



UNIVERSITY OF  
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# WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE EUROPEAN REGIONS

The Impact from Corruption and Bad Governance

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## ABSTRACT

While much of the literature on descriptive representation of women focuses on the formal role played by political parties and institutions, a growing body of research emphasizes the impact of informal institutions. We build on this scholarship and hypothesize that, as corruption and partiality in government favor clientelism and advancement of candidates with access to traditional networks, this will have a negative impact on the proportion of elected women. We test this argument on a new, as yet unused dataset on locally elected councilors in 167 regions of 18 European countries. Using a novel measure of regional corruption and quality of government, we perform a multi-level analysis with several regional-level as well as national-level control variables. As such, this article is one of the first to study the variance of women's local political representation within countries in a comparative perspective. The results suggest that levels of corruption, partiality, and ineffectiveness of government substantially affect the proportion of female councilors. The article contributes by illustrating how bad governance is an important determinant for women's political presence in contemporary Europe and concludes that hindrances to female representation are not eliminated by the reformation of formal/organizational factors alone.

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## INTRODUCTION

Parties are becoming the key variable in research on women's political representation, especially in research focusing on Europe. Gallagher and Marsh (1988) have aptly described parties' candidate selection procedures as "the secret garden of politics," but feminist scholars have succeeded in shedding light on organizational factors such as the presence of party gender quotas (Dahlerup 2006; Krook 2009; Paxton et al. 2010; Tripp and Kang 2008). Research has also highlighted how aspects such as centralization and formalization affect the recruitment of women. One convincing finding is that, for the advancement of women, it is important that the party organization has ties with organizations outside the party because these provide more points of access for women (Kittilson 2006, 48-49).

There is little doubt that parties, and how they organize, are decisive for the advancement of women. A burgeoning field of research, however, has started to complement previous literature by looking at informal influences in the selection of female political candidates. In a recent study, Fox and Lawless (2010) point to an "ingrained ethos of masculinity" in political parties; they found that highly qualified and politically well-connected women from both major political parties in the United States are less likely than similarly situated men to be recruited to run for public office. Cheng and Tavits (2011) discuss three mechanisms at work in informal dynamics: (i) gatekeepers are more likely to recruit and promote people like themselves, (ii) there is a lack of women in male party gatekeepers' social networks, and (iii) there is an indirect signal effect – if most of the gatekeepers at the national or local level are men, this signals that there is an "old boys' club at work," which discourages women's participation.

Our study should be seen as part of the burgeoning field of research focusing on informal influences in the selection of female political candidates. We highlight a previously overlooked factor, namely, the role of corruption and bad governance. Our research draws on insights gained from studies focusing mostly on countries outside Europe. For example, cross-national comparative research has established that societies that elect few women tend to be more corrupt than societies that elect large numbers of women (Dollar et al. 2001; Swamy et al. 2001). In a case-study on Thailand, Bjarnegård (2013) demonstrates how informal recruitment to political positions serves to protect corrupt interactions between men in power, and

she argues that women are excluded since they are not trusted with the sensitive nature of exchanges. We believe that much could be gained by taking this research into account in studies on women's political representation in Europe. Recent studies show that corruption and bad governance are more widespread and vary within countries in Europe to a larger degree than previously recognized (Charron et al. 2011). At the same time, while research holds that the proportion of women remains low in a number of political institutions throughout Europe, few comparative studies have analyzed the variance in women's representation beyond national-level institutions.

This study breaks new ground by focusing on the subnational level in Europe. We suggest that when corruption and bad governance are widespread, informal influence is strong, favoring clientelism and advancement of candidates with access to traditional networks. More specifically, we hypothesize that a low quality of government – understood in terms of levels of corruption, partiality, and ineffectiveness of government services (Rothstein and Teorell 2008) – has a negative impact on the proportion of elected women. With new, as yet unused data on women's local representation, we can empirically test this claim. We have constructed a comprehensive dataset on the proportion of locally elected female councilors in 167 NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) regions in 18 European countries in the most recent elections for which data was available. Using a novel measure of regional governance, the European Quality of Government Index (Charron et al. 2011), we perform a hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) analysis with regional-level control variables such as educational attainment and economic development, as well as the national-level controls of gender quotas, gender equality culture, and types of electoral system. In this respect, this article contributes a unique analysis of the variance of women's local political representation within countries in a comparative perspective. Our findings underpin the notion that quality of government is the new “secret garden of politics,” which needs to be mapped out in greater detail. The results show that levels of corruption and partiality of government substantially affect the proportion of female local councilors and hence are important determinants of women's political representation in contemporary Europe.

The rest of the article will proceed as follows: First we discuss recent trends in research on women's political representation and make a distinction between descriptive versus substantive representation of women. Thereafter we review findings in current scholarship on gender and corruption and show how this strand of research is relevant for understanding women's inclusion in/exclusion from political institutions. In the section on methodology we argue for the advantage of studying the subnational level in Europe, and we present our new dataset on locally elected councilors. The section on results reports the findings from our empirical analysis. In the concluding section we argue that hindrances to women's political representation are not eliminated by the reformation of formal/organizational factors alone.

