether (s)he holds a position as a (parliamentary) party leader. A measure for MPs' electoral vulnerability, which ranges from 0 (*safe seat*) to 1 (*insecure seat*), is computed by dividing the order in which an MP got elected on a district party list by the total number of seats his/her party won in that district in the previous election (André et al., 2015). The logic behind
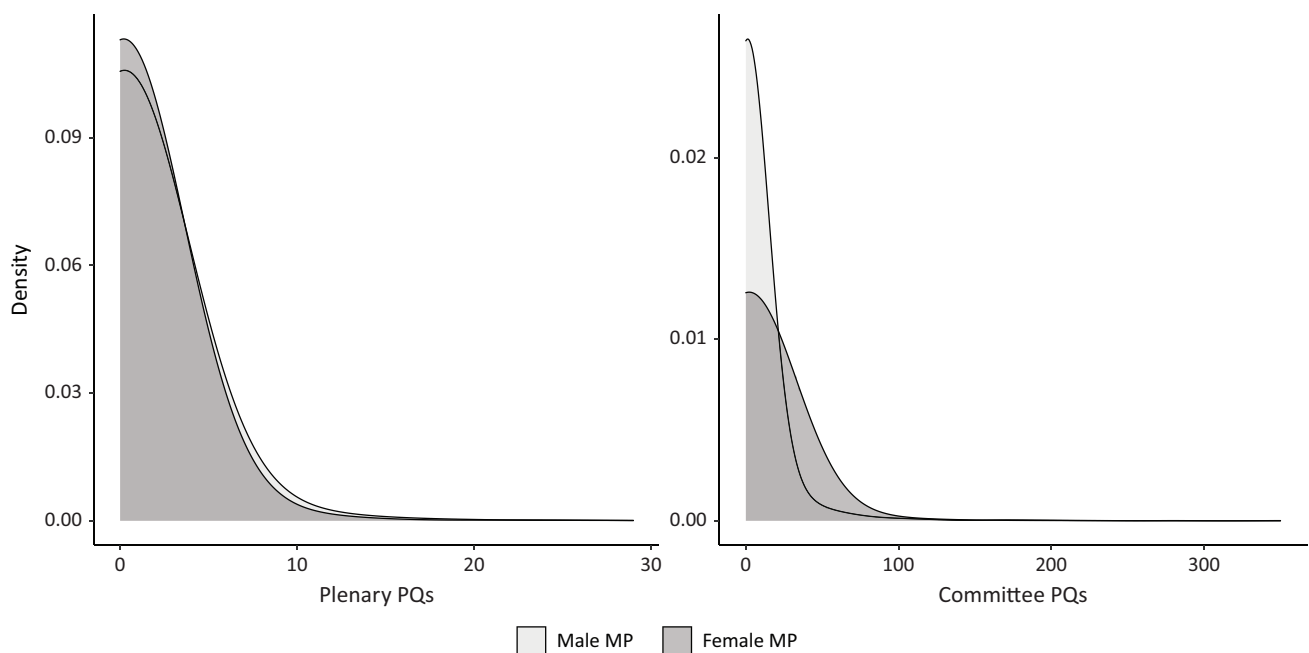

Figure 1. Distribution plots.

these controls is that inexperienced, electorally vulnerable backbenchers may more actively use low-cost instruments such as PQs compared to MPs with more experience, electoral security, or leadership functions who may use tools more selectively (Bailer & Ohmura, 2018).

At the party level, we control for party groups' seat size (in %), since each recognized party group in the Belgian Chamber is entitled to ask two oral PQs per plenary session, no matter their size. This means that MPs of smaller party groups have a higher mathematical chance of being able to ask plenary PQs (see also de Vet & Devroe, 2022).

At the level of the ministerial department, we control whether a ministerial department deals with a "hard," "soft," or "neutral" policy domain (Krook & O'Brien, 2012) since we know that women are often underrepresented during debates that deal with the former (Bäck & Debus, 2019; de Vet & Devroe, 2022). To account for the fact that some ministries are more salient than others and likewise attract more PQs (Höhmann & Sieberer, 2020), we control for the total share of PQs addressed to a particular ministry (%) during a given term.

Lastly, party group and legislative term dummies are included to further take any unaccounted variation between parties or between legislative periods into consideration. Table A1 in the Supplementary File provides the descriptive statistics. All models are estimated using robust standard errors, clustered at the level of the party group per legislative term.

4. Results

Which strategic considerations do MPs make when they direct PQs to the executive and which differences between male and female opposition members can one observe? Table 2 shows the results of the multivariate regression analyses that model the amount of oral plenary PQs that MPs direct to a particular ministerial department. The reported coefficients are incidence rate ratios: Scores above 1 indicate a positive effect and scores below 1 a negative effect.

Model 1 shows the general effects of our independent variables of interest, without the inclusion of interaction terms. First of all, it confirms earlier findings that women MPs do not ask as many PQs as men do. In part, this underrepresentation may be caused by party groups who coordinate access to the plenary floor: Party groups can only ask two PQs per plenary session which means that prior coordination is imperative. Earlier research has revealed how particularly women seem the victim of this more restricted access to the plenary floor as men MPs ask the majority of PQs during (highly mediatized and visible) plenary sessions (but for instance not during committee meetings; de Vet & Devroe, 2022). Second, of the strategic considerations that may guide opposition parties' questioning behavior, only the ministerial department's saliency to the questioner's party reaches statistical significance ($p = 0.058$). MPs do question the executive more intensively on issues that their party emphasizes in its electoral program (see also Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011). Although we also observe a positive coefficient for ideological disagreement among coalition partners this fails to reach statistical significance in the baseline model. Similarly, we find no effect for the ideological distance between the questioner's and the minister's party in that minister's policy domain. Lastly, we also do not find indications that female or male ministers are targeted more intensively.

The controls all go in the anticipated directions; particularly, the committee membership of MPs stands out as an important predictor of how many PQs they will direct to which minister. This indicates the importance of MPs' issue specialization. Legislators who served the entire term logically also ask more PQs and MPs that belong to smaller parties typically more often take the plenary floor. The rather large positive effect we find for the (general) share of PQs addressed to that ministry during the term illustrates the need to control for variation in ministries' general political importance and saliency.

More central to our research question are the interaction terms with MPs' gender included in Models 2–5 (Table 2). Since these interactions terms and their substantial effects are somewhat difficult to interpret based on regression coefficients alone, we also refer to Figure 2 which plots the effects of policy distance (Figure 2A), coalition disagreement (Figure 2B), issue saliency (Figure 2C), and ministers' gender (Figure 2D) on the predicted number of plenary PQs tabled by male and female MPs. The included interaction terms seem to provide some support for our hypotheses.

First of all, Model 3 shows a moderately negative and significant ($p = 0.08$) interaction effect between MPs' gender and the degree of ideological disagreement between coalition partners. Upon closer inspection, Figure 2B shows that male MPs seem to ask more PQs when intracoalition disagreement is larger, while female MPs seem to ask fewer PQs when this is the case. Although only significant at the $p < 0.1$ level, this provides some suggestive evidence in favor of H2: Female opposition MPs seem to refrain more from conflict between coalition partners than male opposition members. The significant ($p = 0.08$) and positive interaction effect between MPs' gender and issue saliency similarly provides some support for H3. Although the issue saliency of a ministerial department also drives male opposition MPs' questioning behavior, particularly women seem to address more PQs to ministers on topics that their own party finds important (see Figure 2C). Whereas female opposition MPs seem less inclined to target ideologically distant ministers, especially compared to men who appear more inclined to do so (see Figure 2A), the interaction term fails to reach statistical significance (Model 4), forcing us to reject H1. Also, H4 is rejected: Although female opposition MPs (somewhat) less often seem to target male ministers compared to male opposition MPs, this effect is not statistically significant.

Table 2. Negative binomial regression models explaining the number of oral plenary PQs posed by MPs per ministerial department.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Independent variables					
Female MP	0.84 (0.08)*	0.93 (0.15)	1.21 (0.26)	0.68 (0.11)**	0.77 (0.08)**
Policy distance	1.00 (0.03)	1.00 (0.03)			
Coalition disagreement	1.03 (0.07)		1.06 (0.08)		
Issue salience	1.01 (0.01)*			1.00 (0.01)	
Female minister	0.97 (0.12)				0.90 (0.13)
Female MP * Policy distance		0.97 (0.04)			
Female MP * Coalition disagreement			0.90 (0.05)*		
Female MP * Issue saliency				1.02 (0.01)*	
Female MP * Female minister					1.26 (0.20)
Control variables					
Mandate duration	1.90 (0.13)***	1.90 (0.14)***	1.90 (0.13)***	1.89 (0.13)***	1.89 (0.14)***
Parliamentary tenure	0.99 (0.01)	0.99 (0.01)	0.99 (0.01)	0.99 (0.01)	0.99 (0.01)
Party (group) leader	1.10 (0.18)	1.11 (0.18)	1.08 (0.17)	1.10 (0.18)	1.10 (0.18)
Electoral insecurity	0.74 (0.19)	0.75 (0.19)	0.76 (0.19)	0.75 (0.20)	0.75 (0.19)
Committee member	9.64 (1.72)***	9.66 (1.73)***	9.61 (1.68)***	9.55 (1.74)***	9.61 (1.71)***
Party group size	0.88 (0.01)***	0.88 (0.01)***	0.88 (0.01)***	0.88 (0.01)***	0.88 (0.01)***
Share of PQs addressed to ministry	1.30 (0.02)***	1.31 (0.02)***	1.31 (0.02)***	1.29 (0.02)***	1.31 (0.02)***
Policy domain (ref = *neutral*)					
Hard	1.03 (0.16)	1.03 (0.18)	1.04 (0.18)	1.02 (0.18)	1.02 (0.19)
Soft	1.01 (0.20)	1.06 (0.21)	1.08 (0.21)	0.98 (0.20)	1.06 (0.24)
Party group fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Legislative term fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,268	4,268	4,268	4,268	4,268
Log likelihood	−2,737.58	−2,739.37	−2,738.43	−2,736.29	−2,738.67
Akaike Information Criterion	5,527.16	5,526.73	5,524.87	5,520.58	5,525.33

Notes: Coefficients are incidence rate ratios (cluster-robust standard errors between parenthesis); *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.
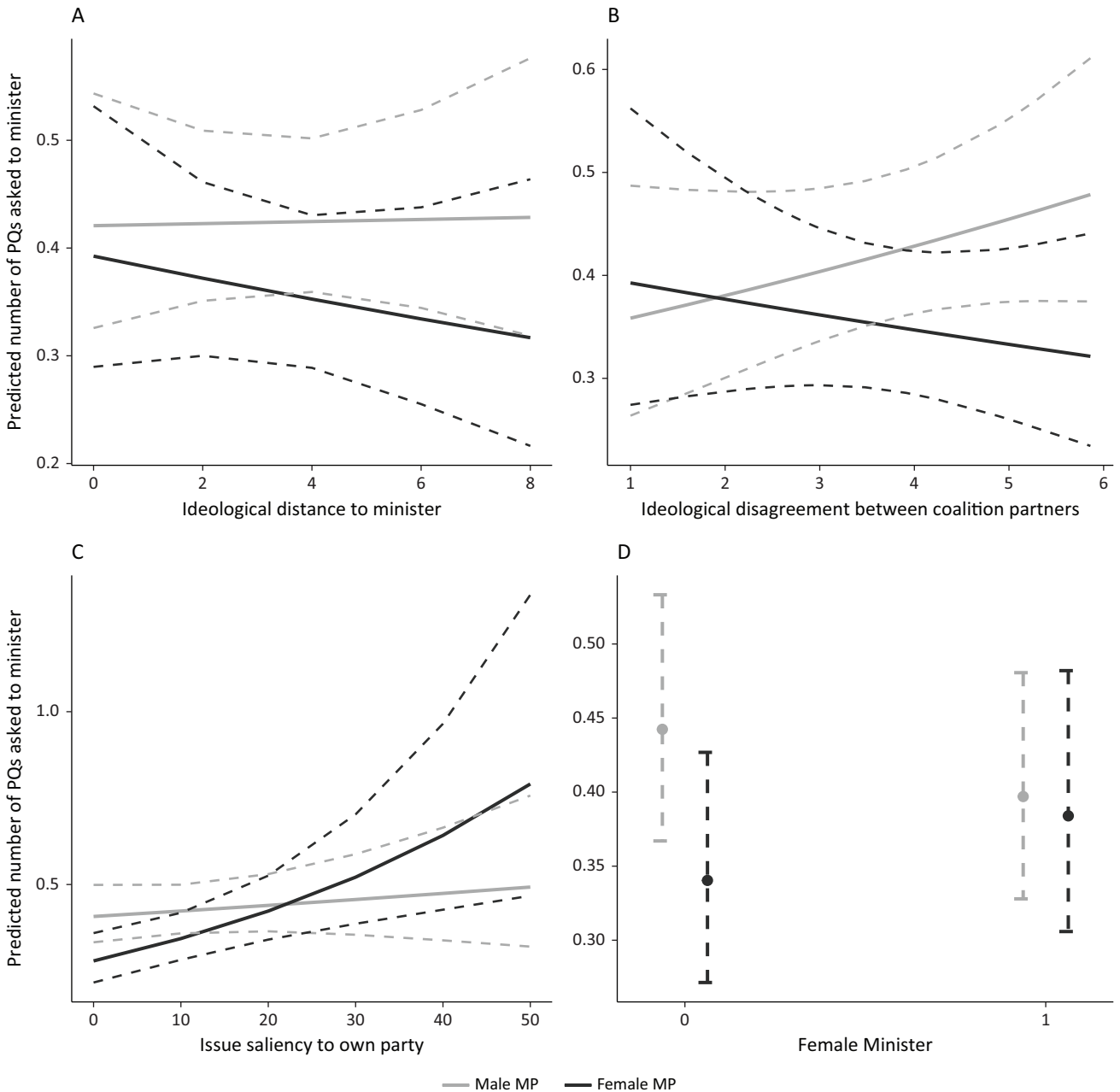
Figure 2. Effects of (A) policy distance, (B) coalition disagreement, (C) issue saliency, and (D) ministers' gender on the predicted number of plenary PQs tabled by male and female MPs. Notes: Marginal effects computed based on Models 2–5 respectively; all covariates held constant at their mean; 90% confidence intervals.

Note in Figure 2 that, in general, the predicted number of PQs posed by male and female opposition MPs is quite low, which is mostly due to the fact that MPs specialize in one or more policy domains while asking zero PQs to ministers responsible for other policy domains. Zero-inflated, negative binomial models that correct for the high number of zero values, however, indicate the robustness of our findings (Table A3 in the Supplementary File). Note also that strategic considerations and gender have less influence on PQs during committees when compared to plenary PQs (Table A3 in the Supplementary File). There, we only find a significant

(positive) effect for issue saliency. Lastly, the number of additional models was estimated in which we included three-way interaction terms to further explore whether female MPs' opposition behavior changes when their party group is headed by a female instead of a male group leader. We find limited evidence for this, but this could be explored in more detail in future studies.

5. Conclusions

This study contributes to our knowledge of the behavioral strategies of opposition actors in representative

democracies. Recent research points toward an increasingly active and conflictual parliamentary opposition, as far as its oversight activity and voting behavior are concerned (De Giorgi & Ilonszki, 2018). Previous work has emphasized the relevance of party-level characteristics or the degree to which opposition parties adopt confrontational or consensual behavioral strategies (De Giorgi & Ilonszki, 2018; Louwerse & Otjes, 2019). By contrast, our article stresses the importance of individual-level variables, such as MPs' gender, as explanations for opposition behavior.

We found some suggestive evidence that female opposition MPs are somewhat less likely to expose and emphasize ideological conflicts between coalition partners, as opposed to male legislators who are more active in domains where the ideological distance between coalition partners is larger and the potential for cabinet conflict increases. Female members of the opposition, by contrast, seem more inclined than male colleagues to emphasize the core issues of their own party in their PQs directed towards executive agents.

These findings seem to provide some support for theoretical insights from social psychology stating that women are often associated with personal characteristics like being consensual, helpful, and compassionate while being more forceful, independent, and confrontational are characteristics often associated with men (Eagly, 1987). At least equally important as being true psychological traits, however, is the fact that these perceived characteristics can become social norms that are translated into (voter) expectations regarding how men and women should act as politicians (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). In turn, this could make contra-stereotypical behavior unlikely and potentially even (electorally) costly. Even though opposition actors probably have a lot of opportunities to expose cabinet conflicts in Belgium, due to the country's high party system fragmentation, instability, and complex coalition bargaining processes, this should not explain micro-level behavioral differences between male and female opposition members. This makes it rather likely that similar patterns can be identified in different settings too.

Beyond testing our theoretical expectations on data of more female opposition members in other institutional settings, future studies could examine the impact of gender on other forms of opposition behavior in parliament (e.g., voting behavior, co-sponsorships) even though MPs often tend to enjoy less individual autonomy here compared to PQs (Martin & Rozenberg, 2014). Moreover, studies could also examine the influence of female party (group) leaders on how (confrontational or consensual) party groups wage opposition in contemporary parliaments. In any case, this article provides some additional evidence that parliamentary activity can be gendered. Our study, focused specifically on strategic opposition behavior, shows how female opposition members might potentially shift the nature of parliamentary opposition to a less confrontational one. This calls for more studies that examine the impact of (more) individual-level factors since it can contribute to a better understanding of legislative-executive relations.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

References

Andeweg, R. B. (2013). Parties in parliament: The blurring of opposition. In W. Müller & H. M. Narud (Eds.), *Party governance and party democracy* (pp. 99–114). Springer.

André, A., Depauw, S., & Martin, S. (2015). Electoral systems and legislators' constituency effort: The mediating effect of electoral vulnerability. *Comparative Political Studies*, *48*(4), 464–496.

Bäck, H., & Debus, M. (2019). When do women speak? A comparative analysis of the role of gender in legislative debates. *Political Studies*, *67*(3), 576–596.

Bailer, S., & Ohmura, T. (2018). Exploring, maintaining, and disengaging—The three phases of a legislator's life. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *43*(3), 493–520.

Bakker, R., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S., Marks, G., Polk, J., Rovny, J., Steenbergen, M., & Vachudova, M. (2020). *Chapel Hill Expert Survey*. www.chesdata.eu

Barnes, T. (2016). *Gendering legislative behavior*. Cambridge University Press.

Bauer, G., & Darkwah, A. K. (2020). We would rather be leaders than parliamentarians: Women and political office in Ghana. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *3*(1), 101–119.

Baumann, M., Bäck, H., & Davidsson, J. B. (2019). Double standards: The role of gender and intraparty politics in Swedish cabinet appointments. *Politics & Gender*, *15*(4), 882–911.

Blumenau, J. (2021). The effects of female leadership on women's voice in political debate. *British Journal of Political Science*, *51*(2), 750–771.

Childs, S. (2000). The new labour women MPs in the 1997

British parliament: Issues of recruitment and representation. *Women's History Review*, *9*(1), 55–73.

Cowley, P., & Childs, S. (2003). Too spineless to rebel? New Labour's women MPs. *British Journal of Political Science*, *33*(3), 345–365.

Dahl, R. A. (1966). *Political oppositions in Western democracies*. Yale University Press.

De Giorgi, E., & Ilonszki, G. (2018). *Opposition parties in European legislatures: Conflict or consensus?* Routledge.

de Vet, B. (2019). *Between party and parliament: The roles of parliamentary party group leaders in partitocratic Belgium* [Doctoral dissertation, Ghent University]. Ghent University Academic Bibliography. https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8637834

de Vet, B., & Devroe, R. (2022). Party control, intra-party competition, and the substantive focus of women's parliamentary questions: Evidence from Belgium. *Politics & Gender*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X21000490

De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2021). Belgium: From highly constrained and complex bargaining settings to paralysis? In T. Bergmann, H. Bäck, & J. Hellström (Eds.), *Coalition governance in Western Europe* (pp. 81–123). Oxford University Press.

Dingler, S. C. , Helms, L., & Müller, H. (2023). Women opposition leaders: Conceptual issues and empirical agendas. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 80–84.

Dumont, P., Fiers, S., & Dandoy, R. (2008). Belgium: Ups and downs of ministerial careers in a partitocratic federal state. In K. Dowding & P. Dumont (Eds.), *The selection of ministers in Europe: Hiring and firing* (pp. 125–146). Routledge.

Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Eagly, A. H. (2007). Female leadership advantage and disadvantage: Resolving the contradictions. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *31*(1), 1–12.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, *109*(3), 573–598.

Ennser-Jedenastik, L., Dolezal, M., & Müller, W. C. (2017). Gender differences in negative campaigning: The impact of party environments. *Politics & Gender*, *13*(1), 81–106.

Escobar-Lemmon, M., & Taylor-Robinson, M. M. (2005). Women ministers in Latin American government: When, where, and why? *American Journal of Political Science*, *49*(4), 829–844.

Escobar-Lemmon, M., & Taylor-Robinson, M. M. (2009). Getting to the top: Career paths of women in Latin American cabinets. *Political Research Quarterly*, *62*(4), 685–699.

Goddard, D. (2019). Entering the men's domain? Gender and portfolio allocation in European governments. *European Journal of Political Research*, *58*, 631–655.

Green-Pedersen, C. (2010). Bringing parties into parliament: The development of parliamentary activities in Western Europe. *Party Politics*, *16*(3), 347–369.

Helms, L. (2008). Studying parliamentary opposition in old and new democracies: Issues and perspectives. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, *14*(1/2), 6–19.

Helms, L. (2022). Political oppositions in democratic and authoritarian regimes: A state-of-the-field(s) review. *Government and Opposition*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.25

Höhmann, D., & Sieberer, U. (2020). Parliamentary questions as a control mechanism in coalition governments. *West European Politics*, *43*(1), 225–249.

Huddy, L., & Terkildsen, N. (1993). Gender stereotypes and the perception of male and female candidates. *American Journal of Political Science*, *37*, 119–147.

Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2019). *Women in national parliaments: World classification*. Statistical Archive. http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.htm

Kanthak, K., & Woon, J. (2015). Women don't run? Election aversion and candidate entry. *American Journal of Political Science*, *59*(3), 595–612.

Karpowitz, C. F., Mendelberg, T., & Shaker, L. (2012). Gender inequality in deliberative participation. *American Political Science Review*, *106*(3), 533–547.

Krauss, S., & Kroeber, C. (2021). How women in the executive influence government stability. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *28*(9), 1372–1390.

Kreppel, A. (2014). Typologies and classifications. In S. Martin, T. Saalfeld, & K. W. Strom (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of legislative studies* (pp. 82–100). Oxford University Press.

Krook, M. L., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2012). All the president's men? The appointment of female cabinet ministers worldwide. *The Journal of Politics*, *74*(3), 840–855.

Lawless, J. L. (2004). Women, war, and winning elections: Gender stereotyping in the post-September 11th era. *Political Research Quarterly*, *57*(3), 479–490.

Louwerse, T., & Otjes, S. (2019). How populists wage opposition: Parliamentary opposition behaviour and populism in Netherlands. *Political Studies*, *67*(2), 479–495.

Lowndes, V. (2020). How are political institutions gendered? *Political Studies*, *68*(3), 543–564.

Mair, P. (2014). Representative versus responsible government. In I. Van Biezen (Ed.), *On parties, party systems and democracy: Selected writings of Peter Mair* (pp. 581–596). ECPR Press.

Martin, S., & Rozenberg, O. (2014). *The roles and function of parliamentary questions*. Routledge.

Müller, W. C., & Strøm, K. (1999). *Policy, office, or votes? How political parties in Western Europe make hard decisions*. Cambridge University Press.

Otjes, S., & Louwerse, T. (2018). Parliamentary questions as strategic party tools. *West European Politics*, *41*(2), 496–516.

Petrocik, J. R. (1996). Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study. *American Journal of Political Science*, *40*(3), 825–850.

Poljak, Ž. (2022). The role of gender in parliamen-

tary attacks and incivility. *Politics and Governance*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v10i4.5718

Preece, J., & Stoddard, O. (2015). Why women don't run: Experimental evidence on gender differences in political competition aversion. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, *117*, 296–308.

Proksch, S. O., & Slapin, J. B. (2011). Parliamentary questions and oversight in the European Union. *European Journal of Political Research*, *50*(1), 53–79.

Rasch, B. E. (2011). Behavioural consequences of restrictions on plenary access: Parliamentary questions in the Norwegian Storting. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, *17*(3), 382–393.

Russo, F., & Wiberg, M. (2010). Parliamentary questioning in 17 European parliaments: Some steps towards comparison. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, *16*(2), 215–232.

Strøm, K. (1997). Rules, reasons and routines: Legislative roles in parliamentary democracies. In W. C. Müller & T. Saalfeld (Eds.), *Members of parliament in Western Europe: Roles and behavior* (pp. 155–174). Frank Cass.

Taylor-Robinson, M. M. (2017). Gender and legislatures. In S. Martin, T. Saalfeld, & K. Strøm (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of legislative studies* (pp. 250–266). Oxford University Press.

Thames, F. C., & Rybalko, M. (2011). Gender and legislative behavior in post-communist Ukraine. *Journal of East European and Asian Studies*, *2*(1), 163–186.

Tuttnauer, O. (2018). If you can beat them, confront them: Party-level analysis of opposition behavior in European national parliaments. *European Union Politics*, *19*(2), 278–298.

Vliegenthart, R., & Walgrave, S. (2011). Content matters: The dynamics of parliamentary questioning in Belgium and Denmark. *Comparative Political Studies*, *44*(8), 1031–1059.

Volden, C., Wiseman, A. E., & Wittmer, D. E. (2013). Why are women more effective members of Congress. *American Journal of Political Science*, *57*(2), 326–341.

Volkens, A., Krause, W., Lehman, P., Matthies, T., Merz, N., Regel, S., & Wessels, B. (2019). *Manifesto Project main dataset (party preferences): Version 2019a* [Data set]. Manifesto Project Database. https://doi.org/10.25522/manifesto.mpds.2019a

Walter, A. S. (2013). Women on the battleground: Does gender condition the use of negative campaigning? *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, *23*(2), 154–176.

Wauters, B., Bouteca, N., & de Vet, B. (2021). Personalization of parliamentary behaviour: Conceptualization and empirical evidence from Belgium (1995–2014). *Party Politics*, *27*(2), 246–257.

Whitaker, R., & Martin, S. (2021). Divide to conquer? Strategic parliamentary opposition and coalition government. *Party Politics*, *28*(6), 999–1011.

About the Authors

Benjamin de Vet is a postdoctoral researcher (FWO) at the research group GASPAR (Department of Political Science at Ghent University). His research interests are parliaments and intra-party decision-making.

Robin Devroe is a postdoctoral researcher (FWO) at the research group GASPAR (Department of Political Science at Ghent University). Her main research interest is the political representation of diverse social groups and voting behavior, with a specific focus on the gendered nature of politics.

Article

From Opposition Leader to Prime Minister: Giorgia Meloni and Women's Issues in the Italian Radical Right

Elisabetta De Giorgi [1,]*, Alice Cavalieri [1,2], and Francesca Feo [3]

[1] Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Trieste, Italy
[2] Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, University of Turin, Italy
[3] Faculty of Political and Social Science, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy

* Corresponding author (edegiorgi@units.it)

Abstract

Under the motto "God, homeland, and family"—but also by stressing one further important marker of social identity, i.e., gender—Italian radical right party leader Giorgia Meloni multiplied her party seats in parliament from 2013 onwards. After the 2022 elections, she became the first woman prime minister in Italy. Starting from an overview of the figure of Giorgia Meloni as a radical right woman leader, we explore her and her party's position on women-related issues and their relevance while exploring, in opposition, two different contexts: representative institutions and social media. To do that, we draw on parliamentary data—bills and parliamentary questions introduced in parliament by Fratelli d'Italia—and on Meloni's public discourse—examined in an analysis of all the tweets posted by her official Twitter account, between 2013 and 2021. As expected, a low saliency of women's issues appears in all the types of data examined, although some of them are more exposed to the shift in attention caused by the rise of related trend topics. Both Meloni and her party are strong supporters of the "natural family" and make use of women's issues in claiming femonationalist arguments, especially on social media. However, Meloni and her party cannot be considered as fully "neo-traditional," as are other similar parties in Europe, but rather as a combination of "neo-traditional" and "modern-traditional."

Issue

This article is part of the issue "Women Opposition Leaders: Pathways, Patterns, and Performance" edited by Sarah C. Dingler (University of Innsbruck), Ludger Helms (University of Innsbruck), and Henriette Müller (New York University Abu Dhabi).

1. Introduction

On the 19th of October 2019, Giorgia Meloni concluded her speech in front of a crowded San Giovanni Square, in Rome, with the words that would soon go viral on social media: "I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am Christian" (Meloni, 2021). These words resonate together with the more general slogan—"God, homeland and family" (*Dio, patria e famiglia*)—adopted by Meloni's party, Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia, or FdI), and other radical right parties in history. But another important marker of social identity finds space

in her speech besides religious faith and national belonging: gender.

The role of gender issues in populist radical right parties' (PRRP) ideology has found renewed interest in literature (Akkerman, 2015; De Lange & Mügge, 2015; Donà, 2020; Erzeel & Rashkova, 2017; Gwiazda, 2021). In fact, despite their reputation as *männerparteien*—parties predominantly supported, represented, and led by men—PRRP are increasingly engaging with women's issues and gender roles in society. Their positions on these issues are extremely heterogeneous though. A certain appropriation of women's politics and gender rights

is often linked to anti-migration frames (Roth, 2020), but some parties, such as the Dutch Party for Freedom and the French National Rally have openly espoused progressive stances towards women's economic emancipation (Mayer, 2015), or even same-sex partnerships (Akkerman, 2015). The increasing presence of women leaders in PRRPs is also a noticeable trend, which may have a connection with the "engendering" of their politics. While they do not necessarily embody the traits of hegemonic femininity that one would expect (e.g., Geva, 2018, 2020; Meret, 2015), women political leaders on the right claim to represent the interests of women (Celis & Childs, 2018). But which interests?

In this article, we seek to provide a first systematic assessment of the role that women's issues play for Giorgia Meloni, the first woman leader in the Italian radical right. We believe that her party, FdI, represents a very interesting case as it is relatively new and understudied (see Campus, 2020; Feo & Lavizzari, 2021; Gaweda et al., 2022) and, although it had always been in opposition since its foundation, it recently gained a leading position in Italian politics. FdI was the only party in parliament that did not support the government led by Mario Draghi from March 2021 to his resignation in July 2022. This role of the one-and-only opposition certainly contributed to the recent rise of popularity of both Meloni and her party. In fact, while opposition leaders, notably in multiparty systems, are usually difficult to identify (see Dingler et al., 2023), Meloni recently represented not only one (opposition) party leader but, unquestionably, the opposition leader in Italy. Furthermore, considering the most recent developments, Meloni is now not just the only woman party leader in Italy—and, considering the major Italian parties, in the country's political history—but, since the 22nd of October 2022, is also the first woman prime minister in the history of Italy.

Thus, the purpose of the present article is to study Giorgia Meloni as a radical right party woman leader to uncover which women's interests she and her party represented while in opposition. First, we aim to provide an overview of the figure of Giorgia Meloni as a radical right woman leader, through the path that brought her to office, and then to understand the relevance and position of women's issues for her and her party in two different contexts: the representative institutions and social media. To do that, we draw, on the one hand, on parliamentary data—bills and parliamentary questions introduced in parliament by FdI—and, on the other, on Meloni's public discourse—studied through the collection and analysis of all the tweets posted by her official Twitter account. The analysis covers the period between the beginning of 2013, the foundation of the party, and December 2021. In both venues, we explore the saliency and position of Meloni and her party on women-related issues divided into different domains.

This article is consequently divided into four sections: The first is dedicated to the theoretical framework within which our analysis is placed; the second one focuses on Giorgia Meloni's career path and party leadership from a gender perspective; the third and the fourth, respectively, centre on the data and methods employed, and on the analysis of the parliamentary data and tweets' content.

2. Framing Women's Issues in Radical Right Parties

According to the classic theory of substantive representation, women's conservative representatives, given their gender, should represent the best interests of other women as well as their progressive colleagues. But, as Celis and Erzeel (2015) point out, the substantive representation of gender is based on the assumption that there is a set of women's interests circumscribed within a precise perimeter, that is, the one designed by feminist theory. Thus, women representatives should address specific issues—such as reproductive rights, gender equality, gender-based violence, etc.—only by following a certain direction. The reality, of course, is very different. If some studies confirm that the action of conservative female MPs is, in some cases, in line with the action of progressive representatives of the same kind, both in terms of issues addressed and political choices, other studies show that women MPs belonging to centre-right or radical right parties tend to address different issues and to adopt very different points of view (Arfini et al., 2019; Celis & Erzeel, 2015), frequently unveiling contradictions and ambivalences (Scrinzi, 2017). At the same time, the gender ideologies of radical right parties as expressed in their manifestos differ significantly, notably as regards gender equality and how it could/should be achieved. In this, Scandinavian radical right parties are a prime example. An important distinction could be made between "neo-traditional'' and "modern-traditional" ideologies: "For neo-traditionalists, the goal is to provide a favourable climate for women to become mothers and housewives," while "modern-traditionalists combine traditional views with modern elements such as promoting a combination of work and raising children, and advocating equal pay for equal work" (De Lange & Mügge, 2015, p. 71; see also Mudde, 2007).

With the rise of attention to migration issues, radical right parties have often deployed gender issues also with instrumental anti-Islam and anti-immigration aims (De Lange & Mügge, 2015; Donà, 2020; Farris, 2017; Scrinzi, 2014), to such an extent that they have been defined as "Janus-faced" (Akkerman, 2015), as they employ and emphasise gender equality when speaking of immigration and integration, turning conservative "when they address issues related to the family, such as opportunities of women on the labour market, childcare, abortion, or the status of marriage" (Akkerman, 2015, p. 56). Femonationalism (Farris, 2017) presents women's rights as key values of the Western world and contrasts those with other non-Western cultures which, instead, discriminate against women and increase their (physical) insecurity.

Partially connected with the acknowledgement of the variety of positions and concerns expressed in relation to women-related issues by radical right parties is the discussion on the actual relevance of such issues for these actors. It is clear that gender plays a role in the current political battles of the radical right (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021; Verloo, 2018). This does not necessarily mean that gender and women's issues are at the core of radical right ideology though, as the lack of coherent positions may hint. As argued by Spierings (2020, p. 42), such issues may be "trivotal" for these parties, i.e., a combination of trivial and pivotal.

An aspect worth considering is the role played by these parties in parliament over time. Being in government or in opposition, in fact, generally affects the behaviour of parties, with those without government responsibilities freer to address their preferred topics either for ideological or strategic reasons, through their parliamentary activity (De Giorgi, 2016). In this respect, we rest on the well-acknowledged salience and issue-ownership theory (Petrocik, 1996) that prescribe that parties strategically emphasise those issues where they expect to have or gain an advantage over their opponents (Budge, 2015). On the other hand, as one of the major activities for opposition parties in parliament has to do with the government's oversight (Norton, 2008), we should consider that some issues—and, in our case, women's issues—might appear on the opposition's agenda as a consequence of the government's policy choices. Even in that case, the party and the leader would select which specific aspect(s) to draw attention to, thus choosing to represent some women's interests instead of others.

Extant research has recently focused not only on radical right parties' ideas on gender but also on which role their women leaders play in this context, with relevant works on the Danish Pia Kjærsgaard, the French Marine Le Pen, the Israeli Ayelet Shaked, among others (Ben-Shitrit et al., 2022; Campus, 2017; Geva, 2020; Meret, 2015). Thus, in this article, we aim to understand the relevance and position of Giorgia Meloni and her party on women's issues by combining the analysis of their parliamentary activity and political discourse. To guide our analysis, we draw some general expectations from the literature. In line with the idea that gender and women's issues are pivotal, though trivial for the radical right nonetheless (Spierings, 2020), we expect to find a low saliency of women-related issues in both the parliamentary and the social media venues. We also expect these issues to be mostly associated with (modern-)traditionalist positions. We also expect to find femonationalist arguments, that is, the instrumental defence of women's rights, always in connection to anti-immigration, and especially anti-Islam stances. Consequently, while we expect support for gender equality and women's rights to emerge in relation to migration, we expect a very low non-instrumental engagement with these issues otherwise.

3. Giorgia: Woman, Mother, Italian, Christian

More than 70% of the parliamentary parties in the EU member states in 2022 are led by men (Openpolis, 2022). Except for a few Scandinavian or Baltic socialist prime ministers, the vast majority of European women who have had real power in Europe in recent years come from the right wing: Angela Merkel, Roberta Metsola, Ursula von der Leyen, just to list the most prominent ones. When looking at the opposition, the figure does not differ so much: Pia Kjærsgaard, Marine Le Pen, Frauke Petry, and Alice Weidel have been the face of some of the most important radical right parties in Europe in the last years. In Italy, no party belonging to either the mainstream or the radical right party family had been led by a woman until 2013.

Giorgia Meloni is the founder and leader of the party FdI, created shortly ahead of the 2013 political elections and defined as a (populist) radical right party (Puleo & Piccolino, 2022). FdI emerged as a splinter parliamentary group from the centre-right People of Freedom (Il Popolo della Libertà, or PDL), which was in turn the result of the fusion between Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia and National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, or AN), which had allied with each other from 1994 to 2009, before merging into the PDL. There are many elements of continuity between AN and its successor FdI, in terms of both personnel (21 out of 24 members of the National Executive came from the ranks of the AN) and symbolic components (among others, FdI integrated the name "National Alliance" in its own party statute and, until 2019, also included the AN party symbol in its own logo). Nonetheless, since the very beginning, FdI has been very much identified with her young leader, Giorgia Meloni.

