

Political Parties and Gendered Political Representation: A Research Strategy for Assessing the Impact of Institutionalization in Candidate Selection Procedures

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Abstract

This article presents the research strategy of two interrelated research projects that both analyze the role of political parties for women's political representation. Previous research has suggested that an increased institutionalization of political parties' candidate selection procedures will increase women's political representation. However, because of the lack of available data on political parties' internal nomination procedures, there is a shortage on conceptual clarifications as well as on empirical comparisons. With the help of unique data produced by International IDEA covering 176 parties in 64 developing countries, as well as of four comparative case studies, the combined undertaking of the two projects is threefold: First, we conceptually disentangle and concre-

tize the dimensions of institutionalization in candidate selection to allow for a proper operationalization of the concept. Second, we analyze the possible effects of institutionalization, in relation to other party characteristics, on the number of female representatives. Third, we contextually nuance the discussion and examine whether the role of institutionalization in candidate selection is contingent on the different preferences parties are likely to have in different political climates.

Background and aim

This article presents the research strategy of two interrelated research projects that both analyze the role of political parties for women's political representation. One of the projects is financed by *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* (the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation) and the other by *Vetenskapsrådet* (the Swedish Research Council). Both are three-year projects, starting in 2011.² The two projects are similar in terms of the puzzle they address and thus in their overall aim, and they share a common theoretical framework. However, they differ in terms of their analytical approaches: the project financed by *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* uses large-scale statistical data on 176 political parties in 64 countries, whereas the project financed by *Vetenskapsrådet* uses a small-n strategy by examining the two largest par-

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2 The project financed by *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* is called "Political Parties and Women's Political Representation: Assessing the Impact of Institutionalization in Candidate Selection Procedures". The project sponsored by *Vetenskapsrådet* has a similar title: "Political Parties and Gendered Political Representation: Assessing the Impact of Bureaucratization in Candidate Selection Procedures."

ties in four selected countries (see below). By combining the two projects, we adopt a multi-method approach to analyze the role of political parties for gendered patterns of political representation. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in one single project is often preferable but rather uncommon, despite a common agreement that a combination design allows each method to do exactly what it is best at doing, while compensating for the shortcomings of the other (see e.g. Lieberman 2005).

Political parties have been described as being responsible for the male political overrepresentation almost everywhere in the world, and thus as the most important gatekeepers for women's political representation (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; c.f. Lawless and Fox 2005). The fact that men hold more than 81 percent of all seats in national parliaments has been held to be not only problematic in and by itself; the consequential underrepresentation of women's interests in decision-making bodies has also been described as an important obstacle to equitable and sustainable development. Not only are women crucial actors when it comes to furthering policies of particular interest to women as a group (e.g. Lovenduski 2005). Countries with a higher proportion of women in parliament are also suggested to be more peaceful, to show a greater respect for human rights and to have lower levels of corruption (e.g. Dollar et al. 2001; Melander 2005).

Political parties monopolize candidate selection in almost all countries and they thus have a direct impact on the gendered composition of parliament. Exactly how political parties select their candidates and what types of apertures different selection procedures open for female aspirants is, however, to a large extent, still shrouded

in mystery. There is a particular lack of knowledge regarding non-western political parties (see however Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008).

Using both statistical analysis of data on 176 political parties in 64 predominantly developing countries (the *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* project) and four comparative case studies (the *Vetenskapsrådet* project), the two projects aim at assessing the impacts of a key factor of candidate selection on women's possibilities to be elected to national parliament: the level of institutionalization (Norris 1996; also referred to as "bureaucratization" or "formalization"). Although widely acknowledged as crucial for understanding gendered representation, the supposed impact of this dimension of candidate selection is both theoretically unclear and empirically under-researched. In addition, it has not been investigated if and how institutionalization in candidate selection plays out differently in different political climates. Theoretically, we draw on, and speak to, a broad range of literatures, such as theories of representation, political party literature, institutional theory, and organizational theory.

Previous research

A fundamental institutionalist assumption in research on political representation is that structural characteristics of political parties provide the context, or the opportunity structures, for female aspirants to legislative bodies. Consequently, the proportion of female legislators has been shown to vary more between individual political parties than between national parliaments (Caul Kittilson 2006). However, the relationship between candidate selection – the process by which candidates are chosen from among the pool of

aspirants (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Rahat and Hazan 2001; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008) – and women’s political representation has received fairly limited attention by scholars on gender and politics. When attention has been given, it has mainly contributed important theoretical insights (see however Caul Kittilson 2006; Freidenvall 2006; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Systematic empirical research on the gendered consequences of internal recruitment practices in political parties has been scarce due to the fact that it is notoriously difficult to access information about the nature of these procedures, partly because they are often of an informal character (Norris 1996).