## **DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN**

A much-used distinction in scholarship on politics and gender is that between descriptive and substantive representation of women. The first strand of research, descriptive representation, focuses on variations in the number of women elected to political institutions, primarily parliaments, across time and in different parts of the world. The second strand of research, substantive representation, focuses on effects of women's presence in political institutions. In this article we focus explicitly on descriptive representation. While this research field has a long tradition (cf. Duverger 1955), there is no consensus among scholars about whether formal or informal factors play a larger role in causing variations in the numbers of women elected.

The sizeable literature on causes behind the election of large numbers of women reveals a shift, at least in Western democracies, from system-oriented towards strategy-oriented explanatory models (Wängnerud 2009). Strategy-oriented explanatory models dig into processes that are endogenous to parties; factors such as party ideology and organizational structure are brought forward. In contrast, system-oriented explanatory models dig into processes that are exogenous to parties; factors such as the electoral system and gender equality culture are brought forward. Studies on informal influence can be situated somewhere in between: they aim to highlight complex dynamics at work outside "the protocol." There are variations, especially within countries, that cannot be explained by party ideology or organizational factors alone. Figures from the dataset used in this article can illustrate. For example, how is it that, in Greece, there are

some regions in which females make up an average of 12 per cent of local councilors, whereas in other regions females make up more than 24 per cent of councilors? Italy is another country with large variations at the subnational level; there are some regions with an average of 10 per cent female local councilors and others with an average of 28 per cent.

Our suggestion is, as already stated, that much could be gained by taking findings in research on gender and corruption into account when trying to explain variations in women's descriptive representation in Europe. We build, for example, on research by Esaray and Chirillo (2012) analyzing the relationship between gender and attitudes towards bribery among citizens, as well as the association between female participation in parliaments and national levels of corruption. Most important, they find a stronger relationship between gender and corruption in democracies than in autocratic systems.

## **RESEARCH ON GENDER AND CORRUPTION**

Previous research on the relationship between gender and corruption has focused mainly on individual differences in tolerance to corruption and the relationship between national shares of female politicians and corresponding degrees of corruption. In our focus on the descriptive representation of women we deal primarily with the latter scholarship.

In their seminal study, Dollar et al. (2001) demonstrate that higher rates of female participation in government are associated with lower national levels of corruption. They measure corruption using data from the International Country Risk Guide and claim to have included a range of variables in their analysis to control for various underlying institutional characteristics that could be responsible for a spurious correlation. Since then, the association between the presence of women and levels of corruption has been reproduced in many ways (e.g. Treisman 2007). Studying national differences in the Corruption Perception Index, Swamy et al. (2001) also propose that countries with a greater representation of women have lower levels of corruption. This has in turn produced an underlying assumption among a number of policy-makers that increasing the presence of women can be a quick fix in reducing corruption (e.g. World Bank 2001).

In contrast, Sung (2003) launched a rival explanation, the “fairer system” thesis. This argument contends that “liberal democratic institutions and spirit increase female participation in government and restrain systemic corruption, but the latter two factors are not causally related” (Sung 2003, 708). Data from Freedom House and Fraser Institute is used to back up the theoretical argument in the article. According to Sung (2003, 718), the effect of female participation is lost when liberal constitutionalism is controlled for, as both gender equality and low corruption are seen as effects of a fair system. These findings were later tested and largely supported, also with new indicators used as a proxy for gender inequality (Branisa and Ziegler 2010). While Vijayalakshmi (2008) finds no effect on corruption from having a larger share of female politicians in the local self-government of India, a different result is reported by Beaman et al. (2011). In this experimental study, the authors investigate the effect of a scheme of randomized quotas of reserved seats for women in local village assemblies in India. Accordingly, the villages that had a female leader as a result of this randomized scheme report fewer instances of bribery. It is noted by Pande and Ford (2012, 20) that, regarding the results from this study, “it is possible that inexperience rather than preferences limits corruption on the part of women.” In a recent study Sung (2012) analyzes the impact of having a large number – or a large increase in the number – of elected women in the legislative parliament on national levels of corruption. Using data over time and across most democracies, the panel study finds no effect on corruption from either high numbers of elected women nor from increases in the numbers of elected women.

Acknowledging that the relationship between the representation of women and corruption is contested and possibly more complex than simply an effect of one variable in one direction on another variable, our focus in this article is more limited. We are interested in examining the extent to which levels of corruption and bad governance can explain the variations in the share of elected women at the local level in Europe. Working within this delimitation, we draw on theoretical work by scholars exploring why corruption can be believed to affect the processes of recruitment to political positions.

## Closely knit networks – the mechanism excluding women in corrupt contexts

Bjarnegård (2013) contends that certain aspects of clientelism affect the political representation of women. Criticizing assumptions in earlier research that has viewed women in elected seats as an antidote for corruption, she argues that the association that has been identified in previous writings is in fact misguided and that these studies “tap into something larger than corruption, namely clientelism and change over time” (Bjarnegård 2013, 53). She argues that clientelism as a political practice highlights the interplay between formal and informal political institutions. When formal institutions are weak, certain types of informal institutions may grow strong. According to Bjarnegård, the gender dimension kicks in since “in clientelist systems, opportunities for electoral corruption are gendered in that only those with access to networks, those with connections within the local or national elite, those with resources to finance corrupt behavior, and those who are already influential in society are in positions to be considered assets in clientelist networks and are the only ones who will be trusted with the sensitive nature of the exchange” (Bjarnegård 2013, 37).

