

Women's Empowerment at the Local Level

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Sweden is recognized as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world. It is well-known that the share of women in the Swedish national parliament, the Riksdag, is high—currently 43.6%—and that the number has been high for quite some time. What is less recognized however is that gender equality, even in a country such as Sweden, varies widely at the subnational level. This is, for example, visible in the number of women elected to local councils which currently varies from a share of 29.3% in the municipality of Örkelljunga to 54.1% in the municipality of Tranemo: a difference of 24.8 percentage points. To put this in perspective one can compare the subnational variation to variation across countries; the span between the two most extreme local councils in Sweden is equal to the span between the national parliament in Sweden (43.6%) and the national parliament in Greece (19.7%).

This chapter focuses on women's political empowerment at the local level. Specifically, we highlight women's descriptive (numerical) representation in locally elected assemblies across Europe. There are two main reasons for this focus. First, the data presented in the empirical part of this

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chapter shows that a substantial number of countries display significant intra-state variation. This is a fact that paves the ground for re-evaluations of some of the dominant theories explaining variation in the number of women elected across time and space. Modernization theories, emphasizing broad socio-economic transformations and value shifts, have mainly been examined using data on national-level patterns. The same goes for theories stressing the role of electoral systems or political strategies such as gender quotas. A second reason for highlighting women's descriptive representation in locally elected assemblies is research showing a link between the number of women elected and outcomes of the political process. Research at the subnational level in Norway and Sweden show that municipalities with a high number of women elected tend to be gender equal also in other respects; that is in policy outputs such as childcare coverage (Bratton and Ray 2002), employment opportunities for women (Wängnerud and Sundell 2012), and public expenditures in areas related to the situation of women citizens (Svaleryd 2009). Studies in the United Kingdom show that women display higher levels of subjective political interest for the local level than the national or global level (Coffé 2013).

There is currently a lack of comparative data on women in local councils. To illustrate, there exists no website or report series that regularly publish such information. The most comprehensive attempts in this regard have limitations as these reports have (1) averaged the share of locally elected women to one national figure, (2) covered a limited number of countries, and (3) used sources with dubious quality (CEMR 2008; United Nations Statistics Division 2011). Similarly, Dolan (2008) identifies that although the local level displays the highest variation of minority representation, there is a lack of comparative data on these institutions. We have therefore, ourselves, been engaged in collecting figures on women's local presence in Europe (see Sundström 2013). The main contribution of this chapter is to present the variation found in this database and to discuss some of the outputs stemming from this project. This data reflect the mean share of female local councilors for 441 regions across 38 European countries. The dataset is unique since most studies on women's descriptive representation reflect either the situation in national parliaments or, concerning local councils, report an average value of a country as a whole. Thus, the variation in women's representation within and between subnational units is rarely studied. As discussed above, the dataset presented in this chapter will allow for a new set of studies enriching research on women's empowerment. Most notably we are, by using this dataset, able to produce fine-grained results concerning socio-economic and political

determinants in the election of female local councilors and to reveal complex interactions involving informal “shadowy arrangements” that hinder women from participating as elected representatives.

The chapter will be structured in the following way: First we present previous research on women in local councils, most of which are single case studies. Thereafter we present the new database and results pertaining to women’s political empowerment. We end by discussing what we perceive as the most pressing issues that this database can help to resolve.

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH ON WOMEN IN POLITICS: A BLIND SPOT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The trends of women’s descriptive representation in national parliaments have received a great deal of attention both in research and in policy documents such as the Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations 1995). The Inter-parliamentary Union collects this data on a regular basis and the trends show that the share of women in national legislative bodies, while still underrepresented, has been on the rise around the world for the past decades (Inter-parliamentary Union 2013).

Although national legislative bodies are decisive for the everyday lives of citizens, they are not the only tier in the political system that matters. In virtually all countries citizens are affected by decisions taken at the local level; in councils where elected members are not legislators yet exert tremendous influence in the local community through municipal taxation and the local provision of public services. Moreover, especially in the Nordic countries, much of the political decisions that particularly affect the situation of women—such as public care for children and the elderly—are taken at the local level. Thus the possibilities for women to successfully combine a paid career with a family can be highly dependent on priorities within the locally elected assembly.¹ Consider also that a majority of the elected politicians in the world are active in local councils rather than national parliaments, and that local assemblies often serve as a springboard to national or international positions (Buckely et al. 2015).