Studies focusing on women's leadership often stress how women manage to achieve leadership positions when they enjoy a "legacy advantage": that is, as wife, widow, daughter, or other close relatives of a key male political actor (Baker & Palmieri, 2021). This trajectory is common in radical right parties as well, probably the most prominent case being that of Marine Le Pen, who "inherited" the leadership of the Front National (today Rassemblement National, or National Rally) from her father. In Italy, we also find right-wing women politicians with strong family ties with former leaders and prominent political figures. For example, Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of the former dictator, was elected in parliament multiple times in the ranks of AN; Isabella Rauti, today among the leading figures of FdI, is the daughter of Pino Rauti, former leader of the Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano, or MSI).

Giorgia Meloni stands out from this path. Her political commitment began in 1992 when she joined the youth organisation of the MSI—the main Italian extreme right party at the time (Ignazi, 1998). In 1996, she became the national head of Student Action (Azione Studentesca), the student movement of the newly formed AN, while in 1998 she was elected to the Council

of the Province of Rome. In 2004, she took the lead of Youth Action (Azione Giovani), the youth organisation of AN (Piccolino, 2012). In 2006, Meloni was then elected to the Chamber of Deputies for the first time and became one of the two vice presidents of the Chamber of Deputies. In 2008, after early elections had seen the victory of the centre-right coalition, she was appointed by Silvio Berlusconi as youth minister, at the age of 31. After leaving the PDL in 2012 due to differences of opinion about Berlusconi's leadership, among other reasons, she founded the new party FdI, together with other former members of AN (and MSI). Elected again to the Chamber of Deputies in 2013, she became the parliamentary party group leader and, in 2014, was appointed as party president.

Meloni multiplied her party's seats in parliament from nine to 50 from 2013 to 2018 and brought a huge increase in voting intentions from then to 2022. FdI, which, as we said since its entry into parliament has always been seated in the opposition benches, was the most voted party at the 2022 elections and Meloni became the first Italian woman prime minister. Her popularity has steadily risen over the years, and she is now the most appreciated among Italian party leaders. Contrary to other opposition leaders, which tend to emphasise their political outsiderness, Meloni often stresses her professional path and political capital, relating that to the idea of "competence." Furthermore, as we said, no other major political party in Italy is led by a woman, and this has undoubtedly provided Meloni with significant media visibility in this regard (Feo & Lavizzari, 2021).

For what concerns her stances on women-related issues, Meloni never disguised her anti-abortion positions, which she traces back to her Catholic faith and her personal experience—as explained in her biography, her mother considered terminating her pregnancy (Meloni, 2021)—though the official party line is more oriented to fostering prevention measures rather than abrogating the existing abortion law (Feo & Lavizzari, 2021). She has publicly supported initiatives connected to the "pro-life" transnational network (Pavan, 2020), and opposed within and outside parliament progressive policy-making efforts around sexual orientation and gender identity rights (Feo, 2022). Meloni has also frequently blamed the European Union for having disregarded fundamental issues such as family, natality, and children's education, while arguing that Western civilisation is under attack and its pillars, from the traditional family to motherhood, would be the target of the "gender ideology" (Cesari, 2022). Lastly, she is generally very critical of feminism, which she considers "an ideological tool against right-wing politics rather than a pro-women discourse" (Arfini et al., 2019, p. 702).

After this brief contextualisation of our case study, we now move to the discussion of the data and methods employed in our research, before proceeding to the analysis.

4. Data Overview and Methods

Political parties and leaders have multiple venues to express their worldviews, both inside and outside representative institutions. The major aim of this work is to understand the relevance of women's issues for Giorgia Meloni and FdI, and which women's interests they emphasise. In order to do that, we combine an analysis of parliamentary data—bills and parliamentary questions introduced by FdI from January 2013 to December 2021—with a collection of tweets published by Meloni's official account in the same period.

When in opposition, parties usually have two main goals: exercising control over the government and providing an alternative to the government in political and policy terms. Besides voting on the government legislative proposals, they can do that by undertaking two main activities: scrutinising the government and initiating their own legislation, despite the scarce prospects of approval (Ilonszki & De Giorgi, 2018). These are the parliamentary activities we focus on in our analysis. For governmental scrutiny, we use data about weekly parliamentary questions introduced at the Chamber of Deputies from 2013 to 2021, which are an occasion for parties in parliament to directly ask the government (or a specific minister) for explanations or action on specific issues (Russo & Cavalieri, 2016), or to raise the attention of the executive on such issues. Regarding legislative initiative, we examine all the bills sponsored by FdI MPs in the lower house in the same period (see the Supplementary File). Among different social media platforms, political actors extensively use Twitter to communicate their desired messages to the public just like in a press release (De Sio et al., 2018, p. 11). We collected all the original tweets posted on Meloni's Twitter timeline during the period under analysis and examined their content. The choice of focusing on the leader's account rather than the party's is linked to the increased centrality of leaders and individual politicians in political communication (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), especially in the case of populist parties (Bos et al., 2013). Giorgia Meloni runs a very vertical and personalised leadership, with the consequence that her persona is very much identified with FdI. The importance of the leader vis-à-vis the party organisation in political communication is also reflected in the much higher number of followers for Meloni's account—1,6 million vs. 237.956—that is de facto the privileged source of information on social media for party supporters.

All the mentioned activities represent useful instruments to investigate the relevance and position of Meloni and her party on women's issues in different arenas with different levels of timeliness/dynamism: bills = not timely/dynamic; parliamentary questions = semi-timely/dynamic; tweets = very timely/dynamic. For the whole period, we compiled three datasets (see the Supplementary File for additional information) containing: bills (N = 640); parliamentary questions (N = 302);

tweets (*N* = 12729). We purposefully chose to focus on these three different data sources as they cover a variety of activities, the analysis of which allows us to shed light on FdI and Meloni's attention strategies and behaviour inside and outside parliament. In this respect, we adopt an attention-based perspective typical of salience theory, to check through a quantitative analysis how much emphasis the party and its leader grant to women's issues compared to others, which signals the overall importance of the topic for them.

As issue attention is a dynamic process, the different data sources we use are especially important as we can understand how the party and leader match their interests with the media and the party system's agenda. Political parties are not only agenda-setters but also agenda-takers (Borghetto & Russo, 2018) and they may be "forced" to shift their attention towards certain issues because of public concerns or other parties' actions in parliament (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). Even in that case, political actors choose the perspective to adopt in order to represent specific interest(s) among many. With our sets of data, we have the chance to uncover how this dynamic process unfolded for an opposition party, usually freer to set its own agenda (as FdI was) and whether its strategy changed over time. Studying the issues emphasised by Meloni and FdI signals potential policy paths and future actions, as attention is considered a precondition for policy-making. This becomes crucial as Meloni and her party are now leading a government with a strong parliamentary majority, with the chance of transforming "the words" pronounced while in opposition into deeds.

Given our interest in texts related to women's issues across venues, we compiled a dictionary of women-related keywords (see Supplementary File) to select relevant units of analysis from the general datasets and skim the considerable number of observations we initially had. We searched the datasets by applying the keywords list, which identified 71 bills (out of 640), 187 parliamentary questions (out of 302), and 1460 tweets (out of 12729). In the second step, we excluded all the "false positives" (i.e., the texts captured by the keywords search, but not truly relevant to our study) through a qualitative assessment of each unit of analysis. This operation left us with 24 bills, 14 questions, and 341 gender-related tweets in the period 2013–2021 (the procedure is illustrated in the Supplementary File).

We measured the salience of women's issues across the three data types as the percentage of women's issues over the total number of observations (Section 5.1). Then, we moved to the qualitative analysis of the content of the different data sources (bills, parliamentary questions, and tweets) to explore how FdI and Giorgia Meloni thematise women's issues, that is, to assess their position on such issues. To do so, we relied on a qualitative coding procedure inspired by thematic analysis (Section 5.2; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5. Women's Issues in and for Meloni's Party

5.1. The Salience of Women's Issues in Meloni's FdI

The analysis of the salience of women's issues confirms how these are marginal topics for FdI and Meloni. The percentage of women's issues accounts for a remarkably small part of total observations, both in parliamentary activities and social media (Table 1).

In all the three activities examined (although with a lower emphasis among the bills), we record a slight growth during the XVIII legislature (2018–2021), signalling increasing attention towards the topic in the most dynamic activities (i.e., questions and tweets)—likely in reaction to the discussion of "thorny" policy proposals in parliament and the respective mobilisations outside—and the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic that generated social emergencies that directly affected women. As said, parliamentary questions are a dynamic parliamentary instrument, and they can be easily exploited especially by opposition parties to strategically emphasise specific issues (see, among others, Cavalieri & Froio, 2022), while it is much more difficult to propose new bills dealing with a trending topic that may suddenly emerge. Likewise, social media communication is very timely and dynamic by definition, as it can immediately "react" to trends and discussions appearing in the media sphere (Silva & Proksch, 2022). This seems to be the case for Meloni's engagement on women's issues. As shown in Figure 1, peaks of attention in an otherwise very low and stable trend coincide with specific events, as public demonstrations are often organised in connection to special occasions in the parliamentary agenda.

The public events highlighted in Figure 1 are all big rallies that received the open support of FdI, organised by national and transnational networks defending pro-life

Table 1. Frequency of women's issues across venues and over time.

Legislative term	Bills	PQs	Tweets
XVII (2013–2018)	3,69% (*N* = 8/217)	2,98% (*N* = 5/168)	1,73% (*N* = 111/6412)
XVIII (2018–2021)	3,78% (*N* = 16/423)	6,72% (*N* = 9/134)	3,64% (*N* = 230/6317)
Total (2013–2021)	3,75% (*N* = 24/640)	4,64% (*N* = 14/302)	2,68% (*N* = 341/12729)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the observation of women's issues during the legislative term over the total number of bills and questions introduced and sponsored by FdI and tweets published by Giorgia Meloni in the same period.
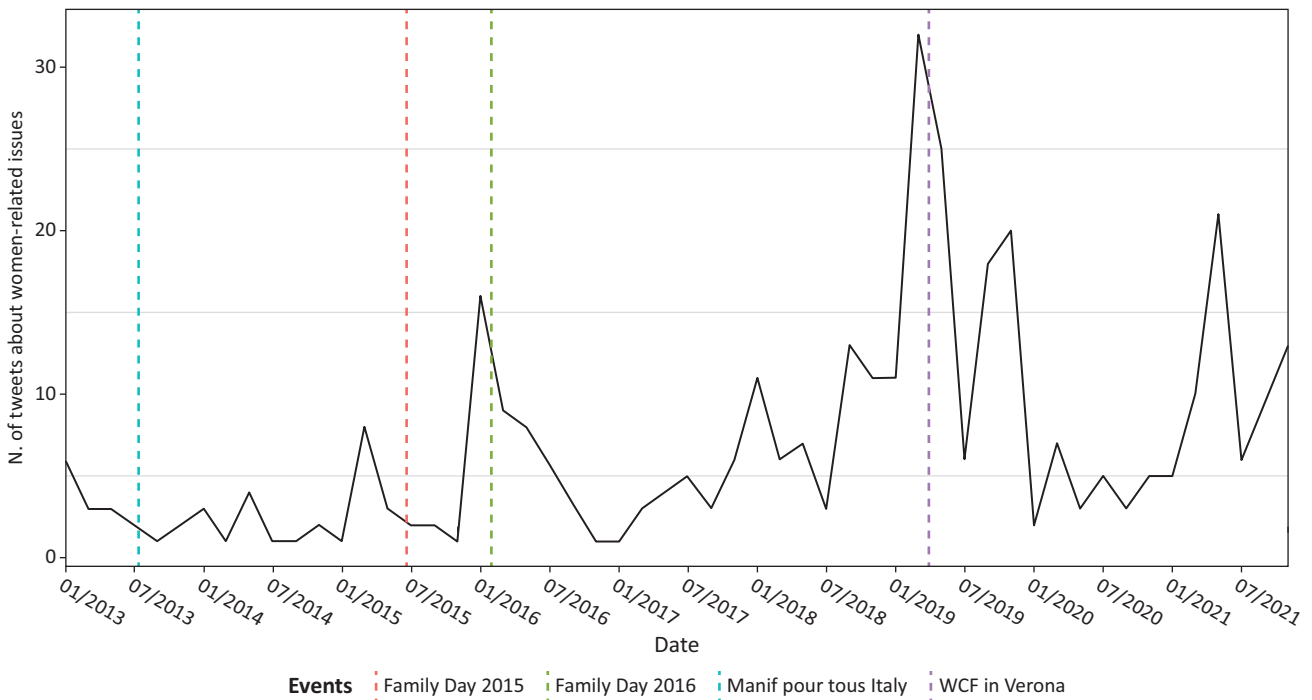
Figure 1. Giorgia Meloni gender-related tweets (2013–2021).

positions, the "natural family" and traditional gender roles, which took place after 2013 as a response to parliamentary discussions concerning the recognition of LGBT+ rights. Not by chance, the highest frequency of women-related tweets occurs during the XIII World Congress of Families in Verona, 29–31 March 2019 (see Pavan, 2020).

5.2. Which Interests? Assessing the Position of Giorgia Meloni and FdI on Women-Related Issues

To analyse how FdI and Meloni thematise women's issues, we relied on thematic analysis, a method for qualitative data inquiry that aims at capturing "something [that is] important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). We developed a descriptive coding scheme that could account for the heterogeneity of our data, which includes all relevant issues mentioned in our observations in relation to women, and then identified three general dimensions: (a) an economic dimen-

sion, which captures references to women as economic subjects involved in productive and reproductive work; (b) a family dimension, which includes any (symbolic) mention of women as members of the "traditional" family; (c) a gender equality dimension, which collects references to gender equality and women's rights. Their distribution is reported in Table 2, while a detailed account of each dimension and sub-dimensions is provided in the Supplementary File, Table A2.

In the economic dimension, we included all bills, questions, and tweets addressing women's material conditions and their position in the economy—e.g., references to women's employment, work–family balance, maternity or parental leave, (non) working mothers, and relative welfare provisions. From the analysis, it emerges that the issue of female labour is primarily addressed as a problem of "work–family balance," homogeneously across the three types of data investigated. The main focus of the proposals in the institutional venue is on the recognition of the rights of working mothers, and welfare mechanisms for their protection. We found mentions

Table 2. Relevance of the three dimensions across venues.

Dimension	Bills	PQ	Tweets
Economic	33,33%	28,57%	11,73%
Family	45,83%	57,14%	29,32%
Gender equality	20,84%	14,29%	58,65%
Total	100% (*N* = 24)	100% (*N* = 14)	100% (*N* = 341)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the observation for each dimension over the total number of women's related bills and questions introduced and sponsored by FdI and tweets published by Giorgia Meloni.

of welfare incentives that would help women reconcile motherhood and care work with a professional career, especially after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (see Supplementary File, Table A3, Bill_1, PQ_1). FdI also supports welfare incentives to cover outsourced "domestic work," including the care of the elderly and housework (see Supplementary File, Table A3, Tweet_1).

Meloni also reiterates her support for reconciliation policies when these come in the shape of private initiatives presented by firms and businesses to support working mothers (see Supplementary File, Table A3, Tweet_2). At the same time, she publicly shamed malpractices—such as cases of women fired as they got pregnant, and working spaces hostile to motherhood, or women who are not allowed to breastfeed at the workplace (see Supplementary File, Table A3, Tweet_3). These positions in favour of women's integration into the labour market are complementary to more conservative stances proposed by the party, more prone to safeguard women's primary role as caregivers. Among these initiatives, for instance, we found the pension reforms allowing early retirement for women.

All in all, we find that FdI's vision of women as economic subjects, and their interests thereof, are primarily shaped by the equation between women and mothers, consistent with other recent studies (Feo & Lavizzari, 2021; Saccà & Massidda, 2018). The main focus of the party is on how to guarantee and reward women with childcare responsibilities in the workforce. No mention is made of the interests of women as workers beyond this equation, for example to the persistence of other inequalities such as the gender pay gap. Equally, no reference is found to other measures that would facilitate women's labour by lessening the double burden of productive and reproductive work, such as paternity leave. What prevails is a conservative understanding of women's issues in the labour market, consistent with a familistic view of women as primary caregivers for children and grandchildren in the household.

The second dimension pertains to the role of women within the family, and the symbolic value of the family as the primary site for values and culture transmission, and the reproduction of society. Notably in parliamentary questions and bills, primary attention is given to women in their (traditional) social role as mothers in heterosexual families (Table 2). Likewise, the public prize of maternity and the experience of motherhood on Meloni's social media evokes the idea of "maternity as destiny" (Ottaviano, 2015) for women. This traditional gender role for women is contextualised in the symbolic evocation of the traditional family. Interestingly, space in this evocation is also devoted to men as fathers and husbands, as a complementary component to mothers in the "traditional family." In other words, for FdI, caring responsibilities do not fall completely outside the sphere of male responsibility (cf. Arfini et al., 2019). The symbolic recognition given to the family and traditional gender roles within it, very evident in social

media communication (see Supplementary File, Table A3, Tweet_4 and Tweet_4), is mirrored in the parliamentary activity of the party. For instance, FdI introduced a bill (N. 2593, 31 July 2014) proposing a modification of articles 29 and 30 of the Italian Constitution to clearly specify that family rights are recognised only within marriages—unions between two persons of different sex—and adoption is possible only for married couples (see Supplementary File, Table A, Bill_2). In one parliamentary question, the party condemned some initiatives held at the local level to adopt gender-neutral forms for parental statements in schools. The adoption of gender-neutral formulas for parents, according to FdI, "diminish the foundations of the family" (see Supplementary File, Table A3, PQ_2). The symbolic promotion of the traditional family is coupled with concrete initiatives for its sponsorship. In fact, proposals envisaged the institution of various forms of benefits and incentives for heterosexual couples who decide to form a family. The overall approach, however, is very much centred on motherhood—rather than parenthood—and mainly aimed at protecting women's nurturing "nature." All in all, in this dimension some elements of the "symbolic horizon" of the radical right clearly emerge. The idea of the complementarity between sexes, which has replaced the idea of women's submission in conservatism (Garbagnoli & Prearo, 2018), serves to guarantee "equity" and equal dignity to men and women, without challenging traditional gender roles.

The last dimension concerns gender equality, and FdI and Meloni's framing of women's rights. The majority of Meloni's tweets fall into this dimension, which is instead only marginally addressed in parliament (see Table 2). One of the main issues addressed within this category is the problem of violence against women, which is framed as a violation of women's rights. Contrary to Saccà and Massidda (2018), who found no reference to the topic in the FdI 2018 electoral manifesto, violence against women is a very recurring theme in the political communication of Giorgia Meloni (this sub-dimension alone accounting for 35% of all tweets) and in the parliamentary activities of FdI (see also Giorgi & Loner 2022). Also in parliament, FdI stresses the necessity to grant protection and equal rights to women (bills about prevention and punishment of violence against women are 20% of all observations about women's issues; e.g., Supplementary File, Table A3, Bill_3), although the issue is often used instrumentally with a femonationalist frame (Supplementary File, Table A3, Bill_4). This happens especially in more dynamic data types, such as questions and tweets. Both Meloni and FdI exploit the issue to emphasise anti-immigration stances (Supplementary File, Table A3, Tweet_6). Basically, women's interest to be free from violence is mostly used in an instrumental way or, more precisely, as a cultural marker between the Italians/Europeans and the "racialized others," who do not conform to Western values. Moreover, the issue of violence against women is mostly framed as a "security"

problem to be addressed with harsher penalties for offenders, whereas no mention is made of the structural inequalities and the nature of gender relations that make women more vulnerable to violence (Supplementary File, Table A3, Tweet_7, PQ_3).

Other issues pertain to reproductive rights and women's equality in the public sphere. The former is not really discussed in relation to abortion, but only concerning filiation for same-sex couples, an issue that FdI firmly opposes. Concerning gender equality in the public sphere, we notice that the party and its leader hold a liberal approach to the issue (cf. Arfini et al., 2019). Women's emancipation and affirmation are connected to individual qualities and actions, in line with the idea of merit. The existence of structural conditions that make it harder for women to emerge is not completely denied (Supplementary File, Table A3, Tweet_8) but their overcoming is connected to individual entrepreneurship and by no means to the adoption of antidiscrimination policies (Supplementary File, Table A3, Tweet_9).

In the social media communication, we could also observe how the direct identification of Meloni and her party as the "true defenders" of women's interests is used to draw a demarcation with the "false defenders," primarily left-wing parties and feminist groups, which are usually depicted as pursuing political struggles that do not coincide with those of real women, such as gender-inclusive language (Supplementary File, Table A3, Tweet_10).

Overall, we can notice that the three themes are present across all of the three data sources examined, but with remarkable differences. Table 2 above illustrates that each venue is particularly suitable for emphasising one particular theme. Parliamentary activities are mostly devoted to the family and economic dimension, while tweets focus mostly on the gender dimension. This is intuitive, as these instruments are very different and are exploited for different purposes. Bills and questions are employed to reaffirm FdI traditional views regarding the family as a social structure and to propose legislation emphasising the "traditional" role of women in society and the economy. Tweets, instead, predominantly address the gender equality dimension, and in particular the issue of violence against women. The different distribution across the venues has some implications: we can expect that issues on social media are addressed in a more symbolic or strategic way than those in parliament.

6. Conclusions

In this work, we sought to provide a first systematic assessment of the role that women's issues play for Giorgia Meloni, the first woman leader in the Italian radical right, and her party, FdI. We sketched the political career path that brought her from leading a marginal opposition party in 2013 to being the very first Italian woman prime minister in 2022 and, then, we uncovered her and her party's relevance and position on women's issues, in two different contexts, i.e., representative institutions and social media.

A low saliency of such issues was observed in both the venues considered, although some activities—those timelier and more dynamic, as less constrained by institutional rules, such as parliamentary questions and tweets—are more exposed to the shift in attention caused by the rise of trend topics and the opening of new public debates. As we saw, there have been a few occasions in the Italian public and institutional debate for an opposition party as FdI to shift the attention towards women's issues. In this respect, the behaviour of the party in less constrained contexts such as parliamentary questions and tweets is likely to be driven by the whole party system's agenda (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010), with women-related issues used as a component of its opposition strategy. On the other hand, bills better mirror the party policy agenda and actual purposes, allowing us to infer how and to what extent FdI and Meloni deal with women's issues. As expected, both the party and Meloni's position strongly support the so-called natural family that must carry the "traditional values" forward. Furthermore, Meloni engages very much in the defence of women's rights with anti-immigration purposes: clear evidence was found of how women's rights and gender equality are employed for claiming femonationalist arguments.

However, Meloni and her party cannot be considered as fully "neo-traditional," but rather as a combination of "neo-traditional" and "modern-traditional" (Mudde, 2007). As modern-traditionalists do, Meloni tries to combine traditional views with modern elements such as promoting the integration of women in the labour market, advocating measures that allow a combination of work and raising children; though, other relevant aspects of women's guarantees as workers—such as the support for equal pay for equal work—are missing. At the same time, as shown in the analysis, these modern traditionalist positions are accompanied by other, more neo-traditionalist ones, that are more consistent with a familistic view of women as primary caregivers. These rather conservative positions are also widely shared by the other Italian radical right party, i.e., Salvini's Lega (Meardi & Guardiancich, 2022).

Particularly on the issue of violence against women, our analysis shows that this is quite central for Meloni and FdI stances, albeit mostly in a strategic way. We also know that FdI voted in favour of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention Action against violence against women and domestic violence in the Italian parliament in 2013, contrary to what many other radical right parties in Europe did (Feo & Lavizzari, 2021). Further research would be needed to provide a valid explanation for FdI and Meloni's mixed positions, but we can try to list some potential reasons. First, they may be part of a strategy of party competition with FdI's closest competitors in the Italian right wing. Second, they may be connected to the crisis of the male bread-winner model in Italy,

though inequality in household activities remains high (Meraviglia & Dudka, 2020), and the need to take into account the reality of dual-income families.

All things considered, gender is surely a "trivotal" issue for Giorgia Meloni and her party: it is not at the core of their agenda, but it is pivotal as a core social relation that they try to exploit to articulate their nativist, conservative, and populist ideology, as come out from all the data analysed in this work. Since our analysis refers to the period in which Giorgia Meloni was a radical right opposition leader, it remains to be seen what will happen now that she has become the first female prime minister, leading a right-wing government that will certainly address gender issues, and indeed could make it a flag, considering that on many other issues, given the several crises Italy is facing, its hands will be tied.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

References

Abou-Chadi, T., Breyer, M., & Gessler, T. (2021). The (re)politicisation of gender in Western Europe. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *4*(2), 311–314. https://doi.org/10.1332/251510821X161773120966 79

Akkerman, T. (2015). Gender and the radical right in Western Europe: A comparative analysis of policy agendas. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *49*(1/2), 37–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1023655

Arfini, E., Ghigi, R., & Magaraggia, S. (2019). Can feminism be right? A content analysis of discourses about women by female Italian right-wing politicians. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, *60*(4), 693–719.

Baker, K., & Palmieri, S. (2021). Can women dynasty politicians disrupt social norms of political leadership? A proposed typology of normative change. *International Political Science Review*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F01925121 211048298

Ben-Shitrit, L., Elad-Strenger, J., & Hirsch-Hoefler, S. (2022). "Pinkwashing" the radical-right: Gender and the mainstreaming of radical-right policies and actions. *European Journal of Political Research*, *61*(1), 86–110. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12442

Borghetto, E., & Russo, F. (2018). From agenda setters to agenda takers? The determinants of party issue attention in times of crisis. *Party Politics*, *24*(1), 65–77. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817740757

Bos, L., van der Brug, W., & de Vreese, C. H. (2013). An experimental test of the impact of style and rhetoric on the perception of right-wing populist and mainstream party leaders. *Acta Politica*, *48*(2), 192–208. https://doi.org/10.1057/ap. 2012.27

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478 088706qp063oa

Budge, I. (2015). Issue emphases, saliency theory and issue ownership: A historical and conceptual analysis. *West European Politics*, *38*(4), 761–777. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1039374

Campus, D. (2017). Marine Le Pen's peopolisation: An asset for leadership image-building? *French Politics*, *15*(2), 147–165. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-017-0026-9

Campus, D. (2020). Female populist leaders and communication: Does gender make a difference? In B. Krämer & C. Holtz-Bacha (Eds.), *Perspectives on populism and the media* (pp. 235–254). Nomos. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845297392

Cavalieri, A., & Froio, C. (2022). The behaviour of populist parties in parliament. The policy agendas of populist and other political parties in the Italian question time. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, *52*(3), 283–296. https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2021.25

Celis, K., & Childs, S. (2018). Conservatism and women's political representation. *Politics and Gender*, *14*(1), 5–26. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X17000575

Celis, K., & Erzeel, S. (2015). Beyond the usual suspects: Non-left, male and non-feminist MPs and the substantive representation of women. *Government and Opposition*, *50*(1), 45–64. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2013.42

Cesari, A. (2022, April 29). Meloni: "L'ideologia gender mira alla scomparsa delle madri. Noi difenderemo l'identità femminile" [Gender ideology aims at mothers' disappearance. We will defend women's identity]. *Il Secolo d'Italia*. https://www.secoloditalia.it/2022/04/meloni-lideologia-gender-mira-alla-scomparsa-delle-madri-noi-difenderemo-lidentita-femminile

De Giorgi, E. (2016). *L'opposizione parlamentare in Italia. Dall'antiberlusconismo all'antipolitica* [Parliamentary opposition in Italy. From antiberlusconism to antipolitics]. Carocci.

De Lange, S. L., & Mügge, L. M. (2015). Gender and

right-wing populism in the Low Countries: Ideological variations across parties and time. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *49*(1/2), 61–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1014199

De Sio, L., De Angelis, A., & Emanuele, V. (2018). Issue yield and party strategy in multiparty competition. *Comparative Political Studies*, *51*(9), 1208–1238. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414017730082

Dingler, S. C., Helms, L., & Müller, H. (2023). Women opposition leaders: Conceptual issues and empirical agendas. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 80–84.

Donà, A. (2020). What's gender got to do with populism? *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *27*(3), 285–292. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506820929222

Enli, G. A., & Skogerbø, E. (2013). Personalized campaigns in party-centred politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, *16*(5), 757–774. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.782330

Erzeel, S., & Rashkova, E. R. (2017). Still men's parties? Gender and the radical right in comparative perspective. *West European Politics*, *40*(4), 812–820. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1286181

Farris, S. R. (2017). *In the name of women's rights: The rise of femonationalism*. Duke University Press.

Feo, F. (2022). Legislative reforms to fight discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+: The failure of the Zan Bill in Italy. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *5*(1), 149–151. https://doi.org/10.1332/251510821X16377638483577

Feo, F., & Lavizzari, A. (2021). *Triumph of the women? The female face of right-wing populism and extremism. Case Study Italy.* Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/17877.pdf

Garbagnoli, S., & Prearo, M. (2018). *La crociata anti-gender: dal Vaticano alle Manif pour Tous* [The anti-gender crusade: From the Vatican to Manif pour Tous]. Kaplan.

Gaweda, B., Siddi, M., & Miller, C. (2022). What's in a name? Gender equality and the European Conservatives and Reformists' group in the European Parliament. *Party Politics*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688221116247

Geva, D. (2018). Daughter, mother, captain: Marine Le Pen, gender, and populism in the French National Front. *Social Politics*, *27*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxy039

Geva, D. (2020). A double-headed hydra: Marine Le Pen's charisma, between political masculinity and political femininity. *Norma*, *15*(1), 26–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2019.1701787

Giorgi, A., & Loner, E. (2022). Populist female MPs and the discourse around gender and gender-based violence in the Italian twittersphere during the pandemic. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxac043

Green-Pedersen, C., & Mortensen, P. B. (2010). Who sets the agenda and who responds to it in the Danish parliament? A new model of issue competition and agenda-setting. *European Journal of Political Research*, *49*(2), 257–281. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2009.01897.x

Gwiazda, A. (2021). Right-wing populism and feminist politics: The case of law and justice in Poland. *International Political Science Review*, *42*(5), 580–595. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0192512120948917

Ignazi, P. (1998). *Il polo escluso: Profilo storico del Movimento sociale italiano* [The pole left out: Historical profile of the Italian Social Movement]. Il Mulino.

Ilonszki, G., & De Giorgi, E. (2018). Introduction. In E. De Giorgi & G. Ilonszki (Eds.), *Opposition parties in European legislatures. Conflict or consensus?* (pp. 1–16). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315561011

Jones, B. D., & Baumgartner, F. R. (2005). *The politics of attention: How government prioritizes problems*. University of Chicago Press.

Mayer, N. (2015). The closing of the radical right gender gap in France? *French Politics*, *13*(4), 391–414. https://doi.org/10.1057/fp.2015.18

Meardi, G., & Guardiancich, I. (2022). Back to the familialist future: The rise of social policy for ruling populist radical right parties in Italy and Poland. *West European Politics*, *45*(1), 129–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1916720

Meloni, G. (2021). *Io sono Giorgia. Le mie radici, le mie idee* [I am Giorgia. My origins, my ideas]. Rizzoli.

Meraviglia, C., & Dudka, A. (2020). The gendered division of unpaid labor during the Covid-19 crisis: Did anything change? Evidence from Italy. *International Journal of Sociology*, *51*(1), 64–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2020.1832346

Meret, S. (2015). Charismatic female leadership and gender: Pia Kjærsgaard and the Danish People's Party. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *49*(1/2), 81–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1023657

Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037

Norton, P. (2008). Making sense of opposition. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, *14*(1/2), 236–250. https://doi.org/10.1080/13572330801921257

Openpolis. (2022, March 16). *Scarseggiano le donne alla guida di partiti in Europa* [There is a shortage of women leaders in European political parties]. https://www.openpolis.it/scarseggiano-le-donne-alla-guida-di-partiti-in-europa

Ottaviano, C. (2015). Motherhood and care:(Still) women's destiny? *AG: AboutGender International Journal of Gender Studies*, *4*(8), 240–261. https://doi.org/10.15167/2279-5057/ag.2015.4.8.279

Pavan, E. (2020). We are family. The conflict between conservative movements and feminists. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *12*(2), 243–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/23248823.2020.1744892

Petrocik, J. R. (1996). Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study. *American Journal of Political Science*, *40*(3), 825–850. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111797

Piccolino, G. (2012). Giovani postfascisti. Fronte della gioventù, Azione giovani, Giovane Italia: l'evoluzione di una cultura politica [Young postfascists. Youth front, Youth action, Young Italy: The evolution of a political culture]. *Trasgressioni: Rivista quadrimestrale di cultura politica*, *54*, 3–74.

Puleo, L., & Piccolino, G. (2022). Back to the post-fascist past or landing in the populist radical right? The Brothers of Italy between continuity and change. *South European Society and Politics*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2022.2126247

Roth, J. (2020). Intersectionality strikes back: Feminist struggles against right-wing populism in the Americas. In J. Roth & G. Dietze (Eds.), *Right-wing populism and gender. European perspectives and beyond* (pp. 285–308). transcript.

Russo, F., & Cavalieri, A. (2016). The policy content of the Italian question time. A new dataset to study party competition. *Rivista Italiana di Politiche Pub-*

bliche, *11*(2), 197–222. https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.1483/83926

Saccà, F., & Massidda, L. (2018). Gender discourse in a populist election campaign. In F. Saccà (Ed.), *Democracy, power and territories* (pp. 30–46). Francoangeli.

Scrinzi, F. (2014). *Caring for the nation. Men and women activists in radical right populist parties*. European Research Council. http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_383799_en.pdf

Scrinzi, F. (2017). A "new" National Front? Gender, religion, secularism and the French populist radical right. In M. Köttig, R. Bitzan, & A. Petö (Eds.), *Gender and far right politics in Europe* (pp. 127–140). Springer.

Silva, B. C., & Proksch, S. O. (2022). Politicians unleashed? Political communication on Twitter and in parliament in Western Europe. *Political Science Research and Methods*, *10*(4), 776–792. https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2021.36

Spierings, N. (2020). Why gender and sexuality are both trivial and pivotal in populist radical right politics. In G. Dietza & J. Roth (Eds.), *Right-wing populism and gender* (pp. 41–58). transcript.

Verloo, M. (Ed.). (2018). *Varieties of opposition to gender equality in Europe*. Routledge.

About the Authors

Elisabetta De Giorgi is an associate professor of political science at the University of Trieste (Italy). Her main research interests are representative institutions and the behaviour of the various institutional actors in the parliamentary arena, notably parliamentary opposition. On these issues, she has published several articles in national and international journals and the volume *L'Opposizione parlamentare in Italia* (2016). She co-edited a number of special issues of international journals and the volume *Opposition Parties in European Legislatures* (2018).

Alice Cavalieri is a research fellow at the University of Turin (Italy) where she works on a project about the policy analysis capacity of high public servants. She is the country lead for Italy of the OxCGRT led by the Blavatnik School of Government (University of Oxford) and a member of the Italian team of the Comparative Agendas Project. Her main research interests concern public budgeting and policy changes in European countries. Her first book, *Italian Budgeting Policy*, is forthcoming in 2023 for Springer Nature (Palgrave Macmillan).

Francesca Feo is a PhD candidate and research fellow at Scuola Normale Superiore (Italy). Her thesis focuses on the varieties of resistance faced by gender and equality policies in comparative perspective. Her main research interests include gender and LGBT+ policy-making and the gender politics of populist and radical right parties in Europe. Her work appears, among others, in *Politics & Gender*, the *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, and the *International Political Science Review*. She is co-convenor of the standing group on gender and politics of the Italian Political Science Association (SISP).

Article

The "Accidental Candidate" Versus Europe's Longest Dictator: Belarus's Unfinished Revolution for Women

Farida Jalalzai [1,]* and Steven Jurek [2]

[1] Department of Political Science, Virginia Tech, USA
[2] Department of Political Science, SUNY Brockport, USA

* Corresponding author (fjalalzai@vt.edu)

Abstract

Women in Central and Eastern Europe have made gains as presidents and prime ministers. A notable exception to this is Belarus, where President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, the longest dictator in Europe, has tightly clung to power since 1994. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya surprised many when she threw her hat in the ring for the 2020 presidential election. This article asks how Tsikhanouskaya arose as the 2020 opposition candidate and how gender shaped the campaign. Gender played a central role in her being able to stand in the election. Her husband had been a leading presidential candidate but was imprisoned by the regime. Like women who rose to executive leadership positions, Tsikhanouskaya ran in her husband's place. Lukashenka permitted her candidacy because he did not see her as a political threat. Lukashenka regularly diminished her candidacy using sexist rhetoric. Tsikhanouskaya's own campaign highlighted more traditionally feminine traits such as being a nurturer, unifier, and non-power seeking, and only being in politics by chance. Referring to herself as an "accidental candidate," she made it clear that she sought to unify the Belarussian people against the dictatorship and would step aside after this was accomplished. As de facto opposition leader, she continues to highlight these more feminine qualities and craft a less threatening image.

Keywords

Belarus; Central and Eastern Europe; dictatorships; democracy; gender studies; revolution; women in politics

1. Introduction

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Europe's longest-serving dictator, has clung to power since 1994. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya surprised many when she ran in the 2020 presidential election. The "accidental candidate" quickly amassed supporters in opposition to the dictatorial regime. Though Lukashenka claimed a landslide victory, widespread reports of election irregularities surfaced triggering massive protests and government crackdowns (Neuman, 2020). Facing increasing threats of detention, Tsikhanouskaya took exile in Lithuania, unofficially serving as Belarus's leading opposition figure. This article asks how gender shaped both Tsikhanouskaya's 2020 candidacy and the presidential campaign.