Clientelism is a label for exchanges of personal favors for political support. In contrast to Bjarnegård, we believe that these factors may be at play in comparatively formalized systems as well, hence it would be more correct to theorize on the role of informal influence, as in the study by Cheng and Tavits (2011). Cheng and Tavits investigate whether the gatekeeper – the local party president – is a woman or a man. The finding is that women candidates are more likely to be nominated when the gatekeeper is a woman. As previously discussed, they suggest both direct and indirect effects: direct effects stem from the fact that gatekeepers are more likely to recruit and promote people like themselves and that female party gatekeepers have more women in their social networks. Indirect effects stem from signals of an “old boys’ club at work.” We find the distinction between direct and indirect effects useful. There is some evidence that female candidates, in corrupt systems, lack the economic resources needed to buy support – a direct effect. However, in a European context it may be more useful to think in terms of closely knit networks where outsiders – women – are not trusted and thus locked out. Corruption, partiality, and ineffectiveness of government services could be likened to a filter hindering women, and it is reasonable to believe that there are two mechanisms at work at one and the same time: in corrupt systems, party gatekeepers are less



willing to support women candidates, and politically engaged women are also less willing to strive for candidacy.

We have argued that male-dominated closely knit networks with informal patterns of recruitment can hinder the advancement of women in political institutions in European countries.<sup>i</sup> Following this reasoning, our intention is to test this claim empirically. We therefore hypothesize that a low quality of government – understood as high levels of corruption, partiality, and ineffectiveness of government services – will have a negative impact on the proportion of female local councilors in the European regions.

## **DESIGN AND DATA**

In this study we break new ground by focusing on the gender composition of elected officials at the sub-national level and by studying regions rather than nations. Our study was prompted by the recent publication of other studies showing that corruption and bad governance are more widespread and vary to a larger extent within countries in Europe than previously recognized (Charron et al. 2011). While the proportion of women is still low in a number of political institutions throughout Europe, few comparative studies have analyzed the variance in descriptive representation beyond national-level institutions. This insight informed our collection of data on the proportion of female local councilors in the European regions. Even though European countries are heterogeneous, they are, from a global perspective, quite similar in terms of culture, modernization, and liberal democratic institutions. Much research in the field of gender and corruption is focused on regions like Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Yet, we argue that it is essential to recognize that a low quality of government has a negative effect on social and economic development in established democracies as well. This leads us to a research design with several opportunities. Most important, our focus on regions allows us to move beyond the ecological fallacies sometimes present in cross-country studies, where researchers ignore variances within countries and make inferences regarding nations based on observations that are not valid for the entire country (Rydgren 2007).

## Explaining female local councilors in the European regions

The dependent variable of our study is the proportion of locally elected female councilors aggregated to a mean of each region. Since the construction of this variable required a comprehensive collection of new data by the authors, the following sections will briefly describe the data collection procedure. It should be noted that previous scholarly comparisons of subnational representation of elected women have provided little insight into the reasons for the variations across and within countries.<sup>ii</sup> At best, a report has provided an overview of the national averages of locally elected women (CEMR 2008). Yet no recent source of comparative data exists to date that describes such variances within countries. The dataset used in this article therefore contributes by providing a unique picture of the proportion of women in the locally elected assemblies in the European regions.

The authors performed the collection of data in the 18 countries included in this study with the purpose of finding the most recent figures (as of March 2013) on the gender composition of locally elected councils. The first priority was to obtain the official sources of data from statistical offices and electoral institutions. In some instances – when statistics from official channels were not sufficiently comprehensive – experts, such as scholars specialized in elections or statistics, provided the figures (for a description of sources, see Appendix 2).

What constitutes a local councilor is difficult to assess across these diverse institutional settings. For 16 of the 18 countries studied in this report we have found figures on categories that we believe are highly comparable: They broadly correspond to municipal councils – that is, local deliberative assemblies constituted by councilors elected by direct universal suffrage. Two countries (Slovakia and Romania) presented some challenges in meeting these requirements. For Romania, data on municipal councilors is not available to researchers, and so we use figures on their intermediate-level councils. In Slovakia, national authorities have not collected data on the gender composition of local councilors. Instead of excluding the country from this comparison we include figures on the sex ratio of mayors of the municipalities in the country (for more information on the local assemblies in the countries, see Table 1).<sup>iii</sup> The regions in this study are based on the system of NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) and their levels differ in

the countries we analyze. Figures on local councilors in each municipality or local division are aggregated to an average value for each NUTS region in this study.<sup>iv</sup> This is a common procedure of reporting statistics in many of these countries, and most often the authors have not been forced to make this calculation, but have instead relied on official aggregates.