The few empirical analyses on the topic all highlight the level of institutionalization in candidate selection as one of the most important factors for women’s possibility to be selected to legislative office. An oft-cited definition of an institutionalized selection procedure describes it as a procedure that is carried out according to written rules that are “detailed, explicit, standardized, implemented by party officials, and authorized in party documents” (Norris 1996, 202). The rather general hypotheses that has been generated suggest that women fare better in parties whose candidate selection procedures are institutionalized and formalized rather than patronage-based and informal (e.g. Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2008; Lovenduski and Norris 1993). In contrast to institutionalized processes, patronage-based procedures are generally characterized by party rules that are either brief or simply not implemented. Informal arrangements and personal relationships overrule written rules, which also means that “procedures may vary from one selection to another” (Norris 1996,

203). Such informal institutions and personal cliques are generally less open to newcomers and less advantaged groups on the political arena, women included, as power instead tends to be passed on to someone within the group (Guadagnini 1993; Bjarnegård 2009).

The literature on the role of political parties for women’s political representation has thus provided important insights. It is, however, the case that the issue of institutionalization of candidate selection has neither been sufficiently conceptually concretized and operationalized nor systematically compared. A great paradox in research on gender and politics is thus that one of the most commonly suggested factors impacting women’s political representation is also the perhaps least researched. The most important reason for these shortcomings is the striking lack of comparative data on candidate selection procedures. Another problem in this body of research is that it has mostly focused on western political parties and have analyzed political parties as if they operated in a vacuum, i.e. in isolation from the context in which they operate (see however Krook 2009). It has not been sufficiently taken into account that different political climates generate different political demands and considerations on the part of the political parties, and that some of these demands and considerations are likely to be highly gendered.

Research strategy: a multi-method approach

We address the shortcomings of earlier research with the help of theoretical knowledge from a number of different fields, a new dataset on political parties, and four suitable country case-studies. Our theoretical point of departure is that

institutions matter for how rational actors behave in politics (Peters 2005). Conceptually, we build on research on formal and informal institutions (e.g. Helmke and Levitsky 2004), which broadens the institutionalist approach by claiming that all “rules of the game” are not necessarily formalized or written. In political life, a certain type of behavior is often expected based on informal institutions. Thus, with institutions, we refer to all actual or perceived, formal or informal rules, practices and norms that actors feel that they are constrained by (Helmke and Levitsky 2004).

We devote our attention to the political parties, more specifically to the rules that the political parties employ internally as well as to the considerations generated by the overall external political landscape in which they operate. More precisely, we suggest that the surrounding political climate as well as the type of candidate selection procedure affect what type of politicians that end up in parliament. In areas ravaged by armed conflicts, a military background is likely to be perceived as an asset. In areas where the political legitimacy of the people lies with the person who pays the most money for their votes, an attractive candidate is likely to be a person with large clientelist networks. In both these cases, women are generally disadvantaged. In the two projects, we hypothesize that a way to get around these kinds of preferences is by specifying the criteria needed for nomination and by making the rules of the game open and clear to everyone, in other words, to *institutionalize* – or formalize – the selection procedure.

More specifically, the combined undertaking of the two projects is threefold (fulfilling the third task is the main contribution of the project financed by *Vetenskapsrådet*): First, we conceptually disentangle

and concretize the rather obscure dimensions of institutionalization in candidate selection to allow for a proper operationalization of the concept. Second, we analyze the possible effects of institutionalization, in relation to other party characteristics, on the number of female representatives. Third, we contextually nuance the discussion and examine whether the role of institutionalization in candidate selection is contingent on the different preferences parties are likely to have in different political climates. To empirically examine the issues, we use a multi-method (or mixed methods) design, including both statistical analysis of large-scale political party data (the *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* project) and comparative case studies (the *Vetenskapsrådet* project).

A statistical analysis of large-scale political party data (the *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* project)

Our first task is to disentangle and properly operationalize institutionalization in candidate selection. To do so, we theoretically build on research on political parties in developing countries and emerging democracies (Field and Siavelis 2008; Randall and Svåsand 2002; Gunther and Diamond 2003) as well as on literature on candidate selection (e.g. Norris 1996; Rahat and Hazan 2001; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008; Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Field and Siavelis 2008). A theoretical exploration of the concept is then accompanied by an empirical examination of the dimensions of institutionalization in candidate selection.