Gender played a central role in Tsikhanouskaya's standing for election and factored noticeably in the campaign. Tsikhanouskaya's husband, a leading presidential candidate, was barred from running and imprisoned by the regime. Like several other women worldwide, Tsikhanouskaya rose to prominence through marital ties. Lukashenka only permitted her candidacy since he did not see her as a political threat because she is a woman and repeatedly diminished her candidacy with sexist rhetoric. Tsikhanouskaya's campaign highlighted more traditionally feminine traits such as being a surrogate,

unifier, and apolitical. Referring to herself as an "accidental candidate" she sought to unify the Belarussian people against the dictatorship but would step aside immediately if this was accomplished. While we recognize the importance of a woman coming close to cracking the Belarussian glass ceiling, Tsikhanouskaya's rise affirms the more limited pathways open to women where authoritarian institutions and structures prevail. Her stressing of more traditionally feminine traits suggests continued constraints on women's political ascension.

We first provide a short overview of Belarus and the autocratic government under Lukashenka. We then discuss women's political status. Moving to an analysis of Tsikhanouskaya, we focus on her rise as a candidate and scrutinize how gender facilitated her candidacy and influenced both campaigns. Our findings are based primarily on media analysis of the election and the ensuing protest movement. This case study sheds much-needed light on women as opposition leaders. The existence of an opposition leader does not imply there is democracy. Indeed, electoral autocracies are the most common types of authoritarian regimes and yet Tskihanouskaya leads the anti-system opposition party seeking democratic regime change in Belarus from abroad (Lührmann et al., 2018; Schedler, 2013). Her rise breaks the traditional understanding of how opposition leaders arise in autocracies, especially in presidential systems (Helms, 2021, 2022). This case study of Belarus allows us to better examine the link between women's rise to prominence through activism and family connections, but also the limits on women's political executive ascensions in autocratic systems.

2. Background of Belarus and the Rise of *Batka*

No current map of Europe excludes Belarus. Lukashenka's official narrative, however, glorifies Belarussian history as distinct from its European neighbors. Accordingly, *Batka*, or the father of the new nation, cultivates a "paternal" image and champions the role that an independent and sovereign Belarus operates in geopolitics by straddling East and West (Heintz, 2021). Belarus is seen as a border state to Europe, opposing a "return to Europe" as so many Eastern European countries sought after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Baltics, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, and Hungary (pre-Orbán) all have vocal popular narratives promoting Europeanness and regard Cold War-era communist governments as Kremlin imperialism or an interregnum that stymied their development (Graney, 2019). The ensuing determination towards reconnecting westward manifests in seeking European Union membership as well as admittance to NATO.

2.1. The Dictator

Lukashenka came from rather mundane origins of serving in the army for five years, then working as an instructor in political affairs and secretary in the communist youth organization in the 1970s. He moved up in the communist party as a state and collective farm manager in the 1980s (Press Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus, 2022). Elected to the parliament of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1990, he was the only deputy who opposed the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. In the first presidential election in the post-Soviet state, now Belarus, in 1994, Lukashenka beat the incumbent communist Prime Minister Vyacheslav Kebic, with 80% of the votes in the second round. He remains in power under his sixth consecutive presidency (Åslund, 2020).

2.2. Democratic Erosion

Despite relatively competitive elections in the early 1990s and amid optimism across all of Central Eastern Europe (CEE) over the course of the decade, Belarus became a repressive regime based around the cult of Lukashenka (Way, 2005). Opposition to Lukashenka became synonymous with unpatriotic behavior. Referenda in the mid-1990s increased presidential powers dramatically. The president could dismiss parliament, and the unicameral Supreme Council was disbanded and replaced with a bicameral National Assembly—of which the president selects one-third of the members of the upper house. Lukashenka extended his term another two years rather than hold the 1999 election (US Department of State, 2001). This is not uncommon in unfolding autocracies. The character of the people elected in nascent democracies directly impacts the viability to sustain democracy. If the rules of the game are changed, term limits eliminated, and political opposition repressed, then elections become uncompetitive and lack integrity. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue, the greatest threat to democracies comes from within.

By the early 2000s, substantial government manipulation of elections was evident, including incumbent monopolization of the media, weak opposition, and de facto power of the executive over parliament (US Department of State, 2001). Executive authority was virtually unlimited, corruption proved rampant, and the judiciary was no longer independent. The authoritarian state under Lukashenka's leadership became entrenched. In another referendum in 2004, presidential term limits were abolished, clearing the way for Lukashenka's monopolization of power (Myers, 2004).

2.3. Democracy and Autocracy

Democracy "presumes fully contested elections with full suffrage, and the absence of massive fraud, combined with effective guarantees of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, and association" (Collier & Levitsky, 1997, p. 434). Autocracy suggests that "citizens do not have the right to form organizations and only

elites have access to the legal system and therefore political leaders and powerful figures are not constrained by the rule of law; citizens' economic well-being is tied to their political connections" (Krasner, 2016, p. iii).

Across multiple indices measuring democracy, Belarus ranks among the bottom. The V-Dem Institute (2022) ranks Belarus 148th out of 179 countries. Belarus earned the abysmal ranking of 181 out of 195 countries in Freedom House (2022), which considered it a consolidated authoritarian regime. *Polity* categorizes Belarus as an autocracy and *The Economist*'s Democracy Index scores Belarus 18th worst in the world (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021). The Corruption Perceptions Index scores Belarus 41 out of 100 (Transparency International, 2021). Crackdowns on independent journalism positions Belarus as the worst in Europe (Reporters Without Borders, 2021). The autocratization of Belarus and civil society repression substantially limit democratic change. Despite allowing opposition candidates and parties in national elections, Belarus qualifies as an electoral autocracy; elections are neither free nor fair (Lührmann et al., 2018). Gender equality could thus also lag far behind. However, the situation is more complicated. The next section reflects the nuances associated with democracy and women's status.

3. Women's Status in Central Eastern Europe

Between 1945 and 1990, countries in CEE appeared supportive of women's participation. Constitutions often guaranteed equality between women and men, women's labor force participation was equal to men's, and child-care centers were state provided to alleviate burdens to women's workforce integration. Many parliaments featured gender quotas (Jaquette & Wolchik, 1998). Men, however, were still placed at the helm (La Font, 2001). As the fight for democracy transpired (1980–1990), women pushed for change (Penn, 2005). Women's engagement in independence movements in communist states proved limited (Waylen, 1994). Women's presence in political institutions in the aftermath of democratization also declined (Chiva, 2005, 2018; La Font, 2001 Wike et al., 2019). When parliaments became sites of real power, women were marginalized (Matland & Montgomery, 2003; Rincker, 2017).

The Global Gender Gap Index measures educational attainment, health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment. Based on a scale from 0 to 1 (with 1 indicating *gender parity*), Belarus's overall women's political empowerment score is 0.758 and is ranked 33rd among 156 countries. Economic participation and opportunity is 0.840; educational attainment is 0.999 (primary and secondary education is compulsory); health and survival is 0.977.

Women's political empowerment score is low, only 0.216. Women comprise only 3.6% of ministers and they have failed to attain the highest offices (World Economic Forum, 2021). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, women comprised only 3.8% of the legislature in 1990. A decade later, their share was only 4.5%. Women's levels jumped in 2004 when 29% of parliamentarians were women. This was followed in 2008 with 32% and then 26% and 27% in 2012 and 2016 respectively. Belarus is currently ranked 28th among 186 countries for women in the lower house, with 40% of legislators being women. Record highs were achieved without gender quotas (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). The average percentage of women legislators is 30% throughout Europe so Belarus's 25% for women in the upper house brings their numbers more to the norm. Still, without deeper interrogation, one would conclude that women's political standing was high, but this is more fantasy than reality.

Authoritarian rulers strategically extend women's rights and representation to enhance perceptions of regime legitimacy rather than to spur true democratic change (Tripp, 2019). Autocratic gender washing distracts observers from other governmental abuses to curry favor with the international community. Roughly two-thirds of the parliamentary quotas for women implemented in the mid-1990s were in authoritarian states (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2022). Women were loyalists; their allegiance was a precondition to their ascension while men enjoyed varied inroads and autonomy. Rather than empowering women, women legislators serve in more dependent roles *because* they are women; we see this very scenario playing out in Lukashenka's Belarus.

In 2004, Lukashenka was attempting to fill more seats with loyalists in the parliamentary elections. Parliament was not simply "rubber stamping" his agenda. Open disagreements surfaced and some members resorted to hunger strikes (Koulinka, 2006). Some of the few women parliamentarians broke away from male opponents of the president. One female parliamentarian publicly declared her loyalty to Lukashenka in the press, praised his leadership, and made a pragmatic case for increasing women's presence—incorporating more women would quickly raise Belarus's standing on international human development indices and sharply contrast the perception of authoritarianism (Koulinka, 2006). The goal was not to increase women's political empowerment or democratization but to present a better picture of Belarus to the world.

Before the elections, Lukashenka publicly declared the importance of increasing women's parliamentary presence through traditional understandings of gender roles:

> We should have no less than 30 to 40% women in parliament. Therefore I will use all means to support greater representation of the female portion of society in parliament....Male candidates who will compete against women...[should] give up [their intention to run for office] and let women work. Women should be widely represented in parliament. Then the parliament will be stable and calm. Women

are always an emanation of kindness. Then the male members of parliament will work properly. (Lukashenka as cited in Koulinka, 2006)

Women's enhanced participation is understood as a way to make legislators more obedient and respectful of the power structure and norms. As loyal and kind followers, women would respectfully toe the line and their presence would encourage their male counterparts to follow suit. Women candidates supported by Lukashenka accessed important resources such as media coverage. Lukashenka succeeded in having 30% of parliament comprised of women but the body was extremely weakened and akin to a rubber stamp (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, 2022). That the institution is so weak can help explain women's presence, whereas their absence often indicates more influence in the actual decision-making of that body (Luciak, 2005; Rincker, 2017). A woman has yet to hold the presidency or prime ministership, given Lukashenka's tight grip on power. Democratic transition is thought to facilitate women's political inclusion and is viewed as a springboard to presidencies and prime ministerships in part due to women's increased mobilization (Jalalzai, 2013; Montecinos, 2017). Advocating for independence from colonial powers or transition to democracy, women engage in political protest and sometimes leverage this experience to obtain a political foothold (Jalalzai, 2013; Montecinos, 2017). In some regions, including Asia and Latin America, women repeatedly stood at the forefront of democratic regime change—first toppling dictators, then holding office. These were often daughters or wives of charismatic male leaders (Jalalzai, 2013; Thompson, 2019). While still facing many obstacles, women demanded and seized myriad opportunities as previously closed systems opened to their participation before, during, or after the transition (Montecinos, 2017). Belarus has never successfully transitioned to democracy and Lukashenka's clinging to power helps explain the dearth of women executive leaders. While exceptions exist, the family path does not prevail for women executives in Europe, including the CEE (Jalalzai & Rincker, 2018). While executives from dynasties are largely declining in most democracies, they are quite common in less democratic systems (Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2017).

4. Tsikhanouskaya's Ascendance to Opposition Leader

This next section provides contextual details explaining increased public discontent and sets the stage for Tsikhanouskaya's ascension and the ways gender shaped her rise, candidacy, and role as opposition leader.

4.1. Situational Background: Discontent in Belarus

A potential transition emerged in 2020. Belarussians were growing discontented with the government for its handling of the pandemic and the economy. Moments of instability or crisis can propel women to executive power or at least mount strong candidacies. Lukashenka's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic grew in the spring to summer of 2020. Sponsored by the government, elderly war veterans and thousands of military personnel held the 9 May Victory Day military parade despite spiking virus cases. It was the only European country to hold professional soccer games with fans while the outbreak was in full swing. Lukashenka advised Belarusians to "kill the virus with vodka," go to saunas, and work in the fields to avoid infection. "Tractors will cure everybody!" he proclaimed (as cited in Karmanau, 2021a). Belarus stood apart from its European counterparts for not instituting a national lockdown or quarantine measures. Only very limited physical distancing measures were implemented while life went on mostly as usual (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). Yet, Belarusians' opposition to Lukashenka grew as the ineptitude of the government's handling of the pandemic became obvious. By June 2020, Belarus had nearly double the confirmed cases of Poland, which has four times the population (Roth, 2020).

Belarusians were vocal in their disgruntlement with Lukashenka's inability to deliver economically, and increasing protests throughout 2020 reflected this discontent. In 2014, Belarus' recorded its highest GDP of 78 billion USD, which by 2020 shrunk to nearly 60 billion USD. GDP per capita was virtually the same, at under 6200 USD, in 2014 as it was pre-pandemic 2020, positioned among the poorest in Europe (Trading Economics, 2020). While Lukashenka's official numbers claim near 0% unemployment, less than 6% below the poverty line, and a GINI index score that beats Iceland, Finland, and Norway, citizens no longer had confidence that his regime could deliver the goods. Real wages dropped over the last decade by almost 40% due to a highpoint inflation rate of over 100%. The last decade was lost in terms of economic growth and the underlying economic frustrations surfaced in the wake of the pandemic bungling (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.; Tokbolat, 2020; Zenkovich, 2020).

Instability set in as months of massive protests erupted due to the poor pandemic response and deteriorating economic conditions. Belarusian authorities responded with a ferocious crackdown with more than 35,000 people arrested and thousands beaten by police—a repression that triggered bruising Western sanctions. A series of events and miscalculations of Lukashenka set the stage for a political unknown. Siarhei Tsikhanouski, a popular opposition blogger and critic of Lukashenka's dictatorship, helped fuel widespread protests given his visibility. His anti-Lukashenka slogan "Stop the Cockroach" particularly displeased the regime and its popularity was deemed a threat to Lukashenka's stranglehold on power (Karmanau, 2021b). On May 6, 2020, nine days before the deadline to file paperwork for the August presidential election, Tsikhanouski was

detained for participating in an unauthorized demonstration held six months before (Filkins, 2021). The timing was suspicious and coincided with Tsikhanouski increasingly being asked by his social media followers to run for the presidency. Given his detention, he was unable to file the paperwork himself and, on May 16, Tsikhanouskaya tried to do so on his behalf. However, the election commission (controlled by Lukashenka) refused to accept the petition (Dorokhov, 2020).

4.2. Tskikhanouskaya's Rise: The Role of Gender

Tsikhanouskaya was an English teacher and had spent the last years raising her two young children. One of her children is deaf and she was helping him learn how to speak (Filkins, 2021). When Tsikhanouski became ineligible, Tsikhanouskaya decided to run for the presidency instead. Some reports suggested that Tsikhanouski was unaware of his wife's candidacy until he was suddenly released from pretrial detention and there were even reports that he was initially upset when he found out about her bid (Filkins, 2021). Other accounts mentioned that Tsikhanouski helped her obtain the 100,000 signatures she needed. Within one week after being released, Tsikhanouski was in detention again, accused of using violence against a police officer in what appeared to be a staged incident (Dorokhov, 2020).

Two other presidential aspirants, banker Viktor Babaryka and Valery Tsepkalo, a former ambassador to the United States and entrepreneur, were seen as potentially viable contenders. However, their candidacies were soon derailed. In June, Babaryka was arrested on various charges including embezzlement. Though allegations were widely perceived as politically driven, he was disqualified as a candidate given the pending charges (Dixon, 2020). By July 1, the signatures that Tsepkalo obtained were voided by the election commission, bringing an end to his candidacy (Jegelevicius, 2020). Tsikhanouskaya was one of the few candidates that remained in the field. Lukashenka perceived her as non-threatening *because* she was a woman, thus explaining why she was allowed to compete, a point we dissect later. Tsikhanouskaya, however, soon quickly grew as the main opposition candidate that disparate forces galvanized around ("BSDP (Community) urged," 2020).

As opposition crackdowns continued, Tsikhanouskaya sent her children abroad because she feared for their safety when she was told that they would be taken to an orphanage if she refused to withdraw from the race (Rogers, 2022). A few days later, Tsepkalo fled Belarus with his two sons because of threats that he would have his children taken away. His wife Veronika stayed in Belarus. Veronika Tsepkalo and Maria Kolesnikova, Babaryka's campaign manager, united around Tsikhanouskaya's candidacy. Research shows a willingness of the opposition to form pre-electoral coalitions even in autocracies when change is possible (Hauser, 2019). Thousands of people attended Tsikhanouskaya's first official campaign rally held on July 19, 2020 (Makhovsky, 2020). While clearly popular, the lack of reliable data does not allow us to firmly confirm the extent of public support.

Gender, "the culturally constructed meaning of biological sex differences," is "how we come to understand and often magnify the minor differences that exist between biological males and females" (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1996, p. 13). Individual personal characteristics link to various behavioral expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Virtually every culture associates women and men with feminine and masculine traits respectively. Women are typically connected to communal traits such as being nurturing, collaborative, and empathetic, while men are linked to agentic traits including being independent, competitive, and aggressive. The gendered hierarchy typically places perceived masculine characteristics above stereotypically feminine ones. Perceptions of women being collaborative may provide women some advantages, especially during a crisis. We see gender being pivotal to Tsikhanouskaya's rise. Gender was also a noticeable part of the 2020 election in that Tsikhanouskaya was a target of sexism at the hands of Lukashenka but she also tended to reinforce feminine roles as a candidate.

Gender manifested in the 2020 election through overt sexism. Lukashenka has made several statements throughout his political career advocating limited roles for women. He has reinforced women's role in the family and focused on women's appearance saying: "A woman's vocation is to decorate the world, while a man's is to protect the world and women" (as cited in Dryndova, 2020). Tskihanouskaya's candidacy was initially perceived as weak and non-threatening. This provided her coverage or protection as she was permitted to run because her candidacy was considered non-viable. As she was still obtaining the necessary signatures to run, Lukashenka stated at a rally that "our constitution is not for women. Our society has not matured enough to vote for a woman. This is because by the constitution the president handles a lot of power" (as cited in Petkova, 2020). Lukashenka, an unapologetic misogynist, made very similar statements throughout the campaign that cast doubts on women's ability to be presidents. He stated: "A woman can't be president [and] the president will be a man" (as cited in Luxmoore, 2020). He also said: "Our constitution was not written for women. And our society isn't ready to vote for a woman" (as cited in Luxmoore, 2020). Lukashenka perpetuated the image of the strong man and father of the nation and used his platform to diminish women's standing. "These three unfortunate little girls were found," he said, referring to Mariya Kalesnikava, Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and Veranika Tsapkala, adding: "They don't understand what they say and what they do. But we can see who stands behind them" (as cited in Luxmoore, 2020). As Tskihanouskaya gained a massive following, it is possible that Lukashenka continued to believe that she would not be appealing to enough Belarussians, because of her gender, or that he

did not want to signal that he was indeed threatened by her candidacy, thus allowing her to remain in the race.

The accidental quality of Tsikhanouskaya's rise is gendered. According to the media, she was "the accidental candidate in Belarus who is trying to unseat 'Europe's last dictator'" (Wesolowsky, 2020), the "accidental Joan of Arc" (Stickings, 2020), and an "accidental revolutionary" (Davidzon, 2021; Filkins, 2021). Tsikhanouskaya strategically highlighted the accidental nature of her candidacy. "I am accidental….I am not building my career, I am not settling scores, I do not know the language of politics, I do not like this business" (as cited in Filkins, 2021). Tsikhanouskaya's apolitical background reinforced the unlikely nature of her rise; she was a "housewife turned leader by fate" (Davidzon, 2021). She was not politically active (Filkins, 2021) and continued to see herself as apolitical even after declaring her candidacy. She stated: "During the campaign I didn't see myself as a politician but I pushed myself forward….I don't see myself in politics. I am not a politician" (as cited in Sytas, 2020). She was selected opposition leader not through a formal process but by default. The "accidental" nature of her candidacy and leadership breaks previous conceptions of how opposition leaders are chosen (Helms, 2022) but women executives, including Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom and Angela Merkel of Germany, are often depicted as "accidental" and "unexpected" (Jalalzai, 2013).

Another strategy Tsikhanouskaya employed was emphasizing being a wife that reluctantly stepped into politics on behalf of her husband. That Tsikhanouskaya's husband was a leading opposition figure comports with larger patterns related to women's pathways to executive power, such as Corazon Aquino of the Philippines (Jalalzai & Rincker, 2018). Tsikhanouskaya would never have run had it not been for her husband's imprisonment. She argued: "I had to take this place instead of my husband, who was imprisoned for no reason" (Rogers, 2022). Generally, women's candidacies are often framed as surrogates. They play the political game to further the agenda of others. This seemingly lessens the potential threat that women pose to the established gendered order (Jalalzai & Hankinson, 2008). The surrogate concept is particularly salient given the wife narrative. Party gatekeepers mobilize women candidates with family links because of perceived advantages. The party's interest is to maintain or achieve power; their backing of women is to preserve control. We do not argue that Tsikhanouskaya was mobilized by political players wielding power from behind the scenes. Rather, we recognize the long history of women serving as proxies for men, several of them who were wives of political men (Jalalzai, 2013).

Tsikhanouskaya's emergence reinforces feminine characterizations of women as political proxies and downplays her own political ambitions. The public was also growing weary of "strong man" politics making someone who eschewed the image of a politician particularly appealing. Tsikhanouskaya's discourse and even shy mannerisms likely appealed to more traditional segments of the public who turned against the regime. Being a woman also conceivably made Tsikhanouskaya seem more trustworthy given stereotypes.

A woman like Tsikhanouskaya could more convincingly demonstrate that she was motivated to seek power for the betterment of the nation in pursuit of democracy. Not being a politician was an asset to this cause. Tsikhanouskaya repeatedly noted that she was just like her fellow Belarusians and was an ordinary woman who wanted change: "I understand that people perceive me as an ordinary woman, that together for Belarusians fighting for these changes. And I understand that people know that, you know, what sympathy and empathy I have" (as cited in Rogers, 2022). The framing of Tsikhanouskaya's candidacy as accidental and her aim to bring democracy to Belarus in large part relied on traditional conceptions of women's roles. In contrast to Verononika Tsapkala and Kalesnikava, Tsikhanouskaya's message was not overtly feminist. Tsikhanouskaya's less militant persona and less political image better positioned her to lead the opposition. This trio of women opposition leaders was significant and mobilized other women.

Because she was not there to further an independent political career, a related frame that emerged was that of a temporary leader uniting the country against the dictatorship and moving towards democracy. Tsikhanouskaya pledged to step aside if elected: "My mandate is only to be with Belarusians till we bring our country to new elections" (as cited in Graham, 2021). She not only united her fellow citizens, but she brought together a diverse opposition that was ready to fight but increasingly facing crackdowns. She stated: "I am doing this for the Belarusian people (unity), and for my husband" (as cited in Filkins, 2021).

Throughout, Tsikhanouskaya highlighted motherhood: "People are forgetting that a year ago I was just a mother, not at all involved in politics" (as cited in Roth, 2021). Motherhood has frequently been used as an entry point for women in politics. Activists in the maternalist movement in the United States argued for women's empowerment by extension of their domestic roles. In Latin America, motherhood was key for the Bolivian Housewives Committee and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. Generally, women's activism was in response to government abuse of their family members and essentially an extension of their family roles. In Belarus, "women were thus not only led by women politicians but started to self-organize for political purposes" (Dryndova, 2020). With their male relatives being imprisoned for their opposition to Lukashenka, "hundreds of women formed long 'lines of solidarity,' carrying flowers" and portraits of loved ones detained during protests (Sandford, 2020). "Dressed in white they greeted all cars with flowers and cars answered them with signals. This peaceful protest against president dictator Lukashenko was named 'Flower Revolution'"

(Gaydukevich, 2020). Similar to other movements referenced, women came together to stop violence at the hands of security forces (Gaydukevich, 2020). While empowering, this perpetuates traditional notions of women as it tends to focus on women's identities as mothers and wives.

4.3. Leading the Non-Parliamentary Opposition

Official results of the August 2020 election awarded Tsikhanouskaya only 10% of the votes. Poll workers pointing out irregularities or violations were fired on the spot; many were forced to sign off on results before the election even took place, and others were made to sign falsified results. The pervasiveness of election tampering created an uproar (Manenkov & Litvinova, 2020). Post-election, it is no surprise the opposition formed a new party Together (Ivanova, 2020). Tsikhanouskaya called for the release of political prisoners, the adoption of a new constitution curtailing presidential powers, and new elections (Filkins, 2021).

As noted by Dingler et al. (2023), women are not very well represented in formal opposition roles and the literature has not focused on the few women who access these posts. Even research analyzing women heads of government, including Thatcher and Merkel, tends to ignore their roles in leading the opposition (Beckwith, 2015). According to Helms (2022), research analyzing gender and opposition is grounded in resistance women face as politicians or opposition to the goals of women's empowerment. In contrast, this article and thematic issue directly focus on varied ways women can lead the opposition even in autocratic systems. Leaders and others recognized as such by the international media in these systems tend not to be located within parliaments but instead operate as opponents to authoritarian regimes from the outside. Tsikhanouskaya plays an important role in leading the opposition without having a parliamentary seat or even physically being in the country given the risks to her and/or her family's lives. Her case demonstrates the complexity and variability among opposition leaders.

Based in Vilnius, Lithuania, Tsikhanouskaya currently concentrates her efforts on generating international support for the Belarusian opposition and demands that the dictatorial regime faces stricter sanctions. She uses her influence to mobilize activists and volunteers to stop the violence. Freeing the scores of political opponents that have been imprisoned and demanding new presidential elections is central. She has tried to enhance civil society in Belarus by providing critical information (that would normally be censured) and fostering connections between civil society groups. Her active social media accounts attest to this as does her high public profile. She has traveled internationally to meet world leaders, including President Biden in the United States, to influence policy pertaining to Belarus. Tsikhanouskaya uses her international platform to make demands and to raise awareness of the continued abuse political activists and opponents of the Lukashenka regime face. She has also created what might be deemed as a shadow government. From her official website, 16 people comprise her "team": nine women and seven men. She calls herself the "leader of Belarusian democratic forces" and "leader of a democratic Belarus" (Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, 2022). She continues to highlight similar feminine stereotypes she did during the campaign including being a reluctant politician and unifier. As Russia initiated a full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Tsikhanouskaya focused substantial attention on the Belarussian anti-war movement, seeking to prevent Belarusian forces from joining the war and calling for Lukashenka's removal. This strategy is an attempt to reactivate opposition to the regime. Given the crackdowns after the 2020 elections, the public tended to avoid actively engaging in protest activity out of fear for their security and the invasion has not seemed to substantially change this (Kłysiński, 2022). Repression and censorship remain the norm and there are still over 600 political prisoners in Belarus (Euronews, & Associated Press, 2021).

5. Conclusions

While women have recently made gains in executive office holding in CEE, Belarus is an exception. Belarus has not transitioned to democracy and opposition is not tolerated. In 2020, a potential challenge to the status quo manifested when a poor economy and terrible pandemic response prompted widespread protests. Lukashenka's regime imprisoned and/or disqualified the greatest threats (all men). When Tsikhanouskaya stepped in as presidential candidate when her husband was imprisoned, she united different factions against the regime. Like other women who rose to prominence, Tsikhanouskaya ascended to politics due to her marital ties. Perpetuating the strong man and father of the country, Lukashenka attacked women in the opposition using sexist rhetoric. He permitted Tsikhanouskaya's candidacy since he did not see her as a political threat; given the statements made throughout the campaign, it is very likely that he viewed her this way, at least in part, *because* she was a woman.

Tsikhanouskaya's campaign highlighted more traditionally feminine traits such as being a nurturer, unifier, and apolitical. Referring to herself as an "accidental candidate" she sought to unify the Belarussian people against the dictatorship but would step aside immediately in the aftermath. She skillfully portrayed herself as a surrogate for her husband and her shy and non-threatening style likely allowed her to gain mass appeal, even among more traditional voters.

Despite Tsikhanouskaya's initial hesitancy to stay involved in politics, her opposition to the regime continues. Some of the most prominent women opposition leaders today do not officially hold political office (Dingler et al., 2023). Undoubtedly, Tsikihanouskaya is

recognized as the leading opposition leader in Belarus despite lacking a formal role. Her example demonstrates the importance of broadening the conception of opposition leaders, recognizing their important influence, and acknowledging the high stakes of their participation. Still, her more traditional pathway to prominence and tendency to highlight feminine traits suggests limitations women still face in autocratic systems like Belarus.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Åslund, A. (2020, August 9). Europe's last dictator: The rise and fall of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. *Atlantic Council*. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/belarusalert/europes-last-dictator-the-rise-and-possible-fall-of-alexander-lukashenko

Beckwith, K. (2015). Before prime minister: Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, and gendered party leadership contests. *Politics and Gender*, *11*(4), 718–745.

Besley, T., & Reynal-Querol, M. (2017). The logic of hereditary rule. *Journal of Economic Growth*, *22*(2), 123–144.

Bjarnegård, E., & Zetterberg, P. (2022). How autocrats weaponize women's rights. *Journal of Democracy*, *33*(2), 60–75.

BSDP (Community) urged to vote for Tikhanovskaya and defend the right to free elections. (2020, July 23). *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. https://www-svaboda-org.translate.goog/a/30743221.html?_x_tr_sl=be&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc

Central Intelligence Agency. (n.d.). *Belarus country report*. The World Factbook. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/belarus/#economy

Chiva, C. (2005). Women in post-communist politics: Explaining under-representation in the Hungarian and Romanian parliaments. *Europe-Asia Studies*, *57*(7), 969–994.

Chiva, C. (2018). *Gender, institutions and political representation reproducing male dominance in Europe's new democracies*. Palgrave MacMillan.

Collier, D., & Levitsky, S. (1997). Democracy with adjectives. *World Politics*, *49*(3), 430-451.

Davidzon, V. (2021, March 10). Belarus opposition leader calls on West to get tough. *Atlantic Council*. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/belarusalert/belarus-opposition-leader-calls-on-west-to-get-tough

Dingler, S., Helms, L., & Müller, H. (2023). Women opposition leaders: Pathways, patterns, and performance.

Politics and Governance, *11*(1), 80–84.

Dixon, R. (2020, July 23). Belarus's Lukashenka jailed election rivals and mocked women as unfit to lead. Now one is leading the opposition. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/belarus-lukashenko-opposition-election/2020/07/23/86f231f6-c5ca-11ea-a825-8722004e4150_story.html

Dorokhov, V. (2020, August 6). Who is Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya? *DW*. https://www.dw.com/en/sviatlana-tsikhanouskaya-the-teacher-challenging-lukashenko-europes-last-dictator/a-54472974

Dryndova, O. (2020, December 9). A feminist revolution? On the female face of the Belarusian protests. *Eurozine*. https://www.eurozine.com/a-feminist-revolution

Duerst-Lahti, G., & Kelly, R. (Eds.). (1996). *Gender, power, leadership and governance*. University of Michigan Press.

Eagly, A., & Karau, S. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, *109*(3), 573–598.

Economist Intelligence Unit. (2021). *Democracy index 2021*. https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020

Euronews, & Associated Press. (2021, August 8). Belarusian authorities detain over 20 in new wave of arrests. *Euronews*.

European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity. (2022). *Belarus*. https://www.europeanforum.net/countries/belarus

Filkins, D. (2021, December 6). The accidental revolutionary leading Belarus's uprising: How Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya came to challenge her country's dictatorship. *The New Yorker*. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/12/13/the-accidental-revolutionary-leading-belaruss-uprising

Freedom House. (2022). *Countries and territories*. https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores

Gaydukevich, O. (2020, September 19). The flower revolution of Belarus. *Thursd*. https://thursd.com/posts/the-flower-revolution-of-belarus

Graham, T. (2021, July 26). A conversation with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. *Council on Foreign Relations*. https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-sviatlana-tsikhanouskaya

Graney, K. (2019). *Russia, the former Soviet Republics, and Europe since 1989: Transformation and tragedy*. Oxford University Press.

Hauser, M. (2019). *Electoral strategies under authoritarianism: Evidence from the former Soviet Union*. Lexington Books.

Heintz, J. (2021, May 25). Dictator or dad? Belarus leader suppresses all dissent. *AP News*. https://apnews.com/article/belarus-europe-business-187dbc95a9a0f70c58ee610c67ff372d

Helms, L. (2021). Introduction: The nature of politi-

cal opposition in contemporary electoral democracies and autocracies. *European Political Science*, 20, 569–579. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-021-00323-z

Helms, L. (2022). Political oppositions in democratic and authoritarian regimes: A state-of-the-field(s) review. *Government and Opposition*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.25

Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2022). *Global data on national parliaments*. IPU Parline. https://data.ipu.org/node/16/data-on-women?chamber_id=13335

Ivanova, P. (2020, September 1). Belarus opposition leaders to create new political party. *The Independent*. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/belarus-protests-opposition-election-maria-kolesnikova-lukashenko-together-a9697916.html

Jalalzai, F. (2013). *Shattered, cracked or firmly intact? Women and the executive glass ceiling worldwide*. Oxford University Press.

Jalalzai, F., & Hankinson, C. (2008). Political widowhood in the United States: An empirical assessment of underlying assumptions of representation. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *29*(3), 395–426. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15544770802212224

Jalalzai, F., & Rincker, M. (2018). Blood is thicker than water: Family ties to political power worldwide. *Historical Social Research*, *43*(4), 54–72.

Jaquette, J., & Wolchik, S. (Eds.). (1998). *Women and democracy: Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe.* The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Jegelevicius, L. (2020, July 1). Belarus presidential election: Key challenger Valery Tsepkalo barred as Lukashenka rivals trimmed. *Euronews*. https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/01/belarus-presidential-election-key-challenger-valery-tsepkalo-barred-as-lukashenko-rivals-t

Karmanau, Y. (2021a, October 22). Belarus scraps short-lived mask mandates amid virus surge. *Associated Press*. https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-europe-health-pandemics-belarus-23001be567f93f12980c60bedd81a77c

Karmanau, Y. (2021b, December 14). Belarus court sentences opposition leader's husband to eighteen years in prison. *News Hour*. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/belarus-court-sentences-opposition-leaders-husband-to-18-years-in-prison

Kłysiński, K. (2022, March 24). *Saving face abroad: The Belarusian opposition in exile on the war in Ukraine*. Center for Eastern Studies. https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2022-03-24/saving-face-abroad-belarusian-opposition-exile-war-ukraine

Koulinka, N. (2006). Women, political discourse, and mass media in the Republic of Belarus. *Global Media Journal*, *5*(9), 1–5. https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/women-political-discourse-and-mass-media-in-the-republic-of-belarus.php?aid=35179

Krasner, S. (2016). *Autocracies failed and unfailed: Limited strategies for state building*. Atlantic Council. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Failed_States_SP_0315_web.pdf

La Font, S. (2001). One step forward, two steps back: Women in the post-communist states. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *34*, 203–220.

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die*. Penguin Books.

Luciak, I. (2005). Party and state in Cuba: Gender equality in political decision making. *Politics & Gender*, *1*(2), 241–263.

Lührmann, A., Tannenberg, M., & Lindberg, S. (2018). Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening new avenues for the comparative study of political regimes. *Politics and Governance*, *6*(1), 60–77.

Luxmoore, M. (2020, August 21). As Lukashenka clings to power, his trusty machismo is losing its allure. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. https://www.rferl.org/a/as-lukashenka-clings-to-power-his-trusty-machismo-is-losing-its-allure/30795991.html

Makhovsky, A. (2020, July 20). Belarus presidential candidate sends her children abroad after threats. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/belarus-election-candidate-children-idINKCN24L1Q3

Manenkov, K., & Litvinova, D. (2020, September 1). Belarus poll workers describe fraud in August 9 election. *Associated Press*. https://apnews.com/article/international-news-ap-top-news-europe-72e43a8b9e4c56362d4c1d6393bd54fb

Matland, R., & Montgomery, K. (Eds.). (2003). *Women's access to political power in post-communist Europe*. Oxford University Press.

Montecinos, V. (Ed.). (2017). *Women presidents and prime ministers in post-transition democracies*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Myers, S. (2004, October 18). Boss of Belarus seems to win referendum, as expected. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/18/world/europe/boss-of-belarus-seems-to-win-referendum-as-expected.html

Neuman, S. (2020, September 23). Belarus president is secretly inaugurated weeks after disputed election. *National Public Radio*. https://www.npr.org/2020/09/23/916000965/belarus-president-is-secretly-inaugurated-weeks-after-disputed-election

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2020). *Voices from the field, Belarus: Defending the rights of the vulnerable in the face of the pandemic*. https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2020/06/voices-field-belarus-defending-rights-vulnerable-face-pandemic

Penn, S. (2005). *Solidarity's secret: The women who defeated communism in Poland*. University of Michigan Press.

Petkova, M. (2020, August 7). Who is the woman challenging Belarusian president Lukashenko? *Aljazeera*. https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/8/

7/who-is-the-woman-challenging-belarusian-president-lukashenko

Press Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus. (2022). *Biography of the president of the Republic of Belarus*. https://president.gov.by/en/president/biography/full

Reporters Without Borders. (2021). *Belarus*. https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2021

Rincker, M. (2017). *Empowered by design decentralization and the gender policy trifecta*. Temple University Press.

Rogers, D. (2022, January 3). *The reluctant revolutionary: An interview with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya*. Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy. https://genevasummit.org/the-reluctant-revolutionary-an-interview-with-sviatlana-tsikhanouskaya

Roth, A. (2020, June 16). Belarus blues: Can Europe's "last dictator" survive rising discontent? *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/16/slipper-revolution-lukashenkos-reign-under-pressure-in-belarus

Roth, A. (2021, August 9). Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya: "Belarusians weren't ready for this level of cruelty." *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/09/sviatlana-tsikhanouskaya-belarusians-not-ready-cruelty-lukashenko-belarus

Sandford, A. (2020, August 13). Belarus crackdown: Women form human chains in 'solidarity' protests. *Euronews*. https://www.euronews.com/2020/08/13/belarus-un-human-rights-chief-condemns-crackdown-as-thousands-of-protesters-remain-in-cust

Schedler, A. (2013). *The politics of uncertainty: Sustaining and subverting electoral authoritarianism*. Oxford University Press.