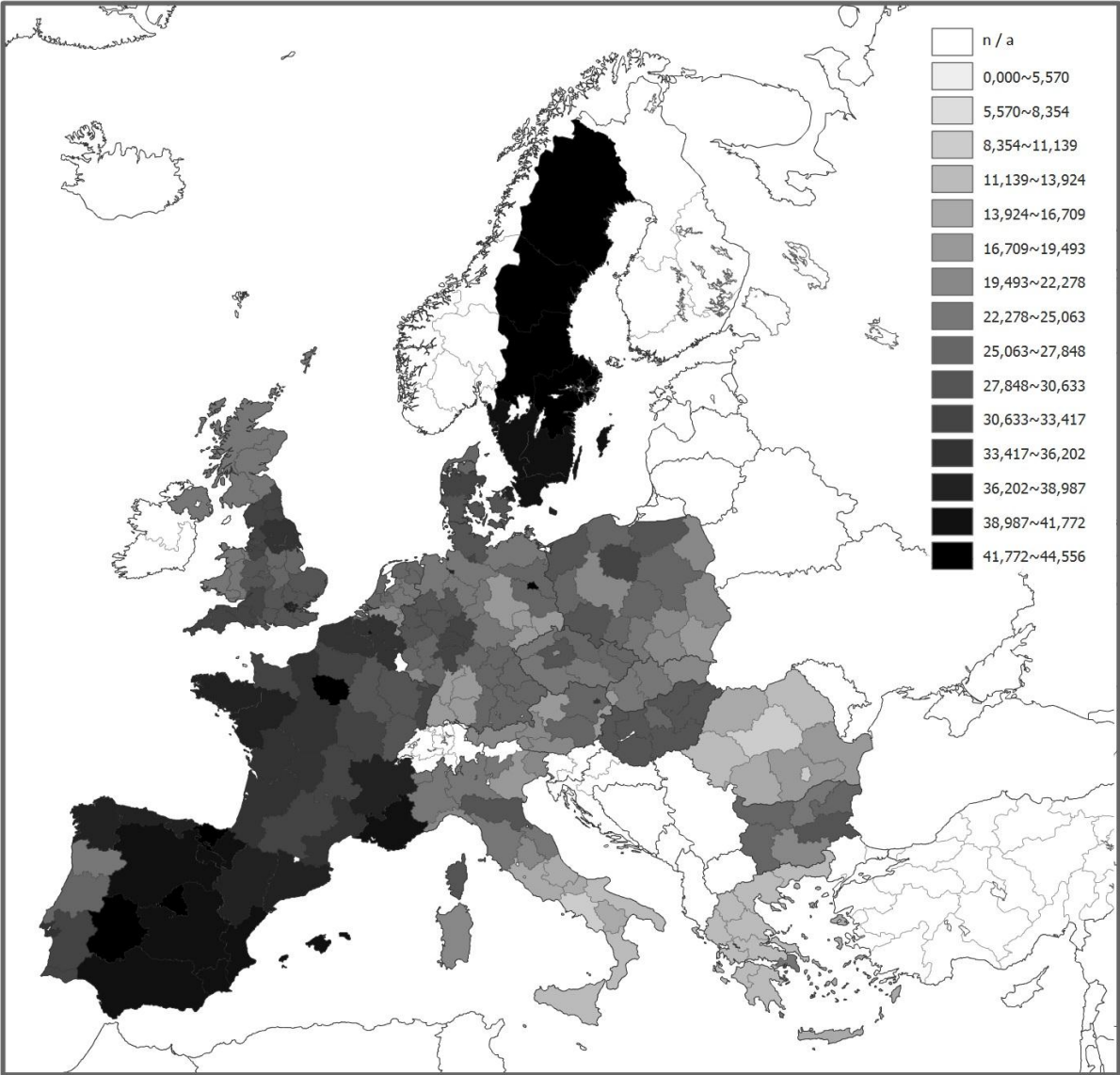
Overall, we believe that our dependent variable is operationalized in a way that we measure the concept that we are interested in. The percentage of elected women is a standard operationalization in the literature on descriptive representation (Wängnerud 2009). It should be acknowledged that it is challenging to compare local councilors across these institutionally diverse contexts, as the mandates and responsibilities of these councilors differ across countries. The authors have compiled the responsibilities of the local councils of each country and found that the responsibilities of the local councils differ across the 18 countries we study (this information is readily available upon request). However, we do not see this as problematic since we are not aiming to explain the effects of having a certain share of locally elected women. Assuming that the processes of clientelism and recruitment to the position of councilor are relatively similar, even though these councils might have different responsibilities, we believe that the specific differences between the countries are less relevant. Also, it should be noted that if countries do indeed differ significantly with respect to how corruption affects the share of elected women, these differences are taken into account statistically by the random intercept at the country level in our multi-level model.

Since the electoral cycles in the countries we study are not synchronized, the year when the most recent elections were held varies across our sample from 2008 to 2012 (see Table 1 for details). In three countries, Portugal, Netherlands, and Denmark (and also in a few Austrian regions), elections were held in 2009. The French data is from 2008. Since the data on regional quality of government was collected during 2009 and we would like the dependent variable to be measured after our main independent one, this is not perfect. However, we argue that this does not constitute a problem. Quality of government is known to be a “sticky” concept and it is unlikely that this measure would fluctuate rapidly over time.

