Reform to Better Representation? The Institutional and Cultural Determinants of the Representation of Women in Legislatures

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There is disagreement regarding which factors have an impact more on the number of female legislators in a country. Some scholars say that institutional factors (such as the electoral system and gender quotas) facilitate an increase in the percentage of female representatives. Other scholars say that cultural factors (related to societal views on women's roles) are the main factor. However, no study done so far has adequately compared side by side the effects that institutional and cultural factors have on the number of female representative in a national legislature. This leads me to ask what factors play the biggest role in the number of female legislators in a country?

First, I provide a review of the literature that has been done on the number of female legislators. The review is divided into research that has examined institutional factors and research that has examined cultural factors. Next, I then provide an argument as to why I believe that cultural factors will have more predominance over institutional factors -- and that institutional arrangements that facilitate higher female representation are instead a function of cultural factors. This is because at every step of the electoral process, cultural attitudes towards women's role in politics can come into effect, and decrease the likelihood of a female legislator being elected.

This leads me to test two hypotheses in this paper. The first hypothesis is that the presence of institutional rules that facilitate an increased representation of women (namely, voluntary party quotas and legal gender quotas) are found in countries with more egalitarian views of the role of women in politics and society. The second hypothesis is that the proportion of females in a country's legislature is dependent on cultural views toward women in politics and society, and not on institutional factors (namely, the electoral system and both voluntary and legal gender quotas). The results

from the analyses provide only partial confirmation for the first hypothesis, but full confirmation for the second hypothesis. Finally, conclusions are given that describe the implications of the findings, along with limitations of the current research.

Literature Review

Institutional Factors

There have been several explanations that attempt to explain differences in countries regarding the representation of women in national legislatures. These explanations can be classified into two categories: institutional and cultural factors.

Institutional factors can be classified as those relating to institutional rules and laws that facilitate the election of women to legislatures. Specifically, these factors can be divided into two areas: Electoral systems and gender quotas. Most of the evidence from this area of research has shown that legislatures with proportional electoral systems have higher proportions of female legislators than legislatures with majoritarian electoral systems (Rule, 1987; Kenworthy and Malami, 1999; Paxton and Hughes, 2007).

Several reasons have been given as to why this is the case. One reason is that countries with proportional electoral systems have higher district magnitudes. When there is a higher district magnitude in a country, a party will have a higher chance of winning several seats in the same district. As a result, parties will then consider representing a variety of interests, including those related to gender issues (Tripp and Kang, 2008).

Some scholars argue because it is easier to balance the genders on party lists in order to appeal to wider electorates (Maltand, 2005). Others argue that it is because of

contagion effects. This occurs when parties place more women on their party lists in response to one party initially doing so (Matland and Studlar, 1996).

Gender quotas are another institutional mechanism as to which the increased representation of women can be facilitated. Quotas can be in the form of voluntary party quotas, compulsory party quotas, or reserved legislative seats for women. Initial research did not show a significant relationship between the implementation of a gender quota and the number of female legislators (Reynolds, 1999; Kunovich and Paxton, 2005), but recent research has done so (Caul, 2001; Tripp and Kang, 2008). In addition, further research has shown that the ability of gender quotas to increase female representation is conditional on other factors in the political environment (Krook, 2010).

Cultural Factors

Cultural factors are those factors that relate to views of women's role in society. Initially, investigations into cultural factors did not directly measure attitudes toward women's roles, but instead used proxy measurements. These include assessing the impact of religion, region, and economic development on the number of female legislators. Namely, this research has shown that Muslim countries hinder the number of female legislators (Reynolds, 1999). Also, Scandinavian countries and countries with strong parties on the left are more likely to have a higher number of female legislators (Kenworthy and Malami, 1999). The research also shows that countries with higher levels of economic development are more likely to have higher levels of female representatives in countries (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). The timing of women's

suffrage in a country has also been used as a proxy measurement for cultural characteristics (Salmond, 2006).