Stickings, T. (2020, August 17). The stay-at-home mother standing up to Belarus's strongman leader: How an English teacher became protest movement's "accidental Joan of Arc" battling for country's freedom after "rigged" election. *Daily Mail*. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8634819/Belaruss-opposition-leader-taking-dictator-Europe.html

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. (2022). *Team*. https://tsikhanouskaya.org/en/team

Sytas, A. (2020, August 22). Belarusian opposition leader sees herself as a symbol of change. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-belarus-election-tsikhanouskaya/belarusian-opposition-leader-sees-herself-as-a-symbol-of-change-idUSKBN25I0G4

Thompson, M. (2019). The rise and downfall of dynastic female leaders in Asia. In C. Chao & L. Ha (Eds.), *Asian women leadership* (pp. 49-62). Routledge.

Tokbolat, Y. (2020, August 8). Economic stagnation is at the heart of the Belarus protests. *The National Interest*. https://nationalinterest.org/blog/politics/economic-stagnation-heart-belarus-protests-167900

Trading Economics. (2020). *Belarus GDP per capita*. https://tradingeconomics.com/belarus/gdp-per-capita

Transparency International. (2021). *Corruption Perceptions Index*. https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/blr

Tripp, A. (2019). *Seeking legitimacy: Why Arab autocracies adopt women's rights*. Cambridge University Press.

US Department of State. (2001). *Belarus country report on human rights practices for 1996*. https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/1996_hrp_report/belarus.html

V-Dem Institute. (2022). *Democracy report 2022: Autocratization changing nature?* https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf

Way, L. (2005). Authoritarian state building and the sources of regime competitiveness in the fourth wave: The cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine. *World Politics*, *57*(2), 231–261.

Waylen, G. (1994). Women and democratization: Conceptualizing gender relations in transition politics. *World Politics*, *46*(3), 327–354.

Wesolowsky, T. (2020, August 5). The accidental candidate in Belarus who is trying to unseat "Europe's last dictator." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. https://www.rferl.org/a/the-accidental-candidate-in-belarus-who-is-trying-to-unseat-europe-s-last-dictator-/30767486.html

Wike, R., Poushter, J., Silver, L., Devlin, K., Fetterolf, J., Castillo, A., & Huang, C. (2019). *European public opinion three decades after the fall of communism*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/gender-equality-2

World Economic Forum. (2021). *Global gender gap report*. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

Zenkovich, T. (2020, August 26). Belarus protests: Beleaguered economy underpins anger at Lukashenko government. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/belarus-protests-beleaguered-economy-underpins-anger-at-lukashenko-government-145063

About the Authors

Farida Jalalzai is associate dean for global initiatives and engagement in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences and professor of political science at Virginia Tech. Her research analyzes the role of gender in the political arena including women national leaders. She has published several books and authored dozens of articles and chapters related to women in politics around the world. Her research has been funded by the Thyssen Foundation and she is a recipient of the Fulbright Commission Global Scholar Award.

Steven Jurek is associate professor and chair of the Political Science and International Studies Department at the State University of New York Brockport. He is also the American director of the TransAtlantic Consortium for European Union Simulations and Studies, which organizes an annual multi-day international simulation between twenty European and American universities. His research interests include European integration, comparative politics, and democratization.

Article

Gender and Opposition Leadership in the Pacific Islands

Kerryn Baker [1],* and Jack Corbett [2]

[1] Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University, Australia
[2] Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Southampton, UK

* Corresponding author (kerryn.baker@anu.edu.au)

Abstract
Parliaments in the Pacific Islands are among the most male-dominated in the world. Yet despite the odds, there is a cohort of women who have been elected and won senior roles. This article adds to an emerging literature that examines the gendered pathways to political influence in the region by focusing on the hitherto overlooked role of the opposition leader. It uses a biographical approach to consider the pathways in and through this role by four women opposition leaders: Fiame Naomi Mata'afa (Samoa), Hilda Heine (Marshall Islands), Dame Carol Kidu (Papua New Guinea), and Ro Teimumu Kepa (Fiji). We parse out factors that explain the success of these leaders while also identifying barriers that have prevented their emergence in other Pacific states. We identify two main ways in which women politicians have used the position of leader of the opposition: first, the conventional understanding of the role as a path to power; and second, the less well-understood role of defending and protecting democratic norms and institutions. The latter can be interpreted as a version of the "glass cliff" phenomenon where women leaders assume key positions in times of crisis. Our findings thus highlight that while in the Pacific the role of leader of the opposition can be a path to power, the relatively few women leaders who have taken on this role have used it in diverse and varied ways.

1. Introduction

Political opposition is fundamental to our understanding of liberal democracy. But as the introduction to this thematic issue shows (Dingler et al., 2023), conceptualising "opposition" leadership for the purposes of comparative research has proven a long-standing challenge. The Pacific region is no exception. Most states operate Westminster systems and many have first-past-the-post electoral systems (Fraenkel, 2016; Larmour, 2005). Yet party systems are often fragmented and weakly institutionalised (see Bishop et al., 2020; Rich et al., 2008). When the opposition is considered, it is usually defined by its absence: in terms of ideological or programmatic debate; party-based campaigning; and key resources

and organisational capacity. Instead, the key focus is on the pre-eminence of executive dominance, with opposition benches occupied by those members of parliament (MPs) unable to gain ministerial roles who are waiting for the chance to launch a motion of no confidence and obtain them (see May, 2017; Morgan, 2005).

The same focus on absence is true for women politicians, leading to a dearth of analysis of women opposition leaders (see Helms, 2022). Women are very much under-represented in Pacific politics as both legislators and leaders. While women's political leadership is an increasingly large area of scholarship, both globally (see Jalalzai, 2013; O'Brien, 2015) and in the Pacific Islands region (see Cox et al., 2020; Spark & Corbett, 2020), how and why women assume the role of opposition leader is

far less studied. Rather, the focus is on the obstacles to participation and influence, which in the Pacific include financial, cultural, and institutional barriers (see Baker, 2018; Fraenkel, 2006; Huffer, 2006; Zetlin, 2014).

Despite this difficult context, there is nevertheless a cohort of women who have held the position of opposition leader in Pacific legislatures. To consider how women MPs have interpreted the role of opposition leader we compare the experience of four who have held the post: Fiame Naomi Mata'afa (Samoa), Hilda Heine (Marshall Islands), Dame Carol Kidu (Papua New Guinea), and Ro Teimumu Kepa (Fiji). We adopt a biographical approach to explore their pathways in and through the position. We find two different trajectories: first, a short tenure that ultimately proves a stepping stone to the role of head of government; and second, a (potentially) longer occupancy in which women leaders frame their opposition leadership in terms of defending democratic norms and institutions rather than trying to establish a credible alternative government. The latter trajectory can be interpreted as a version of the "glass cliff" phenomenon (Ryan & Haslam, 2005), where women leaders assume key positions in times of crisis. In the Pacific, this form of "glass cliff" opposition leadership has not become a path to power; instead, women's leadership in these periods has become symbolic of democratic resistance and resilience. Our findings thus support the common view that in the Pacific the role of the leader of the opposition is only rarely a path to power while at the same time adding much-needed nuance to its specific use by women leaders.

To substantiate these claims, the article is structured as follows. We begin with a brief overview of the literature on opposition leadership and how the role has been constituted in the Pacific region. Then, we outline the methods and approach of this article. Following that, we examine the experiences of four women leaders of the opposition in Pacific Islands countries. We consider their experiences through the lens of two distinct narratives: (a) opposition leaders as heading credible alternate governments and (b) opposition leaders as defenders of democratic norms and institutions. We conclude by considering what the experiences of women opposition leaders in the Pacific can tell us about democracy and politics in the region more broadly.

2. Opposition Leadership, Gender, and Pacific Politics

As Dingler et al. (2023) demonstrate in their introduction to this issue, there are three main strands of literature that can help us explain the form and function of opposition leadership. The explanatory power of each strand varies in relation to the Pacific region. Taken together, though, we can see that despite its significant social and political diversity, there are notable general trends in the region: Institutions are weak, creating space for highly personalised and intensely male-dominated systems to emerge.

The first explanation is institutional. Most Pacific states adopted versions of the Westminster system—including executive-legislative fusion and first-past-the-post electoral systems—at independence (Fraenkel, 2016; Larmour, 2005). Yet Westminster systems have functioned very differently than expected in the region, with politics often defined by the weakness of programmatic political parties or institutionalised party systems, and the corresponding personalisation of political leadership (see Corbett, 2015a; Kabuni et al., 2022; Steeves, 1996). Indeed, these trends recur despite the diversity of political institutions and cultures across the region. The point is that while parties matter in most of the Pacific—politicians regularly move between them and form new ones—they do not play a critical role in mobilising voters for elections. By and large, Pacific voters elect relatives, community members, or persons whom they have a prior association with, rather than parties. The result is that where parties do exist, and regardless of the mix (single, two-party, or multi-party systems), their main role is that they enable politicians to form a government and maintain executive authority (Corbett, 2015b; Rich et al., 2008). This form of highly personalised politics has two distinct effects (Corbett, 2015a). On the one hand, it creates unstable governments, with the switch of a few MPs triggering frequent motions of no confidence. On the other, some leaders are able to dominate all aspects of political and social life to the extent that they have unparalleled influence. Indeed, some countries fluctuate between these extremes, with Nauru emblematic of how a sustained period of dominance by independence leader Hammer deRoburt was followed by a succession of short-lived political alliances that rose and fell with alarming regularity (Connell, 2006). In short, institutional explanations of opposition leadership have limited explanatory power as even though Pacific states often follow the Westminster tradition of nominating an "official opposition," the person who inhabits the role does not usually fulfil the same functions as in other states.

The second explanation is drawn from leadership studies and focuses on agency rather than structure. This literature should be better placed to explain why institutionalist explanations struggle to account for the patterns and trends apparent in the Pacific. Where party politics is weakly institutionalised, as in the Pacific, personal networks take on outsized importance over and above formal political structures (see Corbett, 2015a; Corbett & Veenendaal, 2018). These include familial, church, and clan ties. In much of the Pacific, chiefly authority is also interlinked with political authority. Studies of political leadership in the region, however, rarely consider the role of the opposition, let alone subject it to sustained theorisation. Rather, the tendency is to note its absence. When the opposition is discussed, it is usually by reference to potential alternative prime ministerial candidates (but not necessarily alternative parties or policy platforms). The position has also been interpreted as an

important symbol for reformers who champion a particular way of practising democratic governance. As we shall see, in Papua New Guinea, Dame Carol Kidu assumed the position in 2012 as the sole member of the opposition amidst a constitutional crisis. In Fiji, Ro Teimumu Kepa held the role in the context of the Frank Bainimarama-led government suspending many other liberal rights and freedoms. The point in each case is that the position of leader of the opposition can also be occupied by figures who seek to champion a more programmatic—and, arguably, democratic—form of politics as an alternative to the highly personalised systems that are the more common pattern. As the above examples illustrate, a number of leaders who have fulfilled this role have been women. Indeed, until the relatively recent elevation of Hilda Heine (in 2016) and Fiame Naomi Mata'afa (in 2021) to lead their countries, opposition leader and deputy prime minister were the most senior positions women politicians in the Pacific had obtained.

The third explanation can be found in the literature on gender and politics. Women in Pacific politics are usually defined by their absence, both from parliament but also senior public roles. The region is infamous for having the lowest levels of women MPs in the world. Unsurprisingly, this has led to a significant body of work on the barriers to women's political participation (see Baker, 2018; Fraenkel, 2006; Huffer, 2006; Zetlin, 2014). Key factors include the pervasive influence of money politics on campaigning, which means campaign costs are prohibitive for many women and lead to their being considered high-risk candidates. Cultural factors are also important, both in relation to traditional norms and customs, but also the pervasive influence of Christianity across the region. Electoral systems, particularly first-past-the-post voting systems, are also identified as a significant barrier. As elsewhere, prospective women leaders may also run "from" rather than "for" office due to the perception that politics is corrupt and highly masculinised (Spark & Corbett, 2018).

The general frame through which Pacific politics is examined tells us that weak institutions have given rise to highly personalised, male-dominated systems. In such systems, opposition leadership is rarely considered in its own right, whether through an institutional, leadership, or gender lens. If it is considered at all, it is as a pit stop to executive leadership: a temporary position in which to consolidate support for a tilt at the prime ministership (or presidency), in a dynamic political context. We would therefore expect women politicians to treat the role of leader of the opposition in a similar way to their male colleagues—as a way of increasing their profile and reputation as a potential leader of government. What is interesting is that they appear just as likely to gain the role when the democratic system itself appears under threat.

This latter observation conforms to theories that emphasise how women are disproportionately represented in leadership positions that are considered precarious and often assume such positions in times of cri-

sis, a phenomenon known as the "glass cliff" (see Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan et al., 2010). The "glass cliff" constitutes an additional barrier for women leaders, as women in such positions face a more difficult path to success (and in this case, to government). Yet in such circumstances, the presence of women opposition leaders has important symbolic value. In periods of democratic crisis or transition, the issue of women's representation is significant both in that the absence of women is viewed as a democratic deficit, but also in that the increased presence of women is often framed as a means of strengthening democracy (Waylen, 2015). When women become opposition leaders they inhabit these framings. Using four case studies from the Pacific region—which, like other non-western regions, is under-studied in literature on women's political leadership and the "glass cliff" phenomenon—we highlight how women have taken on the role of opposition leader in periods of democratic strain and upheaval. The lesson is that for a select few women, the role has proven to be a rapid springboard to the prime ministership. For others, the position has been more symbolic, with women opposition leaders perceived as defenders of democratic values.

3. Methods and Approach

In this article, we use a biographical approach to consider the pathways in and through the role of the opposition leader for four women, all the first to assume opposition leader roles in their respective countries. This approach is the most feasible given the small number of cases there are to consider (Dingler et al., 2023). It has also been used quite extensively to study women MPs in the region (see Cox et al., 2020; Spark & Corbett, 2020). We draw primarily on public sources—published interviews, profiles, biographies, and speeches—to undertake this analysis. We draw extensively on the numerous interviews and profiles from local and international media outlets on the four opposition leaders, as well as parliamentary transcripts and the existing academic literature. We have also conducted at least one research interview with each of the profiled opposition leaders for prior projects (see Baker, 2019; Corbett, 2015a). Due to guarantees we gave when collecting some of that material—including a commitment to not attribute quotes—we rely on it for background only. Carol Kidu has written an autobiography (Kidu, 2002) and Ro Teimumu Kepa is the subject of a biography (Rasigatale, 2003), although both were written before their time as opposition leaders.

Our definition of "opposition" is broad, following Helms (2022), and is consistent with the often fractured and malleable party systems present in the Pacific region. Carol Kidu and Ro Teimumu Kepa were officially recognised as leaders of the opposition within parliament, while Hilda Heine and Fiame Naomi Mata'afa were publicly recognised as opposition leaders due to their positions as the head of the opposition parliamentary bloc

and the main opposition party respectively. As we will outline, the contexts in which women opposition leaders have risen to power are incredibly diverse. As a result, we primarily focus on drawing out patterns or similarities across the group as differences are much better explained by context specificities. Although a comprehensive assessment of both women's and men's experiences as opposition leaders is beyond the scope of this article, we acknowledge that the key pattern we seek to emphasise—how women opposition leaders have often been cast as defenders of democracy—is not unique to them as male politicians have also taken on this role (for example, Mick Beddoes, in Fiji, as opposition leader in 2002–2004, and 2006). But we also argue that its recurrence is not entirely coincidental and thus reveals an important way in which contemporary understandings of both gender and democratic leadership intertwine in the Pacific context.

The four leaders are each drawn from countries that adopted elements of the British Westminster parliamentary system, with varying levels of hybridisation. Fiji has consistently been the clearest example of "opposition with a capital 'O'" (Potter, 1966). Fiji's party system is more strongly institutionalised than in the other case studies, due in large part to the ethnic cleavage that has defined post-independence politics in the state (see Durutalo, 2008). Its political history, however, has been disrupted by a succession of coups and abrogations of its (four) constitutions (see Frankel & Firth, 2007; Lal, 1992; Lal & Pretes, 2001). Periods of military rule have limited democratic rights and freedoms, including that of the political opposition. Ro Teimumu Kepa is to date the only woman elected leader of the opposition in Fiji, serving in the role from 2014 to 2018. Ro Teimumu was first elected to Parliament in 2001, and was deputy prime minister from 2001 to 2006, when the government she was part of was overthrown in a military coup. When Fiji returned to democracy in 2014, she was elected leader of the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) and became leader of the opposition following the election. She was replaced as SODELPA leader by Sitiveni Rabuka in 2016, and he became the opposition leader following the 2018 election.

In Papua New Guinea, the party system is fragmented and parties are for the most part loose formations of politicians without clear ideological foundations (see Okole, 2005). As governments are generally formed through large and unwieldy coalitions of small party groups and independents, so too are opposition blocs. The lure of access to ministerial portfolios and government funds, in addition to grace periods that prevent votes of no confidence for half of each parliamentary term, means the opposition is often further limited by defections (Kabuni et al., 2022). Dame Carol Kidu was the leader of the opposition in Papua New Guinea from February to July 2012. Prior to this, Kidu had been a parliamentarian since 1997. She had served as a Cabinet member with the community development port-

folio from 2002 until a constitutional crisis in 2011 led to her becoming opposition leader. Kidu retired from politics in July 2012.

Marshall Islands adopted a hybrid constitution that mixed elements of US presidentialism with Westminster parliamentarianism. The leader of the government is elected by members of the Nitijela (parliament) and also acts as the head of state. This executive-legislative fusion creates space for a Westminster-style opposition leader role. But, like Papua New Guinea, the absence of strong parties or an institutionalised party system makes coalition membership relatively fluid. Of note is the interplay between democratic politics and the Marshallese chiefly system, with several Presidents also high-ranking chiefs (see Carucci, 1997). Hilda Heine was first elected to the Nitijela in 2011 and became minister for education. Heine was the leader of the opposition from 4 January to 26 January 2016, after which she became president when her predecessor Casten Nemra lost a no confidence motion. The Heine government lost office in January 2020 following a general election.

In Samoa, the authors of the constitution sought to balance representative democracy with traditional forms of governance. Initially, adversarial elements of a Westminster political system, including elections and political parties, were seen as contrary to customary traditions of consensus in decision-making (Lawson, 1996). The first Samoan political party, the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), was not established until 1979, seventeen years after independence (see So'o, 2008). It grew to control electoral politics for four decades, regularly winning a two-thirds majority in parliament and using its legislative dominance to weaken opposition movements (see Iati, 2013). Following the 2016 election, in which HRPP-endorsed or affiliated candidates won a combined 94 per cent of parliamentary seats, the country had no recognised opposition. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa was the leader of the opposition party Fa'atuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST) in Samoa from March 2021 to April 2021. Fiame first entered parliament in 1985 and became a Cabinet minister in 1991. In 2016, she became Samoa's first woman deputy prime minister. In 2020 she resigned from the Cabinet after a dispute within the HRPP government over proposed changes to the judicial system. After being elected leader of the opposition FAST party, she led them into the April 2021 election, which produced a deadlocked parliament. Following a prolonged constitutional crisis, Fiame was confirmed as prime minister of Samoa and leader of a FAST government in July 2021.

As these brief vignettes illustrate, the women who have become leaders of the opposition have done so in very specific contexts. But there are two important patterns. The first, as we would expect, is that the leader of the opposition role is a stepping stone to becoming head of government. It should therefore be no surprise that the only two women heads of government in the Pacific have occupied it. What is interesting is that in

both cases they have done so for only a few short weeks, underscoring arguments that point to the irrelevance of opposition leadership in the region. There are certainly no cases to date in which women politicians have held the role for a significant period and then transitioned to the head of government. The other two cases, however, highlight another key pattern: women opposition leaders as guardians of democracy. This pattern speaks to the importance of the role and the symbiotic relationship between a particular understanding of democracy—liberal and modernist—and gender representation.

4. Opposition Leadership as a Pathway to Government

For Fiame Naomi Mata'afa and Hilda Heine, opposition leadership served as a pathway—or perhaps more accurately, given their short tenures in the opposition role, as a springboard—to government. In these cases, opposition leadership provided an opportunity to consolidate support as a credible alternate government: Fiame from voters as part of a general election campaign; Heine from within the legislature following an election. This is similar to how men opposition leaders in the region have utilised the role. Yet the periods of political upheaval in which both Fiame and Heine took on the roles distinguish their tenures.

Fiame, as both a high-ranking *matai* (chief) and one of the longest-serving MPs and Cabinet ministers in the Samoan Parliament, was uniquely placed to contest the prime ministership against Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi. As of 2021, Tuilaepa had been prime minister for 23 years. Fiame had worked closely with Tuilaepa as an HRPP MP, becoming deputy prime minister in 2016, but had split with the party in 2020 after refusing to support a series of bills that opponents argued eroded human rights protections (see Meleisea & Schoeffel, 2022).

Following her resignation from the Cabinet, Fiame was invited to take up the leadership of the new opposition party FAST. Despite considerable backlash to the law changes, the HRPP and Tuilaepa remained popular in Samoa. But over their long tenure, during which they often faced very limited opposition, the HRPP had developed a practice of running multiple candidates in electorates. FAST capitalised on this, running a national-level campaign and endorsing fewer candidates than the HRPP. In practice, this meant that while HRPP won a significantly higher proportion of the vote share in the April 2021 election, their candidates split the vote in multiple electorates, and ultimately FAST and HRPP won the same number of seats—25 each, with one independent MP also elected. Three months of political upheaval followed as a constitutional crisis developed, centred around competing interpretations of Samoa's gender quota legislation, which HRPP attempted to use as a trigger for a second election (see Baker, 2021). After a series of court cases, the Court of Appeal issued a ruling in July that paved the way for FAST to officially take office, with Fiame confirmed as Samoa's first woman prime minister.

In the aftermath of the 2021 Samoan election, it was noted that Fiame's "chiefly and political lineage gives her significant domestic appeal," which was pivotal to FAST presenting itself as a credible alternative government (Suaalii-Sauni & O'Brien, 2021, para. 14). She is the daughter of a *tama'aiga* (paramount chief) and the first prime minister of Samoa, and her mother is from another high-ranking chiefly family. At a young age (and after a prolonged court battle), she was bestowed the *matai* title of Fiame. A *matai* title is a prerequisite for eligibility to stand for parliament in Samoa, but Fiame's title is particularly prestigious: "Among many Samoans, particularly older ones, her high-ranking title matters more than her [political leadership] status" (Spark & Corbett, 2020, p. 472).

Fiame's extensive political experience also contributed to bolstering FAST's credibility as a potential party of government. While a change of government after four decades was hugely significant, Fiame's history as a senior HRPP figure suggested drastic policy change was unlikely. Fiame's success, in other words, is in large part due to her ability "to ensure continuity while embodying change" (Spark, Corbett, & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2021, p. 529).

Hilda Heine is in many ways an archetypal Pacific women politician: highly educated, being the first Marshallese person to earn a doctoral degree in 2004; politically well-connected, as a member of a prominent Marshallese family; and with a strong background in public and community service (see Baker, 2016). Heine was first elected to national politics in 2011 and became minister of education. Elections in late 2015 swept a cohort of long-serving ministers out of politics and brought in a significant number of younger politicians (see LaBriola, 2017). A historic three women were elected to the 33-seat Nitijela. This included Heine, who was re-elected along with two close male relatives.

Government formation in the Marshall Islands tends to be a fractious process. After jostling for position between three factions, newcomer Casten Nemra was elected president on 4 January. Heine was offered a ministerial post but declined and instead joined the opposition, which began agitating for a vote of no confidence (Cox et al., 2020). This lobbying drew heavily on Heine's personal relationships within the Nitijela, including with her relatives. On 26 January, a successful vote of no confidence was held, making the Nemra government the shortest-lived in Marshallese history. Heine was elected by the Nitijela to replace him the following day.

Heine's tenure as opposition leader was extraordinarily brief—just 14 days. It was a period of consolidating political and personal connections to form the government, and in this way, it was similar to how male politicians have approached the role. Heine's opposition leadership, however, also presented a disruption to traditional *iroij* (chiefly) dominance of politics in the Marshall Islands (Kupferman, 2016; see also Carucci, 1997). Most previous presidents had been *iroij*, and it

was *iroij* members of the Nitijela that had orchestrated Nemra's election.

While their respective tenures as opposition leaders were very short, both Fiame and Heine were experienced and well-known political actors. They were able to draw on their profiles and reputations to establish themselves as the heads of credible alternate governments. Their periods of opposition leadership were thus similar to the way many male leaders in the Pacific approach the role, although distinguished by the historic significance of being the first women to become heads of government.

The positioning of opposition as a "government-in-waiting" is recognisable and common across established and emerging democracies. Yet both the cases of Fiame and Heine represent unique political circumstances in their respective contexts. When Fiame assumed the opposition leadership, there had not been a change of government in 35 years. The power of other parties to carry out the key functions of an opposition—"criticising the government, scrutinising and checking governmental actions and policies, and representing a credible 'alternative government'" (Helms, 2008, p. 9)—had been eroded by the HRPP's dominance of politics and their utilisation of that dominance to restrict access to funding in particular (Iati, 2013). Fiame's pathway from opposition leader to prime ministership, therefore, was far from assured. But the authority she derived from her past political experience and her paramount chiefly lineage meant she was uniquely placed to lead a credible alternate government.

In the Marshall Islands, votes of no confidence are not uncommon, with the motion that removed Nemra the eighth since 1998; a ninth, against Heine, would occur in 2018. Yet successful votes of no confidence are a relative rarity, with the 2016 vote being the second to succeed in that time period. Its timing, coming just two weeks following the election of Nemra as president, was also unprecedented. Due to these circumstances, Heine's political profile and connections within the legislature were especially important in moving from opposition leadership to the presidency.

In winning the presidency, Heine became the first woman head of government of an independent Pacific Island state; Fiame, later, became the second. While their approach to the opposition leadership was similar to many men, in the role both Heine and Fiame posed an explicit challenge to the male dominance of political leadership in their respective countries. Fiame's status as a politician was augmented by her high-ranking title and paramount chiefly lineage, situating her as an outlier in terms of gender but firmly within customary governance traditions. Heine had strong support from male relatives and was able to form a coalition to counter chiefly influence in the selection of the executive. The overarching point, however, is that while the ways these two leaders transitioned to power via the role of leader of the opposition was undoubtedly gendered, it also conforms to patterns and norms about the practice of democracy in the region, and so gender alone cannot explain their respective successes (see Spark, Cox, & Corbett, 2021).

5. Opposition Leadership as Guardianship of Democracy

We turn now to another important interpretation of women opposition leaders in the Pacific: as guardians of democracy. As outlined, party politics in the region tends to be weakly institutionalised, with fluid alliances and unstable governing coalitions ubiquitous features of political life. Even where party systems are more well-established, as in Fiji, democracy has been fragile and subject to successive coups. In these contexts, it is perhaps unsurprising that a key archetype of women opposition leaders in the Pacific, as exemplified by Carol Kidu and Ro Teimumu Kepa, is as a defender of democratic norms and institutions.

Dame Carol Kidu was born in Australia and moved to Papua New Guinea when she married Buri Kidu at the age of 19. He went on to become Papua New Guinea's first Indigenous chief justice. She first entered politics in 1997 and served three terms in the Papua New Guinea parliament before retiring in 2012. Kidu has frequently attributed her first election win to "sympathy votes": "There is no doubt in my mind that the deciding factor for my win in 1997 was the fact that I was the widow of Sir Buri Kidu" (Kidu & Setae, 2002, p. 51; see also Kidu, 2002). This is not an uncommon pathway into politics for women in the Pacific (Baker & Palmieri, 2021).

In 2011, Kidu was the long-serving minister for community development within the government led by Sir Michael Somare. In March of that year, Somare flew to Singapore for medical treatment. When he had not returned by August, a bloc of MPs moved to declare his role vacant, and Peter O'Neill was elected prime minister. Somare then returned to Papua New Guinea and contested the motion to vacate in court. While the Supreme Court ruled in his favour, the Speaker continued to support O'Neill. This created a situation where two factions were each claiming to be the legitimate government. The constitutional crisis was not resolved until general elections were held in July 2012.

As the constitutional crisis continued, the Somare faction refused to sit on the opposition benches. Kidu, however, separated herself from her colleagues and was recognised by the Speaker as the formal (one-woman) opposition in February 2012. In assuming the role, she told journalists that her aim was to "look at how we can strengthen the opposition" in Papua New Guinea, noting that the role of the opposition leader had no staff or resources attached to it (as cited in Blackwell & AAP PNG Correspondent, 2012, para. 5). Kidu also highlighted in parliament the difficulties of not having a supporting party or faction behind her: "Being the single member of opposition is an impossible task, so I invite others to join me" (as cited in Blackwell, 2012, para. 5).

Kidu's role as opposition leader, while recognised as historic in that she was the first woman in Papua New Guinea's history to hold this role (Spark et al., 2019), was largely symbolic. When she was appointed as leader of the opposition, Kidu had already made known her retirement plans at the 2012 election. As the sole member of the opposition, Kidu could not present a credible alternative government. She instead stressed that her motivation for assuming the role of opposition leader was to highlight the importance of the opposition for Papua New Guinean democracy.

Ro Teimumu Kepa is an *iTaukei* (Indigenous Fijian) woman from a prominent chiefly family. She is the widow of Sailosi Kepa, a former chief magistrate of Fiji who also served as attorney general and minister for justice in the interim administration following the 1987 coup. Her sister was married to Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Fiji's first prime minister. In 1999 Ro Teimumu was appointed to the Senate, and following the 2000 coup, she served as minister for women, culture, and social welfare in the interim government. She was elected to parliament in 2001, and in 2004, after the death of her sister, was bestowed the title of *Roko Tui Dreketi*, one of three paramount chiefly titles in Fiji. Ro Teimumu served as deputy prime minister until the 2006 military coup, which she strongly and publicly opposed. When Fiji returned to democracy, Ro Teimumu was elected leader of the SODELPA party for the 2014 Fijian election.

A biography of Ro Teimumu describes how, during her first election campaign in 2001, her team were taken aback by the cultural protocols of respect paid to her as a member of a chiefly family:

> House calls like this by a member of the Great House was just unheard of and to be forced to look in the eyes of the *raluve* [princess] was just beyond belief. A custom strictly observed by the people of the *vanua* [land] of Rewa was to keep their eyes on the ground or look sideways when speaking with a member of the Great House so their eyes would not meet. (Rasigatale, 2003, p. 103)

Baro Saumaki (2007, p. 223) wrote of Ro Teimumu's 2006 election campaign: "In Fiji, chiefly power remains firmly embedded in Indigenous social and political tradition…[and] chiefs are able to use their traditional position to gain political mileage."

As a paramount chief, SODELPA's election of Ro Teimumu as party leader in the lead-up to the first post-coup elections in 2014 was consistent with their positioning as a party: one that stood for "the restoration of chiefly authority and the role of traditionalism" (Lawson, 2016, p. 41). As a Cabinet minister in the government that was overthrown in the 2006 coup, Ro Teimumu also represented a further opportunity for SODELPA to position itself as anti-coup. Ro Teimumu's popularity—she personally won more than a third of SODELPA votes in the 2014 election—stemmed from

this combination of chiefly status and public anti-coup, pro-democracy stance (Nanau, 2015). Indeed, Steven Ratuva (2015) observed that SODELPA's election strategy was centred around Ro Teimumu as leader while Brij Lal (2014, pp. 466–467) noted:

> Kepa brought dignity and calm to the leadership, but lacked the political sharpness and debating skills required to combat temperamentally volatile and intellectually obtuse opponents in an intense political campaign, when the media for the most part were cheerleaders for the regime's party. If there were muted murmurs of dissent about her leadership qualities, these were never publicly aired.

When FijiFirst won a comprehensive victory, SODELPA became the main opposition party and Ro Teimumu was confirmed as leader of the opposition.

Ro Teimumu had already positioned herself as a defender of democracy and this continued as opposition leader. In her first speech she noted the return to democracy had given a voice to the political opposition:

> We were made invisible; we were a non-entity; we were not even second-class citizens and we had very little rights. Today, almost eight years later, through the elections which we view as a victory against all odds, we have been given a voice—all 18 of us in opposition….For most of our people, I am sure, Madam Speaker, their hope is that Monday, 6th October, 2014 signals the end of dictatorships, oppression and suppression, and the beginning of an accountable and transparent governance in Fiji, for the first time in almost eight years. This is certainly what my colleagues and I on this side of the House hope for, and I have no doubt that those who voted for us also look forward to this and as members of the opposition, we are ready to play our part to deliver this to our people. (Parliament of Fiji, 2014, p. 20)

After two years in her parliamentary role, however, Ro Teimumu's position was undercut when she was replaced as party leader by Sitiveni Rabuka, the architect of Fiji's first coup in 1987. Ro Teimumu stayed on as parliamentary opposition leader until the 2018 election, after which she was replaced by Rabuka, although she remained in parliament. Rabuka was seen by the party as better able to counter Bainimarama's popularity at the ballot box (Fraenkel, 2019). Yet Rabuka's involvement in past coups meant SODELPA deliberately stepped away from its anti-coup, pro-democracy stance under Ro Teimumu.

Both Kidu and Ro Teimumu assumed the role at a time when the role and function of the opposition was under stress. Kidu became Papua New Guinea's opposition leader following a divisive and protracted constitutional crisis. Ro Teimumu took on the role as the Fijian parliament was reconvened eight years after

a military coup; in the preceding elections, the coup leader was elected Prime Minister. In these circumstances, the role of the opposition leader took on an important symbolic role as a defender of democracy. As long-serving and high-profile political figures (and, in the case of Ro Teimumu, of chiefly lineage), both Kidu and Ro Teimumu were well-placed to take on this role and to use their leadership capital to champion a more democratic style of politics.

Having a woman in the role was symbolically significant too, given that the increased presence of women in politics is often seen as part of the solution to a "crisis of democracy" (Waylen, 2015). Yet, in both cases, with a return to politics-as-usual, women opposition leaders were sidelined. Kidu, while well-respected as a long-serving politician and Cabinet minister, was not treated as a credible alternate prime minister in the manner of her predecessors (and successors) in the role. After two years, Ro Teimumu was replaced by Rabuka, another former coup leader. Both examples thus represent versions of the "glass cliff" phenomenon where women leaders are installed for largely symbolic reasons during crises and are then usually removed when politics as usual resumes.

6. Conclusion

Taken together, the experiences of the four women profiled above tell a story of the fragile nature of the opposition in Pacific politics, with the position of opposition leader frequently sidelined, undermined, or absent altogether. It should be noted that this is not dissimilar to women's experiences in politics more broadly; as elsewhere in the world, women politicians are disproportionately the targets of violence, harassment, and intimidation (see NDI, 2020). This is especially the case when women are in prominent positions and if they seek to challenge dominant social norms. What is more particular to the Pacific, is that the role of the opposition leader is often symbolic, serving as a safeguard for democratic norms and practices. This is surprising because institutionalist explanations would predict that Westminster-inspired systems with executive-legislative fusion coupled, in some cases, with first-past-the-post electoral systems would entrench two-party systems and the role of the official opposition. But by and large theories of Pacific leadership that emphasise the personalisation of politics, combined with gendered analysis that illuminates the way women politicians navigate political systems that are hostile to their presence, appear to have more explanatory purchase. The lesson is that Westminster institutions exist within distinctive political frameworks that shape and are shaped by local gender and leadership norms. The limits of institutionalist explanations reinforce the need to look beyond the "official" position if we want to better understand the dynamics of opposition politics in democratic regimes (e.g., Dingler et al., 2023).

The approach advocated for in this issue is particularly important for explaining why women often take on political leadership positions in periods of instability or crisis (Jalalzai, 2013). This is true in all four of these case studies: Fiame took on the opposition leadership in the aftermath of a seismic split within the ruling HRPP, which ultimately lead to its eviction from the government after nearly four decades; Heine, in a tumultuous period of Marshallese politics which ended in a vote of no confidence in a two-week-old government; Kidu, in the midst of a complex constitutional crisis; and Ro Teimumu, during the return to democracy after a military coup. Crises can provide windows of opportunity for change, and it is notable that the only two women heads of government in independent Pacific states to date utilised brief periods as opposition leaders as a springboard to the executive. This is similar to the trajectory (real or intended) of many male opposition leaders in Pacific states. Yet only rarely has this been a viable pathway to executive power for women in the region.

Opposition leadership, however, is not simply a pathway to power—it provides an important democratic check and balance in Westminster-style democracy. While this has not always been present and effective in the Pacific, we can see examples of where women have used the symbolism of the role of opposition leader to highlight and work to ameliorate democratic deficits. This suggests gendered politics at play, whereby the presence of women in senior positions is perceived to advance and legitimise democracy. This is undermined, however, by the way in which women opposition leaders have been largely unsupported as legitimate political actors, and ultimately replaced by men who are seen as more viable prime ministerial candidates.