Current Knowledge on Women’s Representation in Local Politics

Despite the importance of local councils, the election of women at the local level has seldom been studied in a comparative perspective. Existing subnational studies tend instead to focus on one country at a time. Early studies from the United States—a country that is the dominating focus in

this field of research—focused on the desirability and importance of office (Karnig and Welch 1979), the competition for these posts (Welch and Karnig 1979), the role of media coverage (MacManus 1992), and the size of councils and cities (Bullock and MacManus 1991) to explain detected variations. More recently, Trounstine and Valdini (2008) focus on the effect of electoral systems and demonstrate that a plurality system increases the presence of white female local councilors but not the proportion of African American women or Latina councilors. Finally, Smith et al. (2012) examine the impact of the local context on the varying presence of female council members and mayors in 239 larger cities in the United States. The findings are that the election of women as council members and the election of women as mayors are interdependent phenomena and, in addition, that the local context, such as locally dominant political ideology, matters a lot. They (Smith et al. 2012, 324) conclude: “Although it is perhaps unsurprising that liberal cities elect more female council members, our results are the first to validate this relationship empirically.”

A recurring theme in the few existing comparative studies is the effect of informal factors on the election of women, which resembles the result from Smith et al. (2012) presented above. Drage (2001) compiles information on women in local government in 13 countries in the Asia-Pacific region in the late 1990s. The study suggests that campaigns by NGOs as well as the presence of international conferences provide a momentum for women to gain local influence. Based on case studies on local councils in a number of established democracies such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and Germany, Pini and McDonald (2011) suggest several obstacles facing women running for office, such as the persistence of “old-boys-networks” that exclude women from elected seats. Pini and McDonald also point to factors that may increase the presence of locally elected women, such as the use of gender quotas and the positive influence of norm change that can be initiated both from “below” through grassroots campaigns and also from “above” through the work of state feminism and having role models in higher leadership positions.

Taking a bird’s-eye view to the literature, we see three trends in scholarship on women in local councils: one strand testing the impact of factors derived from the literature on national-level determinants such as personal motivation for a political career (Briggs 2000) or party recruitment strategies (Bhavnani 2009; Bird 2003; Hinojosa 2009; Yule 2000) and another strand delving more deeply into local cultures such as local norms and tensions between male and female politicians (Bochel and Bochel 2008;

Kokkonen and Wängnerud 2016; Rao 2005; Rincker 2009). A third strand of research, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, investigates the effects in the everyday lives of citizens of having a high versus low number of women in locally elected assemblies (Bratton and Ray 2002; Svaleryd 2009; Wängnerud and Sundell 2012; see also Brolo and Troiano 2016 for a study on municipalities in Brazil). All of these veins of research would benefit from having access to comparative data on women's descriptive representation at the local level since this would allow for more conclusive reasoning on factors enabling and hindering the empowerment of women: For example, does the emphasis on local culture mean that we end up in a situation discussing idiosyncratic factors valid only for one or two cases at a time? In the next section we will present the data collected by Aksel Sundström at the Quality of Government Institute, University of Gothenburg, and thereafter get back to a discussion on the usefulness of this data.²

COLLECTING COMPARATIVE DATA ON WOMEN IN LOCAL COUNCILS

Using a large-N framework, Vengroff et al. (2003) come closest to studying variation in women's descriptive representation at the subnational level across a global set of countries. However, the authors' focus is on assemblies at state and provincial levels rather than locally elected bodies. Most important to note is that Vengroff et al. average the share of subnationally elected women to the country as a whole. A country is therefore given one mean figure in their dataset and thus the study cannot account for much of the interesting intra-national variation in the share of elected women.