More recently, there has been a turn to using actual measures of views of women's role in politics and society. Paxton and Kunovich (2003) used data from the World Values Survey to show that attitudes toward women in society were strongly related to the number of female legislators. This study, however, only partially took into account institutional factors, since the study controlled for proportional legislatures, but not gender quotas.

Theory

While institutions have been shown to have a strong relationship with the number of women in legislatures, the impact of cultural factors can provide a stronger explanation as to why some countries have more female legislators. This is because institutional arrangements, such as quotas or proportional electoral systems are created out of a sense of fairness and equity. Essentially, this is about the causal process of institutional reform.

A country with a higher sense of gender equality in its society will be more likely to enact gender quota laws or proportional legislatures. While gender quotas lead to the increase of women in legislatures, the impetus of enacting those quotas lies in the cultural attitudes in place in a given country. In other words, a sense of gender equality in a country leads a country or parties within a country to enact quota rules, which in turn increases the number of female representatives in a national legislature.

However, an increased representation of women can occur in the absence of institutions that facilitate women's representation. Social norms in a country play a role

in all steps toward a women getting elected to office. Matland (2005) devised a sequence of events that show the path of potential candidates to legislative office. These steps are selecting yourself, being selected by the party, and getting elected. However, Matland does not explicitly demonstrate how cultural attitudes toward women come into effect at step in the process. Despite this, at each one of these steps, the role of gender ideology can be seen.

Women have to see themselves a viable candidates for elected office first and foremost. If someone does not see herself as a possible candidate, then she will not take the first steps to make a run for office. This sense of seeing oneself as a candidate is important when looking at differences between men and women in political ambition. It has been shown that women are less likely than men to think of themselves as a candidate for political office. This has affected the percentage of female legislators in the United States (Lawless and Fox, 2005). In addition, women are more likely to discuss politics with others and become more politically active if they have role models in the form of female politicians (Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2007).

Women then have to also be recruited as candidates for office. This step happens at the party level. At this stage, it is not about how women see themselves as potential candidates, but how political actors see women as potential candidates. In societies where there is a higher sense of gender equality, one could expect to find that political gatekeepers will be more willing to recruit women for political office. Also in these societies, parties will be more likely to implement voluntary gender quotas in their campaigns.

Finally, voters have the ultimate decision on whether or not a woman gets elected to office. This step is also where institutional rules come into the picture in facilitating women's representation. If a country has a party list version of proportional representation, a larger district magnitude, or a legal gender quota, then the likelihood of a female getting elected to office increases. However, for smaller magnitude districts and non-proportional electoral systems, voters' perceptions of the appropriate role of women in society can come into play. There is evidence that gender biases can still come into effect today, which will make voters less likely to vote for female candidates (Lawless, 2004; Dolan, 2010).

Still, however, no study has directly compared institutional factors to cultural factors. Such a direct comparison would provide a clearer understanding as to which factors facilitate a greater representation of women in legislatures. While gender quotas are the result of notions of gender equality in a country, it is not a necessary condition for increasing the number of women in a legislature. Other factors, such as self-perceptions as a potential candidate and internal party decisions, can lead to the increase of female legislators in the absence of gender quotas.

As a result, I believe that when comparing the effects of gender quotas to that of cultural attitudes, we can expect to find that cultural factors have a stronger effect in explaining the amount of women in a national legislature as compared to the effect of gender quotas and electoral system rules. Institutional rules, thus, are a sufficient, but not a necessary factor in facilitating the representation of women in national legislatures. My hypotheses are thus as follows:

Hypothesis 1: More positive views of women's role in society will be positively related to the implementation of a legal gender quota, the size of the legal quota, and the presence of voluntary party quotas in a country.

Hypothesis 2: Views of women's role in society will have a stronger effect than legal gender quotas, voluntary party quotas, and the electoral system on increasing the percentage of female members of a country's national legislature.