This research sheds some light into the complex relationship between gender, Westminster-style democracy, and opposition leadership in the parliaments of the Pacific region. Our conclusion is tentative, based as it is on a small number of successful cases. A more thorough theorisation must wait for more women to assume leadership roles, including leader of the opposition, so that patterns relating to the intersection between gender, ethnicity, rank, class, and other identities can be distinguished. For now, we have taken the modest yet still fundamental step of analysing the select few cases that exist to highlight that gender dynamics are important, poorly understood, and will require further research.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Baker, K. (2016). *The highest glass ceiling—Women, politics and executive power in the Pacific* (In Brief 2016/7). The Australian National University. https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2016-04/ib-2016-07-baker.pdf

Baker, K. (2018). Great expectations: Gender and political representation in the Pacific Islands. *Government and Opposition*, *53*(3), 542–568.

Baker, K. (2019). *Pacific women in politics: Gender quota campaigns in the Pacific Islands*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Baker, K. (2021). *Gender quotas and the 2021 Samoan constitutional crisis: What next for the "10 percent law?"* (In Brief 2021/29). The Australian National University.

Baker, K., & Palmieri, S. (2021). Can women dynasty politicians disrupt social norms of political leadership? A proposed typology of normative change. *International Political Science Review*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121211048298

Bishop, M. L., Corbett, J., & Veenendaal, W. (2020). Labor movements and party system development: Why does the Caribbean have stable two-party systems, but the Pacific does not? *World Development*, *126*, Article 104719.

Blackwell, E. (2012, February 15). Queensland woman becomes PNG opposition leader. *Courier Mail*. https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/australian-woman-becomes-png-opposition-leader/news-story/8c42928f7854b3f1eb56da0011b361fe

Blackwell, E., & AAP PNG Correspondent. (2012, February 15). Qld-born woman new PNG opposition leader. *Sydney Morning Herald*. https://www.smh.com.au/world/qldborn-woman-new-png-opposition-leader-20120215-1t5g1.html

Carucci, L. M. (1997). *Irooj ro ad*: Measures of chiefly ideology and practice in the Marshall Islands. In G. M. White & L. Lindstrom (Eds.), *Chiefs today: Traditional Pacific leadership and the postcolonial state* (pp. 197–210). Stanford University Press.

Connell, J. (2006). Nauru: The first failed Pacific state? *The Round Table*, *95*(383), 47–63.

Corbett, J. (2015a). *Being political: Leadership and democracy in the Pacific Islands*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Corbett, J. (2015b). Small fish swimming in the shape of a shark: Why politicians join political parties in the Pacific Islands. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, *53*(2), 130–152.

Corbett, J., & Veenendaal, W. (2018). *Democracy in small states: Persisting against all odds*. Oxford University Press.

Cox, J., Corbett, J., & Spark, C. (2020). Being the president: Hilda Heine, gender and political leadership in the Marshall Islands. *Small States and Territories*, *3*(2), 339–358.

Dingler, S., Helms, L., & Müller, H. (2023). Women opposition leaders: Conceptual issues and empirical agendas. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 80–84.

Durutalo, A. L. (2008). Fiji: Party politics in the post independence period. In R. Rich, L. Hambly, & M. G. Morgan (Eds.), *Political parties in the Pacific Islands* (pp. 165–183). ANU Press.

Fraenkel, J. (2006). The impact of electoral systems on women's representation in Pacific parliaments. In E. Huffer (Ed.), *A woman's place is in the house—The House of Parliament: Research to advance women's political representation in Forum island countries* (pp. 57–106). Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

Fraenkel, J. (2016). Conclusion: Political institutions in the Pacific. In S. Levine (Ed.), *Pacific ways: Government and politics in the Pacific Islands* (2nd ed., pp. 395–416). Victoria University Press.

Fraenkel, J. (2019). Ethnic politics and strongman loyalties in Fiji's 2018 election. *Journal of Pacific History*, *54*(4), 480–506.

Frankel, J., & Firth, S. (Eds.). (2007). *From election to coup in Fiji: The 2006 campaigns and its aftermath*. ANU Press.

Helms, L. (2008). Studying parliamentary opposition in old and new democracies: Issues and perspectives. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, *14*(1/2), 6–19.

Helms, L. (2022). Political oppositions in democratic and authoritarian regimes: A state-of-the-field(s) review. *Government and Opposition.* Advanced Online Publication. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.25

Huffer, E. (2006). Desk review of the factors which enable and constrain the advancement of women's political representation in Forum island countries. In E. Huffer (Ed.), *A woman's place is in the house—The House of Parliament: Research to advance women's political representation in Forum island countries* (pp. 1–56). Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

Iati, I. (2013). Samoa's price for 25 years of political stability. *The Journal of Pacific History*, *48*(4), 443–463.

Jalalzai, F. (2013). *Shattered, cracked, or firmly intact? Women and the executive glass ceiling worldwide.* Oxford University Press.

Kabuni, M., Laveil, M., Milli, G., & Wood, T. (2022). *Elections and politics.* In S. Howes & L. N. Pillai (Eds.), *Papua New Guinea: Government, economy and society* (pp. 17–55). ANU Press.

Kidu, C. (2002). *A remarkable journey*. Pearson Education.

Kidu, C., & Setae, S. (2002). Winning and losing in politics: Key issues in Papua New Guinea. *Development Bulletin*, *59*, 51–53.

Kupferman, D.W. (2016). Marshall Islands. In S. Levine

(Ed.), *Pacific ways: Government and politics in the Pacific Islands* (2nd ed., pp. 132–147). Victoria University Press.

LaBriola, M. C. (2017). Marshall Islands. *The Contemporary Pacific*, *29*(1), 111–118.

Lal, B. V. (1992). *Broken waves: A history of the Fiji islands in the twentieth century*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Lal, B. V. (2014). In Frank Bainimarama's shadow: Fiji, elections and the future. *The Journal of Pacific History*, *49*(4), 457–468.

Lal, B. V., & Pretes, M. (Eds.). (2001). *Coup: Reflections on the political crisis in Fiji*. Pandanus Books.

Larmour, P. (2005). *Foreign flowers: Institutional transfer and good governance in the Pacific Islands*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Lawson, S. (1996). *Tradition versus democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa*. Cambridge University Press.

Lawson, S. (2016). Chiefly leadership in Fiji after the 2016 elections. In S. Ratuva & S. Lawson (Eds.), *The people have spoken: The 2014 elections in Fiji* (pp. 41–58). ANU Press.

May, R. J. (2017). *Papua New Guinea under the O'Neill government: Has there been a shift in political style?* (Paper 2017/6). The Australian National University.

Meleisea, M., & Schoeffel, P. (2022). Sāmoan custom, individual rights, and the three 2020 acts: Reorganizing the Land and Titles Court. *The Journal of Pacific History*, *57*(4), 439–450. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2022.2058475

Morgan, M. (2005). *Cultures of dominance: Institutional and cultural influences on parliamentary politics in Melanesia.* (Paper 2005/2). The Australian National University.

Nanau, G. L. (2015). Representative democracy, the constitution and electoral engineering in Fiji: 2014 and beyond. *The Journal of Pacific Studies*, *35*(2), 17–34.

National Democratic Institute. (2020). *#NotTheCost: Qualitative research report on violence against women in politics in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands*.

O'Brien, D. Z. (2015). Rising to the top: Gender, political performance, and party leadership in parliamentary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, *59*(4), 1022–1039.

Okole, H. (2005). The "fluid" party system of Papua New Guinea. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, *43*(3), 362–381.

Parliament of Fiji. (2014). *Hansard: Monday, 13th October, 2014*. https://www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/MONDAY-13TH-OCTOBER-2014.pdf

Potter, A. (1966). Great Britain: Opposition with a capital "O." In R. A. Dahl (Ed.), *Political oppositions in western democracies* (pp. 3–33). Yale University Press.

Rasigatale, M. (2003). *Kepa: A Fijian princess (Dua na Raluve ni Viti).* Mak Heritage.

Ratuva, S. (2015). Protectionism versus reformism: The battle for *Taukei* ascendancy in Fiji's 2014 general election. *The Round Table*, *104*(2), 137–149.

Rich, R., Hambly, L., & Morgan, M. G. (Eds.). (2008). *Political parties in the Pacific Islands*. ANU Press.

Ryan, M. K., & Haslam, S. A. (2005). The glass cliff: Evidence the women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions. *British Journal of Management*, *16*(2), 81–90.

Ryan, M. K., Haslam, S. A., & Kulich, C. (2010). Politics and the glass cliff: Evidence that women are preferentially selected to contest hard-to-win seats. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *34*(1), 56–64.

Saumaki, B. (2007). Bose ni Vanua and democratic politics in Rewa. In J. Frankel & S. Firth (Eds.), *From election to coup in Fiji: The 2006 campaigns and its aftermath* (pp. 213–224). ANU Press.

So'o, A. (2008). The establishment and operation of Samoa's political party system. In R. Rich, L. Hambly, & M. G. Morgan (Eds.), *Political parties in the Pacific Islands* (pp. 185–206). ANU Press.

Spark, C., & Corbett, J. (2018). Emerging women leaders' views on political participation in Melanesia. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *20*(2), 221–235.

Spark, C., & Corbett, J. (2020). Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa: Samoa's first woman deputy prime minister. *The Journal of Pacific History*, *55*(4), 453–474.

Spark, C., Corbett, J., & Fairbairn-Dunlop, P. (2021). Tomorrow's woman? *The Journal of Pacific History*, *57*(4), 528–531.

Spark, C., Cox, J., & Corbett, J. (2018). *Being the first: Women leaders in the Pacific Islands*. Developmental Leadership Program.

Spark, C., Cox, J., & Corbett, J. (2019). Gender, political representation and symbolic capital: How some women politicians succeed. *Third World Quarterly*, *40*(7), 1227–1245.

Spark, C., Cox, J., & Corbett, J. (2021). "Keeping an eye out for women": Implicit feminism, political leadership, and social changes in the Pacific Islands. *The Contemporary Pacific*, *33*(1), 64–95.

Steeves, J. S. (1996). Unbounded politics in the Solomon Islands: Leadership and party alignments. *Pacific Studies*, *19*(1), 115–138.

Suaalii-Sauni, T. S., & O'Brien, P. (2021, April 12). Samoa's stunning election result: On the verge of a new ruling party for the first time in 40 years. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/samoas-stunning-election-result-on-the-verge-of-a-new-ruling-party-for-the-first-time-in-40-years-158608

Waylen, G. (2015). Engendering the "crisis of democracy": Institutions, representation and participation. *Government and Opposition*, *50*(3), 495–520.

Zetlin, D. (2014). Women in parliaments in the Pacific region. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, *49*(2), 252–266.

About the Authors

Kerryn Baker is a fellow in the Department of Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University. She is the author of *Pacific Women in Politics: Gender Quota Campaigns in the Pacific Islands* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2019) and the co-editor (with Marian Sawer) of *Gender Innovation in Political Science: New Norms, New Knowledge* (Palgrave, 2019).

Jack Corbett is professor and head of the School of Social Sciences at Monash University. His latest book is *Statehood à la Carte in the Caribbean and the Pacific: Secession, Regionalism, and Postcolonial Politics* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press).

Article

Political Pathways and Performance of Women Opposition Leaders in Indonesia and South Korea

Nankyung Choi

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands; n.choi@vu.nl

Abstract
While some world regions have seen women opposition leaders with no ties to political families rise to national leadership, in East Asia, women opposition leaders who ascend to national executive positions have been largely limited to the wives, daughters, or sisters of prominent male politicians. Locally, however, there have been some broadening and diversification of women who seek and win executive office through oppositional politics. Given the small number of women opposition leaders who have gained leadership positions in the government, this article develops an interpretive study of the relationship between becoming "critical actors" and doing "critical acts" as women opposition leaders. Using four illustrative cases of women who have pursued executive power through oppositional politics, this article questions whether and how the variation in women's pathways affects their exercise of power in Indonesia and South Korea, two young though consolidating democracies in East Asia. Drawing on the biographies and policies of two presidents (Megawati Soekarnoputri and Park Geun-hye) and two mayors (Tri Rismaharini and Kim Soo-young) it shows that local women opposition leaders use their executive leadership to initiate and implement public policies, unlike their national counterparts whose pathways and performance are intertwined with family background. By doing so, the article sheds light on the complex nexus between political pathways and performance of women opposition leaders.

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Women Opposition Leaders: Pathways, Patterns, and Performance" edited by Sarah C. Dingler (University of Innsbruck), Ludger Helms (University of Innsbruck), and Henriette Müller (New York University Abu Dhabi).

1. Introduction

In East Asia, instances of women who gain executive political office through oppositional politics remain rare and poorly understood. Still, less is known about such women's performance once in power and whether and how they promote the interests of women in their specific sociocultural contexts. In the small volume of scholarship on this subject, the focus has tended to remain at the national level, where instances of women who gain executive office have not only been few but are mostly from elite backgrounds, with Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen as a notable exception. Comparatively less is known about women who have sought and won executive political office through oppositional politics at local

levels, even as instances of such women appear to be growing and come from more diverse backgrounds than their national counterparts. As a contribution to research on women and political opposition, this article develops an exploratory analysis of four women opposition leaders who have won and exercised political power at the national and local levels in Indonesia and South Korea (hereafter Korea).

Until recently, East Asian women's participation in oppositional politics has been strongly associated with sociopolitical movements aimed at overthrowing authoritarian regimes, as the region has been and remains overwhelmingly authoritarian. In this context, Indonesia and Korea stand out as two young but consolidating democracies. Modes of political opposition in both countries

have shifted from insurgent social movements-based to party-based forms and opposition party leadership has emerged as an important stepping-stone to the executive. However, the consolidation of formally democratic political institutions is in itself uninformative concerning its implications for women in opposition politics and their experiences in seeking and using executive power. Do women executives arising from opposition politics signify the quality of democracy and improvements in gender inequality? As such, an examination of women executives rising through oppositional paths in these countries represents an opportunity to contribute to the scholarship on women opposition leaders and executive leadership in newly democratizing polities.

With their recent history of democratic transition, distinctive cultural features, and shared and specific gendered patterns of politics, Indonesia and Korea represent particularly interesting settings in which to explore the experiences of women who have sought, won, and exercised political power through oppositional politics. Using a comparative approach focused on the experiences of four individuals, the article addresses two questions. First, what are the differences in women's pursuit of executive power through oppositional paths at the national and local levels of governance? Second, do such differences in women's political pathways shape their performance once in office, and if yes, how?

Addressing these questions, this article is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the challenges of studying women's opposition leaders and explains the analytical framework employed in this study. The second section examines national women opposition leaders, while the third concerns local women opposition leaders. The conclusion summarizes arguments developed through the empirical analysis and their implications for theory and future research. Overall, the article shows that local women opposition leaders pursue and use executive leadership for specific issues and advocacies while pathways and policy performance of their national counterparts are intertwined with family background. By doing so, the article sheds light on the complex nexus between political pathways and performance of women opposition leaders.

2. Women Opposition Leaders' Political Pathways and Performance

Understanding women's efforts to gain executive political power through participation in oppositional politics and using that power in promoting women's interests encounters numerous problems owing to both the relative paucity of relevant literature and methodological challenges. Complicating matters, there are multiple ways of understanding and studying how women pursue political power and this, in turn, requires analysis of features of women in oppositional politics in different country contexts. As a small-n comparative and interpretative study, this analysis does not aim to make general causal statements about women opposition leaders in general or in Indonesia and Korea. Instead, the analysis uses four illustrative cases of women who have pursued political office through oppositional politics to understand whether and how the variation in women's pathways affects their exercise of power.

Research on women political leaders is scant but growing, with the number of women in leadership positions increasing recently. Still, the literature on women holding executive positions remains focused on women at the national level of governance (e.g., Madsen, 2015; Montecinos, 2017; Skard, 2014; Wiltse & Hager, 2021). Among women political leaders, those who began their political careers by representing opposition parties and rose to power through a popular election have been particularly rare and there is only isolated work on them (e.g., Lubina, 2020). By contrast, there is little scholarly literature focused on women who rise to local government leadership through oppositional politics. Understanding what these women do once in office poses additional challenges.

The small number of women opposition leaders deters any attempt to study them in a systematic manner. An alternative approach is to develop and theorize a small number of cases in specific contexts so that we can better understand "what *specific actors* do" and why rather than "what '*women*' do" in general (Childs & Krook, 2009, p. 126, emphasis added). Complementing such an approach, Childs and Krook (2009, p. 127) propose a framework for addressing "the diversity among women and the importance of individuals who resolve to act on behalf of women as a group." Central to this framework is identifying the "critical actors" who are assumed to "act individually or collectively to bring about women-friendly policy change" (Childs & Krook, 2009, p. 127). While Childs and Krook's framework concerns women legislators' substantive representation in promoting policies for women, this article extends it to women executives who theoretically have greater influence over policy-making (Jalalzai, 2016). As empirical studies show that women political leaders are frequently indifferent or reluctant to challenge the prevailing patriarchal gender ideology (Derichs et al., 2006; Everett, 2014; Richter, 1990), it is important and interesting to see whether and how women opposition leaders perform differently in acting on behalf of other women.

What would make women executives engage in "'critical acts,' or initiatives that 'change the position of the minority and lead to further changes'" (Childs & Krook, 2009, p. 138)? Comparing twenty women presidents in office in 2010, Jalalzai (2010) looks into the relations between their institutional paths and outcomes of exercising powers. One of the findings is that how the woman president comes to power, whether through a popular election or a party ticket, may explain her role in policy-making and representing women substantively. Some women have proven to be able to become dominant presidents, but, in East Asia, the pathway to

national leadership positions has been generally (except in Taiwan) limited to women possessing familial ties to powerful male politicians. This suggests "continued constraints on women's abilities to break through to power" at the national level (Jalalzai, 2010, p. 153). By contrast, by lowering our gaze to the local level where women with no family ties have risen to powerful positions, we can appreciate different modalities through which women juxtapose agency and constraints in manifesting their political leadership.

The relations between women's, and especially women opposition leaders', pathways to power and their performance once in office have been scarcely explored. Women's political pathways refer to mechanisms by which women decide to pursue political office and power, explore options, mobilize resources, develop networks or relationships with constituents, and build distinctive political styles (Choi, 2019). Among diverse pathways, women executives seem to rise via either elite pathways in which women's assumption of power is often "mediated" by male relatives or grassroots pathways in which women's political careers are "shaped from the beginning by their own choices, attributes and efforts, grounded in a strong sense of their own political efficacy" (Fleschenberg, 2008, p. 35). So, this article compares women opposition leaders of elite and grassroots pathways at different levels of governance. Women of elite pathways tend to rely on the reputations and powers of their male relatives, while women of grassroots pathways often take on specific issues or advocacies. Surely the contexts and modalities of rising to power do not solely explain the style, content, and impact of women's leadership. Still, the modalities of women's pursuit of political office are assumed to at least partly explain different outcomes between becoming "critical actors" and doing "critical acts." This seems particularly so in the cases of women opposition leaders in the third wave democracies as they often emerge not as power-seekers but because of their cause.

However, there is no clear consensus on how to examine women's political performance. Disaggregating political performance is complex (Rai, 2014), and evaluating women's political performance has its own methodological and analytical challenges (Celis, 2010). Women's political performance has to be defined not only personally but also institutionally and culturally because it depends not only on women leaders' motivations, political capital, or life experiences but also on the degrees of institutional and cultural tolerance or resistance to gender equality policies (Curtin, 2008; Goetz, 2009). Women leaders' knowledge of, interest in, and ability to articulate women's interests are necessary but often insufficient. As Jalalzai (2016, p. 22) points out, it is important to consider the "gender context" in which women political leaders arise in assessing "whether women in political positions represented anomalies or proved commonplace." Even once in office, women still face profound institutional and cultural obstacles to advancing

their agendas in general and women's issues in particular. Moreover, "women's interests" are not something "that exist 'out there,' ready to be brought into the representational process" and are often the subject of heated and contentious political debates (Celis et al., 2008, p. 101; see also, Vincent, 2010).

Considering these challenges and given the limited space, this article limits its focus to women executives' substantive representation of women—i.e., the use of executive powers in representing women's issues and in initiating or executing women-friendly policies (Jalalzai, 2016, p. 219). The executive is often considered the most masculine branch of government (Duerst-Lahti, 1997). In a political system where women have to gain executive office through a popular vote (as in Indonesia and Korea), the public expectations about the masculinist operation of the executive office often constrain not only women candidates' chances for attaining the office but also how they exercise power after ascending to it. In a recent study, Indonesia's local women executives point out the gender bias embedded in political parties as the biggest challenge to their political leadership (Novitasari et al., 2021). When women become executives, the office and power also become the subject of gendered norms and power relations. In evaluating women executives' substantive representation of women, therefore, it is important to bear in mind that women have to overcome the obstacles and impediments resulting from the rhetoric and expectations built by men who have dominated the political world and thus do not face the same impediments.

In East Asia, Indonesia and Korea are two of the few countries that have recently had women presidents who began their political careers as opposition leaders and also have a modestly growing number of women mayors, including those from opposition parties. Pursuing a paired comparison (Tarrow, 2010), the following two sections analyze and compare women as opposition leaders at the national and local level in terms of what kinds of opposition leaders they were, how they rose to power, and what they did in acting for women. Two presidents—Megawati Soekarnoputri and Park Geun-hye—are selected as cases of elite pathways at the national level, while two mayors—Tri Rismaharini and Kim Soo-young—for grassroots pathways at the local level. Drawing on the biographies and policies of these four women, the analysis develops an in-depth understanding of how women opposition leaders achieve leadership positions and how such pathways affect their substantive representation once in office. Findings are based on media reports, government documents, academic research papers, and personal interviews with the two mayors.

3. Elite Pathways: Megawati Soekarnoputri and Park Geun-hye

Both Indonesia and Korea have presidential systems and recently had their first women presidents. Coming from

political dynasties, Megawati and Park are illuminating cases of elite pathways: Megawati is the eldest daughter of Indonesia's first president Soekarno (1959–1965), while Park is the daughter of Korea's former dictator Park Chung-hee (1961–1979). Although they manifest dynastic politics in Southeast and Northeast Asia, respectively, both women began their political careers by representing opposition parties. Similar to other women leaders with family ties, both Megawati and Park emerged in crises, building legitimacy or exhibiting charisma as a "political savior who is destined to rescue the nation from its unhappy condition and who is able to impart a sense of hope" (Bell, 2014, p. 150). Megawati Soekarnoputri, who had emerged as an opposition leader confronting former dictator Soeharto, succeeded the presidency from the office of vice president to replace President Abdurrahman Wahid who was impeached by the parliament in 2001. As a candidate of the ruling party in the 2012 presidential election, Park emphasized her gender and family tie: a woman prepared to deal with the country's challenges, including increasing income disparities and persistent corruption in business and politics, with a motherly responsibility and sensitivity; and the daughter whose father achieved astonishing economic development for the country. However, they both also exhibited indifference or inability to address women's issues, illustrating that elite pathways "can be effective only to a point" (Lubina, 2020, p. 9).

3.1. Political Biographies of Megawati and Park

Born in 1947, Megawati Soekarnoputri's surname means "daughter of Soekarno." She entered politics in 1987 after her father was given the title of Proclamation Hero. In 1996, she was elected to chair the Indonesian Democratic Party (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia, hereafter PDI), one of the two opposition parties. In that year's summer when she was thrown out of the PDI chairmanship, Megawati emerged as the "undisputed opposition leader of Indonesia" (Torregrosa, 1998, p. 246). In the month-long resistance, her supporters—militants, human rights advocates, union organizers, intellectuals, farmers, and students—camped out on the streets around the party's headquarters in Jakarta. The military eventually cracked down on the protesters, which was followed by riots that left five people dead, more than a hundred injured, and 20 declared missing and Megawati was barred from running in the 1996 parliamentary elections. When President Suharto began his seventh five-year term in early 1998, Indonesia's economy collapsed amid the financial crisis and a long-suppressed discontent with his corrupt regime broke out onto the streets. Megawati joined other opposition leaders in demanding Suharto's resignation.

Reestablishing the PDI as the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan, hereafter PDIP), Megawati created and controlled a formidable political machine that took her to

victory in the 1999 parliamentary elections (Mietzner, 2016, p. 358). However, she lost the presidential race against Abdurrahman Wahid in the indirect presidential election and instead became the vice president. In 2001, when Wahid was impeached, she became the country's first woman president and was hailed as a symbol of women's political advancement. But she soon turned out to be far less interested in women's issues even compared to her male predecessors (Blackburn, 2004, p. 94; Suryakusma, 2003). According to Reid (2014, p. 166), along with other women leaders of Southeast Asia, Megawati's election as president could be attributed to "a more aggressive male relative being hors de combat, but undoubtedly something also to a particular style of female charisma attractive to the region's voters." In other words, Megawati's political rise was possible because of the country's deeply conservative and male-dominated political culture combined with her influence inherited from her father Soekarno.

Megawati's political capital—i.e., Soekarno and her preservation of Soekarnoism—seems crucial to our understanding of her political performance. According to Mietzner (2016, p. 359), Soekarnoism consists of three major principles: (a) that Indonesia should be multi-religious and thus not turn into an Islamic state; (b) that nationalism unifies all Indonesians; and (c) that the state protects the poor, or so-called "little people" (*wong cilik* in Javanese). Due to her status as the matriarch of the Soekarno dynasty, Megawati has been at the center of securing the dynasty's political significance and still plays a key role in the country's politics. When she stood as an opposition leader, she was viewed as "the only figure with the kind of charisma to move the masses" (Torregrosa, 1998, p. 250). However, she has also insisted that "hard and tough" politics is for men and she was doing politics not as a woman but as a Soekarno.

Born in 1952 as the eldest daughter of dictator Park Chung-hee, Park Geun-hye grew up at the Blue House after her father became the acting president in 1963. Following her mother's death in 1974, she took over official duties as first lady until her father's assassination in 1979. She entered politics during the 1997 presidential election by supporting Lee Hoi-chang, the ruling Grand National Party's (hereafter GNP) presidential candidate. Lee lost his presidential bid, while Park was elected as an MP in 1998. When the opposition GNP faced unfavorable electoral conditions in the 2004 general election, Park emerged in the party leadership, stimulating regional sentiment and nostalgia for Park Chung-hee. Galvanizing the conservative electorate, Park contributed to the GNP's unexpected electoral success of winning 121 seats, stunning the pollsters that had predicted 50–80 seats at best (S. Shin, 2019, p. 165).

After being elected as the GNP's substantive leader in July 2004, Park consolidated her image as the "election queen" by making a string of electoral victories. In the May 2006 local elections, she played a critical role in the GNP's sealing 12 of the 16 city mayorships and provincial

governorships. Unsurprisingly, she emerged as a strong candidate in the 2007 presidential primary but lost the nomination to Lee Myung-bak, who won the December presidential election. During the Lee presidency, Park led the opposition faction within the party and reinforced her popular image as "a principled, trustworthy politician" while the Lee government made a series of political missteps, failing to meet its electoral promises (S. Shin, 2019, p. 167). When the GNP was in crisis in late 2011, she used her position as the GNP interim leader to reorganize the party and changed its name to the Saenuri Party. In the April 2012 general elections, the Saenuri Party won a majority of 152 seats, which was widely attributed to Park's election strategy. In the following 2012 presidential election, Park became the first Korean president to achieve an overall majority of the popular vote and the first woman president (S. Shin, 2019, p. 167). From the very beginning, however, Park became the subject of public and media scrutiny due to accusations of electoral fraud and poor responses to disasters like the 2014 Sewol Ferry incident. She retained a relatively high popularity among older generations until late 2016 when the "Choi Sun-sil Gate" political scandal turned the tide against her. In 2017, she became the first Korean president to be impeached by the parliament, which was later confirmed by the Constitutional Court.

Similar to Megawati, Park's biggest political capital was her father. Although Park Chung-hee remains controversial, he is regarded among older generations as the leader who laid the foundation for the "Miracle on the Han River" that "transformed one of the poorest countries in the world at the end of the Korean War into an economy generating a GDP per capita comparable to that of some European countries" (Koen et al., 2021, p. 82). Park's personal tragedy, losing both parents to assassination in 1974 and 1979, also catalyzed an empathy that became important political capital for her electoral support (S. Shin, 2019, p. 165). However, once in office, her leadership style was "widely considered to be 'imperial,' 'aloof' and 'out of touch'" (S. Shin, 2019, p. 173). Unlike Megawati who downplayed her gender, Park highlighted her gender by promoting herself as "the prepared female president" (Oh, 2014, p. 202).

3.2. Political Performance of Megawati and Park

Both Indonesia and Korea are presidential democracies with multi-party systems. In both countries, the president is both the head of the state and the government, holding dominant powers such as discretionary appointment powers, chair of cabinet meetings, emergency long-term or decree powers, central role in defense as the commander in chief, and central role in government formation (see Jalalzai, 2010, pp. 143, 147). However, even with these dominant powers, both women's presidencies marked mixed, somewhat disappointing, records in addressing women's interests. Studies have shown that elite pathway women have exhibited indifference or unwillingness to challenge the prevailing patriarchal gender ideology (Everett, 2014), which explains their disappointing record in improving women's rights and status (Derichs et al., 2006; Richter, 1990). Similarly, both Megawati and Park were conservative leaders who expressed little concern about gender equality and women's interests. This can be evidenced by a decline of women's representation in the cabinet under the two women presidents, too: there was only one woman minister (the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family) during the Park administration while there were two (the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Ministry of Trade and Industry) during the Megawati administration. Still, both women presidents did make some "critical

Table 1. Political performance and substantive representation of women by Megawati and Park.

Policy areas	Megawati Soekarnoputri (2001–2004)	Park Geun-hye (2013–2017)
Gender equality	Enactment of Law No. 23 of 2004 regarding the elimination of domestic violence	The Framework Act on Gender Equality replacing the 1995 Framework Act on Women's Development
	Enactment of Law No. 39 of 2004 regarding the Placement and Protection of Overseas Migrant Workers	Partial amendment to the Act on the Prevention of Sexual Violence and Protection of Victims
Pro-poor	Enactment of Law No. 40 of 2004 regarding the National Social Security System	Basic Pension System for all seniors, 65 years or older (largely failed due to the unclear role-sharing relationship with the National Pension Service)
Children/Family	—	Free childcare for children under the age of five (failed to implement due to the failure of securing the budget)
No action	Gender quota (30%) of the parliamentary seats proposed by the Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy	Increased recruitment of women managers in public office (a campaign promise but women's proportion in senior positions actually decreased)

acts." Table 1 provides an overview of the laws and policies decided or implemented during each president's term, as well as those that were unsuccessful. Following Jalalzai's (2016) model, the policies related to women's interests are classified into four categories: gender equality, pro-poor, children/family, and no action.

From the beginning of her presidency, Megawati received criticism for taking no action on women's issues, such as the plight of women migrant workers, violence against women, and women's participation in politics. Many criticized her public rejection of affirmative action and gender quotas for the reason that they contradicted the democratic principle of equality. Comparably, her two male predecessors had made breakthroughs for Indonesian women: Interim President B. J. Habibie issued a presidential decree setting up the National Commission on Violence against Women and President Abdurrahman Wahid redefined the Women's Ministry as the Ministry for the Empowerment of Women. Megawati rarely expressed any concern about women's issues or engaged in any conversation with women's organizations and activists (Suryakusma, 2003).

At the end of her tenure, however, perhaps in a desperate move to appeal to the electorate, Megawati legislated three critical laws, which civil society organizations had demanded for years. She ratified Law No. 23 of 2004 on the elimination of domestic violence on 22 September 2004 and enacted Law No. 39 of 2004 on the placement and protection of Indonesian migrant workers and Law No. 40 of 2004 on the National Social Security System on the last two days of her presidency (Trisnantoro, 2018, p. 148). The three laws provided important ways for addressing issues of domestic violence, migrant workers, and the social security system but they were not without limitations. For example, both activists and academics criticized Law No. 23 of 2004 for having no specific regulation regarding sexual violence against women and children or for not including more vulnerable victims of sexual violence, such as domestic workers (Chotib, et al., 2022; Komnas Perempuan, 2011). Concerning Law No. 39 of 2004, civil society members and organizations criticized the Megawati administration for failing to consult with them before enacting the law, which does not recognize migrant domestic workers and undocumented migrant workers, the majority of whom are women and much more vulnerable to ill-treatment as migrant workers are not eligible to receive the government's protection (Setyawati, 2013, pp. 270, 273).

Park inherited both structural and cultural challenges to representing women's interests as well as restrictive women's policies initiated by her predecessors. One of the issues was the high rate of women's unemployment as a result of a career break due to childbirth and childcare. The preceding administrations established the support system for career-interrupted women's employment, including the expansion of spouse parental leave and the mandatory implementation of a claim scheme for family care leave, but with little effect. During the campaign, Park had promised free childcare for children under the age of five but her administration failed to fulfill it because of conflicts with the provincial governments and education offices over financial issues (Cheon, 2017). The Park administration's women's employment policy that focused on the creation of part-time jobs was also criticized for its negative implications on widening the gender gap in the labor market and continuing gender roles in which women are exclusively responsible for childcare within the family (K. Shin, 2014). The 2015 legislation of the Framework Act on Gender Equality that replaced the 1995 Framework Act on Women's Development was largely viewed to have marked the government's shift from a gender perspective focused on addressing gender inequalities to a conservative perspective focused on expanding women's participation in economic activities (K. Shin, 2016).

Policy outcomes of Megawati and Park demonstrate the potential and limitations of national women executives with family ties in addressing women's interests. Hailed as the first woman president in each country, Megawati and Park could have taken advantage of their historic ascension to top executive positions. However, while the dominant nature of the presidency provided them with opportunities to initiate and implement critical policies to represent women's interests, they also faced institutional (e.g., a lack of support from political parties, regardless of the parties' ideology) and cultural obstacles (e.g., patriarchal and patrimonial political culture). Considering how elite pathways might have shaped their exercise of political power and the institutional and cultural obstacles they faced once in office, it is fair to say that both Megawati and Park made some meaningful achievements. Megawati's enactment of the three critical laws regarding domestic violence, the protection of migrant workers, and the social security system should be viewed as an important step toward improving women's rights. Similarly, Park's campaign promises to support the policies and programs for women's reemployment and childcare could have generated more positive results if her administration had secured financial resources. In fact, little prioritization of women's issues is not limited to Megawati and Park. Most women presidents who symbolized the family path to power in Latin America were found to have made little or no contribution to furthering women's issues (Jalalzai, 2016, p. 218). Representational effects of women presidents, whether from ruling or opposition parties, seem to depend not just on their personal political modalities or constituency pressure but also on the degrees of gender sensitivity of political institutions, including parties and bureaucracy.

4. Grassroots Pathways: Tri Rismaharini and Kim Soo-young

Women hold far fewer political offices than men in both countries. Yet, both countries have exhibited some

modest expansion and diversification of women's pathways to political power, partly because of the adoption and implementation of political decentralization (Indonesia in 2001 and Korea in 1995). In both countries, the strengthening of local government was considered an essential element of democratization, and women were expected to be among the primary beneficiaries of improved needs assessment and service delivery. In 2021, women's proportions in legislative offices increased to 18% and 19.4%, respectively, at the provincial level and 15.5% and 30.7%, at the district/municipal level. However, women executives are still scarce at the provincial level (only one in Indonesia and none in Korea) and at the district/municipal level (less than 5% in both countries).

Tri Rismaharini and Kim Soo-young exemplify how women opposition leaders of grassroots pathways exhibit different characteristics and outcomes of political engagement in addressing women's issues at the local level, compared to their counterparts from elite pathways at the national level. Local executives in both Indonesia and Korea are responsible for delivering a wide range of services for the development and well-being of the local community. Elected every five (in Indonesia) and four years (in Korea), mayors in both countries have powers to draft local regulations, issue mayoral decisions, propose and implement the municipal revenue and expenditures, and submit supplementary budget proposals (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2014; Ministry of the Interior and Safety, 2017). From women's perspectives, what mayors, rather than the president, represent can be more vital to the delivery and improvement of services they have a direct stake in, like employment-generation schemes, public schools, health clinics, housing, and sanitation.

4.1. Political Biographies of Risma and Kim

Born in 1961 as a third child to a family of seven headed by a civil servant father, Tri Rismaharini became the first woman mayor of Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city, in 2010. Trained as an architect and city planner (BA in architecture and MA in urban development), Risma spent 20 years in the civil service. As the head of the city's Sanitation and Parks Office, she earned a national and international reputation for her work of transforming the city from foul and congested into green and business-friendly (Harsaputra, 2014). Never active in party politics until 2010, she was nominated by the PDIP, then the largest opposition party in the parliament, as the mayoral candidate to pair with Mayor Bambang Dwi Hartono, who ran as a deputy mayoral candidate because he had already completed the maximum two terms. While taking advantage of the media attention to Risma's bureaucratic achievements, Bambang and other PDIP elites seemed unprepared for her stubborn personality and uncompromising working style. Once in office, Risma quickly became popular for her unusually

frank and unbending political style and her pro-poor programs. Alarmed by Risma's political rise, Surabaya's political and business elites immediately began using all kinds of tactics and political maneuverings to unsettle and even remove her from the political arena (Hakim, 2014, p. 147).

Risma survived such political manipulation and was even named as a potential candidate for the 2014 presidential elections. When we met in her mayoral office in June 2013, Risma reiterated the challenges she had faced and her responses to them:

> I don't worry about political communication [with other elites]. I know that I have a good grip on regulations and the basics of society, and those who elected me. I have no political ambition. My mayoral position is given by Allah. I must respect the trust from the people and satisfying their needs is the most important. (Interview, June 12, 2013)

Her weak position in the PDIP's internal politics resurfaced when the party recommended Wisnu Sakti Buana, who had endorsed the move to impeach her in 2011, for the deputy mayoral position. In 2015, she was reelected with over 86% of the vote.