The main reason for the lack of global comparative studies, taking subnational variation into account, is poor data availability. As a first step to remedy this problem, we ourselves engaged in a data collection that to date (June 2016) covers 441 regions in 38 European countries (including Turkey). The first challenge was to decide which bodies to compare since the design of the political system varies tremendously across Europe.³ We collected the most recent figures on the share of women elected at the lowest administrative tier in a country; thus a local councilor is *an individual elected to local deliberative assemblies constituted of councilors elected by direct universal suffrage* (see Egner et al. 2013).⁴ Since some countries, such as Spain, consist of a very large number of municipalities

(around 8000) and other, such as Sweden, of a rather low number (around 290) the next challenge was how to compile this data. The data collected reflect local councils but is, out of practical reasons, aggregated to the regional level. The units reflect statistical regions as standardized by the Eurostat authority, the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). The data show that there is a large variance with regard to the average share of female local councilors, ranging from 1.86% (the Turkish region Hatay) to 55.23% (the region Mykolaivs'ka in Ukraine). Figure 6.1 gives an overview of the subnational variation in current Europe. The darker the color on the map, the higher is the average number of female local councilors.⁵

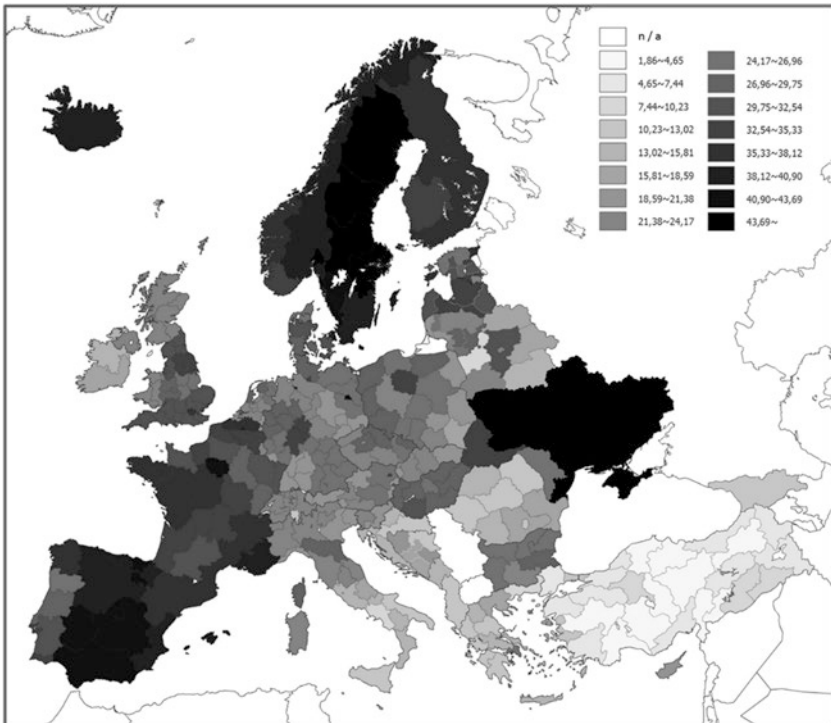


Fig. 6.1 The share of locally elected women in 441 European regions (percentages). Notes: The gray scale denotes the average share of locally elected women in a region (in percentages of the seats). The data is even more fine-grained than illustrated in this image

DESCRIBING WITHIN-COUNTRY VARIATION

The map in Fig. 6.1 shows that differences between the regions in Europe with the highest and lowest shares of locally elected women are striking. This is further illustrated in Fig 6.2. One of the most visible patterns from these boxplots is not only the difference between regions from different countries but a significant within-country variation. In a substantial number of countries, there are visible differences between the region with the highest and the lowest shares of women in local councils. For example, the number of locally elected women varies between 10 and 24 % in Greece. Another illustration is France where the equivalent variation is between 29 and 42 %. France is interesting to highlight since national legislation from