TABLE 1 COMPARING LOCAL COUNCILORS ACROSS 18 COUNTRIES

Country	Name of local councils	No. local authorities	Year of election
France	Municipal councils (conseil municipal)	36 569	2008
Germany	Local council (gemeinderat)	app 14000	2011
Italy	<i>Local council (consiglio comunale)</i>	8094	2011
Spain	Local council (concejal)	8117	2011
UK	Local authority councils	466	2010
Hungary	Municipal body of representatives ( <i>képviselő-testület</i> )	3175	2010
Czech Republic	Municipal council ( <i>zastupitelstvo obce</i> )	6250	2010
Slovakia	Local council ( <i>obecné zastupiteľstvo</i> in municipalities, <i>mestské zastupiteľstvo</i> in cities). Figures refer to mayors (starosta in municipalities, primátor in cities).	2792 (2009 mayors)	2010
Portugal	Parish assembly (assembleia de freguesia)	4259	2009
Romania	County council (consiliul județean)	41	2012
Sweden	Municipal assembly (kommunfullmäktige)	290	2010
Denmark	Municipal council (kommunalbestyrelse)	98	2009
Belgium	Municipal council (conseil communal/ gemeenteraad )	589	2012
Austria	Municipal council (gemeinderat)	2357	2009-12
Netherlands	Local council (gemeenteraad)	418	2009
Poland	Municipal council (rada gminy)	2479	2010
Bulgaria	Municipal council (obchtinski savet)	264	2010
Greece	Municipal council (dimotiko simvoulio)	325	2010

FIGURE 1      LOCALLY ELECTED FEMALE COUNCILORS IN THE EUROPEAN REGIONS (PERCENT)



Comments: For the exact share of elected women for each region, see the Appendix 3.

Studying the distribution of our dependent variable we can conclude that there is a large variance in the share of locally elected women between countries, but more importantly, also within the nations in this study. The difference between the regions with the lowest and the highest share of women exceeds 10 per cent in a majority of the countries in our sample. In Denmark, for example, the region of Syddanmark has an average of 28.5 per cent women in their local assemblies, compared to 38.6 per cent in Hovedstaden. In Greece, the 12.3 per cent female share of the councilors in the region of Kentriki Ellada stands in contrast to the region of Attica and its mean proportion of 24.3 per cent. In Italy, too, this difference is clearly visible. While the councils in Emilia-Romagna comprise 28.2 per cent women on average, those in the

region of Campania are made up of only 10 per cent women. The variance in the share of locally elected female councilors is graphically illustrated in Figure 1 and listed numerically in Appendix 3.

### Regional measure of Quality of Government

While there is no shortage of indicators for levels of corruption or the quality of government in countries (e.g. the International Country Risk Guide rating, the Corruptions Perception Index, and the World Bank Good Governance Indicator), there is a clear lack of reliable data on the subnational level. We use the most comprehensive regional governance indicator available, the European Quality of Government Index (EQI). This index 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 et al. 2011). The investigators focused on 18 countries and surveyed approximately 34 000 citizens on three different types of government services (law enforcement, health care, and education). Participants were asked to numerically evaluate three aspects of these services: their *quality*, *impartiality* and *corruption*. The survey consisted of 16 independent questions related to the three pillars of good governance, which were then combined to create a regional index. Moreover, the researchers combined the regional scores with external measures of quality of government in order to complement the regional scores from the survey with a country context. To do so, the researchers introduced a component controlling for these regions' deviation from the national average of the established World Bank's World Government Indicator (WGI).<sup>v</sup> The final index is standardized so that the mean is 0 with a standard deviation of 1. In all, the EQI gauges the quality, impartiality, and corruption of government in these regions. Higher numbers correspond with low levels of corruption, partiality, and ineffectiveness, and lower numbers correspond with high levels of these factors (see also Charron and Lapuente 2013). We include all regions from the 18 countries that have been covered by the EQI.<sup>vi</sup>

### National-level control variables

Our model includes a rigorous test for alternative explanations for the variance of our dependent variable. We use both national-level and regional-level variables for this purpose. The four national-level controls are *type of election system*, *gender equality culture*, *legislative gender quota at the subnational level*, and *voluntary party*

*gender quotas*. The role of election systems has a long history of research on women's representation (e.g. Duverger 1955; Norris 1993). Numerous studies find that women's presence is favored by electoral systems with party lists, proportional representation (PR), and large district magnitudes (see Kittilson 2006). To account for this aspect we control for election system and create four dummy variables (Mixed-Member Proportional system, Two-Round System, Party-List Proportional System, and First Past the Post system).<sup>vii</sup> Related to the control for gender equality culture, it has been stated that "societies that elect large numbers of women tend to be more gender equal also in other respects than societies that elect few women" (Wängnerud 2009, 51). The concept of gender equality culture – where women have opportunities for upward mobility – has been widely acknowledged to correlate with the number of women in elected seats (Inglehart and Norris 2003, 138). Although the concept is quite difficult to gauge empirically, a reasonable alternative is to use a measure of women's participation in the labor force (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2008; Stockemer 2011). This measure has been shown to be significant in previous analyses of women's participation in local politics, comparing national averages in Europe, thus it makes sense to include this factor as a control (Wide 2006, 144). The indicator included in our analysis measures the ratio of women to men active in the labor market.<sup>viii</sup> It has been shown that, especially in more recent democracies, legislative quotas matters (Dahlerup 2006). To gauge this effect we have created dummy variables for countries with legislative gender quotas at the subnational level.<sup>ix</sup> Besides the importance of legislative acts, some studies also point to voluntary acts by parties, such as the implementation of gender quotas or other voluntary gender-specific measures within parties, as important determinants of the number of women elected (Freidenvall 2006; Studlar and McAllister 2002). It should be noted that the number of women elected has also increased in parties that have never adopted quotas. Thus, one can expect a "contagion effect" in party systems where one party has adopted voluntary quotas (such as a zipper system for party lists); that is a positive impact on the share of female candidates also in other parties (Kittilson 2006). To measure this effect we introduce dummy variables for countries with political parties that have adopted voluntary gender quotas.<sup>x</sup>