Born in 1964 to a family of five, as the eldest daughter of a small business owner father and housewife mother, Kim Soo-young began her political engagement as a student activist. In 1986, Kim was elected the President of the Student Council of Ewha Women's University. Kim entered formal politics by joining the campaign team for opposition candidate Kim Dae-jung in the 1992 presidential election. The election of Kim Dae-jung as the first opposition president in 1997 opened up a massive influx of left-leaning so-called "386 generation" of former student and labor activists into formal politics. In 1999, she participated in the establishment of the Democratic Alliance for Women's Political Empowerment (today's Korea Women's Political Solidarity), which advocated for gender quotas and provided women political power-seekers with training and support. In 2006, Kim became the first head of the Women's Hope Center for Employment Support in Siheung and Changwon. The center's success story provided a model for the 2008 Act on the Promotion of Economic Activities of Women with Career Interruption and by 2012, more than 110 centers operated to provide career-interrupted women with training and support for reemployment across the country (Kang et al., 2017, p. 92).

Kim first ran for the Yangcheon mayoral re-election in 2011 in a bid to replace her husband, also a former student activist who was elected as the Yangcheon mayor in 2010 but had to resign after being sentenced for electoral fraud. Unprepared and subject to the public suspicion of her intention, she failed in the election. In 2014, she beat a formidable candidate in the party primary for the Yangcheon mayoral candidacy, benefiting from the party's internal regulation that gives women 10% of

the votes as extra points. As a woman candidate, she took advantage of the Government Fund for Women's Development, the legislation to which she contributed as the head of the women's department of the Uri Party (Interview, June 30, 2022). She became the first woman mayor to represent an opposition party (New Politics Alliance for Democracy, today's Democracy Party) in Seoul. She was re-elected with 61% of the votes in 2018 but lost her third bid in the 2022 election by a narrow margin.

4.2. Political Performance of Risma and Kim

Like women presidents', women mayors' substantive representation seems to be affected by a combination of factors: from structural factors such as political parties and governance systems/procedures; situational factors such as the extent of political apprenticeship; to relational factors with bureaucrats, local assembly members, and the constituents. Expectations about a right balance between femininities (e.g., communicative and honest) and masculinities (e.g., decisive and authoritative) also seem to pose a challenge to women mayors. Both Risma and Kim adopted a "motherly" image and approach to politics and governance, which is reflected in their priority policy areas, such as gender equality, social welfare, and children/family (see Table 2).

Risma continued to invest in the city's infrastructure, including public parks and established a home for homeless people where they can receive vocational training and support to start small businesses (Hakim, 2014). In 2011, Risma made public education free through secondary school allocating more than a third of the city's budget to education (Jacques, 2015). In 2013, Risma received a Millennium Development Goals Award for education and the healthcare of mother and child from the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono government (Hakim, 2014, p. 223). One of her most controversial decisions was her instruction to close prostitution areas, including Gang Dolly known as the largest red light district in Southeast Asia, and to establish rehabilitation and training centers for former prostitutes. The number of prostitutes decreased from 3,518 in 2008 to 2,117 in 2012, which was hailed by the Ministry of Social Affairs as a national model (Hakim, 2014, p. 94). Although this event may reflect Risma's extraordinary courage and determination, it was also criticized by aid and healthcare workers as being ineffective in eliminating the sex trade and adversely driving prostitutes to more risks. Religious leaders—Surabaya being the home base of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest cultural Islamic organization—and moralists were the strongest proponents of Risma's move. However, her critics argued that making prostitution illegal would force many sex workers to work in more dangerous and unregulated conditions (Pandaya, 2014). Still, Risma's achievements were widely praised, and, in December 2020, President Joko Widodo appointed her as the Minister of Social Affairs.

Not only as a former opposition activist but also as one of the few women mayors, Kim employed both feminine and masculine leadership styles. As a self-proclaimed "Mother Mayor," she focused on improving the city infrastructure, from public libraries to playgrounds and places for parents with small children, and on providing working parents with childcare support (Park, 2017). To understand residents' daily needs, she held monthly off-site mayor's office meetings for which she traveled around the district and met with residents. She also employed a masculine leadership style when she had to persuade reluctant bureaucrats

Table 2. Political performance and substantive representation of women by Risma and Kim.

Policy areas	Tri Rismaharini (2010–2020)	Kim Soo-young (2014–2022)
Gender equality	Women friendly city Economic Heroes (*Pahlawan Ekonomi*: training programs for housewives from poor families)	Woman-friendly city selected by the Ministry of Women and Family Enactment of Ordinance on the Creation of Women-Friendly City Women leaders workshops
Social welfare	Social services for people with social welfare problems (*Pelayanan Masalah Kesejahteraan Sosoial*: PMKS) Health services for the poor	Foodbanks for the poor Various regular events for the poor seniors
Children/Family	Free public education for primary and secondary school Shelters for abandoned children and children with special needs Public libraries	Public libraries, including the new Yangcheon District Public Library Childcare facilities (e.g., playgrounds, Book Café, Mom Café, and childcare support centers) Emergency childcare service

or legislators while making big decisions regarding the district's development (Interview, June 30, 2022). In representing women's concerns, Kim's administration held yearly workshops for local women leaders (2014–2022) and provided career-interrupted women with opportunities for training and employment in various areas, from education to entertainment. In 2017, Kim also succeeded in getting Yangcheon selected as a women-friendly city, a national policy that encourages both women's and men's participation in local policy-making for women's development, care, and security in the city.

Both Risma and Kim began their political careers representing opposition parties out of strong commitments to represent the people. As an experienced and highly respected bureaucrat, Risma emerged as the Surabaya mayor with a good grasp of the problems that local communities faced. As a staunch activist, Kim assumed the Yangcheon mayoral position with a deep understanding of the everyday challenges of local society, from housing to childcare. Though somewhat different in leadership styles—Risma showed a tendency of taking a top-down approach while Kim appeared somewhat low-key—both women mayors used their executive leadership to represent their constituents' aspirations and women's interests. While mayoral powers have limitations in terms of resources and impact, and not without controversies, both women mayors initiated and implemented diverse policies to improve their cities to be more women-friendly.

5. Conclusion

By comparing national and local women opposition leaders in Indonesia and Korea whose political pathways seem distinct from each other—the former's rise to presidential positions attributed to family ties while the latter's to commitments to local communities—this article demonstrates the complexity of women opposition leaders' political pathways and performance. National women opposition leaders' pathways and performance were closely intertwined with family background, while their local counterparts pursued and exercised executive leadership to advance their political agendas, including women's issues. The article also shows that the political performance of women executives, including those who began their political careers by joining opposition parties, depends not only on why and how they pursue political power but also on the institutional and cultural obstacles that they face once in office. While a biographical study has limitations, this article suggests it can be a useful approach to the study of women opposition leaders when and where their small number deters any attempt to study them systematically. It seems so particularly when women opposition leaders assume executive leadership in the political systems in which executives can initiate and implement a wide range of government policies. That said, given the building scholarly consensus that governance is not just about political representation but

deeply related to the governance systems by which gendered power relations and practices are reproduced, taking institutional and cultural dimensions into the study of women opposition leaders should be the next research agenda. In doing so, political parties deserve special attention in terms of their roles (or lack thereof) in both nominating, training, and supporting women for executive office and integrating women's issues into the political agenda.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Bell, D. S. (2014). Review article: Political leadership. *Government and Opposition*, *49*(1), 139–158.

Blackburn, S. (2004). *Women and the state in modern Indonesia*. Cambridge University Press.

Celis, K. (2010). Gendering representation. In G. Goetz & A. G. Mazur (Eds.), *Politics, gender, and concepts: Theory and methodology* (pp. 71–93). Cambridge University Press.

Celis, K., Childs, S., Kantola, J., & Krook, M. L. (2008). Rethinking women's substantive representation. *Representation*, *44*(2), 99–110.

Cheon, H. (2017, February 8). Pak-kŭn-hye chŏng-pu 4nyŏn, kyo-yuk-chŏng-ch'aek-ŭl p'yŏng-ka-ha-ta [Four years of the Park Geun-hye government, evaluate its education policy]. *Jeonbuk Provincial Daily*. https://www.domin.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=1142921

Childs, S., & Krook, M. L. (2009). Analysing women's substantive representation: From critical mass to critical actors. *Government and Opposition*, *44*(2), 125–145.

Choi, N. (2019). Women political pathways in Southeast Asia. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *21*(2), 224–248.

Chotib, M., Safira, M. E., Multazam, L., & Maftukhin, M. (2022). Examining the long road to protection of women from sexual violence in the bill on the elimination of sexual violence. *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, *5*(5), 347–356.

Curtin, J. (2008). Women, political leadership and substantive representation: The case of New Zealand. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *61*(3), 490–504.

Derichs, C., Fleschenberg, A., & Hüstebeck, M. (2006). Gendering moral capital: Morality as a political asset and strategy of top female politicians in Asia. *Critical Asian Studies*, *38*(3), 245–270.

Duerst-Lahti, G. (1997). Reconceiving theories of power: Consequences of masculinism in the executive branch. In M. E. Borrelli & J. M. Martin (Eds.), *The other elites: Women, politics, and power in the executive branch* (pp. 11–32). Lynne Rienner.

Everett, J. (2014). Women in local government in India. In A. M. Goetz (Ed.), *Governing women: Women's political effectiveness in contexts of democratization and governance reform* (pp. 196–215). Routledge; United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

Fleschenberg, A. (2008). Asia's women politicians at the top: Roaring tigresses or tame kittens? In K. Iwanaga (Ed.), *Women's political participation and representation in Asia: Obstacles and challenges* (pp. 23–54). NIAS Press.

Goetz, A. M. (2009). *Governing women: Women's Political effectiveness in contexts of democratization and governance reform*. Routledge.

Hakim, A. (2014). *Tri Rismaharini*. Change Publisher.

Harsaputra, I. (2014, February 15). Tri Rismaharini: Madame mayor iron fist, tender heart. *The Jakarta Post*. https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/02/15/tri-rismaharini-madame-mayor-iron-fist-tender-heart.html

Jacques, H. (2015, January 15). How Surabaya mayor stands up for sex workers, students and rare animals. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2015/jan/15/mayor-surabaya-indonesia-tri-rismarahini

Jalalzai, F. (2010). Madam president: Gender, power, and the comparative presidency. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *31*(2), 132–165.

Jalalzai, F. (2016). *Women presidents of Latin America: Beyond family ties?* Routledge.

Kang, H. J., Jeong, H. I., & Ko, H. (2017). Policies and legislations for women in Korea from the 1990s to the present. In Y. Cho & G. N. McLean (Eds.), *Korean women in leadership* (pp. 81–98). Springer International Publishing.

Koen, V., André, C., Beom, J., Purwin, A., & Kim, B. (2021). Better policies to prolong the miracle on the Han River. In *Korea and the OECD: 25 Years and beyond* (pp. 82–95). OECD.

Komnas Perempuan. (2011). *Mengenai pelaksanaan konvensi penghapusan segala bentuk diskriminasi terhadap perempuan di Indonesia, 2007–2011* [Regarding the implementation of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in Indonesia, 2007–2011].

Lubina, M. (2020). *A political biography of Aung San Suu Kyi: A hybrid politician*. Routledge.

Madsen, S. (Ed.). (2015). *Women and leadership around the world*. Information Age Publishing.

Mietzner, M. (2016). The Sukarno dynasty in Indonesia: Between institutionalization, ideological continuity and crises of succession. *South East Asia Research*, *24*(3), 355–368.

Ministry of Home Affairs. (2014). *Law No. 23 on the Local Government*. Government of Indonesia.

Ministry of the Interior and Safety. (2017). *Local Autonomy Act (No. 14839)*. Government of Korea.

Montecinos, V. (Ed.). (2017). *Women presidents and prime ministers in post-transition democracies*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Novitasari, M., Roni, & Ardiansa, D. (2021). *Political leadership of eight women heads of region: A tug of war between relations and identity*. Cakra Wikara Indonesia.

Oh, Y. (2014). Yŏ-sŏng-tae-t'ong-lyŏng si-tae yŏ-sŏng-chŏng-ch'aek-ŭi p'yŏng-ka-wa chŏn-mang [An analysis of women policies of the Park Geun-hye government]. *Minju Sahoeui Jeongcheg Yeongu*, *26*, 201–230.

Pandaya. (2014, June 22). View point: Is Risma only driving sex workers to the street? *The Jakarta Post*.

Park, H. (2017). Bogji, iljali, geongang…eomeoniui ma-eum-eulo chaeng-gyeoyo: 'saenghwaljeongchi dal-in' Kim Young-soo Seoul Yangcheongucheongjang [Welfare, jobs, and health…take care of them with a mother's heart: Yangcheon mayor Kim Soo-young, the master of lifestyle politics]. *Shin Donga*, *692*, 232–235.

Rai, S. M. (2014). Political performance: A framework for analyzing democratic politics. *Political Studies*, *63*(5), 1179–1197.

Reid, A. (2014). Urban respectability and the maleness of (Southeast) Asian modernity. *Asian Review of World Histories*, *2*(2), 147–167.

Richter, L. K. (1990). Exploring theories of female leadership in South and Southeast Asia. *Pacific Affairs*, *63*(4), 524–540.

Setyawati, D. (2013). Assets or commodities? Comparing regulations of placement and protection of migrant workers in Indonesia and the Philippines. *ASEAS—Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *6*(2), 264–280.

Shin, K. (2014). Si-kan-che no-tong-kwa sŏng-p'yŏng-tŭng: Pak-kŭn-hye chŏng-pu-ŭi si-kan-che il-cha-chi ch'ang-ch'ul chŏng-ch'aek-e tae-han pi-p'an-chŏk non-ŭi [Part-time work and gender equality: A critical discussion on the Park Geun-hye administration's part-time creation policy]. *Journal of Korean Women's Studies*, *30*(1), 81–112.

Shin, K. (2016). Yŏ-sŏng-chŏng-ch'aek-e-sŏ sŏng-p'yŏng-tŭng-chŏng-ch'aek-ŭ-lo? chen-tŏ-chŏng-ch'aek-ŭi o-hae-wa i-hae [From women's policies to gender equality policies? The misunderstanding and understanding of gender policies]. *Journal of Korean Women's Studies*, *36*(4), 1–36.

Shin, S. (2019). The rise and fall of Park Geun-hye: The perils of South Korea's weak party system. *The Pacific Review*, *33*(1), 153–183.

Skard, T. (2014). *Women of power: Half a century of female presidents and prime ministers worldwide*. Policy Press.

Suryakusma, J. (2003, January 18). Indonesia: Megawati

hasn't helped her countrywomen. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/18/opinion/IHT-indonesia-megawati-hasnt-helped-her-countrywomen.html

Tarrow, S. (2010). The strategy of paired comparison: Toward a theory of practice. *Comparative Political Studies*, *43*(2), 230–259.

Torregrosa, L. L. (1998, April). Opposing force. *Vogue*, 246–250.

Trisnantoro, L. (2018). Healthcare system reform and governance for sustainable development under Indonesia's health insurance (JKN) policy. In *Sustainable Development Goals in Southeast Asia and ASEAN* (pp. 143–159). Brill.

Vincent, L. (2010). A question of interest: Women as opposition. *Democratization*, *8*(1), 69–84.

Wiltse, E., & Hager, L. (2021). *Women's paths to power: Female presidents and prime ministers, 1960–2020*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

About the Author

Nankyung Choi is a lecturer in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. She has published in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *South East Asia Research*, *Indonesia*, and *Sojourn*.

Article

The Instrumentalization of Women Opposition Leaders for Authoritarian Regime Entrenchment: The Case of Uganda

Aili Mari Tripp

Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA; atripp@wisc.edu

Abstract
Electoral authoritarian regimes have sought to use a variety of tactics to remain in power even as they have opened themselves up to competition through multiparty elections. These tactics have included an array of measures targeting opposition women. They became significant in Africa after the 1990s as most countries adopted multiparty systems and ruling parties needed to maintain vote share. Ruling parties in African authoritarian countries strengthened their patronage networks by promoting women as leaders. At the same time, women in opposition parties have fared poorly compared to women in ruling parties and male opposition candidates. This has been the case even where one finds the special dispensation of a gender quota in the form of reserved seats. This article looks at how Uganda's ruling party has used various tactics to advance women leaders, responding to pressures from both the women's movement and international actors while seeking to ensure its continued dominance. It reveals an essential feature of authoritarianism in Africa today, namely the instrumental use of women leaders to entrench the ruling party in power.

Keywords
authoritarianism; autocracy; parties; quotas; Uganda; women opposition leaders

1. Introduction

Ruling parties in authoritarian countries have often promoted women as leaders through gender quotas that are ostensibly aimed at promoting women in all parties. However, women in opposition parties have generally fared poorly compared to women in ruling parties and male opposition candidates. In Uganda, for example, women in the opposition have had more difficulty than ruling party women in taking advantage of the reserved parliamentary seats, even though they are purportedly accessible to all women regardless of party affiliation. The challenges opposition women face might not seem so surprising, but this discrepancy is quite significant. It reveals an essential feature of authoritarianism in Africa today, namely that the promotion of women is primarily aimed at maintaining the ruling party's vote share and not necessarily a means to advance women in politics.

The story of opposition women is one of authoritarian entrenchment. This article looks at how authoritarian regimes have become increasingly institutionalized by instrumentalizing women's rights to their own benefit and against the opposition, especially after the introduction of multipartyism in the 1990s. This happened as the need to maintain party dominance became more pressing, with the potential loss of vote share that occurred as most African countries introduced multipartyism. It has had particularly harmful effects on opposition women and leaders, more than on opposition male politicians. Thus, the adoption of reserved seats, which is purportedly done to advance the inclusion of women, ultimately legitimizes an authoritarian regime.

The article begins by explaining the argument, research design, and methods. It provides the motivation for the article, building on the existing literature on reserved seats and women's representation in electoral

authoritarian regimes. It provides a background to the Ugandan case, detailing the status of women in the political opposition parties. It then describes the various strategies the ruling party has adopted to maintain vote share, notably after the country shifted to multipartyism in 2005. This included tactics involving reserved seats, independent women candidates, and tactics of repression and cooptation. The article concludes that these various strategies involving women leaders are part of the ruling party's efforts to maintain vote share and ensure longevity in power.

This article looks at the case of Uganda, a multiparty autocratic country, to show how the ruling party maintains its grip on women's leadership. Not only does the ruling party use the instruments of the state to brutally repress the opposition, but it also attempts to coopt and divide the opposition. The imbalance of opposition women in parliament has more to do with the ruling party and its strategies and less to do with the opposition parties themselves.

Overall, women in Uganda today claim 46% of local government positions, 33% of the parliamentary seats, and 43% of the cabinet positions. Women claim the position of vice president, prime minister, deputy prime minister, speaker of the House, and five out of 11 Supreme Court justices. With the 10th parliament (2016–2021), the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) appointed a woman, Hon. Ruth Nankabirwa Sentamu, as the chief party whip. These are by no means the first such appointments. For example, from 2011 to 2021, Rebecca Kadaga held the position of speaker of the House. Another woman, Speciosa Kazibwe, held the post of vice president from 1994 to 2003. And women have long held top cabinet posts.

These patterns represent a steady increase in women's representation in Uganda since the NRM took over in 1986. In 1989, Uganda adopted a reserved system in parliament that set aside seats for women in each district. In the 2021 parliamentary election, 146 women were elected to reserved seats, one for each district. An additional 14 were elected to open seats (out of a total of 353 seats), and 13 were elected to special interest group seats (out of 30). The opposition parties combined have claimed only *one-fifth of the reserved seats for women*, far less than their hold on 29% of the open seats. In contrast, the ruling party controls 64% of the parliamentary seats and 80% of the reserved seats for women, according to the Uganda Electoral Commission (2021). This is not counting women in other appointed, reserved, and independent seats controlled by the ruling party. In this article, I argue that promoting women's rights is part of an instrumental strategy by authoritarian regimes to remain in power and further entrench themselves. Women were not promoted in Ugandan politics simply out of a desire for inclusivity but, also, because this was a mechanism through which the ruling party could maintain their dominant vote share as they opened up to multipartyism. The expansion of the number of districts and reserved seats and the increases in appointed parliamentary seats and independent candidates occurred when the country adopted multipartyism and appears to be part of a broader strategy to ensure NRM dominance.

Uganda fits the modal African party system in which a hegemonic presidential party dominates the political landscape, surrounded by several smaller parties, including the Democratic Party and the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) of the former president, Milton Obote. After President Yoweri Museveni took over in 1986, Uganda was governed by his "no-party" NRM, which was ostensibly a broad-based movement but operated as a de facto single party. It became a multiparty system in 2005 following a referendum. The Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) emerged as the main opposition party in 2004, followed by the National Unity Platform (NUP), which controlled the largest share of opposition seats after the 2021 elections.

The primary motivation for the ruling party's tactics has been the need to remain in power, particularly after the country adopted a multiparty system in 2005. At that time, there was a drop in support for the NRM in parliamentary elections from 100% in 2001 to 67% in 2006 and similar rates in subsequent elections. Museveni also experienced a drop in support from 69% in the 2001 presidential elections to 59% in 2005 and 58% in the 2020 elections. The new challenges from the opposition, even if it is fractured, have meant that maintaining vote share is the paramount goal of the NRM.

The article draws on 45 in-depth interviews in Uganda with women's rights leaders, parliamentarians, ruling and opposition party leaders, journalists, lawyers, academics, members of the judiciary, including a Supreme Court justice and a High Court justice, representatives from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, several former ministers, including the first minister of women in development, members of the Constitutional Commission, and many others. The interviews were part of a more extensive five-country study on women and authoritarianism in Africa.

Since I was interested in the political elite, most interviews were based in Kampala. The interviews were conducted in 2020 and 2022 via Zoom, WhatsApp, and in person in Uganda, regarding the impact of regime type on women's rights. The majority of interviews were carried out over Zoom and Whatsapp in 2020, during the period of confinement due to Covid-19. Interviewees were selected through snowball sampling and were representative of different political parties, sectors of society, ethnicities, and ages. A Ugandan research assistant, a graduate student in gender and women's studies at Makerere University, set up the interviews. Although this was not an ideal modality for conducting interviews, I have done extensive research in Uganda since 1992 and have interviewed hundreds of such individuals over the years. Many interviewees already knew me or knew of my many books and articles on women and politics in

Uganda. The interviews generally lasted between one and one and a half hours.

The interview questions varied depending on the experiences of the individual, but generally, the interviews examined the impacts of the women's movement, politicians, parties, courts, and other actors on the women's rights agenda in Uganda. The interviews probed changes over time. They examined the limits of the NRM agenda and the interactions between the NRM and the opposition. Since the relationship between the NRM and the opposition is a key element in differentiating authoritarian countries like Uganda from democracies in Africa, this was a major focus of the interviews.

2. Women's Representation in Electoral Authoritarian Regimes

Women's political leadership has historically been associated with democracies. However, cross-national statistical studies have shown that this is not the case in Africa. In fact, in Africa, autocracies have been as likely to advance women as leaders as democracies, especially regimes with entrenched ruling parties that have remained in power for decades (Tripp, in press). At the same time, autocrats have had no qualms about repressing women in the opposition and preventing their advancement as leaders.

Some of the literature on quotas has focused on the positive aspects of reserved seats for women because they are regarded as a mechanism to advance a women's rights agenda (Qureshi & Ahmad, 2022; Yoon, 2013). Reserved seats are seen as a way of encouraging women to participate in politics (Burain, 2014; Song, 2016), closing the gender gap in political representation, enhancing gender equality, and as evidence for the redress of past imbalances (Nanivadekar, 2006), especially in countries that are culturally less amenable to women's public roles. Quotas, including reserved seats, are sometimes viewed as a positive response to pressures from women's movements and coalitions (Kang & Tripp, 2018; Krook, 2006) and pressures from international bodies like the United Nations to ensure stronger representation of women in political decision-making (Bush & Zetterberg, 2021).

More critical accounts have suggested that such quotas represent "autocratic genderwashing" to hide the less savory aspects of authoritarian rule (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2022). Reserved seats may limit women's meaningful ability to influence policymaking, as in the case of Rwanda (Burnet, 2020), or block women from accessing constituency seats (Darhour & Dahlerup, 2013). What generally is not considered—and what this article explores—is the implications reserved seats have for the strengthening of autocracy, particularly strategies to quelch the opposition. Quotas are often treated as a neutral mechanism in the literature, but much depends on the political environment in which they are introduced. Targeting opposition women is integral to this tactic of adopting reserved seats. Yet the inclusion of

marginalized groups through quotas is said to lend legitimacy to a political system and enhance the prospects of incumbents winning elections (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; Nanivadekar, 2006). But herein lies a dilemma: Quotas can be used not only to advance inclusion but also to further entrench autocratic ruling parties.

In this account, quotas are not only a response to pressure from women's movements but also a means by which hegemonic ruling parties maintain dominance and longevity in power. This article contributes to the literature on authoritarianism by showing how ruling parties use women to entrench themselves in power while sidelining opposition women. As Bernhard et al. (2020) have shown, incumbent authoritarians open themselves to the risk of losing when they introduce multiparty competition, but with time they generally gain legitimacy and regime strength. The instrumentalization of women's leadership and isolation of opposition women are vital components of this strategy of entrenching themselves. Incumbent leaders in authoritarian countries have multiple legal and illegal means of excluding opponents from the electoral competition (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Schedler, 2002).

As incumbent parties were threatened with the loss of vote share with the introduction of multipartyism in the 1990s in Africa, they sought new strategies to remain in power to further institutionalize their hegemonic position. This coincided with efforts by international and regional organizations like the United Nations and the African Union to pressure governments to increase women's representation. Adopting quotas such as reserved seats became one mechanism that authoritarian executive leaders adopted to further entrench their parties and regimes in power. Other strategies of control regarding women included outright repression, cooptation of opposition women in leadership positions, and attempts to build coalitions with various opposition parties, often through women leaders.

All but two of the countries with reserved seat systems globally are non-democratic. In almost all non-democratic countries with functioning parliaments that have reserved seats, most women can be found in seats controlled by the ruling party and/or parties affiliated with the ruling party. In the remaining countries, the ruling party holds the preponderance of seats, thus maintaining its dominant position, even where the opposition parties combined have more seats (Table 1). Opposition parties have responded by promoting few women parliamentary candidates, making the likelihood of opposition women leaders emerging even more of a rarity. By opposition women leaders, I am referring to women who hold leadership positions in opposition parties that are represented in parliament.

This article asks why have the opposition parties not been as successful in capturing female reserved seats as males or even females in open seats, even though these parties have had women in top leadership positions of

Table 1. Women parliamentarians in reserved seats: Ruling party vs. opposition parties, 2022.

Country	Freedom House ranking	Women in parliament	Women in reserved seats		
			Ruling party women parliamentarians	Opposition women parliamentarians	Independent women parliamentarians
Bangladesh	39 Partly free	20.90%	86% (62)	13% (9)	1% (1)
Burundi	14 Not free	38.20%	76% (35)	24% (11)	0% (0)
China	9 Not free	24.90%	49% (435 est.)	51% (307 est.)	0% (0)
Djibouti	24 Not free	26.20%	93% (14)	7% (1)	0% (0)
Egypt	18 Not free	27.70%	38% (27)	54% (38)	8% (6)
Eswatini	17 Not free	13.5%	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
Guyana	73 Free	35.70%	46% (11)	54% (13)	0% (0)
Haiti	37 Partly free	0%	0%	0%	0% (0)
Iraq	29 Not free	29.80%	33% (31)	62% (59)	5% (5)
Jordan	34 Not free	11.50%	Not applicable	0%	100% (15)
Kenya	48 Partly free	21.60%	56% (39)	41% (29)	3% (2)
Mauritania	35 Partly free	20.3%	60% (12)	40% (8)	0% (0)
Morocco	37 Partly free	24.10%	47%** (45)	63% (50)	0% (0)
Nepal	56 Partly free	32.70%	58% (52)	42% (38)	0% (0)
Niger	48 Partly free	25.90%	Not available	Not available	Not available
Pakistan	37 Partly free	20.20%	45% (31)	55% (38)	0% (0)
Rwanda	21 Not free	61.30%	90% (44)	10% (5)	0% (0)
Samoa	81 Free	9.10%	75% (3)	25% (1)	0% (0)
Saudi Arabia	7 Not free	19.90%*	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
Somalia	7 Not free	24.40%*	Not available	Not available	Not available
Tanzania	34 Partly free	36.90%	92% (94)	8% (8)	Not applicable
Uganda	34 Not free	33.80%	42% (61)	26% (38)	32%* (48)
United Arab Emirates	17 Not free	50%*	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
Zimbabwe	28 Not free	30.60%	61% (52)	39% (33)	0% (0)

Notes: * appointed; ** ruling coalition; the numbers vary from year to year, making this an estimate; Afghanistan and Eritrea have had reserved seats for women in the past: Afghanistan has not convened its National Assembly since 2021 when the Taliban took over and transferred power to an all-male Leadership Council; Eritrea has not convened its parliament since 2002. Sources: Freedom House (2023), International IDEA et al. (2022), Inter-Parliamentary Union (2019), see also Harvard Dataverse for sources for this dataset.

their parties. The article argues that it has to do with the logic of authoritarian rule and the need by ruling parties to further entrench themselves to remain in power by seeking new forms of legitimacy, such as the adoption of reserved seats. In the case of Uganda, women in the opposition are de-campaigned vigorously by the ruling party and have found that running women for reserved seats is a losing proposition. Although, to some extent, the regime is interested in responding to women's rights activists who demand increased female representation, ultimately, its main goal is to remain in power, and it instrumentalizes women's representation to ensure its dominance.

Most discussions of adopting quotas and promoting women as leaders in Africa have focused on the end of the Cold War, changes in international norms and prac-

tices after the 1995 Beijing Conference, and donor strategies (Bush, 2011). However, in Uganda, the reserved seat system started in the late 1980s prior to these international trends, and it was used to strengthen the NRM by reinforcing new patronage structures (Tripp, 2000). Tamale (1999) argues that the affirmative action program of the NRM came out of its desire to show the international community after the takeover in 1986 that it was committed to democracy, had transcended its military claims to power, and garnered greater legitimacy. It was also, in part, a reward for the contributions of women to the five-year guerrilla struggle on the condition that they supported the NRM (Tripp, 2000).

In Africa, women's representation more generally is influenced by the use of quotas (Bauer & Britton, 2006), post-conflict impacts (Tripp, 2015), women's movements

(Kang & Tripp, 2018), the electoral system (Lindberg, 2004), and levels of corruption (Stockemer, 2011). But other region-specific factors influence these dynamics as well.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women's rights have also been used to expand clientelistic networks and constituencies. Leaders in the Maghreb countries of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria have used women's rights, in part, to marginalize violent extremists and Salafists to improve their external image and enhance their position as trading partners with Europe and Africa (Tripp, 2019). The appointment of women leaders has been used in some African countries for international status signaling to soften the image of an illiberal regime in the hopes of accessing greater foreign direct investments, loans, and foreign aid and enhancing trade relations (Bush & Zetterberg, 2020). Governments believe that advancing women in parliament is a good way to signal gender equity globally since women's legislative representation is one of the most commonly used measures for indicating a commitment to gender equity (Arendt, 2018).

An important way that regimes remain in power is by broadening their ruling coalitions. One might surmise that since women represent over half of the population, this makes them a key constituency to bring on board politically, especially given their own political aspirations. As newcomers to politics, women often find it most expedient to align themselves with the ruling party, knowing that they are most likely to win with the party's support and are less likely to be de-campaigned. We now turn to discuss how women emerged as leaders in Uganda under NRM and how an initiative aimed at including women, in general, excluded opposition women political aspirants.

3. Background

Women did not feature in any significant way in the authoritarian governments in Uganda until President Yoweri Museveni and his NRM took over in 1986. In the 1989 elections for the National Resistance Council (the NRM-led legislature), 18% of the seats were held by women due to the introduction of affirmative action

reserved seats for women. This followed patterns established during the guerrilla war that brought Museveni to power, in which seats were set aside for women on the local-level resistance councils, particularly in the Luwero area of central Uganda. Women's rights activists later mobilized to ensure that the reserved seats were embedded in the revised 1995 constitution.

Parties also made commitments to women. According to the NRM (2015), 40% of all political positions should be reserved for women except where it was not practical to do so; however, it had not aggressively tried to meet these goals until after 2005. A major change in tactics occurred when Uganda adopted multi-partyism in 2005. After this time, the NRM had to worry more about maintaining its vote share. Unlike the opposition parties, the NRM at this time significantly increased its percentage of female ministers, women in parliament (Table 2), and local government.

Ironically, despite the divisiveness of the NRM leadership, both opposition and NRM women parliamentarians have worked closely together in the Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association, which is the most active parliamentary caucus. Both opposition and NRM women parliamentarians are equally committed to a women's rights agenda (Wang, 2013), as are women in open and reserved seats (Clayton et al., 2017). The Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association has championed key legislation, including laws around inheritance, marriage, divorce, female genital mutilation, trafficking of persons, gender-based violence, public order management, and maternity leave. They have also collaborated on girl child education, sexual violence, maternal health care, and early marriage. These are all issues supported by the NRM but also the opposition parties.

Women in the opposition are slightly more likely to bring up gender-related issues in parliamentary sessions than women in the NRM; however, these findings are not robust in a study of 14 years of parliamentary discourse (Clayton et al., 2017). Women in reserved seats are more active in parliament in making interventions than women in open seats, even though women in reserved seats differ little from women in open seats in the Ugandan

Table 2. Women in Uganda's parliament.

Year	Districts (No.)	Affirmative action seats	Women in open seats	Women appointed	Total women	Total MPs	Women (%)
1989*	39	39	2	9	50	280	18
1996*	39	39	8	4	51	276	19
2001*	56	56	13	6	75	304	24
2006	79	79	14	1	100	319	31
2011	112	112	11	8	131	375	35
2016	112	112	18	9	139	426	33
2021	146	146	18	13	167	529	32

Note: * The parliamentary body was called National Resistance Council in 1989, 1996, and 2001. Source: Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe et al. (2019).

parliament in terms of their qualifications (Clayton et al., 2017; O'Brien, 2012). Some have argued that this is because the women in the reserved seats feel accountable to their constituencies, the women's movement, and the NRM. But this would be true of NRM women in open seats as well. This study suggests that pressure from the women's movement explains the behavior of women parliamentarians in different parties and different types of seats.

4. Women Leaders in Opposition

The change in NRM's strategy toward women's representation has impacted opposition parties, which also had set targets for women's representation. Opposition parties have promoted women where they can, selecting several notable women leaders at the highest levels over the years. Betty Nambooze served as spokesperson for the Democratic Party (2005–2010) and subsequently as MP. In 2021 she won another term representing Mukono Municipality on the NUP ticket. Miria Obote, the wife of Uganda's founding president Milton Obote, was president of the UPC from 2005 until 2010 and ran for president in 2006. Cecilia Ogwal served as the UPC's acting secretary general between 1985 and 1992. She was active in the Constituent Assembly in 1994 and has been a member of parliament since 1996. Sharon Oyat Arach was appointed as UPC spokesperson in 2020. Of the UPC's top leadership circle of nine individuals, one-third are women, including the party spokesperson (Sharon Oyat Arach), national woman leader (Miria Muhwezi), and assistant woman leader (Racheal Neluba).

Several women have started parties of their own. Beti Olive Kamya-Turwomwe became the first woman in Uganda to form a political party in 2010—the Uganda Federal Alliance—and was a presidential candidate in 2011. Before that, she was a leader of the FDC, although she eventually switched parties to the NRM and, after 2021, became inspector general of government. She represented Lubaga North Constituency for the FDC in parliament from 2006 to 2010.

Women have also played leading roles in the parliamentary opposition. Winfred Kiiza of the FDC was the leader of the opposition in the 10th parliament (2016–2018), having served in parliament since 2006. The opposition leader, Betty Aol Ochan, from 2018 to 2021, was an FDC leader from Gulu District who has been an MP since 2018. Alice Alaso helped form a party that split off from the FDC in 2019, the Alliance for National Transformation, and now is the party's acting national coordinator. She was the FDC's first secretary general for 10 years and women's representative in parliament for Serere District, representing FDC from 2006 to 2021. Dr Lina Zedriga Waru is the vice-chairperson of the NUP in charge of Northern Uganda.

Despite the relatively large number of opposition women holding positions of power in their parties and leadership roles in parliament, the overall number of women from the opposition parties in the National Assembly has been relatively poor, largely due to aggressive NRM decampaigning tactics and the use of reserved seats. The FDC had committed to 40% representation of women at the national level, but they have also advocated for eliminating the quota system because of the advantages it gives the opposition (Muriaas & Wang, 2012). Opposition parties have put forward 28 female candidates compared with the NRM's 29 for open seats in the 2021 elections, yet they won only five seats this way compared to the 11 won by the NRM (Table 3). Opposition women had an 18% chance of gaining open seats compared with a 38% chance for NRM women. Opposition parties put forward 252 female candidates for the reserved seats, compared with the NRM's 145, yet they won only 24 of the seats compared with the NRM's 100. Again, opposition women had a 9.5% chance of gaining reserved seats compared to the 69% chance for NRM women (Table 4). This is not counting the independent seats, most of which are controlled by the NRM. In contrast to women candidates, 627 opposition men vying for open seats won 12% (77) of them, while NRM male candidates had 5.3 times greater chance of winning and claimed 64% of the seats. Although NRM's share of parliamentary reserved seats for women has decreased from 73% in 2006 to 69% today, it has found other ways to maintain vote share through control of women independents and women in appointed seats (Table 2).