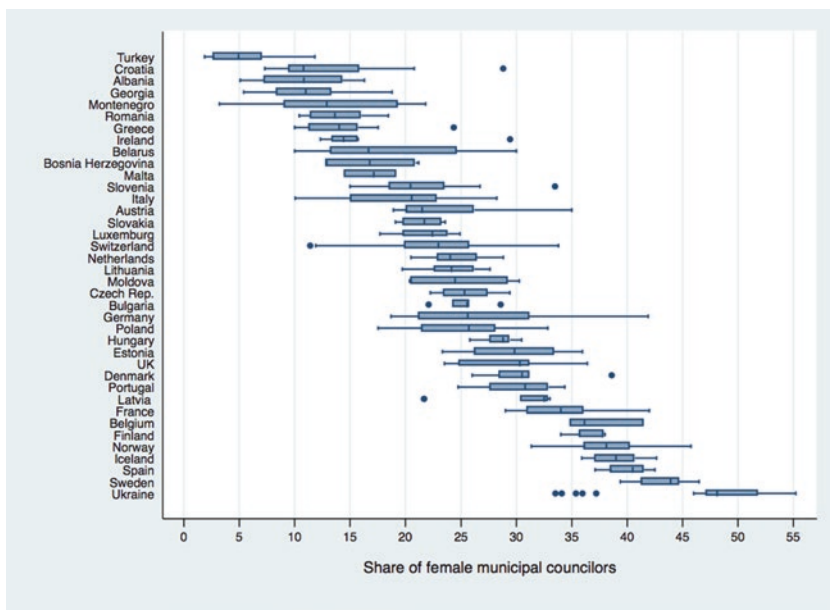


Fig. 6.2 The share (%) of locally elected women in the regions of 38 European countries. Notes: The variable is the share of locally elected female councilors aggregated to a mean of each region. The boxplots are ordered along the mean value of the regions in each country and report the 25th and 75th percentiles of the distribution through the lower and upper hinges of each box. While the whiskers refer to 1.5 of the interquartile range, the single dots are the extreme outliers in this distribution

Table 6.1 Classification of countries per intra-state variation in women's local representation

<i>High variation</i> (<i>>15 percentage points</i>)	<i>Medium level variation</i> (<i>10–15 percentage points</i>)	<i>Low variation</i> (<i><10 percentage points</i>)
Austria	Albania	Belgium
Belarus	Bosnia Herzegovina	Bulgaria
Croatia	Denmark	Czech Republic
Germany	Estonia	Finland
Ireland	France	Hungary
Italy	Georgia	Iceland
Montenegro	Greece	Lithuania
Norway	Latvia	Luxembourg
Poland	Moldavia	Malta
Slovenia	Netherlands	Romania
Switzerland	Portugal	Slovakia
Ukraine	Turkey	Spain
	United Kingdom	Sweden

2000 stipulates that in municipal elections in towns with more than 3500 residents party lists must include an equal number of women and men. In 2007 this was changed into a requirement that party lists must strictly alternate women and men. Moreover, municipal executives must include an equal number of women and men (Praud and Dauphin 2010, 26).

Yet, not all countries have a similar intra-state variance. In Table 6.1 we have classified the countries in our dataset in three groups: countries with a high level of subnational variation (15 percentage points and above), countries with a low level of subnational variation (below 10 percentage points), and a group with medium level of subnational variation (between 10 and 14 percentage points).

We are not going to comment on the results in Table 6.1 in detail. One thing to point out however is that the Scandinavian countries are found in all three categories: In Norway there is a high level (above 15 percentage points) of subnational variation; in Sweden the subnational variation is low (below 10 percentage points); and Denmark is found in the middle category with a medium level (between 10 and 15 percentage points) of subnational variation.

We have chosen to highlight the results for France and the Scandinavian countries in order to show that this database can pave the ground for re-evaluations of some of the most dominant theories explaining variation in

the number of women elected across time and space. First, the Scandinavian countries are all known for their “passion” for equality (Graubard ed. 1986) but the results from Norway and Denmark speak against the assumption of a common Nordic gender culture that produces a supportive environment for women in politics. Moreover, the Scandinavian countries—and France as well—are all modernized countries with high levels of socio-economic development. In sum, theories suggesting a general “rising tide” where modernization underpins cultural change, that is, attitudinal change from traditional to gender-equal values, which in turn affect the empowerment of women (Alexander and Welzel 2011; Bergh 2007; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Liebig 2000), are less suitable when it comes to explaining subnational patterns. The same goes for theories emphasizing the importance of national legislation prescribing parity—as in France—or the presence of voluntary gender quotas within political parties. The first gender quota was already introduced in 1974 in a political party in Norway, and since 1993 most Norwegian parties employ some type of regulation in order to increase the number of women elected (Bergqvist et al. 2000, 77). Yet, the effect is still not visible across all its regions.

EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

In this section we will give two examples of studies that have used the dataset presented in the previous section. The starting point for our discussion is that women's empowerment is a process that includes transformations of the milieu in which potential female political candidates find themselves. We believe that much could be gained from theorizing more carefully on dynamics in the space between broad socio-economic and cultural transformations on one hand and, on the other, strategic actions on behalf of political parties. The first study discussed below contributes with fine-grained understandings of socio-economic and political factors determining the political recruitment of women, whereas the second study contributes with a discussion on “shadowy arrangements” that hinders women to gain access to elected seats.

A Fine-Grained Analysis of the European Regions

Sundström and Stockemer (2015) ask the question “what determines women's political representation at the local level?” Their test includes a

number of regional-level covariates such as female labor force participation, population density, electoral strength of leftist parties, electoral strength of radical-right wing parties, and economic development (GDP per capita). Their model also includes a number of national-level covariates, such as voluntary party quotas, legislative gender quotas, a proportional representation (PR) electoral system, the years of female suffrage, federalism, and women's descriptive representation on the national level.

To start, the findings show that the mean proportion of women's representation at the local level in Europe (24.96%) is relatively similar to the mean proportion of women's representation at the national level (23.43% for the sample of European countries in the dataset). Interesting to note is that while national-level factors explain around 85 % of the variance in the dataset as a whole, around 15 % is explained by regional-level covariates (Sundström and Stockemer 2015, 12). But despite the fact that the national context accounts for the majority of the variance, there is still within-country variation that can only be captured by covariates at the subnational level. The analysis demonstrates that high levels of female labor force participation, a high support for leftist parties, weak support for radical right-wing parties,⁶ and a high degree of urbanization positively impact the representation of women at the local level.⁷

One of the most important results in this fine-grained analysis is that the proportion of female local councilors does not increase with the general economic development of a region. Instead, regions where women and men contribute roughly equally to the economy have more than six percentage points more female councilors than regions where women, as compared to men, only contribute one-fourth to the economic performance. Causality may run in both directions: A higher level of female labor force participation may lead to a larger pool of female political candidates to select from. However, it may also be the case that local councils with a high proportion of women motivate female citizens to start a paid career through, for example, the provision of public services like kindergarten (cf. Bratton and Ray 2002) or employment opportunities in the public sector (cf. Wängnerud and Sundell 2012).

Another important result is that in countries where women's descriptive representation is high nationally, it also tends to be comparatively high at the local level. In this case causality may also run in both directions. In a previous section, we referred to Smith et al. (2012) who demonstrate that the election of women as council members in larger cities in the United States and the election of women as mayors are interdependent

phenomena. They conclude that the presence of female councilors appears more important to electing a female mayor than vice versa, but they also suggest that it is plausible that certain female mayors recruit, train, and support potential female candidates for the council. In a similar way, the local councils in Europe might serve as a springboard for women to higher levels of political office (Buckley et al. 2015), and women in national parliaments might serve as role models for women at lower ranks.

To conclude, it comes as no surprise that factors at the national level are important for the situation at the subnational level. However, the analysis presented thus far demonstrates that one cannot take for granted that broad socio-economic transformations or value shifts *automatically* trickle down to the local level. There are factors in the local context that modify expected relationships. The conditions for women on the local labor market is one such factor, another is the strength of various parties. In regions where there is strong support for radical right-wing parties, developments in the political empowerment of women may even run in a different direction than in regions where the support for this type of parties is weaker and/or there is strong support for leftist parties.

Shadowy Arrangements that May Hinder Women to Step Forward

We believe that comparative data on women's descriptive representation at the local level is particularly useful for analyses of the interplay between formal rules and informal norms in the empowerment of women. In a previous section we referred to case studies on local councils by Pini and McDonald (2011). They suggest the persistence of "old-boys-networks" that exclude women from elected seats. This is in line with research by Fox and Lawless (2010) who found that highly qualified and politically well-connected women from both major parties in the United States were less likely than similarly situated men to be recruited to run for public office. They point to an "integrated ethos of masculinity" as an obstacle to women. Cheng and Tavits (2011) are a bit more specific when they spell out the potential mechanisms at work that may hinder women who aspire on a political career: political gatekeepers are more likely to recruit and promote people like themselves; there is a lack of women in male party gatekeepers' social networks; and there is an indirect signal effect. If most of the gatekeepers at the national or local level of political parties are men, this signals the existence of male-dominated networks which discourages women who otherwise would be willing to run.