We undertake the empirical analysis with the help of a new and unique dataset produced by International IDEA that we have been granted access to. This is the first survey database of its kind. It covers

176 parties in 64 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe. The data is survey based and has been collected in cooperation with locally based researchers in each of the countries. People representing the party at different levels of the party hierarchy have been interviewed. The questionnaire employed is comprehensive and covers both external (e.g. national party legislation) and internal party regulations. As far as the internal party regulations go, they are identified both with reference to party regulations and their implementation and with reference to what the respondent thinks *really* matters for candidate selection. As a consequence, we are able to gain information not only about formal rules but also – at least to some extent – about informal practices. This focus on a combination of formal and informal procedures has been asked for in recent work on gender and candidate selection (Krook 2009); thus, the project is able to fill an identified gap in the literature.

There are both open-ended questions (e.g. “*What are the party rules for the process by which candidates to chamber 1 of the national legislature are recruited and then s/ elected to stand for election?*”) as well as multiple choice questions (e.g. “*To what extent do the following factors, in your opinion, affect positively the chances of candidates to get s/ elected by the party...: ability at public speaking; closeness to party leader or senior party officials; commitment to the campaign; educational qualifications; experience of holding party office; local/regional connections with the community; name recognition; personal wealth; business experience; trade union experience; many years of membership; other?*”). The open-ended questions allow somewhat more nuanced answers; consequently, they both require and enable an initial qualitative in-depth analysis of each party’s candidate selection procedure. The immediate ob-

jective of this in-depth analysis is to come up with a nuanced coding of the data to render it fit for statistical analysis. The analysis and coding of the multiple-choice questions will be somewhat more straightforward, but nevertheless require careful consideration. After initial work with organizing, analyzing, and coding the data, we will be able to develop a fine-grained tool to operationalize institutionalization in candidate selection. More specifically, we employ factor analysis, which is a useful statistical method for examining underlying dimensions of a complex concept. It is possible that some of the observations regarding candidate selection in the dataset together represent another, unobserved, variable or dimension. Exploratory factor analysis can thus help us reduce the number of variables employed in subsequent analyses. By carrying out such an analysis in conjunction with our theoretical knowledge on candidate selection, we expect to be able to qualify the picture of what the essence of institutionalization is.

As for the second task, the assessment of the impact of institutionalization in candidate selection on women’s political representation, we use advanced multivariate regression analysis. In this analysis, we put the possible impact of our main independent variable (institutionalization in candidate selection) in relation to the effects of other commonly suggested causes to women’s political representation: the electoral system (majoritarian or proportional, etc.), party system (one-, two- or multiparty system), etc. In other words, we carefully make use of necessary control variables.

The analysis, however, is not limited to estimating the impact of the *level* of institutionalization (i.e. the rule-boundedness); the actual content of the rules

themselves are also taken into account. For instance, the dataset includes information on, among other things, the level of centralization in the selection process, potential internal election systems for the selection of candidates, and the use of voluntary electoral quotas for women and other groups, etc. It may be the case that the level of institutionalization by itself does not impact positively on the number of women in parliament but that it needs to be combined with other aspects of candidate selection in order for it to have a positive impact. Therefore, we test for the possibility of interaction effects with other features of candidate selection. To give an example, it is possible that a relatively institutionalized procedure is mainly favorable to women if it is combined with a relatively centralized level of decision making that leaves little room for local power brokers to dominate the process (c.f. Zetterberg 2009; Guadagnini 1993). This project has a unique possibility to empirically address precisely these kinds of hypotheses – commonly put forward, but, so far, seldom put to the test.

In the third task, we add features of the overall political and societal context to the statistical analysis. Here, we explicitly examine whether and how the overall political context shapes the relationship between institutionalization and women's political representation (by testing for possible interaction effects of institutionalization in candidate selection and factors related to the political climate). Recent theoretical work on gender and candidate selection has paid attention to the possibility that the impact of certain candidate selection procedures is contingent on the political context in which they operate (e.g. Krook 2009); however, empirical as-

sessments are – to our knowledge – notably limited.

The third task is performed in two ways, of which one uses statistical analysis. By drawing on previous research, and by making use of data from the Quality of Government (QoG) research program, we add features of the overall political and societal context to the statistical analysis: the level of democracy, corruption levels, conflict levels, military spending, ethnic fractionalization, rule of law, the dominant religion etc. Here, we explicitly examine whether and how the overall political context shape the relationship between institutionalization and women's political representation (by testing for possible interaction effects of institutionalization in candidate selection and factors related to the political climate). For instance, it is possible that institutionalized procedures do not matter much for the representation of women in a country like Sweden, where low levels of corruption and a long history of peace contributes to a relatively gender equal political sphere; however, an institutionalization of party selection procedures in a country like Thailand might indeed increase the number of women in parliament, by diminishing the importance of having supporting large clientelist networks in order to be considered an attractive candidate (c.f. Bjarnegård 2009). Thus, a possible result may be that an increased institutionalization (or formalization) of candidate selection procedures contributes to closing gender gaps in some types of political climates, but not in others. Such a result would make an important contribution to the debate on how political parties shape the opportunities for women to be elected to political office.