Data and Methods

Hypothesis 1

The data that I use comes from the Democracy Cross-national Dataset (Norris, 2009). The latest version of the dataset includes questions that allow me to information from the 2005 edition of the World Values Survey (WVS), which includes questions about women's role in politics and society. To test for Hypothesis 1, I use three different institutional dependent variables.

Dependent Variables

My dependent variables for Hypothesis 1 are the presence of a voluntary party quota in a country, the proportion a country's legal gender quota, and the presence of a gender quota law in a country. For the information in these variables, I used data in the Democracy Cross-National Dataset from the Quotas Project. In addition, I created a new variable for the presence of voluntary party quotas in a country in 2005 through using information from Krook (2010). The first dependent variable is the presence of voluntary party quotas in a country or not. The second dependent variable is the size of a country's

legal quota. The final dependent variable is the presence of a legal quota in a country or not.

Independent Variables

I use four different independent variables to test Hypothesis 1. All four of the independent variables come from data in the 2005 WVS. The first independent variable is an interval measurement of the average level of support for women in politics in each country. The scale goes from one (being the least support) and four (being the greatest support).

The second independent variable is an interval measurement of the average level of approval in each country for the statement that when jobs are scarce, men have more of a right to a job than women do. The scale goes from one (being the greatest agreement with the statement) to three (being the least agreement with the statement).

The third independent variable is an interval measurement of the average level of agreement that men make better political leaders than women. The scale goes from one (being the greatest agreement with the statement) to four (being the least agreement with the statement).

The final independent variable is an indexed gender equality scale that is measured on a 100-point scale. The scale consists of five items. The first item is the question asking if men make better political leaders than women. The second item is from the question that asks the statement when jobs are scarce, if men have more of a right to a job than women do. The third item is from a question that asks if the respondent agrees that a university education is more important for a boy than a girl. The

fourth item is from a question that asks if the respondent thinks that a woman needs to have a child in order to be fulfilled. The final item asks the respondent if they approve of a woman's choice in becoming a single parent. The average score is used for each country.

The measures for the independent variable thus allow me to directly measure attitudes towards women in politics in each country, in addition to also measuring attitudes towards women's role in society as a whole. This will allow me to see if levels of representation are affected by cultural factors limited to politics, or by broader factors that go beyond politics. However, the WVS only has data on a restricted number of countries in the dataset, which does not encompass the entire world. However, given the case selection for the countries in the WVS, it will still allow me to make general inferences about the universe of democratic countries.[1]

Control Variables

I also use a couple of control variables to test this hypothesis. The first control is for democracy, and I use the country's Freedom House rating in 2004 to capture this variable (Freedom House, 2005). I also added in a control for a country's membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

All of the independent variables are tested in separate models on each of the dependent variables. Specifically, the independent variables are tested in separate binary logistic models for the dependent variable measuring the presence of voluntary party quotas in a country. The independent variables are tested in separate ordinary least

[1] The questions from the WVS have a N-size ranging from 52 countries to 77 countries, depending on the question.

squares regressions with robust standard errors for the dependent variable measuring the size of a legal gender quota. Finally, the independent variables are each tested in separate binary logistic models for the dependent variable measuring the presence of a legal gender quota in a country.

Hypothesis 2

Dependent Variables

To test Hypothesis 2, I use the percentage of women in the lower house[2] of a country's national legislature in 2004 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2005) as the dependent variable. This variable ranges from 0 percent to 48.8 percent.

Independent Variables

I use the same four independent variables from Hypothesis 1 as my independent variables for Hypothesis 2. Again, these variables are: the average level of support for women in politics in each country, the average level of approval in that men have more of a right to a job than women do when jobs are scare, the average level of agreement that men make better political leaders than women, and the 100-point indexed gender equality scale. Each of the independent variables is tested in separate models.