In our study (Sundström and Wängnerud 2016) on corruption as an obstacle to women's descriptive representation we build on research inspired by feminist institutional theory (e.g. Kenny 2013; Krook 2010a). We argue that the influential supply and demand framework of recruitment of women to political posts (see Norris 1993) would gain from refined understandings of the milieu in which potential female candidates find themselves. This refinement includes analysis of informal norms embedded in a broad range of public institutions. At the general level we suggest that corruption indicates the presence of "shadowy arrangements" that benefit the already privileged (Johnson et al. 2013). More specifically we suggest that those shadowy arrangements affect the political recruitment of women in two ways: (1) they pose a direct obstacle to women when male-dominated networks influence political parties' candidate selection, and (2) they pose an indirect obstacle when they influence citizens' everyday life experiences and make women reluctant to engage in political matters.

What is particularly noteworthy in this study on corruption is the attempt to capture indirect effects. The line of reasoning is as follows: In studies of the political recruitment of women, it needs to be recognized that only small parts of most populations interact regularly with elected representatives and very few citizens are aware of who the party gatekeepers are. Instead of focusing on political parties, scholars should try to capture signals from the political system in the broad sense and measure citizen's experiences from encounters with a wide range of public institutions. The idea is to employ a citizen-based perspective and analyze signal effects that stem from how they generally "face the state" (see Lipsky, 1980).

The focus in Sundström and Wängnerud (2016) is the same as in Sundström and Stockemer (2015): the variation in the number of women elected to local councils across Europe. However, in Sundström and Wängnerud (2016) the main explanatory factor, the independent variable, is a regional measure of quality of government. What we want to test is the effect of shadowy arrangements that have the potential to negatively affect the empowerment of women. Arguably, it is difficult to find direct measures of male-dominated networks and norms embedded in public institutions that send out signals hindering women. At the same time, this thought-provoking line of reasoning needs large-N quantitative assessments and rigorous controls in order to develop.

The measure—the European Quality of Government Index, EQI—that we use should be seen as a proxy for an informal regime existing parallel to official political strategies and rhetoric. The EQI was assembled in 2009

by scholars at the Quality of Government Institute, at the University of Gothenburg, with funding from the European Commission (see Charron and Lapuente 2013; Charron et al. 2011, 2014). The investigators focused on the subnational units of 18 European countries and surveyed about 34,000 citizens on three different types of government services that people normally are in regular contact with: law enforcement, health care, and education. Respondents were asked to evaluate three aspects of these services: their quality, impartiality, and corruption.⁸ These indicators were then combined with data from the World Bank's World Government Indicator (WGI) and thus the final index also gauges corruption in the political sphere. In all, the EQI gauges the quality, impartiality, and corruption of government authorities in 167 regions (the number of units for which we have data on both the proportion of female local councilors and EQI). Figure 6.3 shows a scatterplot over the bivariate relationship between EQI and the share of female local councilors. Higher numbers of

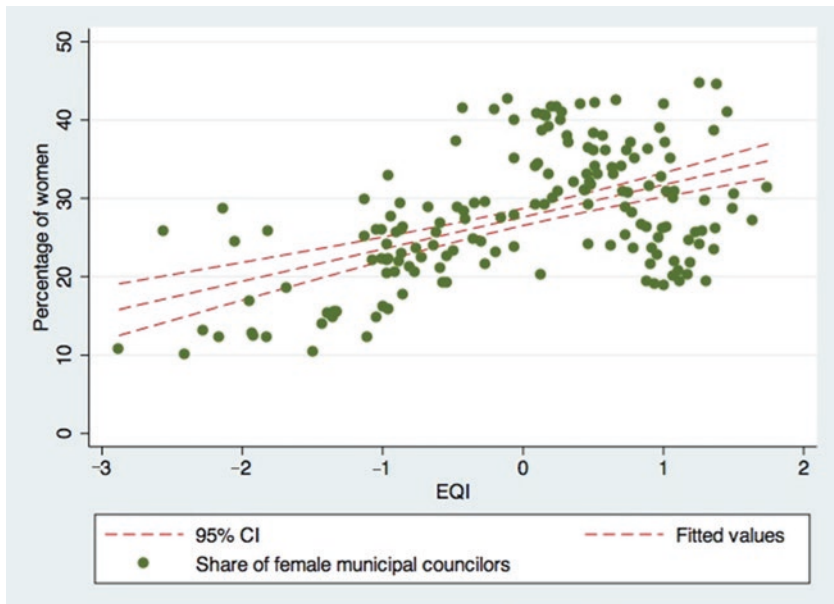


Fig. 6.3 Bivariate relationship: female councilors and quality of government. Notes: The scatterplot includes figures for 167 regions in 18 European countries. The EQI is a measure of quality of government, where higher values equal an improved quality. For a more detailed description, see Sundström and Wängnerud (2016)