Even though there are numerous women in opposition party leadership positions, these parties are risk averse when fielding women candidates for parliamentary elections because they fear they are more likely to lose than men. Opposition parties tend to compete more successfully in urban areas than in rural districts, which limits the areas where they can make inroads. Women in the opposition face more hurdles than men, especially since they generally do not have access to the resources NRM women enjoy. Women in the reserved seats have to represent an entire district rather than a constituency, which is usually three to four times smaller, placing added financial burdens on them. Women politicians generally have fewer resources, yet people expect them to pay for children's school fees or hospital bills and make demands on them that they are less likely to make on male incumbents (Segawa, 2016).

In the past, the FDC held the majority of opposition seats for women, but as of 2021, the majority of opposition seats went to the NUP, with 13 reserved seats and three open seats held by women. But NUP, like the other opposition parties, has similarly experienced difficulties winning reserved parliamentary seats for their female candidates (see Table 4). As a result, the parties have focused on other areas of leadership for women.

Most opposition parties do not allocate funds for their women's leagues, so the difference between their policy and practice is quite stark. They do not see fielding women as a winning strategy in the face of the incumbent's resource advantage. The opposition parties

Table 3. Women candidates and winners of open seats by party: 2021 general election.

Party	Women candidates for open seats	Women winning open seats	Women winning open seats (%)	Total of candidates	Women candidates for all open seats (%)
National Resistance Movement	29	11	38	352	8
Forum for Democratic Change	5	0	0	212	2
National Unity Platform	6	3	50	182	3
Alliance for National Transformation	6	0	0	110	6
Democratic Party	4	0	0	97	4
Uganda People's Congress	3	1	33	31	10
Justice Forum	1	0	0	14	7
Ecological Party of Uganda	0	0	0	5	0
People's Progressive Party	2	1	50	3	66
Social Democratic Party	1	0	0	1	100
Independents	91	2	2	1,040	35

Source: Electoral Commission (2021).

are also unable to meet their targets for women quotas because they face internal organizational weaknesses and lack finances and human resources. This means they cannot always operate countrywide party branches and offices and cannot recruit and run effective campaigns for women candidates, especially in rural areas where the political landscape is very rough for opposition candidates (Moses Khisa, personal communication, March 18, 2022).

As a result of the defensive posture taken by resource-poor opposition parties in response to the NRM, some women's rights activists place the blame for the lack of women candidates squarely at the feet of the opposition parties. According to one women's rights activist, the FDC has not taken gender and women's rights seriously. As she explained to me in an interview:

You have to have the leaders within the party structures committed to these provisions within their constitution and within their other policies. They'll have policies on paper, but when it comes to resourcing the strategic plan, implementing, monitoring, and evaluation, they think they can win elections without focusing on building the party, training candidates. (U37, interview, July 28, 2020)

She and other women's rights activists have been critical of parties' lack of commitment to advancing women and for maintaining parties as "a very patriarchal space," as one put it (U14, interview, July 25, 2020; U3, interview, June 23, 2020).

As a result of these realities, women are risk averse when running with opposition parties. Not surprisingly,

Table 4. Women candidates and winners of reserved seats by party: 2021 general election.

Party	Women candidates for reserved seats	Women winning reserved seats	Women winning reserved seats (%)
National Resistance Movement	145	100	69
Forum for Democratic Change	83	8	10
National Unity Platform	86	13	15
Alliance for National Transformation	38	0	0
Democratic Party	26	1	4
Uganda People's Congress	14	2	14
Justice Forum	5	0	0
Ecological Party of Uganda	0	0	0
People's Progressive Party	0	0	0
Social Democratic Party	0	0	0
Independents	361	20	6

Source: Electoral Commission (2021).

women politicians make strategic calculations, knowing they are likely to be vigorously de-campaigned if they run with an opposition party. One woman opposition leader said:

> Many women fear to engage on the opposition side because of the incredibly difficult terrain in which we are engaged in currently. Anyone who comes out to oppose the government is seen as an enemy of progress or an enemy of the country. The president doesn't shy away from labeling people like Kyagulanyi, who is the party leader of NUP, as the enemy of the country because he speaks against ills. He speaks about the inequalities that are now very vividly seen. (U10, interview, July 28, 2020)

The deficit of opposition women in parliament reveals a glaring imbalance between the opposition parties and the NRM, particularly since many of these parties have no difficulty appointing women to key positions within their parties. While it would be easy to attribute the lack of female opposition candidates in parliamentary races to a lack of party commitment to advancing women, as some activists have suggested, a closer look at the NRM tactics of repression and cooptation of women seeking reserved seats mean that opposition women face greater obstacles in getting elected than opposition men.

5. Ruling Party Tactics

To maintain vote share, the NRM has not only used the reserved seat system, it has been systematically picking off high-profile leaders of opposition parties, including women, while limiting potential defectors and maintaining a fairly inclusive ruling elite coalition (Khisa, 2016). The ruling party uses various forms of cooptation and patronage, from job offers to money, promises not to de-campaign candidates, and other tactics to lure them from the opposition. However, they also use repression, blocking access to jobs or businesses, credit, unusual tax assessments, dismantling franchise holdings and businesses of businesswomen, and other economic disincentives (Muwanga et al., 2020). These efforts to coopt opposition leaders escalate as elections draw near.

The opposition tends to win in urban areas, but the NRM controls the countryside, where three-quarters of the population lives (Bwana, 2009). The NRM has basically merged its party apparatus with the state and, therefore, can harness state resources to gain electoral advantage. These resources give it greater organizational capacity than the opposition parties, especially its use of the local council system, which is a multi-tiered system of administrative units that reach the village level. To some extent, the NRM can also use the Women's Councils within that local government structure for the same organizational ends, although they are fairly weak. The NRM can field candidates in almost all districts, including women candidates. It also has the necessary resources

to bribe people into supporting the NRM and uses funds diverted from government projects for women, youth, and other groups (Khisa, 2016; Muwanga et al., 2020).

5.1. Reserved Seats

The NRM itself is not overly aggressive in terms of training women candidates. Nevertheless, it has adopted several methods to increase female and overall representation that does not require training. The lack of training suggests that promoting women as leaders is not a priority, but advancing them as NRM loyalists into the National Assembly is, in fact, a goal. One tactic to achieve this end has been the adoption of reserved seats. The use of reserved seats to include women in the parliament is relatively low cost since it does not come at the expense of any seats held by incumbent men.

The NRM introduced a reserved seat system in 1989, which was enshrined in the 1995 constitution. The reserved seat system continued with the country's opening to a multiparty system in 2005. Most of these reserved seats are held by the NRM, with each district represented by one woman. The use of reserved seats allows the NRM to control the number of women who will be elected without the uncertainty of party list systems or other systems where the outcome is not predetermined.

The reserved seats also proliferate in rural districts where the NRM can use the local state to coerce women. It is challenging for opposition parties to recruit strong and credible women candidates who can compete against NRM candidates. It is also common for the NRM to use its local machinery, including business supporters, to bribe potential opposition women candidates out of races. Thus, it is common for NRM candidates to win district women's seats unopposed (Moses Khisa, personal communication, March 16, 2022).

Museveni has increased the number of parliamentary seats from 280 in 1989 to 375 in 2011 and 529 in 2021. This meant that the NRM could increase the percentage of women in reserved seats without challenging the position of men in the parliament. Women in parliament increased from 79 seats in 2006 to 146 in the 2021 election. The proportion has not changed since 2006, but the raw number of women has increased. The NRM vote share (Table 5) has stayed pretty much the same since the country went multiparty, with the NRM holding on to the majority of seats. The NRM has also increased the number of appointees from 25 in 2006 to 30 in 2021. If one combines the NRM's elected seats with the NRM women in reserved seats, the appointed seats, and the independents who support the NRM, the overwhelming majority of parliamentarians are NRM supporters. This means that NRM has maintained its hold on politics, even with some fluctuations. After the 2006 election, what the NRM lost in overall seats, it recouped with an increase in women's seats, independent seats, and special interest appointees (Table 6).

Table 5. Women parliamentarians by party.

	1989	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
National Resistance Movement	100%	100%	100%	66%	49%	49%	42%
National Unity Platform							14%
Forum for Democratic Change				13%	14%	13%	7%
Democratic Party				4%	7%	4%	3%
Uganda People's Congress				4%	3%	2%	2%
Conservative Party				0%	0.61%	0%	0%
Justice Forum				0%	0.64%	0%	0.25%
People's Progressive Party							0.1%
Others					0%	0%	0%
Independents				13%	26%	31%	32%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total elected constituency		214	295	215	238	289	353
Number of women appointed		59	12	25	25	25	30
Number of women elected	41			79	112	112	146
Women's seats	18%	19%	24%	31%	35%	33%	32%
Total seats	280	283	295	319	375	426	529

Source: Electoral Commission (2021).

Additionally, women comprise at least two of 10 representatives of the Uganda People's Defense Forces, at least one of five youth representatives, at least one of five representatives of persons with disabilities, and at least one woman in five workers' representatives and representatives of old people. And finally, there are women who run for the open constituency seats.

Table 6. NRM vote share in parliamentary elections.

Year	NRM vote share (%)
1989	100
1996	100
2001	100
2006	66
2011	71
2016	71
2021	64

Source: Uganda Electoral Commission (2021).

5.2. Use of Independent Women Candidates

Another tactic of the NRM to increase its vote share has been the use of independent candidates in the second round of elections. There was an increase in independent candidates from 13 in 2006 to 32 in 2021. Almost 200 independent women candidates ran for district seats in 2016, thus constituting nearly half of the 405 who ran for parliament (Wang & Yoon, 2018). Often individuals who do not win primaries as NRM candidates run as independents in the second round. This gives NRM candidates an undue advantage. This has helped the NRM maintain the lion's share of votes, even as the NRM vote share of elected women dropped from 66% in 2006 to 42% in 2021. Meanwhile, the opposition parties are increasingly fragmented.

5.3. Repression

A key tactic in Uganda is to treat opposition leaders violently to make an example of them. Museveni won a sixth five-year term in office in the January 2021 elections that his chief opponent, Bobi Wine, claimed were fraudulent. In the 2021 elections, Bobi Wine and his NUP supporters came under ruthless repression, as had FDC leaders and members in prior elections. Women opposition leaders and members have not been spared, as we have seen in other countries as well (Krook, 2020). As one activist said to me: "Women are a bit cautious. They're thinking, 'Okay, I really want to participate, but not in this environment. I have children'" (U37, interview, July 28, 2020). Thus, the risk involved in participating in politics is great, particularly in opposition politics and especially for newcomers to politics who do not have ample resources.

Ugandan police have attacked women in the opposition who have protested government policies. In 2012, Ingrid Turinawe, then the chairperson of the FDC Women's League and FDC National Political Mobilizer, attended a political rally in Kampala where she was arrested, and a policeman grabbed her breast. She sued the Uganda Police Force and the attorney general for suffering and embarrassment. She was awarded compensation, and the Ugandan government was forced to apologize.

Betty Nambooze, MP for Mukono Municipality since 2010, had been arrested on numerous occasions on politically-motivated charges. Her life was threatened,

and she was allegedly poisoned on one occasion. Although she had been a Democratic Party stalwart, in 2020, she joined the NUP party.

A few years later, a National Executive Committee member and FDC secretary for the environment, Zainab Fatuma, was stripped in 2015 in a protest (Nyamishana, 2015). In response, a coalition of women's organizations issued a press statement protesting the treatment, saying:

> The women's movement, civic associations and women leagues of political parties and citizens who identify with adherence to the constitution by all state institutions strongly condemn the use of degrading and dehumanizing acts by the Uganda Police Force which is mandated to provide law and order. These acts manifest as both a political tool to intimidate women's leadership but also as a grave human rights abuse. (Nyamishana, 2015)

5.4. Cooptation

Cooptation is another common NRM tactic it can carry out because it has access to state resources, which it uses to great effect. While many local leaders have crossed over to the NRM, some have been prominent national leaders. For example, Anita Among had been deputy treasurer of the FDC but joined NRM in 2020. Two years later she claimed the third most important position in the country, as Museveni appointed her speaker of the House in 2022. Beti Kamya-Turomwe had once been a member of FDC and served in parliament from 2006 to 2011. She later formed her own party, Uganda Federal Alliance, and ran for president in the 2011 elections. She then crossed over to the NRM and served first as minister for the Kampala Capital City Authority (2016–2019) and then as minister of lands, housing, and urban development from 2019 to 2021. She is now the inspector general of government.

The NRM appears to be an equal opportunity co-opter, luring high-profile opposition leaders from all parties. The UPC has also lost high-profile women to the NRM. One of its members of parliament, Betty Amongi, began serving as minister of gender, labor, and social development in Museveni's government after 2021. She was appointed minister of Kampala Capital City in 2019 and before that as minister of lands, housing, and urban development in 2016, even though she was in the UPC at the time. She won the parliamentary seat for Oyam South Constituency. She is married to the UPC president Jimmy Akena, a member of parliament for Lira Municipality. Akena is the son of Milton Obote, the former prime minister and president of Uganda.

6. Conclusion

The case of Uganda shows how authoritarian regimes and ruling parties instrumentalize and manipulate the politics of inclusion to entrench themselves in power. While much of the literature has treated the adoption of quotas as a response to international and domestic pressures, it has focused primarily on how they are an effort to include women and much less on how they help perpetuate autocratic rule. This article has shown that reserved seats are mainly a phenomenon found in authoritarian countries, and there is a reason for this. The use of reserved seats (in contrast to legislated seats or party quotas) facilitates the use of women for patronage since they can be treated as a group that owes their positions to the ruling party. This instrumentalization of women's rights might not seem surprising, but the discrepancy between the levels of legislative representation of women in the NRM and the opposition parties is significant, especially when one compares the percentage of candidates fielded by the various parties and compares opposition women's rate of success to that of opposition men. Opposition women and women leaders have turned out to be the biggest losers in this process.

While the NRM is the main obstacle to the success of opposition women, divisions and weakness within the opposition pose another constraint. Party women have demanded that opposition parties do more to support female candidates. And while they do better in promoting women within their party leadership, their strength is primarily in urban areas, which limits the districts in which they might expect to win.

The literature on autocracy has looked at how electoral authoritarian regimes entrench themselves even in the face of electoral competition. Still, this literature has not examined the gender dimensions of these tactics, which are crucial in electoral authoritarian regimes that have opened themselves to competition by adopting a multiparty system. By employing a variety of tactics targeting the opposition and, in particular, opposition women, the incumbents have taken a goal that won them international favor—that of increasing women's political representation—and have weaponized it against the political opposition through repression and a politics of division and cooptation.

The NRM-led government not only used reserved seats as a form of patronage. They expanded the number of districts to increase the number of reserved seats for women and they supported NRM candidates who lost in the primaries and had them run as independents in the second round. They increased the number of appointed seats to augment the number of NRM women and other such special groups in parliament. This had particularly adverse effects on women opposition parliamentarians, who found it nearly impossible to run for office without the threat of being de-campaigned and undermined, repressed, and coopted.

The same factors that make it possible for the NRM to advance women and risk opening elections up to challenge simultaneously make the opposition hesitant to advance women candidates. The problem is not simply the opposition's lack of interest in women's

advancement, but the limited possibilities for opposition women when they run for either the reserved or open seats.

The Ugandan case shows how authoritarian regimes use legal and illegal means of tilting elections in their favor. It shows how a seemingly democratic demand of the women's movement and a goal of global feminist mobilization—to increase women's political representation—can be used for authoritarian ends and weaponized against women themselves. This poses a potential challenge to how we understand reserved seats as a source of gender equality and inclusion since the promotion of women in politics primarily serves the political purposes of autocrats rather than the interests of women.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Arendt, C. M. (2018). From critical mass to critical leaders: Unpacking the political conditions behind gender quotas in Africa. *Politics & Gender*, *14*(3), 295–322.

Bauer, G., & Britton, H. E. (2006). *Women in African parliaments*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Bernhard, M., Edgell, A. B., & Lindberg, S. I. (2020). Institutionalising electoral uncertainty and authoritarian regime survival. *European Journal of Political Research*, *59*(2), 465–487.

Bjarnegård, E., & Zetterberg, P. (2022). How autocrats weaponize women's rights. *Journal of Democracy*, *33*(2), 60–75.

Burain, E. (2014). Reserved seats for women: Encouraging female political participation in the Pacific. *The Parliamentarian*, *95*(1), 18–21.

Burnet, J. E. (2020). Gender balance and the meanings of women in governance in post-genocide Rwanda. *African Affairs*, *107*(428), 361–386.

Bush, S. (2011). International politics and the spread of quotas for women in legislatures. *International Organization*, *65*(1), 103–137.

Bush, S., & Zetterberg, P. (2021). Gender quotas and international reputation. *American Journal of Political Science*, *65*(2), 326–341.

Bwana, C. N. (2009). Voting patterns in Uganda's elections: Could it be the end of the National Resistance Movement's (NRM) domination in Uganda's politics? *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de L'Est*, *2019*(41), 81–93. https://doi.org/10.4000/eastafrica.582

Clayton, A., Josefsson, C., & Wang, V. (2017). Quotas and women's substantive representation: Evidence from a content analysis of Ugandan plenary debates. *Politics & Gender*, *13*(2), 276–304.

Dahlerup, D., & Freidenvall, L. (2005). Quotas as a "fast track" to equal representation for women: Why Scandinavia is no longer the model. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *7*(1), 26–48.

Darhour, H., & Dahlerup, D. (2013). Sustainable representation of women through gender quotas: A decade's experience in Morocco. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *41*(2), 132–142.

Electoral Commission. (2021). *2021 general elections*. https://www.ec.or.ug/2021-general-elections

Franceschet, S., & Piscopo, J. M. (2008). Gender quotas and women's substantive representation: Lessons from Argentina. *Politics & Gender*, *4*(3), 393–425.

Freedom House. (2023). *Countries and territories*. https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores

International IDEA, Inter-Parliamentary Union, & Stockholm University. (2022). *Gender quotas database* [Data set]. International IDEA. https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas

Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2019). *Women in parliaments: World classification*. http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

Kang, A. J., & Tripp, A. M. (2018). Coalitions matter: Citizenship, women, and quota adoption in Africa. *Perspectives on Politics*, *16*(1), 73–91.

Khisa, M. (2016). Managing elite defection in Museveni's Uganda: The 2016 elections in perspective. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *10*(4), 729–748.

Krook, M. L. (2006). Reforming representation: The diffusion of candidate gender quotas worldwide. *Politics & Gender*, *2*(3), 303–327.

Krook, M. L. (2020). *Violence against women in politics: A global phenomenon*. Oxford University Press.

Levitsky, S., & Way, L. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.

Lindberg, S. I. (2004). Women's empowerment and democratization: The effects of electoral systems, participation and experience in Africa. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *39*(1), 28–53.

Muriaas, R. L., & Wang, V. (2012). Executive dominance and the politics of quota representation in Uganda. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *50*(2), 309–338.

Muwanga, N. K., Mukwaya, P. I., & Goodfellow, T. (2020). *Carrot, stick and statute: Elite strategies and contested dominance in Kampala* (ESID Working Paper No. 146). Effective States and Inclusive Development.

Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe, S., Magezi, M., P'Ochan, T., & Abang, J. (2019). *Country analysis: Leadership in advancing women's rights in public decision-making pocesses in Uganda.* Robert Bosch Stiftung.

Nanivadekar, M. (2006). Are quotas a good idea? The Indian experience with reserved seats for women. *Politics & Gender*, *2*(1), 119–128.

National Resistance Movement. (2015). *Constitution of the National Resistance Movement*. https://www.nrm.ug/node/387

Nyamishana, P. (2015, October 13). Outrage after Ugandan police strip a female opposition official naked in public. *Global Voices*. https://globalvoices.org/2015/10/13/outrage-after-ugandan-police-strip-a-female-opposition-official-naked-in-public

O'Brien, D. Z. (2012). Quotas and qualifications in Uganda. In S. Franceschet, M. Lena Krook, & J. M. Piscopo (Eds.), *The impact of gender quotas* (pp. 57–71). Oxford Academic.

Qureshi, A., & Ahmad, S. (2022). Reserved seats for women in Pakistan: Reinforcement of patriarchy and powerlessness (2002–2018). *Women's Studies International Forum*, *94*, Article 102629. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2022.102629

Schedler, A. (2002). The menu of manipulation. *Journal of Democracy*, *13*(2), 36–50.

Segawa, N. (2016, November 20). Q&A: Woman opposition leader aims to shake up Ugandan politics. *Global Press Journal*.

Song, Y. (2016). Institutionalizing rural women's political participation in China: Reserved seats election for women. *Asian Women*, *32*(3), 77–99.

Stockemer, D. (2011). Women's parliamentary representation in Africa: The impact of democracy and corruption on the number of female deputies in national parliaments. *Political Studies*, *59*(3), 693–712.

Tamale, S. (1999). *When hens begin to crow: Gender and parliamentary politics in Uganda*. Westview Press.

Tripp, A. M. (2000). *Women and politics in Uganda*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Tripp, A. M. (2015). *Women and power in post-conflict Africa*. Cambridge University.

Tripp, A. M. (2019). *Seeking legitimacy: Why Arab autocrats adopt women's rights*. Cambridge University Press.

Tripp, A. M. (in press). Why African autocracies promote women leaders. *Politics & Gender*.

Uganda Electoral Commission. (2021). *2021 general elections*. https://www.ec.or.ug/2021-general-elections

Wang, V. (2013). Women changing policy outcomes: Learning from pro-women legislation in the Ugandan parliament. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *41*(2), 113–112.

Wang, V., & Yoon, M. Y. (2018). Recruitment mechanisms for reserved seats for women in parliament and switches to non-quota seats: A comparative study of Tanzania and Uganda. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, *56*(2), 299–324.

Yoon, M. Y. (2013). Special seats for women in parliament and democratization: The case of Tanzania. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *41*(2), 143–149.

About the Author

Aili Mari Tripp is a Vilas research professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research has focused on gender/women and politics, women's movements in Africa, transnational feminism, African politics, and the informal economy in Africa. She is the author of several award-winning books, including *Seeking Legitimacy: Why Arab Autocracies Adopt Women's Rights* (2019), *Women and Power in Post-conflict Africa* (2015), *African Women's Movements: Transforming Political Landscapes* (2009), with Isabel Casimiro, Joy Kwesiga, and Alice Mungwa, and *Women and Politics in Uganda* (2000). She is an editor of the *American Political Science Review*.

Article

Women Leading the Opposition: Gender and Rhetoric in the European Parliament

Henriette Müller [1,]* and Pamela Pansardi [2]

[1] Division of Arts & Humanities, New York University Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
[2] Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Pavia, Italy

* Corresponding author (henriette.mueller@nyu.edu)

Abstract

The European Parliament (EP) is an intriguing arena to study the nexus between gender, speech-making, and leadership performance, as it simultaneously challenges and confirms gender-based hierarchies in legislative contexts. While the EP has a higher level of women's representation than national parliaments, women's access to top-level positions nonetheless remains limited. Yet the EP is a special case of a legislature. Lacking a right of initiative, it often acts collectively as an inter-institutional opposition to the other EU core institutions. In this article, through a software-assisted analysis of EP debates following the president's State of the Union Address, we investigate party group leaders' evaluations of the Commission's proposals and their charismatic rhetoric from a gender angle. Focusing on the three most recent legislatures (2009–2021), our analysis shows that while collective inter-institutional opposition is present in the EP, women leaders generally show higher levels of rhetorical skillfulness and voice either approval or opposition toward the Commission more emphatically than their male counterparts.

Keywords

charismatic rhetoric; European Parliament; gender; inter-institutional opposition; party group leaders; political speeches; women's leadership performance

1. Introduction

Recent literature on women's representation in the European Parliament (Parliament, EP) underscores that while the Parliament is "a role model of gender parity with its explicit commitments to gender equality and higher levels of women's representation than the lower houses of its member states," these features do not translate into "a parallel pattern of vertical mobility," with women remaining underrepresented at the Parliament's top (Dingler & Fortin-Rittberger, 2022, p. 74). Hence, although the EP is not embedded in the same forms of male hegemony as most national parliaments due to the overall stronger representation of women, women's access to influential positions within the EP remains limited. With this paradox, the EP provides an intriguing arena in which to study the nexus between gender, speech-making, and leadership performance as it simultaneously challenges and confirms gender-based hierarchies in legislative contexts.

Yet the EP is a special case of a legislature. Rather than being internally divided between governing and opposition parties, it often acts collectively as an inter-institutional opposition to the other EU core institutions. Vis-à-vis the Council, the Parliament regularly acts as opposition in decisions on legislation; regarding the Commission, the EP opposes or aims to influence the Commission's agenda, thus compensating for its lack of a

right of initiative. Critical rebuttals delivered by the party group leaders (PGLs) following the Commission president's annual State of the Union Address (SOTEU) best illustrate the EP's inter-institutional power dynamics and its role of opposition.

However, the provision of inter-institutional opposition by the EP is highly contested (Helms, 2008; Mair, 2007). Mair (2007, p. 12) assessed the EP as essentially powerless, stating that "opposition [at the EU level], even when it exists, is almost by definition ineffective." In contrast, Tömmel (2014, p. 108) argued that the EP, being directly elected by Europe's citizenry, holds a "strong bargaining position with regard to the other institutions," especially the Commission. When its Members act in unity, the EP exerts "substantial influence on legal acts in a broad array of issue areas" (Tömmel, 2014, p. 106), counter-balancing the other EU institutions in decision-making and policy formulation. Shackleton (2017, p. 192) concluded that in "an environment of inter-institutional competition, the EP has proved remarkably successful in influencing the nature of individual policies as well as in co-shaping the agenda of system development.''

This leadership role within the EU polity is embodied and most visible in the office of the party group chair. With wide-ranging powers, "group leaders represent the groups both within the Parliament and outside of it" (Kantola & Miller, 2022, p. 152; see also Dingler et al., 2023). Group chairs are thus of central importance to the EP's political work and its inter-institutional influence and success. From this perspective, they also come closest to the role of traditional opposition leaders (Dingler et al., 2023) in the highly complex system of EU governance, spearheading the Parliament's positioning vis-à-vis the Commission and Council. Since the introduction of the Commission president's SOTEU in 2010, six women have led or co-led political party groups (18.75% of the total of party group chairs): Rebecca Harms (2009–2016, Greens/EFA), Gabriele Zimmer (2012–2019, GUE/NGL), Marine Le Pen (2016–2017, ENF), Ska Keller (2017–present, Greens/EFA), Manon Aubry (2019–present, GUE/NGL), and Iratxe García Pérez (2019–present, S&D; for an overview of party group abbreviations see Supplementary File, Table A1).

This article studies how female party group chairs engage with the EP's inter-institutional oppositional role and whether and to what extent their performance differs from those of their male counterparts. More specifically, we seek to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do female and male political group chairs differ in their expression of opposition to the European Commission, and what kind of gender dynamics can be identified across political groups?
2. Taking the example of charismatic rhetoric, in what ways do patterns of speech-making differ between female and male parliamentary leaders, and what

kind of gender dynamics emerge across political groups?

Empirically, focusing on the three latest legislatures (2009–2021), we concentrate on the parliamentary debate and the speeches given by political group chairs following the annual SOTEU by the European Commission president (N = 87). Through a software-assisted analysis of political language, we first investigate to what degree EP collective opposition exists by analyzing political group chairs' positive or negative evaluations of the Commission president's proposal. Next, we examine whether and how women and men parliamentary leaders differ in their oppositional expression and what kind of dynamics can be identified across political groups. To further evaluate speech-making style, we employ an analysis of charismatic rhetoric, which is used as a proxy to study gender-based differences in political speech-making. In doing so, our article contributes to the growing literature on women's performance in legislatures with a specific focus on leadership and oppositional dynamics at the supranational level (Anzia & Berry, 2011; Bäck & Debus, 2019; Homola, 2021; Kantola & Miller, 2022).

Our analysis shows that while collective, inter-institutional opposition by the EP is evident across all political groups, women generally voice either approval of or opposition toward the Commission more strongly than their male counterparts. Their performance in oppositional speech-making is confirmed by their exercise of rhetorical charisma—again stronger than their male counterparts. At the same time, we find that in party groups with greater levels of gender equality women's and men's rhetorical performances become more similar while their voicing of political opinion becomes more dissimilar. Corroborating previous research, this study shows that sociocultural challenges, gender stereotypes, and women's underrepresentation continue to impact the performance of female legislators even in more gender-equal institutions, such as the EP, highlighting women leaders' exceptional parliamentary performance at the EU level.

2. Women in Legislatures: Connecting Leadership, Charisma, and Rhetoric

The literature has offered serious reflections on the role of gender in the legislative behavior and floor participation of women and men. As Vincent (2001, p. 73) points out, gender is "a central differentiating variable in political behavior" in institutions such as legislatures, often negatively affecting women's representation, performance, and impact. Understanding political language and public speech-making as "essential means of enacting leadership," sociolinguist Judith Baxter found that women's public language and rhetoric are more affected by contradictory socially and culturally constructed expectations, stereotypes, institutional

constraints, and underrepresentation than that of their male counterparts (Baxter, 2010, pp. 7, 113).

Women are almost invariably caught in a double bind: "If they speak and sound overly 'masculine,' they are characterized by colleagues as aggressive, and if they speak and sound overly 'feminine,' they are characterized as tentative, hesitant, or weak" (Baxter, 2017, p. 116). Women leaders are thus driven to master a rhetorical approach that is "highly skilled, linguistically expert, diverse and nuanced…finely-tuned to colleagues and context" (Baxter, 2010, p. 169; see also Anzia & Berry, 2011). Although women's rhetorical style is hardly the polar opposite of men's, they must more frequently employ so-called impression management measures "to ensure they are neither dismissed as insufficiently authoritative nor derided as aggressive 'battleaxes'" (Cameron & Shaw, 2016, pp. 11, 134). However effective these techniques are, the double bind still often yields prejudicial perceptions and evaluations of women's speech-making that impede their exercise of leadership.

Despite these insights, and the centrality of speech-making for parliamentary procedures, research on the rhetorical performance of female political leaders remain scarce. Apart from a few studies of specific institutions and societal contexts (Baxter, 2010; Müller & Pansardi, 2022) or individual political leaders (Bligh et al., 2010; Jones, 2016), the literature has concentrated on women legislators' speech-making, highlighting the constraints to which women are exposed or the content of their speeches. Studies suggest that female legislators take the floor less often than men (Bäck & Debus, 2019; Bäck et al., 2014) and that their speeches focus less often on issues of "hard" politics. Moreover, the literature indicates that female legislators are more likely to address gender-related issues (Bäck et al., 2014) and are more frequently interrupted than their male counterparts (Och, 2020; Pearson & Dancey, 2011a). Brescoll (2011) finds that powerful women speak less (long) than powerful men in the US Senate, suggesting that volubility negatively affects the perception and evaluation of women's competence. Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014) show that women not only speak less often but also align their speech-making more with men, even if their positions deviate from those of their male counterparts. Pearson and Dancey (2011b), meanwhile, find the opposite—female legislators in the US House of Representatives overcompensate for their descriptive underrepresentation by speaking at higher rates than congressmen in debates, thereby enhancing women's substantive representation.

Still, other studies have argued against the existence of any meaningful differences in men's and women's legislative speech-making. Considering the specific case of the British parliament, Shaw (2000) indicates that women develop and embrace a competitive and self-assertive style of speaking as much as men do if this is the dominant style of performance in a given environment. The case studies by Wang (2014) and Murray (2010) find that women and men speak equally long and often in the Ugandan and French parliaments, respectively. In an analysis of energy policy-making, Fraune (2016, p. 139) suggests that "party affiliation affects [a] legislator's energy policy priorities more than [a] legislator's gender," with party ideology trumping gender as a correlative in speeches, voting, and deliberation.

These findings together suggest that there is variation across countries and contexts in the role gender plays in parliamentary debates and speech-making. However, few studies have focused specifically on the performance and rhetoric of women leaders in legislatures, although the context across different positions in a parliament can vary significantly. For example, PGLs might not need to compete in the same way as MPs for speaking time, especially in formal debates, where speaking time is allocated by political groups' size and strictly adhered to. PGLs also need to be well-versed in a variety of policy areas to ascend to the position in the first place, moving across so-called "soft" and "hard" policy issues. Hence, this article draws attention to women leaders in the legislature and their public speech-making.

One way of studying the oratorical skillfulness of leaders in a systematic, comparative fashion is through the concept of charisma—more precisely, charismatic rhetoric (Bligh et al., 2004). In essence, charisma is inherently personal and refers to agency; it is not a characteristic of office or institutional structure. Core characteristics of what constitutes a charismatic leader incorporate both nominally masculine and feminine traits (Antonakis et al., 2016).

Charismatic leaders "increase the appeal of collective goals by clearly linking core aspects of the leader's vision to core aspects of followers' self-concepts" (Bligh et al., 2010, p. 829). In connecting collective goals to individual vision, the charismatic leader draws on qualities both "feminine"—empathetic, caring, other-oriented—and "masculine"—agentic, dominant, self-oriented (Bligh et al., 2010, p. 828). To forge that connection, a leader's rhetorical approach is crucial (Bligh et al., 2004; Shamir et al., 1994). The ability to "deploy linguistic strategies that range along the feminine-masculine continuum according to topic, purpose, the degree of 'publicness' of the meeting, and the norms of the[ir] professional community" is a central leadership skill (Baxter, 2017, p. 121). Analysis of charismatic rhetoric can thus serve as a proxy to assess a leader's "skilled performance" in the realm of speech-making (Antonakis et al., 2016, pp. 296, 304), particularly with reference to stereotypically gendered attributes.

In conclusion, previous research on women leaders suggests that while women and men are, in principle, equally capable of exercising charismatic leadership, the pressures of women's underrepresentation in the political domain and societal gender biases contribute to women leaders' emerging—more frequently than men—as highly skilled rhetors. However, few studies

have focused specifically on women leaders in the legislature and their public speech-making, especially beyond the national realm. To help fill this research lacuna, we thus investigate gender-based similarities and differences in public speech-making and charismatic rhetoric in the EP with a specific focus on European inter-institutional opposition.

3. Inter-Institutional Opposition and Women's Representation: The Special Case of the European Parliament

The EP—like any other European core institution—defies any easy definition and categorization as powers and responsibilities are overlapping and shared rather than exclusively ascribed. The EP's lack of a right to initiate legislation is a significant de jure difference from national parliaments in liberal democracies, even if, in practice, national governments rather than parliaments propose most of the legislation during a term (Tömmel, 2014). Along with the EP being the only directly elected EU institution, this lack is a primary determinant of the EP's inter-institutional role as a central corrective at the EU level—an ultimate "opposition institution," if necessary.

More precisely, the Parliament provides opposition to the Commission by seeking to influence and scrutinize the Commission's agenda-setting and, thus, the Commission's exclusive right of initiative. It opposes the Council in decisions on legislative acts. When acting in a broad, unified coalition, MEPs can achieve significant influence via the legislative process, pressuring both the Commission and the Council (Tömmel, 2014). The Parliament's power of dismissal best illustrates the point of inter-institutional opposition. Never yet exercised, it is considered a "nuclear weapon" among the Parliament's procedural powers (Judge & Earnshaw, 2002, p. 347). Sensitive to its potential, the Commission, particularly, forges "a positive and constructive relationship" with the Parliament (Judge & Earnshaw, 2002, pp. 347–348).

Two inter-institutional dynamics at the EU level are central to understanding the power relationship between the EP, on the one hand, and the Commission and Council, on the other. First, there is a general need for collaboration, power-sharing, and consensus-seeking between the Parliament, the Commission, and the Council to ensure the functioning of the EU polity. The power dynamics here clearly differ from those of the national sphere. Second, throughout the history of European integration, the Parliament's self-defined political role has regularly exceeded the procedural rules. This, in turn, has led to an expansion of the EP's formal competencies in consecutive treaty revisions or amendments and, thus, its empowerment (Fromage, 2018; Meissner & Schoeller, 2019). Hence, while the EP neither holds a position equal to the Council nor can it "fully satisfy the normative and empirical expectations characterizing most established notions of parliamentary

opposition" in democracies (Helms, 2008, p. 229), the expression and influence of opposition by the EP are a salient, though peculiar matter in EU politics, and a vantage point—both intra- and inter-institutionally—for the study of leadership exercised by its party group chairs.

With reference to its composition, the EP is also a special case for the study of gender-based dynamics of speech-making and leadership. It has consistently had higher women's representation than national parliaments. Nonetheless, women's access to prestigious and influential positions within it remains limited (Dingler & Fortin-Rittberger, 2022, p. 80; Kantola & Miller, 2022, p. 150; Sundström & Stockemer, 2022, p. 127).

To illustrate this paradox, the European elections of 2019 (9th legislature) yielded a 42% female Parliament—reflecting a continued increase since 1979. However, women continue to be underrepresented in senior leadership positions and are generally better represented in secondary leadership positions such as vice presidents (currently, eight out of 14 VPs, 57%, are women). Additionally, the allocations of committee memberships and committee leadership positions remain highly gendered, with female overrepresentation in so-called "feminine'' committees, such as those that deal with women's rights, social welfare, and culture (Dingler & Fortin-Rittberger, 2022, pp. 83–84). At the same time, the number of MEPs opposing gender equality rose to over 30%, and patterns of gender-based discrimination, negative evaluations, sexism, and harassment continue to disadvantage women MEPs (Kantola, 2022, pp. 222, 224).

Zooming in on the political groups, in the 9th legislature (2019–2024), women (a) constitute a majority in the Greens/EFA, (b) have achieved near parity with at least 40% representation in the left and liberal S&D, GUE/NGL, and Renew Europe groups, as well as the radical-right populist ID, and (c) are underrepresented in the conservative EPP and the right-wing populist ECR, with just above 30% of the groups' MEPs (Kantola & Miller, 2022, pp. 151–152). Since 2019, only three women, Manon Aubry (GUE/NGL), Ska Keller (the Greens/EFA), and Iratxe García Pérez (S&D), have served in the highly prestigious political position of political group (co-)chair (27%, three out of 11 political group leaders). The EPP—the biggest party group—has never had a female chair. The picture is better one step down, with 23 out of 70 female vice-chairs being women (32%).