Control Variables

In each of the four models, I use the same five control variables. The first control is for democracy (which I use the same Freedom House measurement in Hypothesis 1). The second control is for OECD membership. The third control variable is the dummy

[2] For countries without an upper chamber, the percentage is taken from the unicameral legislature.

variable for whether or not a legal gender quota is in place in a country. The fourth control is the dummy variable for whether or not the country in question has a legal gender quota for its legislature.[3] The final control variable is for whether the electoral system used for the legislative election in a given country is proportional or not.[4] All four of the models being used to test Hypothesis 2 are run using ordinary least squares regression with robust standard errors.

Results

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the results on the tests on Hypothesis 1. They test factors that affect the presence of voluntary party quotas, the size of a legal gender quota, and the presence of a legal gender quota respectively. Looking first at Table 1, we see that measures of cultural attitudes toward women's role in politics and society are not significantly related to the implementation of a voluntary gender quota by a political party in a country.

Table 1 Here

Figure 1 Here

Seeing this in graph form helps show why as well. Figure 1 shows the probability of a developed country and a developing country[5] having a party that implements a

[3] I measured only for whether or not a gender quota law was in place, and not the size of a country's legal gender quota. This is because the results in the model when using the two different variables were similar.

[4] For this variable, if the country either has a form of proportional representation or mixed-member proportional representation, the electoral system is classified as proportional. All other electoral systems are considered non-proportional.

[5] For this distinction of developed and developing countries, I classified a hypothetical developed country as being fully democratic (with a score of 1 on the Freedom House scale), an OECD member, and having a proportional legislature. I classified a developing

voluntary gender quota, dependent on the country's average support for women in politics. As we see, as support for women in politics rises in each type of country, the probability of having a voluntary quota increases, but not by that much. The key difference here is among developed and developing countries, since developed countries already start out with a high probability of having a party that has a voluntary quota. Developing countries still do not have a high probability of having a party with a voluntary country, even when support for women in politics is at the highest level. This shows that the division is more about economic development and not cultural attitudes.

Table 2 Here

Figure 2 Here

Table 2 shows factors that affect the size of a legal gender quota in a country. The regression models show that all four of the independent variables are significantly related to the size of a country's gender quota. Namely, countries with more egalitarian views of gender roles related to both politics and society in general are more likely to have a higher proportion for their legal gender quota. Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of the relationship between the size of a country's legal gender quota and their level of support for women in politics.

Table 3 Here

Figure 3 Here

Table 3 shows factors that affect the presence of a legal gender quota in a country. Here, only support for women in politics is significantly related to the presence of a legal gender quota in a country. Figure 3 shows the probability of a developed country and a

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country as being only partially democratic (with a score of 4 on the Freedom House scale), not being an OECD member, and having a proportional legislature.

developing country having a legal gender quota, dependent on the country's average support for women in politics. Here, we see that both developed and developing countries have an almost zero probability of having a legal gender quota when support for women in politics is at its lowest level. When support for women in politics rises, the probability of a legal quota rises for both types of countries, albeit at a higher rate for developing countries.

Table 4 Here

Table 4 tests Hypothesis 2, showing which factors affect the percentage of women in national legislatures. Here, we see that all four independent variables are strongly correlated with the percentage of female legislators. Specifically, the more egalitarian a country is when it comes to the roles of women in politics and society in general, the more female representatives are present in a country. In addition, none of the institutional variables (electoral system, legal gender quotas, and voluntary gender quotas) are significantly related to the proportion of females in national legislatures.

Figure 4 Here

Figure 5 Here

Figures 4 and 5 show more closely the relationship between cultural attitudes and the percentage of female legislators. Figure 4 shows the relationship between support for women in politics and the percentage of female legislators in a country. The figure clearly shows that for the cases in the study, the percentage of female legislators increases as average support for women in politics rises in a country. Figure 5 shows the relationship between the gender equality scale and the percentage of female legislators.