EQI correspond with lower levels of corruption, partiality, and ineffectiveness and lower numbers correspond with higher levels of these factors.

In order to rule out alternative explanations for the dependent variable, the proportion of female local councilors, our study included a large number of control variables in a multilevel model where these regions are clustered in countries. First, we included six national-level controls: type of election system, legislative gender quota at the subnational level, voluntary party gender quotas, women's labor force participation, degrees of democracy, and location inside or outside of Central and Eastern Europe. Second, at the regional level we included measures on GDP per capita and the level of education. In total, this is to be considered a rather tough test but the results indicate that our full model, including all controls, has a good fit and explains a substantial part of the variance in the proportion of locally elected women across Europe. The models uniformly show that low quality of government hampers women's presence in local politics. Moreover, to further challenge the robustness of the results we performed extensive tests to disentangle nuanced effects from subcomponents of the regional governance index. The most interesting takeaway from these additional analyses is that the subcomponent related to corruption seems to be the strongest predictor: the higher the level of corruption in public institutions the lower the number of female local councilors.

In this study (Sundström and Wängnerud 2016) we are able to show that there is a significant relationship between the quality of local government institutions and women's descriptive representation. However, we are only able to theoretically argue for plausible mechanisms at work. In most contemporary societies women constitute a disadvantaged group in comparison to men. It is not far-fetched to believe that what we capture is the existence of shadowy arrangements that send out signals of "no equal treatment" to female citizens that otherwise would have been willing to step forward as political candidates. To conclude, we firmly believe that research on the role of political parties in recruitment processes and the election of women needs to take into account the broader context outlined above. The findings presented blur the classical distinction between supply and demand factors since supply, whether women come forward as candidates, seems to be strongly related to qualities embedded in a variety of local institutions. In doing so, this chapter contributes to a discussion on gendered recruitment that recently has incorporated insights from feminist institutionalism (see Krook 2010b; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016).

DEVELOPING THE FIELD FURTHER

So far, most studies on women's political empowerment at the local level have been carried out as single case studies or very limited cross-country comparisons. Our main contribution in this chapter has been the presentation of a newly collected dataset covering the share of female local councilors across 441 regions in 38 European countries. We have highlighted results from two publications using this database that demonstrate how factors in the local context, such as the quality of government authorities and the conditions for women in the labor market, impact the election of women to local councils. These results are an important part of the story on the empowerment of women since members of local councils, even though they are not legislators, exert tremendous influence in the local community through municipal taxation and the local provision of public services.

We foresee various types of future studies that would gain from using this type of data. First, this data can be used to analyze multilevel access, whether a high presence of women "trickle down" from top positions or "rise from below." As previously discussed, there is an ongoing debate in the research on whether women in national parliaments are role models that inspire women to run for local offices, or if the relationship is the opposite (cf. Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Fox and Lawless 2010; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007). Buckley et al. (2015) find, in a study on Ireland, that when women serve in local government their opportunities for election to national office increase significantly. However, the local experience does not seem to be equally important for men. With new data, researchers can advance the examination of whether or not women's representation is growing from the local level or starts at higher ranks and dissipates to lower elected tiers. They can also, in a more conclusive way, compare patterns for women and men.

Second, we foresee a number of studies that examine the relationship between women's descriptive representation and public opinion on standpoints related to gender equality. There is a growing literature that analyzes whether there is an effect on public opinion from having female political leaders (Alexander 2012; Barnes and Burchard 2013). This issue is best studied taking within-country variance into account, as gender equality attitudes vary dramatically not only across countries but also within countries. Using data on the local level would allow scholars to hold national gender culture constant and get a more

detailed understanding on dynamics between women in political positions and public opinion related to gender equality (cf. Kokkonen and Wängnerud 2016).