### Regional-level control variables

Numerous studies have found that modernization in a broad sense often tends to correlate with high gender equality and a high presence of elected women (Berg 2007; Inglehart and Norris 2003). It has been found that countries with higher economic development and a highly educated population tend to elect a larger share of women. To account for these effects, regional measures of *GDP per capita* and *level of education* are included as regional indicators of modernization.<sup>xi</sup> The measure for GDP per capita has been averaged for the years 2007-2009 and, as this is the standard procedure when dealing with skewed variables, logarithmically transformed. The indicator for education is a measure of the percentage of the population having completed a tertiary education.

### Potential endogeneity

Before we report the findings from our empirical test, a discussion on the possible challenge of endogeneity between the share of locally elected women and regional quality of government is warranted. With the debate on the causal relationship between gender and corruption in mind, one could believe that the proportion of women in local parliaments would affect the governance in these regions. In order to address this potential problem in our analysis we would, ideally, need time-series data on both women's representation and regional governance. As this data does not exist, we have tried our best to measure our dependent variable after the data on governance. We are therefore humble with our claims and do not attempt to end any debate on causality between gender and corruption. However, we still believe that providing a robust result of correlation in this cross-regional sample is a substantial contribution in itself. We also argue that we do not have a potential problem of spurious relationships in our model. Sung (2003) proposes that the correlation between corruption and women's representation across nations is produced by liberal democracy. It should be noted that we, in this study, analyze only democratic countries (all countries in the sample are declared "free" in the Freedom House Index and are classified as "democracies" in the Polity IV score<sup>xii</sup>). As we hold the democracy variable relatively constant across the countries we study, this factor should not significantly influence our dependent variable.



## METHOD

To gauge the effect of corruption and quality of government on our dependent variable we firstly analyze the bivariate relationship between the proportion of elected women and regional quality of government. Secondly, we proceed to build a multi-level model. We have two regional-level covariates (GDP per capita and educational attainment) and four national-level factors (the electoral system type, female labor force participation, legislative gender quotas on the subnational level and voluntary party quotas). Having data structured across two different geographical stages we deem hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to be the appropriate method (Goldstein 2010). In our multi-level model 167 European regions are nested within 18 countries.

As discussed recently by Stegmueller (2013), studies in comparative political research often face the problem of analyzing a small numbers of countries using multi-level analysis. The recommendations from the literature on what is the minimum number of countries for this method have also varied quite widely (see Hox et al. 2012). Since we do not model cross-level interactions in our analysis we believe that we limit the relative bias of effect estimates of the macro level variables on level one observations and hence regard our method appropriate. We have also run a model using OLS-regression with robust standard errors clustered around countries and find similar results as reported below regarding the impact of the quality of government variable (available from the authors upon request).

For summary statistics of the variables included in the model, see Appendix 1. It should be noted that the dependent variable we analyze below is the one where we included 18 countries, and thus also the two countries (Slovakia and Romania) that admittedly are a bit differently measured. Our rationale for this is based on thorough analysis and several tests to ensure that these two countries do not significantly alter our results. We have run the same model using a slightly altered dependent variable (having only one of these countries or none of them) and basically find the same results as reported below. This further strengthens our belief that the same process of corruption and partiality that affects the recruitment of women is present in both county councils and municipal councils. The literature on women's representation sometimes notes that the Nordic countries are difficult to compare with other settings (Rosenbluth et

al. 2006). We see no problem with including the regions of Denmark and Sweden in this analysis. Constituting 5 per cent of our sample they do not drive our results to any significant extent.

## RESULTS

From the scatter plot in Figure 2 it is evident that we have a strong bivariate relationship between regional quality of government and the average proportion of locally elected women in these entities. This relationship is positive and based on this first analysis it is apparent that the regions with less partiality, corruption and ineffectiveness tend to be the ones with a higher share of female councilors. Within some countries this can be seen clearly. In Greece and Italy, for instance, we generally find that the regions with the worst EQI score are the ones with the lowest presence of women. Sweden, on the other hand, shows little variation in either of the two main variables across regions, but shows that low levels of corruption and partiality within government and a high presence of locally elected women correlate. However, in order to complement this picture with even more robust results we proceed to report findings from the multivariate model.

FIGURE 2. BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIP: FEMALE COUNCILORS AND QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT

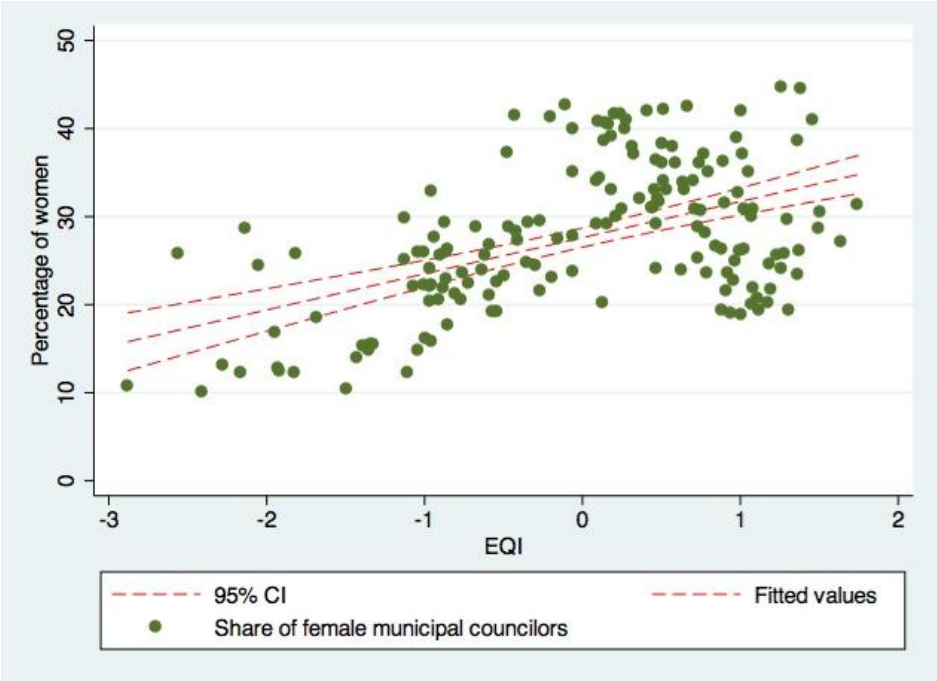


TABLE 2. RESULTS FROM THE MULTIVARIATE HLM ANALYSIS

<b>Dependent variable: Share of female councilors</b>				
Fixed Intercept	27.454*** (1.181)	27.441*** (1.515)	-28.142 (41.376)	-18.221 (50.382)
EQI		3.284*** (0.693)	2.659*** (0.737)	2.463*** (0.733)
Education			0.020 (0.083)	0.024 (0.095)
log GDP/c			4.347*** (1.572)	5.379*** (1.616)
Party quota			-4.265 (5.621)	-5.943 (6.983)
Subnational legislative quota			2.574 (6.148)	0.025 (7.505)
List PR election system			0.995 (8.212)	1.432 (10.499)
TRS election system			-3.701 (12.610)	4.049 (15.693)
MMP election system			2.177 (8.903)	2.133 (11.262)
Fem labor force participation			17.271 (47.366)	-5.411 (57.796)
Random intercept	7.528 (1.365)	6.223 (1.153)	7.456 (1.759)	8.758 (3.787)
Model for log GDP/c slope				0.000 (0.000)
Model for education slope				0.149 (0.167)
Log likelihood	-502.1402	-491.3139	-465.2003	-465.028
AIC	1010.28	990.6278	954.4006	958.056
BIC	1019.634	1003.1	991.8165	1001.708
Observations	167	167	167	167
Number of countries	18	18	18	18

*Comments: The three dummy variables for election system have the fourth dummy, for countries with a First Past The Post-election system, as a reference category. Standard errors are presented in parentheses. \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \* =  $p < 0.05$ .*

Our multivariate HLM analysis basically confirms the findings that regional quality of government has a substantially strong effect on women's representation in the European regions. As evident in model 2 of Table 3, when only the effect from EQI is reported, this relationship is positive and significant at the 99.9 per cent level. When our regional-level and national-level control variables are introduced this effect is slightly decreased, but still strong. In our full analysis, model 4 of Table 3, we still observe positive and significant coefficients from EQI on our dependent variable, when all our independent variables are taken into account. More specifically, the size of the coefficient indicate that a one-point increase in regional governance would predict an increase of approximately 2.5 higher percent of female councilors on aver-

age. Taking our country-level variations into account, we can also see that our model explains a large share of the variance within countries.

The statistics reported in Table 3 indicate that our full model indeed has a good fit and explains a substantial part of the variance in the proportion of locally elected women in the European regions. The control variables show surprisingly few significant effects, but most of them have the anticipated sign of direction. GDP per capita have a positive and significant effect. Also, it should be noted that the findings remain robust if we exclude the Romanian and Slovakian regions from this analysis.

## **CONCLUSION**

The empirical analysis performed in this article substantiates the suggestion that corruption, partiality, and ineffectiveness of government services are important factors when investigating the variance in the representation of women. In this study we have analyzed a novel dataset on the proportion of locally elected female councilors in Europe. As such, this article is one of the first to study the variance of women's local political representation within countries in a comparative perspective. Our findings suggest that regional figures on governance quality exert a substantial influence on women's local political representation.

In our empirical test we rely on cross-sectional data and therefore need to remain careful when making inferences. On the one hand, some studies (e.g. Wängnerud and Grimes 2012) have suggested that there might be feedback mechanisms related to national levels of corruption where there are higher proportions of female politicians – thus we might have potential challenges of endogeneity in our model. On the other hand, we believe that there are three reasons that this does not constitute a large problem. Firstly, we basically measure our dependent variable after our main independent ones. Secondly, we rest on the empirical results where it is mainly cross-country studies that have argued that having a large share of elected women has an effect on corruption (Dollar et al. 2001; Swamy et al. 2001). The studies using a time-series design fail to find any significant effects (Sung 2012). Thirdly, we believe that there are even fewer theoretical reasons to suppose that politicians elected at the local level would have enough influence to fundamentally eradicate corruption and partiality in government.