The figure shows that as a country scores higher on the equality scale, the percentage of female legislators increases.

Conclusions

What accounts for the variation of female members of legislatures across countries? Recent scholarship has been divided between institutional and cultural factors that affect the number of female legislators. This study set out to fully compare the effects of institutional factors (voluntary party quotas, legal gender quotas, and electoral systems) and cultural attitudes towards women's role in politics and society in general to see which of these two key factors most affects the proportion of female legislators in a country.

The results show a partial confirmation of the first hypothesis. Specifically, countries with more egalitarian views towards the role of women in society are more likely to have a higher proportion for their legal gender quota. In addition, there is evidence that the higher the level of support for women in politics is in a country, the higher the size a gender quota will be.

The results also fully confirm the second hypothesis. Namely, countries that have more egalitarian views toward women in politics and society in general will have a higher proportion of females in their national legislature. Also, institutional factors, being the electoral system, voluntary party quotas, and legal gender quotas have no effect on the proportion of female legislators in a country.

The results show the impact that cultural attitudes can play in the political process. These attitudes can have effects that are stronger than institutions that are

present in a given political system. So while having institutions that are more favorable to increasing the number of female legislators is a good step for countries, it is not a substitute for having a culture among the public that fosters a sense of gender equality.

There are several potential reasons for why the first hypothesis was not fully confirmed. The implementation of voluntary gender quotas by parties might not have a relationship with views of women in society because the decision to put in place a voluntary quota is the decision of the party alone. A political party only represents a smaller segment of a society, as opposed to society as a whole. Therefore, certain subgroups within a country that have more egalitarian gender views might make it a point to advance gender equality within their own ranks, irrespective of the views of the broader society.

There is also a potential reason for why the implementation of legal gender quotas may only be related to support for women in politics. This is because the issue of gender quotas is restricted only to the question of women in the political arena, and not other aspects of social life. In addition, remember, that the idea of women being just as good as men at politics is not significantly related to the implementation of legal gender quotas. This might mean that in some countries, while people generally support the idea of women taking part in the political process, it does not mean they believe that they believe men and women are equal in the capacities as politicians.

Despite the findings, my results were only limited to one point in time. This is because additional data in its present form regarding views of women's roles in society are not available for other years. However, the results found in this study provide for a

starting point in understanding the differential impacts that institutions and cultural attitudes have on the number of female legislators.

Also, these results do provide a blueprint regarding how representation of women in legislatures can be increased. First, within countries, societies can foster an environment that allows more women to see themselves as potential candidates for office. This will lead to more women wanting to run for political office. Next, parties can become more proactive by seeking out more women as candidates for office, in addition to welcoming in those women who have decided to run for office. Finally, voters need to be conscious about their beliefs about gender roles in society, and evaluate candidates on their policies and merits, and not their gender. All of these processes happen when there is a society in place in a country that believes that women have an equal right as men to participate in the political arena and to compete for the same job, and are seen as being equally capable as men at being in politics.

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Table 1: Voluntary Party Quotas

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Democracy	-0.708***	-0.906***	-0.869**	-0.805**
	(0.267)	(0.333)	(0.370)	(0.370)
OECD	0.548	-0.126	-0.0697	-0.316
	(0.733)	(0.744)	(0.811)	(0.853)
Proportional	-0.194	-0.515	-0.471	-0.707
	(0.672)	(0.759)	(0.923)	(0.971)
Support for Women in Politics	0.367			
	(0.833)			
Men Have More Rights to a Job		0.0932		
		(1.044)		
Men Are Better at Politics			0.310	
			(0.698)	
Gender Equality Scale				0.0492
				(0.0469)
Constant	0.285	1.939	1.286	-1.246
	(2.391)	(2.498)	(2.499)	(3.606)
N	77	70	55	52
R^2	0.241	0.199	0.230	0.219

Binary Logistic Regression, Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 2: Size of Legal Gender Quota