A third avenue of research examines the link between descriptive and substantive representation of women. In the introduction to this chapter we referred to a number of studies using subnational variation in Norway and Sweden to study effects of having a large share of female local councilors on gender equality in the everyday lives of citizens. The study from Norway (Bratton and Ray 2002) analyzes childcare coverage in Norwegian municipalities in 1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, and 1991 and demonstrates that the number of women elected influenced policy outputs (increased childcare coverage), but that the effect of female representation was not constant, being most obvious in periods of policy innovation. In a similar vein, the study from Sweden (Wängnerud and Sundell 2012) shows that the situation regarding gender equality in the everyday life of citizens (the authors use six different indicators) in 2008 to some extent was determined by the number of women elected to the local councils in the 1990s. These studies suggest that the impact on policy from having women in politics may be bound by context-specific processes and that there are no simplistic relationships between descriptive and substantive representation of women. To capture this nuanced relationship, empirical information regarding women on elected seats should ideally be as detailed and specific as possible. Therefore, the access to new data on the local level outside the Scandinavian countries would certainly be a positive addition to this strand of research.

A final area for future research on women in local politics to touch upon is the entrance of new parties and implications for gender equality. In an earlier section we pointed out that one cannot take for granted that developments at the national level automatically trickle down to the local level. Further research on the role of new political parties such as radical right-wing parties, currently gaining strength in many European countries, could reveal that there is no linear process leading to gender equality. We have already demonstrated that there is significant subnational variation in the share of female local councilors. It might be the case that this variation becomes even stronger in the future: regions where certain political parties dominate the scene may continue to display low numbers, or even start to display diminishing numbers, whereas other regions will show increases in the number of female local councilors. Thus far these types of comparative assessments have been absent from research as data availability have been poor.

In the long run, what we would like to see is data collection at the local level in countries outside Europe. New theoretical insights on the political empowerment of women could be reached from regional success stories. From analyzing certain regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa or the countries within Eastern and Central Europe, it is evident that the data will show surprising patterns. For instance, the authors of this chapter have already noted (see the map in Fig. 6.1) that Ukraine, to our surprise, has one of the absolute highest shares of locally elected women in the world (almost reaching 50%). Importantly the country has reached this goal without gender quotas in the legislation or voluntary schemes within parties. This result is in fact contrary to most theoretical expectations and it is therefore interesting to see what may have led to such outcomes. Similar results and exploratory studies on other regions may prove to generate crucial knowledge on factors seldom examined when discussing women in national parliaments. We are not asking for idiosyncratic factors valid only for one or two cases at a time but for insights that would help to unveil the complex interactions that lead to a strengthened position for women in politics and in their everyday lives.

NOTES

1. Strictly speaking, this is about possibilities for *parents* to successfully combine a paid career and a family. However, in most contemporary societies women are the main care-giver in the family, staying home with small children if there are no other options available.
2. This first dataset was compiled in 2013 (see Sundström 2013). Since then additional data have been collected. Lena Wängnerud is adviser to the project.
3. Regional assemblies were ruled out since they are not really comparable across the various political systems in Europe.
4. See the Appendices 1 and 2 in Sundström and Wängnerud (2016, 366–367) for a description of areas of responsibilities for various local councils and some more details on the data collection.
5. For some countries it is impossible to get data that is disaggregated to each single local council (even though the data collected reflect this level). One should be aware that the procedure of aggregating to regional averages evens out actual differences such as the difference between the Swedish municipalities Örkelljunga (29.3%) and Tranemo (54.1%) mentioned in the introduction to this chapter.

6. Party families were coded based on the Party Manifesto project. While the attribution of parties into the left-wing category is relatively straightforward, it is sometimes more difficult to differentiate a (very) conservative party from a radical right-wing party and to correctly attribute regional parties. A party is coded as belonging to the radical right if it comprises three features: authoritarianism, populism, and the issue ownership of national identity against foreign influences.
7. For detailed information on methods see Sundström and Stockemer (2015). The technique used is hierarchical linear modeling where 272 regions are clustered in 29 countries.
8. The survey consisted of 16 independent questions related to the three aspects of good governance. For details on the construction of the index, see Sundström and Wängnerud (2016, 5).

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