Female representation and gender equality are thus more pronounced in the center-left political groups (Sundström & Stockemer, 2022, p. 128). Kantola (2022, p. 222) found that only the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL "constructed gender equality as a fundamental principle of the groups, which was upheld with formal and informal practices." In contrast, the groups S&D and ALDE/Renew "perceived gender equality as an important but flexible norm"; the EPP, ECR, and EFDD "perceived [it] as a highly contradictory and divisive issue"; and finally, the radical right populist ID group (formerly, the ENF)

"saw gender as a dangerous construct" and gender equality as "nonsense" (Kantola, 2022, p. 223).

In conclusion, the EP is a special legislature, both concerning (a) the provision of inter-institutional opposition due to its lack of legislative initiative and (b) the persistence of a gendered hierarchy among leadership positions despite women's overall high representation. Moreover, and similarly to many national legislatures, it attests a left-right divergence in the promotion and realization of gender equality. Connecting the insights on women leaders' performance set out in Section 2 to the insights of this section, we expect, at the example of the EP's inter-institutional opposition to the Commission, that female PGLs perform differently from men in that they are more skilled and prolific public rhetors due to the sociocultural and structural constraints, as well as gender stereotypes they encounter on their pathways to and exercise of leadership. Furthermore, we expect that gender differences in public speech-making vary across political groups, with more gender-equal groups showing less strong differences between women and men than their more unequal counterparts.

4. Method, Empirical Analysis, and Discussion

To address the questions outlined in the introduction, we analyze the language used by PGLs. The group chairs most notably embody the Parliament's political leadership within and outside the EP. Furthermore, the EP's specific role of providing inter-institutional opposition vis-à-vis the European Commission stands out as a vantage point from which to study the exercise of leadership by party group chairs in the EP. We conceptualize parliamentary speech-making as position-taking on "one or several policy issues in front of a broader audience" (Bäck et al., 2014, p. 505) and parliamentary debates as reflecting a "confrontational style of interpersonal deliberation" (Ilie, 2013, p. 501).

Apart from its visibility, the annual State of the Union debate is a crucial moment for the EP to (publicly) influence the Commission's priorities and program (Pansardi & Battegazzorre, 2018) and "to press for the inclusion of new items or even the exclusion of items," as the SOTEU is purposely scheduled ahead of the adoption and presentation of the Commission's Work Programme (September and October, respectively; Corbett et al., 2016, p. 314). Hence, we analyze PGLs' speeches in response to the SOTEU and the Inaugural Speeches by European Commission presidents between 2009 and 2021. The SOTEUs are not delivered in European election years, so for 2009, 2014, and 2019, the debate following the delivery of the Commission president's Inaugural Speech was analyzed.

To investigate the characteristic traits of the different political groups and female and male PGLs' speech-making, we collected all speeches delivered by PGLs between 2009 and 2021, a total of 87. Speeches not available in English were translated using the auto-

mated eTranslation software provided by the European Commission (European Commission, n.d.). Our corpus covers three different Commissions and three different Commission presidents—José Manuel Durão Barroso (2009–2014), Jean-Claude Juncker (2014–2019), and Ursula von der Leyen (2019–present)—with 16 speeches by female and 71 by male PGLs. Table 1 lists the political group chairs between 2009 and 2021 with reference to the number of speeches they delivered in SOTEU or Inaugural Speech debates. It needs to be noted that some PGLs did not deliver a speech during the abovementioned debates and were thus excluded from the analysis.

To analyze the language and tone of the speeches, we relied on the software Diction 7 (Hart, 2001; Hart & Carroll, 2015). Specifically created to analyze the tone of political discourse in written texts, Diction codes text according to 31 predefined variables using built-in dictionaries (word lists). For each variable, Diction automatically assigns each text raw scores that are subsequently standardized based on a built-in corpus of 50,000 texts to ensure the generalizability of the results. The scores are thus immediately ready for a comparative analysis that is not affected by the N-size. The built-in corpus was last updated in 2015, when the latest version, Diction 7, was released. Approximately 25% of the included texts—which range from political speeches to poetry—are authored by women. Whereas a more gender-balanced corpus would better ensure the gender neutrality of the software, Diction's capacity to place the results for all analyzed texts on a single scale partly overcomes its drawbacks, allowing us to compare female and male PGLs' speeches in light of a well-defined and systematized set of variables.

4.1. Inter-Institutional Opposition and Gender Dynamics in the European Parliament

To address our research questions, we investigate the positions that different PGLs express towards the Commission's proposals in the corpus of speeches. We first examine whether collective opposition by the EP toward the Commission is evident, testified to by the presence of significantly more critical attitudes than confirmatory ones among the PGLs. Second, in light of the scholarship that suggests that female leaders approach public speech-making differently than their male counterparts due to sociocultural constraints and gender stereotypes, we analyze whether we can detect specific differences between male and female PGLs expressing favorable or critical attitudes towards the Commission.

To do so, we rely on the Diction 7 built-in dictionaries to generate two indicators: positive evaluation, indicating a favorable attitude towards the Commission, and negative evaluation, indicating a critical attitude. Each is created by summing three different Diction variables (Supplementary File, Table A2, presents the formulas). After analyzing the individual speeches with the software, we averaged the data by political group. Figure 1

Table 1. Political group chairs and the number of speeches delivered.

| Commission	Political group	Year	Chair	Gender	Nationality	Speeches (N)
von der Leyen (9th parliamentary term)						
	EPP	2019–	Manfred Weber	M	DE	3
	S&D	2019–	Iratxe García Pérez	F	ES	3
	Renew	2019–2021	Dacian Cioloş	M	RO	3
		2021–	Stéphane Séjourné	M	FR	0
co-chairs	Greens/EFA	2019–	Ska Keller	F	DE	1
		2019–	Philippe Lamberts	M	BE	2
	ID	2019–	Marco Zanni	M	IT	0
co-chairs	ECR	2019–	Raffaele Fitto	M	IT	2
		2019–	Ryszard Legutko	M	PL	1
co-chairs	GUE/NGL		Manon Aubry	F	FR	1
	GUE/NGL		Martin Schirdewan	M	DE	
Juncker (8th parliamentary term)						
	EPP	2014–2019	Manfred Weber	M	DE	5
	S&D	2014–2019	Gianni Pittella	M	IT	4
		2018–2019	Udo Bullmann	M	DE	1
co-chairs since 2017	ECR	2014–2019	Syed Kamall	M	UK	4
		2017–2019 (co-chair)	Ryszard Legutko (co-chair)	M	PL	1
	ALDE		Guy Verhofstadt	M	BE	5
	GUE/NGL		Gabriele Zimmer	F	DE	4
	Greens/EFA	2014–2016	Rebecca Harms	F	DE	1
		2016–2019	Ska Keller	F	DE	1
		2014–2019	Philippe Lamberts	M	BE	3
	EFDD	2014–2019	Nigel Farage	M	UK	5
co-chairs	ENF	2015–2017	Marine Le Pen	F	FR	1
		2017–2019	Nicolas Bay	M	FR	1
		2015–2019	Marcel de Graaff	M	NL	0
Barroso (II) (7th parliamentary term)						
	EPP	2009–2014	Joseph Daul	M	FR	5
	S&D	2009–2012	Martin Schulz	M	DE	3
		2012–2014	Hannes Swoboda	M	AT	2
	ALDE	2009–2014	Guy Verhofstadt	M	BE	5
co-chairs	Greens/EFA	2009–2014	Daniel Cohn-Bendit	M	DE	2
		2009–2014	Rebecca Harms	F	DE	3
	ECR	2009–2011	Michał Tomasz Kamiński	M	PL	2
		2011	Jan Zahradil	M	CZ	1
		2011–2014	Martin Callanan	M	UK	2
	GUE/NGL	2009–2012	Lothar Bisky	M	DE	2
		2012–2014	Gabriele Zimmer	F	DE	1
co-chairs	EFD	2009–2014	Nigel Farage	M	UK	4
		2009–2014	Francesco Enrico Speroni	M	IT	1
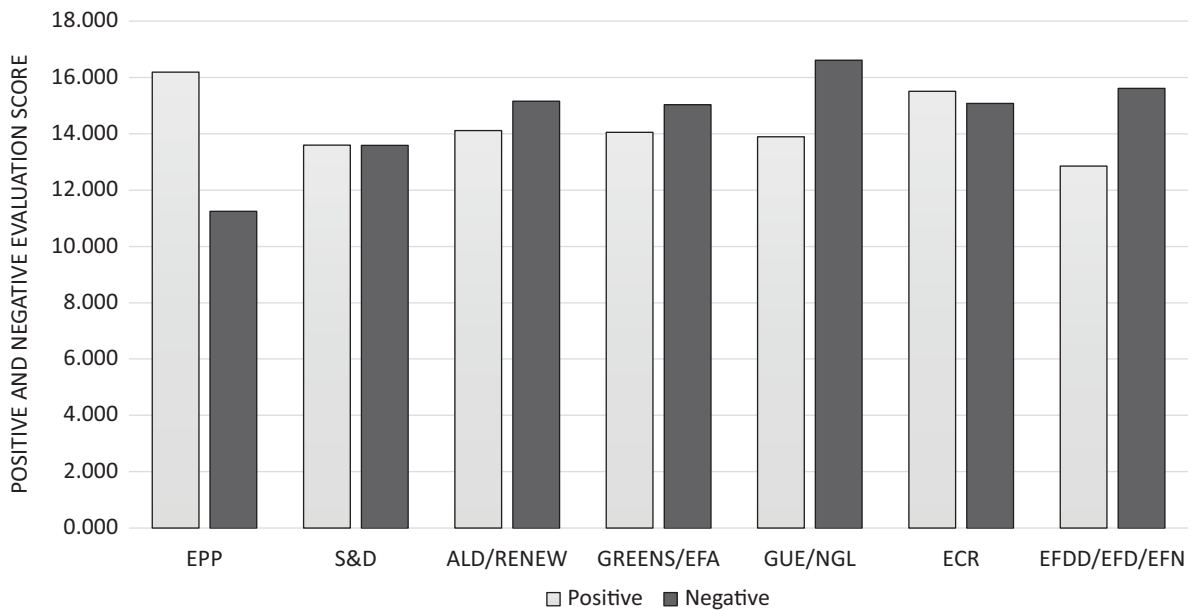
Figure 1. Political group chairs' positive and negative evaluations by political group.

provides the mean values on the two indicators for the different political groups.

Looking at the groups together, Figure 1 shows that negative evaluations of the Commission and its proposals slightly outweigh positive ones (average score of positive 14.31, versus an average score of negative 14.62), with all political group leaders expressing a substantial amount of criticism.

Considering the groups individually, the EPP, with which all three Commission presidents in this study have been affiliated, shows the highest score on positive evaluation and the lowest on negative evaluation. PGLs belonging to the far-right groups EFDD, EFD, and EFN score the lowest on positive and the second highest on negative evaluation. The other political groups range between these two poles. Perhaps surprisingly, the pro-European leftist political group GUE/NGL outweighs the far-right on negative evaluation, with the highest score for this indicator.

To offer a parsimonious inspection of the results concerning positive and negative evaluations by group and gender, we created a new indicator, called Commission approval, by subtracting the negative from the positive evaluation scores for each political group and for male and female PGLs (for a detailed overview see Supplementary File, Table A3). Figure 2 provides an overview of the results. A value above zero indicates that the positive evaluation score is higher than that of the negative evaluation; a score below zero indicates that the negative evaluation score is higher.

First, for the groups that have had both female and male chairs (S&D, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL, EFDD/EFD/EFN), women outweigh men both in their positive (average female score 14.72 versus the average male score of 13.86) and negative (average female score 17.10 versus the average male score 15.31) eval-

uations of the Commission. Furthermore, we observe a stronger gender difference in oppositional than approbative expressions (gender difference for positive evaluation 0.86 and negative evaluation 1.79).

Second, comparing the positions expressed towards the Commission, women and men show significantly different scores on the indicator of Commission approval. For three of the four political groups which have had female chairs, the difference between male and female PGLs' approval of the Commission involves a swing from a positive to negative overall value or vice versa. For S&D and the Greens/EFA, female leaders show a markedly more positive attitude towards the Commission than do their male counterparts. For GUE/NGL, female leaders have a Commission approval value well below zero, while their male counterparts' positive evaluation score is higher than the negative. The Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL group chairs show the most substantial gendered divergence of positive versus negative evaluations. Lastly, for EFDD, EFD, and EFN, both the male leaders and the only female leader (Marine Le Pen) score below zero on Commission approval, with Le Pen far surpassing her male counterparts.

To test for the presence of a significant difference between female and male PGLs, we ran a univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)—conventionally used to study between-group differences in small samples, among others (Rutherford, 2011)—on the scores for Commission approval, using speech length (measured by the total number of words in each speech) as a covariate and focusing only on the parties with both male and female party group chairs. As Table 2 shows, no significant difference between male and female PGLs can be attested.

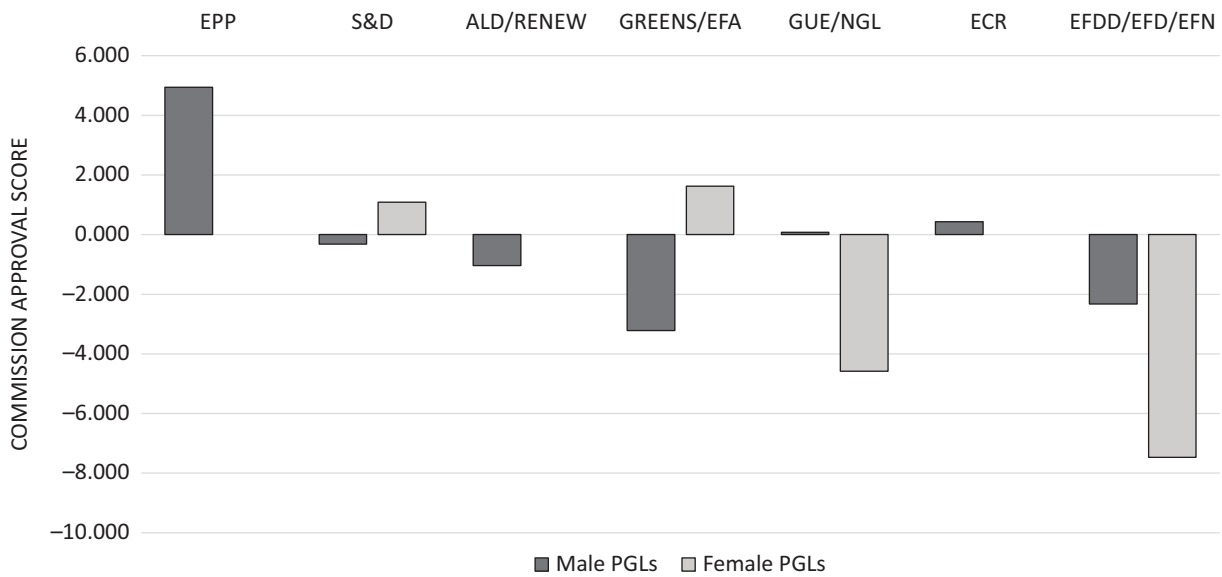While no linear effect of gender in the expression of positive or negative attitudes towards the Commission

Figure 2. Commission approval score by PGLs' political group and gender.

can be detected, the results highlight a relevant difference between male and female leaders and across political groups in expressing opposition to the Commission. Women's public speech-making and voicing of opposition are generally more emphatic, whether positive or negative, than their male counterparts. The next section will further investigate in what ways female and male rhetoric differ from each other.

4.2. The Charismatic Rhetoric of Female and Male Party Group Leaders

To analyze the PGLs' charismatic rhetoric, we followed previous studies (Bligh et al., 2004; Müller & Pansardi, 2022; Olsson & Hammargård, 2016; Pansardi & Tortola, 2022; Tortola & Pansardi, 2018) and combined Diction variables into seven composite constructs. According to the literature, charismatic rhetoric comprises seven essential factors associated with different points along the masculine-feminine continuum of public speech-making: Three of these factors (collective focus, followers' worth, and similarity to followers) involve community and collectivity ("feminine"); two (action and adversity) involve task orientation and authoritativeness ("masculine"); and the final two (temporal orientation, tangibility, and intangibility) are considered gender-neutral (for an in-depth analysis of each factor see Müller & Pansardi, 2022, pp. 134–135).

Table A4 in the Supplementary File summarizes the seven constructs and corresponding Diction formulas, along with sample words for each variable and its gender connotation. The charismatic constructs presented in Table A4 are also aggregated in a single indicator of charismatic rhetoric—which we label charisma—by subtracting the value of tangibility from the sum of the six remaining constructs (Bligh et al., 2004). Turning to the analysis of gender and rhetoric in the context of the EP's party group leadership, Figure 3 provides an overview of party groups and our dependent variable labeled charisma.

Figure 3 (for full results see Supplementary File, Table A5) indicates that female PGLs overall demonstrate higher scores of charismatic rhetoric than their male counterparts. In particular, focusing only on the parties with female PGLs, Table 3 attests to a statistically significant difference between male and female chairs in terms of charismatic rhetoric, confirming the findings already proposed for other institutions (Müller & Pansardi, 2022)—that female leaders deliver a more skillful leadership performance concerning rhetoric (Antonakis et al., 2016). Comparing the four political groups with female PGLs, the charismatic rhetoric of the female and male leaders of the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL are internally closest in distribution (Supplementary File, Table A5).

Concerning the individual constructs of charisma (Supplementary File, Table A6), we observe that the

Table 2. Political groups chairs' Commission approval by gender—ANCOVA results.

	Mean	SD	Univariate $F(2, 45)$
Commission approval			
Male	−1.596	6.912	0.013ns
Female	−1.369	6.201	

Notes: Male PGLs' speeches $N = 32$; female PGLs' speeches $N = 16$; ns = nonsignificant.
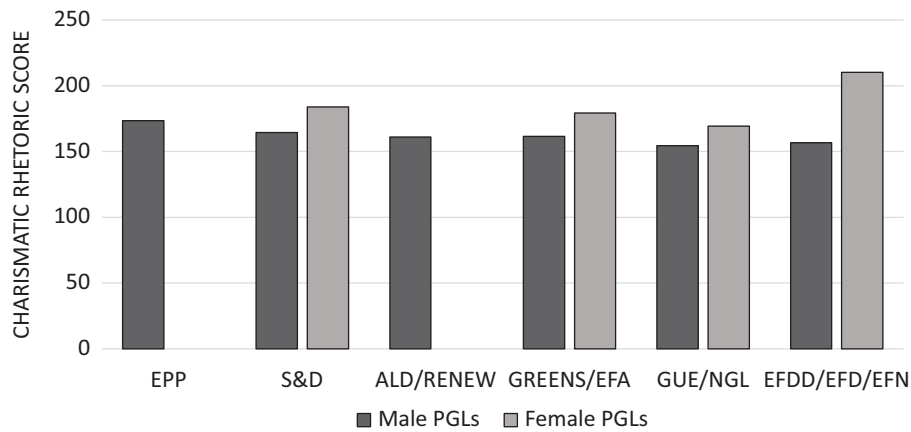
Figure 3. Charismatic rhetoric of PGLs by political group and gender.

female speakers make more frequent references to collective focus, temporal orientation, similarity to followers, and adversity, while male political group leaders invoke followers' worth, tangibility, and most notably action more frequently than their female counterparts. This highlights (a) that women and men both employ feminine and masculine identified factors in their speech-making, as well as ones considered gender-neutral, and (b) that women's speech-making involves a greater variance in the use of the seven factors.

Moving to the individual level of analysis, we find differences between single female PGLs (Figure 4; for full results see Supplementary File, Table A7).

According to our results, Marine Le Pen (EFN) employs charismatic rhetoric most strongly overall. However, this evaluation relies on just a single speech and must therefore be treated with caution. Ska Keller (Greens/EFA) displays the second-highest level of charismatic rhetoric, while Manon Aubry (GUE/NGL) fares lowest on charismatic rhetoric among the female PGLs. No specific pattern in the use of language pertaining to the seven charismatic constructs is detectable; the female PGLs' charismatic language relies on different constructs. For example, Marine Le Pen fares strongest on similarity to followers and adversity, and lowest on tangibility, while Ska Keller fares strongest among all the female chairs on collective focus and followers' worth.

4.3. Discussion of the Empirical Results

Our empirical analysis of the female and male PGLs' rhetoric provides core results that are central not only to the study of inter-institutional opposition exercised by the EP, but to the relationship between gender, leadership, and public speech-making in legislatures. There are four significant points to consider.

First, our analysis confirms that the EP performs collective, inter-institutional opposition toward the Commission. While negative evaluations only barely outweigh positive, in the context of inter-institutional opposition, a "visible collective institutional identity" vis-à-vis the Commission (and Council) nonetheless exists (Hamrik & Kaniok, 2022, p. 689). The strong bargaining position and substantial influence that Tömmel (2014) ascribes to the Parliament, especially when it acts together, is confirmed in the form of collective opposition as all groups express disagreement with the Commission, on average outweighing their approval. In other words, the EP maintains a coherent scrutinizing position in regard to the Commission. Furthermore, positive evaluations of the Commission are more randomly distributed across the political party groups than are negative evaluations. This indicates that while the political groups criticize and scrutinize the Commission's proposals—which is their political and institutional role—they also express praise and approval. This, in turn, highlights that the Parliament indeed fulfills its role as a constructive, functional opponent towards the Commission, balancing consent and criticism across its political spectrum.

Second, our analysis highlights specific differences between male and female PGLs in their expression of favorable and critical attitudes about the Commission. While no linear effect of gender in the expression of pos-

Table 3. Political group chairs' linguistic charisma by gender—ANCOVA results.

	Mean	SD	Univariate $F(2, 45)$
Charisma			
Male	159.925	28.094	5.286*
Female	178.372	21.037	

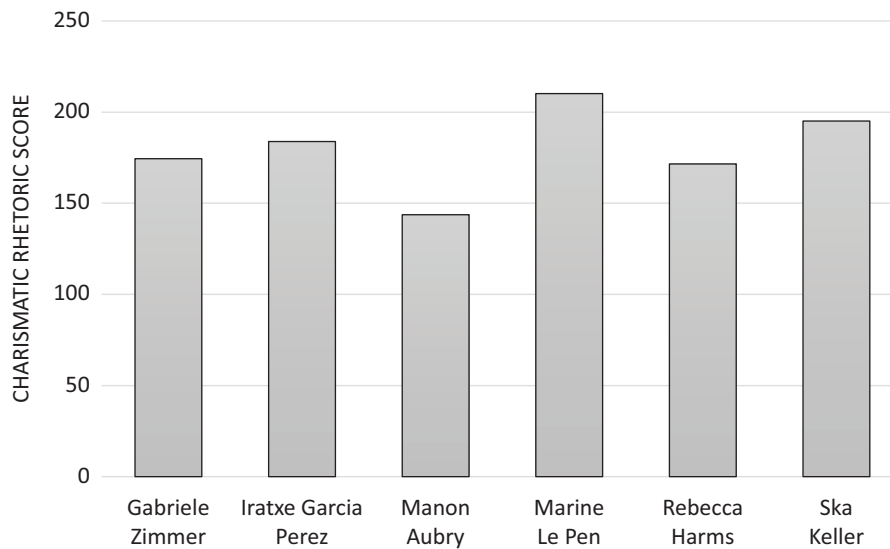Notes: Male PGLs' speeches (n = 32); female PGLs' speeches (n = 16); * $p < 0.05$.

Figure 4. Charismatic rhetoric of female PGLs.

itive or negative evaluations could be detected, corroborating earlier research (Lundell, 2021, p. 35), women slightly outweigh men in their negative assessment and opposition to the Commission. Notably, women express approval of or disagreement with the Commission more strongly than their male counterparts. In this regard, the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL show the strongest divergence between women and men in approval versus disapproval.

While gender inequalities persist across the political spectrum, the green and left political groups in the EP most explicitly and proactively advance gender equality both within their ranks and regarding the body's policy advocacy (Kantola, 2022). The substantial divergence between women's and men's approval and disapproval could signify this socialization process. As indicated above, Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014) found that women tend to speak less and strongly align their positions with those of men in gender-unequal contexts. In contrast, women leaders, and especially those of the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL, voice their differing perspectives independently from their male counterparts. This aspect is negatively confirmed by Marine Le Pen's lavish disapproval of the Commission, outpacing her male counterparts—and all other party group chairs. Women in far-right movements and parties rely on the display of strength and charisma in their leadership performance to a great degree as they encounter highly gender-unequal party-political contexts and a political ideology that is openly misogynistic (Geva, 2020).

Turning to the third result and connecting it to our analysis of gender and opposition, our study of charismatic rhetoric corroborates that female political group leaders are highly skilled speakers who provide a combination of both authoritativeness and relatability (Anzia & Berry, 2011; Baxter, 2010; Cameron & Shaw, 2016). This might explain why women leaders express both approval and disapproval of the Commission more strongly than

male PGLs. While we reject the idea that this gap could be based on biological differences, we understand it as corroboration that women leaders in legislatures are indeed more affected by contradictory socially and culturally constructed expectations and institutional constraints—even in the overall more gender-equal EP—which demand that they engage in and employ higher levels of rhetorical skillfulness and more explicit oppositional behavior (Anzia & Berry, 2011; Bäck & Debus, 2019; Baxter, 2010; Cameron & Shaw, 2016; Homola, 2021; Pearson & Dancey, 2011b).

Furthermore, scholarship has argued that the phenomenon of charisma transcends gender binaries, and our study of the individual constructs of charismatic rhetoric used by male and female PGLs confirms this assumption. Whereas female leaders show overall higher levels of charismatic rhetoric, both male and female PGLs make use of nominally feminine, masculine, and gender-neutral features of rhetorical charisma with varying preferences across groups. Zooming in on the female PGLs, we cannot observe any clear pattern in how female leaders make use of the individual features of charismatic rhetoric. Each woman has her preferred approach. This supports the idea that charisma is inherently personal, making it a highly distinguishable capacity from one politician to the next, thereby also confirming that gender is not an all-determining feature of individual speech-making (Baxter, 2017).

Fourth and finally, the comparison of the party group, gender, and charismatic rhetoric has also brought to the fore that, while not statistically significant, we can observe the closest proximity between male and female charismatic rhetoric in the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL. In addition, Marine Le Pen employs charismatic rhetoric most strongly in the sample overall (although this evaluation relies on a single speech). While future studies are necessary to substantiate these results, it is nonetheless illuminating that women and men of the

Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL, with the groups' history of proactive support for gender equality, seem to level each other out more strongly in terms of leadership performance than do women and men in the other political groups. At the same time, their female and male leaders diverge more strongly in terms of expressing approval and opposition vis-à-vis the European Commission. This aspect is again negatively confirmed by Marine Le Pen's charismatic rhetoric. The high levels of both Marine Le Pen's opposition to the Commission and charismatic rhetoric corroborate the dialectic proposed by Baxter between gender-(un-)equal contexts and women's leadership performance.

Connecting our analysis of gender, charismatic rhetoric, and opposition, our study highlights that female political group leaders are highly skilled legislative performers and linguistic experts who express approval and disapproval more strongly than their male counterparts. We understand it as corroboration that women speakers, and in our case, female PGLs, are indeed more affected by contradictory socially and culturally constructed expectations and institutional constraints, which lead them to develop higher levels of rhetorical skillfulness that are then also expressed in more emphatic approvals or disapprovals of the European Commission (Anzia & Berry, 2011; Bäck & Debus, 2019; Baxter, 2010; Homola, 2021).

5. Conclusion

This research has contributed to the growing literature on women's behavior in legislatures, with a specific focus on PGLs' leadership performance, at the example of public speech-making, and inter-institutional opposition in the EP. The gender-based differences in performance, as illuminated in this study, and the continued lack of women in top-parliamentary positions suggest that a linear link between high female representation in legislatures and women's presence in leadership does not exist. Even in environments considered to be "women-friendly"—such as the EP—gender stereotypes and sociocultural constraints are pervasive. However, there is also hope, as attested by the closer proximity between women's and men's charismatic rhetoric in the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL. If organizations, as in this case, party groups, actively promote and exercise gender equality, gender-based differences in public speech-making seem to become smaller, while gender differences in political opinions tend to grow, allowing for legislatures to become more gender-inclusive environments.

However, for the time being, women's underrepresentation in the political domain, sociocultural challenges, and gender stereotypes continue to contribute to demands that women leaders—more so than men—engage in highly skilled forms of leadership. Demonstrating consistently higher levels of charismatic rhetoric than their male counterparts, which also translates into more emphatic evaluations of the Commission, whether positive or negative, female PGLs are clearly leading the inter-institutional opposition of the EP.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

References

Antonakis, J., Bastardoz, N., Jacquart, P., & Shamir, B. (2016). Charisma: An ill-defined and ill-measured gift. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, *3*(1), 293–319.

Anzia, S. F., & Berry, C. R. (2011). The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson effect: Why do congresswomen outperform congressmen? *American Journal of Political Science*, *55*(3), 478–493.

Bäck, H., & Debus, M. (2019). When do women speak? A comparative analysis of the role of gender in legislative debates. *Political Studies*, *67*(3), 576–596.

Bäck, H., Debus, M., & Müller, J. (2014). Who takes the parliamentary floor? The role of gender in speech-making in the Swedish Riksdag. *Political Research Quarterly*, *67*(3), 504–518.

Baxter, J. (2010). *The language of female leadership*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Baxter, J. (2017). Sociolinguistic approaches to gender and leadership theory. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of research on gender and leadership* (pp. 113–126). Edward Elgar.

Bligh, M., Kohles, J. C., & Meindl, J. R. (2004). Charisma under crisis: Presidential leadership, rhetoric, and media responses before and after the September 11th terrorist attacks. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *15*(2), 211–239.

Bligh, M., Merolla, J., Schroedel, J. R., & Gonzalez, R. (2010). Finding her voice: Hillary Clinton's rhetoric in the 2008 presidential campaign. *Women's Studies*, *39*(8), 823–850.

Brescoll, V. L. (2011). Who takes the floor and why: Gender, power, and volubility in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *56*(4), 622–641.

Cameron, D., & Shaw, S. (2016). *Gender, power and political speech. Women and language in the 2015 UK general election*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Corbett, R., Jacobs, F., & Neville, D. (2016). *The European Parliament* (9th ed.). John Harper Publishing.

Dingler, S. C., & Fortin-Rittberger, J. (2022). Women's leadership in the European Parliament: A long-term perspective. In H. Müller & I. Tömmel (Eds.), *Women and leadership in the European Union* (pp. 74–91). Oxford University Press.

Dingler, S. C., Helms, L., & Müller, H. (2023). Women opposition leaders: Conceptual issues and empirical agendas. *Politics and Governance*, *11*(1), 80–84.

European Commission. (n.d.). *eTranslation*. https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/etranslation/public/welcome.html

Fraune, C. (2016). The politics of speeches, votes, and deliberations: Gendered legislating and energy policy-making in Germany and the United States. *Energy Research & Social Science*, *19*(4), 134–141.

Fromage, D. (2018). The European Parliament in the post-crisis era: An institution empowered on paper only? *Journal of European Integration*, *40*(3), 281–294.

Geva, D. (2020). A double-headed hydra: Marine Le Pen's charisma, between political masculinity and political femininity. *International Journal for Masculinity Studies*, *15*(1), 26–42.

Hamrik, L., & Kaniok, P. (2022). Who's in the spotlight? The personalization of politics in the European Parliament. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *60*(3), 673–701.

Hart, R. P. (2001). Redeveloping Diction: Theoretical considerations. In M. West (Ed.), *Theory, method and practice of computer content analysis* (pp. 43–60). Springer.

Hart, R. P., & Carroll, C. E. (2015). *Diction 7: The text analysis program. Help manual*. Digitext.

Helms, L. (2008). Parliamentary opposition and its alternatives in a transnational regime: The European Union in perspective. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, *14*(1/2), 212–235.

Homola, J. (2021). The effects of women's descriptive representation on government behavior. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *47*(2), 295–308.

Ilie, C. (2013). Gendering confrontational rhetoric: Discursive disorder in the British and Swedish parliaments. *Democratization*, *20*(3), 501–521.

Jones, J. (2016). Talk "like a man": The linguistic styles of Hillary Clinton, 1992–2013. *Perspectives on Politics*, *14*(3), 625–642.

Judge, D., & Earnshaw, D. (2002). The European Parliament and the Commission crisis: A new assertiveness? *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, *15*(3), 345–374.

Kantola, J. (2022). Parliamentary politics and polarisation around gender: Tackling inequalities in political groups in the European Parliament. In P. Ahrens, A. Elomäki, & J. Kantola (Eds.), *European Parliament's political groups in turbulent times* (pp. 221–243). Palgrave Macmillan.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2022). Gendered leadership in the European Parliament's political groups. In H. Müller & I. Tömmel (Eds.), *Women and leadership in the European Union* (pp. 150–169). Oxford University Press.

Karpowitz, C. F., & Mendelberg, T. (2014). *The silent sex: Gender, deliberation, and institutions*. Princeton University Press.

Lundell, E. (2021). *An arena for effective opposition? A systematic investigation into political opposition in the European Parliament* [Master thesis, Uppsala University]. Uppsala University Repository. http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn%3Anbn%3Ase%3Auu%3Adiva-432291

Mair, P. (2007). Political opposition and the European Union. *Government and Opposition*, *42*(1), 1–17.

Meissner, K. L., & Schoeller, M. G. (2019). Rising despite the polycrisis? The European Parliament's strategies of self-empowerment after Lisbon. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *26*(7), 1075–1093.

Müller, H., & Pansardi, P. (2022). Rhetoric and leadership: A comparison of female vice-presidents of the European Commission (1999–2019). In H. Müller & I. Tömmel (Eds.), *Women and leadership in the European Union* (pp. 129–149). Oxford University Press.

Murray, R. (2010). Second among equals? A study of whether France's quota women are up to the job. *Politics & Gender*, *6*(1), 93–118.

Och, M. (2020). Manterrupting in the German Bundestag: Gendered opposition to female members of Parliament? *Politics & Gender*, *16*(2), 388–408.

Olsson, E.-K., & Hammargård, K. (2016). The rhetoric of the president of the European Commission: charismatic leader or neutral mediator? *Journal of European Public Policy*, *23*(4), 550–570.

Pansardi, P., & Battegazzorre, F. (2018). The discursive legitimation strategies of the president of the commission: A qualitative content analysis of the State of the Union Addresses (SOTEU). *Journal of European Integration*, *40*(7), 853–871.

Pansardi, P., & Tortola, P. D. (2022). A "more political" Commission? Reassessing EC politicization through language. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *60*(4), 1047–68.

Pearson, K., & Dancey, L. (2011a). Speaking for the underrepresented in the House of Representatives: Voicing women's interests in a partisan era. *Politics & Gender*, *7*(4), 493–519.

Pearson, K., & Dancey, L. (2011b). Elevating women's voices in Congress: Speech participation in the House of Representatives. *Political Research Quarterly*, *64*(4), 910–923.

Rutherford, A. (2011). *ANOVA and ANCOVA: A GLM approach*. Wiley.

Shackleton, M. (2017). Transforming representative democracy in the EU? The role of the European Parliament. *Journal of European Integration*, *39*(2), 191–205.

Shamir, B., Arthur, M. B., & House, R. J. (1994). The

Rhetoric of charismatic leadership: A theoretical extension, a case study, and implications for research. *Leadership Quarterly*, *5*(1), 25–42.

Shaw, S. (2000). Language, gender and floor apportionment in political debates. *Discourse & Society*, *11*(3), 401–418.

Sundström, A., & Stockemer, D. (2022). Political party characteristics and women's representation: The case of the European Parliament. *Representation: Journal of Representative Democracy*, *58*(1), 119–137.

Tömmel, I. (2014). *The European Union. What it is and how it works*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Tortola, P. D., & Pansardi, P. (2018). The charismatic leadership of the ECB presidency: A language-based analysis. *European Journal of Political Research*, *58*(1), 96–116.

Vincent, L. (2001). A question of interest: Women as opposition. *Democratization*, *8*(1), 69–84.

Wang, V. (2014). Tracing gender differences in parliamentary debates: A growth curve analysis of Ugandan MPs' activity levels in Plenary sessions, 1998–2008. *Representation*, *50*(3), 365–377.

About the Authors

Henriette Müller is an assistant professor of gender, governance, and society at New York University Abu Dhabi. Focusing on gender and women's leadership, her research encompasses the comparative study of political leadership both at the national and international level, as well as across different political systems and sociocultural contexts. Her work has appeared in *Hawwa Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, *Journal of European Integration*, *Politics & Gender*, *Politics and Governance*, and *West European Politics*.

Pamela Pansardi is an associate professor in political science at the University of Pavia. Her research focuses on gender and politics, EU politics, methods in text analysis, and political theory. Her work has appeared in journals such as *European Journal of Political Research*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Social Policy*, *Party Politics*, and *Journal of European Integration*.

cogitatio

Women Opposition Leaders: Pathways, Patterns, and Performance

Edited by Sarah C. Dingler, Ludger Helms, and Henriette Müller

Table of Contents

Politics and Governance is an internationally peer-reviewed open access journal that publishes significant and cutting-edge research drawn from all areas of political science.

Its central aim is thereby to enhance the broad scholarly understanding of the range of contemporary political and governing processes, and impact upon of states, political entities, international organisations, communities, societies and individuals, at international, regional, national and local levels.

cogitatio