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Democracy	-0.106	-0.602	-0.300	-0.173
	(0.439)	(0.498)	(0.552)	(0.578)
OECD	-2.082	-3.810	-5.525	-5.409
	(3.380)	(3.869)	(3.849)	(4.053)
Proportional+	0.355			
	(2.713)			
Support for Women in Politics	6.834**			
	(2.973)			
Men Have More Rights to a Job		7.821**		
		(3.844)		
Men Are Better at Politics			5.343**	
			(2.359)	
Gender Equality Scale				0.338**
				(0.157)
Constant	-13.33**	-9.909	-7.587	-17.75*
	(5.986)	(6.473)	(5.039)	(9.618)
N	77	71	56	53
R^2	0.082	0.051	0.105	0.095

Ordinary Least Squares Regression, Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

+Proportional variable dropped from Models 2, 3, and 4 due to multicollinearity.

Table 3: Legal Gender Quota Implemented

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Democracy	0.201	0.125	-0.105	0.0641
	(0.282)	(0.294)	(0.265)	(0.284)
OECD	-0.723	-0.688	-1.233	-2.415*
	(0.954)	(0.882)	(1.041)	(1.356)
Proportional+	1.946*	1.718		
	(1.162)	(1.211)		
Support for Women in Politics	2.249*			
	(1.153)			
Men Have More Rights to a Job		0.825		
		(1.251)		
Men are Better at Politics			0.590	
			(0.871)	
Gender Equality Scale				0.107
				(0.0701)
Constant	-9.386**	-4.799	-2.393	-8.654
	(3.775)	(3.330)	(2.578)	(5.287)
N	77	70	56	53
R^2	0.130	0.060	0.033	0.110

Binary Logistic Regression, Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

+Proportional variable dropped from Models 3 and 4 due to multicollinearity.

Table 4: Proportion of Female Legislators in National Legislatures

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Democracy	0.182	-0.415	0.116	-0.0312
	(0.973)	(0.911)	(1.074)	(1.048)
OECD	2.580	3.251	2.751	3.644
	(2.986)	(2.942)	(3.268)	(3.000)
Legal Gender Quota	-4.502	-0.957	-1.998	-0.0899
	(2.817)	(2.653)	(2.658)	(2.523)
Party Quota	0.177	0.379	1.511	1.787
	(2.225)	(2.289)	(2.640)	(2.559)
Proportional	2.975	2.931	2.081	-0.543
	(2.212)	(2.394)	(2.720)	(2.839)
Support for Women in Politics	10.54***			
	(2.977)			
Men Have More Rights to a Job		13.32***		
		(3.888)		
Men are Better at Politics			9.308***	
			(2.324)	
Gender Equality Scale				0.626***
				(0.159)
Constant	-13.18	-13.85	-9.884	-28.00**
	(9.117)	(9.003)	(8.889)	(12.16)
N	75	69	54	51
R^2	0.289	0.359	0.416	0.481

Ordinary Least Squares Regression, Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Figure 1: Probability of Having Voluntary Party Quotas