A small-n analysis: four comparative case studies (the Vetenskapsrådet project)

To successfully complete the third task, we see a need to complement the large-n analysis with case studies. Closer empirical scrutiny is important in order to gain a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of how political contexts shape political preferences, and what the gendered implications are. Thus we will conduct four shorter field trips to four different countries in order to get a broad comparative view. The countries selected are Bolivia, Kenya, Georgia and Bangladesh. All four countries have relatively low proportions of women in parliament but the informal societal contexts have, at least partly, different bases. Whereas clientelism is important in all four countries, there are many accounts pointing to the fact that Bolivian politics is particularly dependent on a clientelist political system (e.g. Lazar 2004; Hadenius 2003). The grounds for political legitimacy in Kenya are more ethnically based (e.g. Ndegwa 1997; Hulterström 2004), whereas in post-Soviet Georgia incidences of civil war would suggest a stronger focus on the military (e.g. Cornell 2002; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003). Bangladesh has a history of repeated religious clashes between Muslims and Hindus and a rising Muslim fundamentalist movement. Religious matters also influence local political networks that often shut out women (e.g. Kabeer 1991; Riaz 2003). The case study selection enables contextually rich comparisons between a number of different types of societal informal institutions that might cause the political parties to favor male candidates ahead of female ones. For each country we examine the two biggest political parties, in order to be able to take possible identified differences in level of insti-

tutionalization in selection procedures into consideration. By doing so, it is possible to gain a closer understanding of how the overall political context might impact political parties differently.

The short field trips are planned to take approximately two weeks each. Through International IDEA, we have established contact with the researcher in charge of collecting the survey data and thus gained access to informants as well as to party representatives in the same parties included in the IDEA dataset. We want to complement the existing data that primarily focus on characteristics of the candidate selection with information on broader political concerns and how they affect candidate preferences. We will spend the first week of field studies in the capital, collecting written material (party rules, etc.) and interviewing informants and party representatives high up in the party hierarchy. Based on the information from the IDEA dataset, we will be able to take the discussion a step further and discuss how the characteristics of the candidate selection process interact with larger political preferences. These interviews will be pre-booked as far as possible. The second week will be spent identifying people lower down in the party hierarchy whose narratives of contextual considerations in candidate selection can function as a control of the picture given to us by centrally placed party officials. Interviews will be semi-structured and geared at understanding what guides the preferences of the party selectorates.

A potential problem with the case studies is the limited time that will be spent on each of them. However, we are well suited to get the most out of the short time we have at hand; both of us have worked extensively and successfully with interviews as a method of information gathering in

partisan contexts in developing countries (see e.g. Bjarnegård 2009; Zetterberg 2008). We are thus well acquainted with what the different stages – planning, carrying through and analyzing – of interviewing imply. We are also well aware of the limits of information gathering through interviewing. The IDEA-questionnaires, however, provide us with an unusually good starting point: with a large amount of information and existing contact persons, we will be able to focus exclusively on respondents and issues of direct interest to us. We are thus confident that the field trips are necessary and useful in order to gain a better understanding of the contextually shaped preferences of party selectorates and their gendered implications.

Conclusion

This article has presented the research strategies for two new and interrelated projects on the role of political parties for the gendered composition of national parliaments. By drawing on various bodies of literature, and employing a multi-method approach, we believe that the two research projects are able to contribute important theoretical and empirical insights regarding why political parties around the world still favor male candidates ahead of female ones – and thus why parliaments remain male dominated institutions that do not fulfill the international community's expectations of just social representation.

In conclusion, the results of the projects are likely to attract the attention of the international community of scholars working on gender and political representation as well as on political parties and candidate selection. They are also likely to have a broader societal relevance. It has

been suggested that political parties themselves might hold the key to a new style of politics, a style that might also open up new possibilities for women in politics. This key is often suggested to be the institutionalization of candidate selection procedures. The proposed research project breaks new ground by assessing this very suggestion. The results should therefore be of great interest to international actors who are supporting the strengthening of political parties as well as women acting within the realm of representative democracy.

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