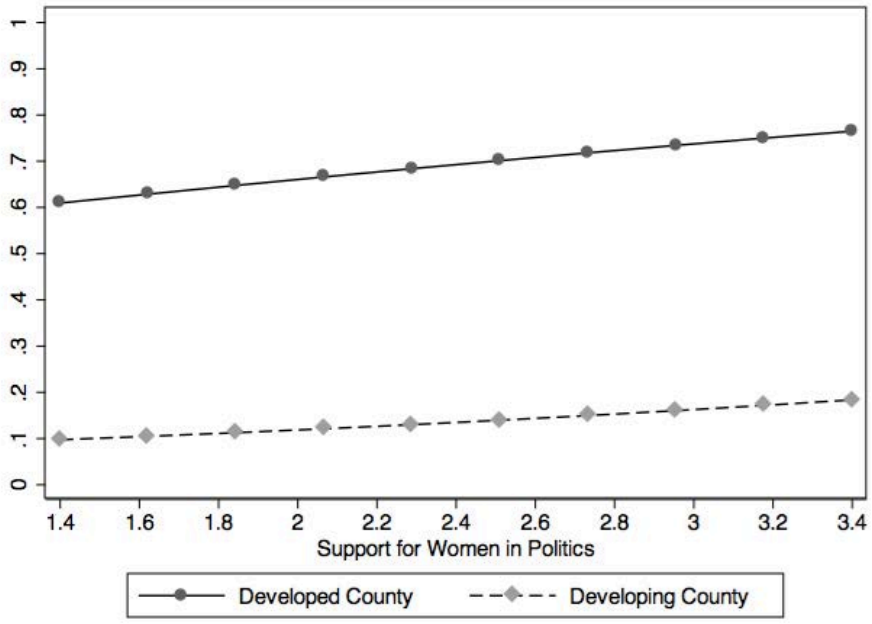


Figure 2: Size of Legal Gender Quotas in Countries

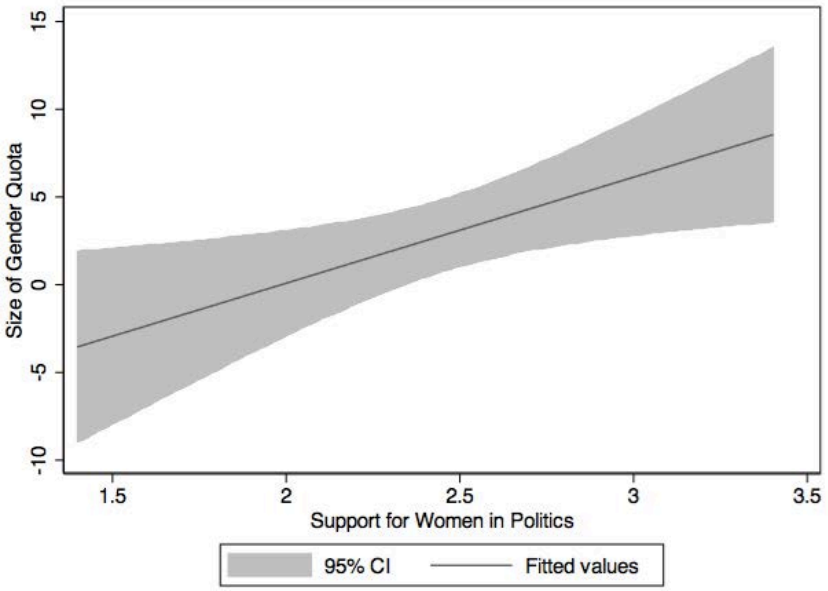


Figure 3: Probability of Legal Gender Quota Implementation

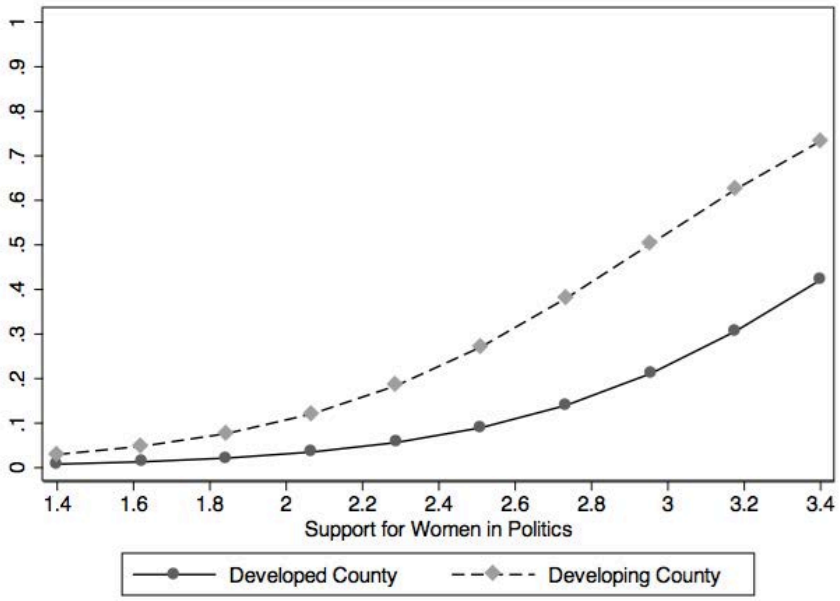


Figure 4

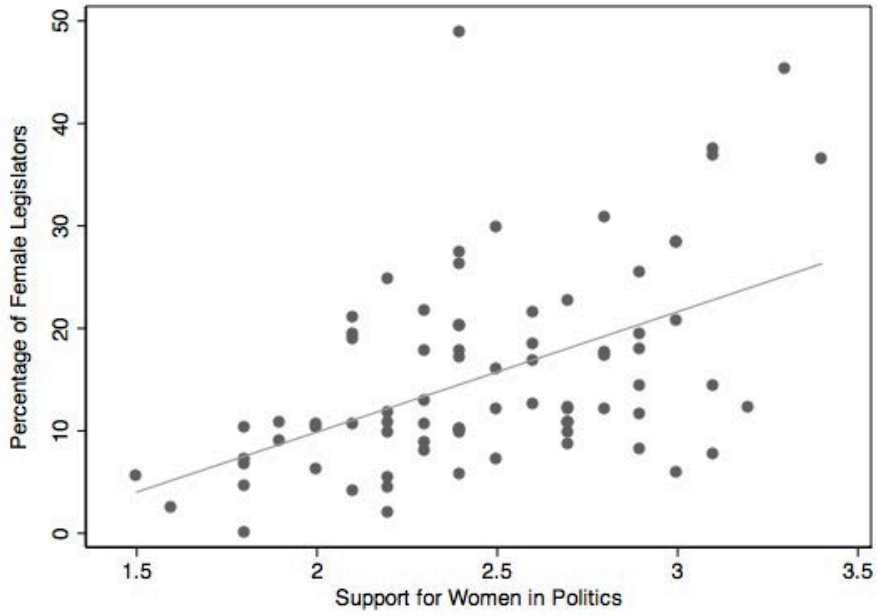
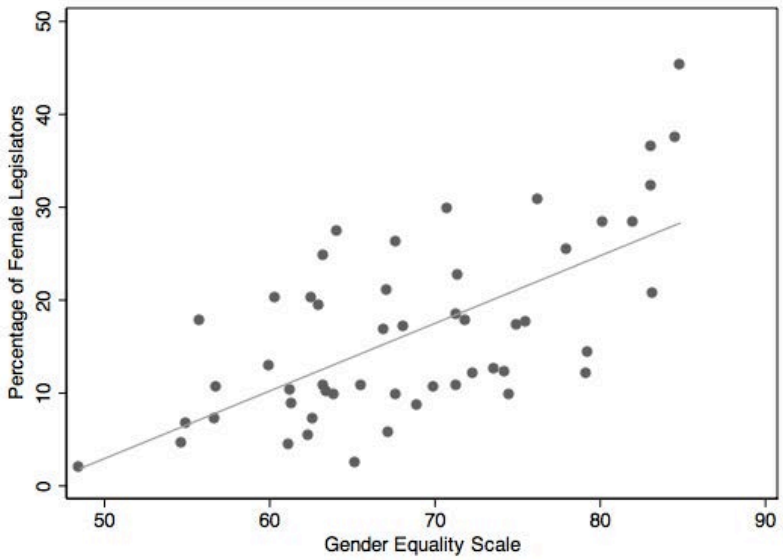


Figure 5


Percentage of Female Legislators
0
10
20
30
40
50
50
60
70
80
90
Gender Equality Scale