We contribute in two respects to the theoretical discussion on gender and politics. Firstly, we argue that, as factors such as corruption and bad governance affect the proportion of elected women, hindrances to women's political representation are not eliminated by the reformation of formal/organizational factors alone. Hopefully, this will inform the future discussion on gender and representation. Secondly, we specifically contribute to the debate on gender and corruption. Sung (2003, 718) observes that "gender equality and government accountability are both great achievements of modern liberal democracy" and thus downplays the possible effect of corruption on women's representation. In earlier literature on country comparisons, such reasoning is difficult to question. However, studying female descriptive representation at the regional level, we can move beyond the prior focus on national-level institutions. If Sung was right, then we should not observe such a wide variance of elected women within the regions in the (democratic) countries we study. Controlling for regional-level and national-level factors that can be seen as possible determinants of women's representation, our models still indicate a significant and substantially important impact from our regional measure of quality of government.

Although we do not claim to propose a final answer to the debate of causality between the representation of women and levels of corruption, our findings clearly advance this field of research. For future empirical research it would be worthwhile to study how this relationship holds in a time-series analysis at the subnational level. This would of course require a continuous effort, as regional data on governance and women's local representation currently is limited. The test performed in this article constitutes for now a significant contribution, and we urge other scholars to continue this discussion. Finally, we would like to go back to the study by Cheng and Tavits (2011) demonstrating that women candidates are more likely to be nominated when the gatekeeper is a woman. It would be relevant to study whether the presence of female gatekeepers is a proxy for a "clean" system or whether it is possible to separate the effects of each factor.

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# APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Summary statistics for the variables in the model

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Share	167	27.60246	8.252306	10.04	44.5565
EQI	167	-0.0011182	1.016937	-2.87937	1.74988
Gdp	167	9.853323	0.6516282	7.953688	11.00957
Edu	167	22.39371	8.044362	7.6	42.9
fem_lab	167	0.7588922	0.0621198	0.634	0.875
Listpr	167	0.6347305	0.4829538	0	1
Trs	167	0.1317365	0.3392213	0	1
Mmp	167	0.1616766	0.3692612	0	1
Ftp	167	0.0718563	0.2590265	0	1
quota_subnat	167	0.5329341	0.5004147	0	1
quota_party	167	0.7784431	0.4165434	0	1

## Appendix 2. Sources from which data was collected

Country	Sources
France	Dr. Aurelia Troupel, Faculté de Droit et de Science Politique
Germany	Statistisches Bundesamt, Statistischer Informationsservice and Landesbetrieb für Statistik und Kommunikationstechnologie Niedersachsen
Italy	The Ministry of Interior
Spain	The Ministry of Interior
UK	The UK Local Government Association, the Welsh Local Government Association, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Local Government Staff Commission in Belfast
Hungary	The Election Information Service at the National Election Office of Hungary
Czech Republic	The Information Services Unit of the Headquarters of the Czech Statistical Office
Slovakia	The International Relations Department, Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia
Portugal	The Directorate of Legal Services and Electoral Studies of the Direcção Geral de Administração Interna
Romania	Respective regional authorities' websites
Sweden	The unit for Democracy Statistics of Statistics Sweden
Denmark	The Danish statistical yearbook 2011
Belgium	The Information Centre of the Brussels Region, the Agentschap voor Binnenlands Bestuur, and the Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie.
Austria	The Verbindungsstelle der Bundesländer and additional regional authorities
Netherlands	The Dutch Institute for Public Administration
Poland	The National Electoral commission
Bulgaria	The Central Election Commission of Bulgaria
Greece	The Ministry of Interior

## Appendix 3.

## The share of locally elected women in the European regions

SE3	44.6	PL61	32.8	PL63	25.8	PL34	20.3
SE1	44.4	DE6	32.7	HU1	25.8	AT33	20.2
ES30	42.5	FR25	32	NL3	25.7	ITD4	20.1
ES21	42.4	FR62	32	BG41	25.7	DEC	20
FR10	42	PT20	31.7	BG31	25.6	DEE	19.3
DE3	41.9	UKC	31.4	UKF	25.6	AT11	19.3
ES43	41.9	DK04	31.2	PL52	25.6	DED	19.2
ES23	41.6	FR22	31	BG33	25.5	ITD3	19.1
ES42	41.5	FR42	31	DE2	25.2	SK01	19.1
BE1	41.5	UKD	30.8	PL22	25	AT31	18.9
ES61	41.2	PT30	30.8	DE8	24.8	DE1	18.7
SE2	40.9	PT18	30.8	PT11	24.7	RO31	18.5
ES62	40.9	UKK	30.7	NL2	24.4	PL32	17.5
ES53	40.7	UKH	30.6	GR3	24.3	RO22	16.8
ES52	40.5	DK02	30.5	BG32	24.3	ITF1	16.0
ES22	40.4	UKJ	30	UKM	24.0	GR4	15.7
ES41	39.8	FR41	30	CZ04	24	ITF5	15.4
FR82	39	PL51	29.7	ITD2	23.9	ITF2	15.4
DE5	38.8	DEF	29.5	ITC2	23.9	RO41	15.2
DK01	38.6	CZ02	29.4	ITE1	23.9	ITE4	14.8
ES13	38.6	HU2	29.2	CZ03	23.7	RO11	14.6
ES12	38.2	PL42	29.2	SK03	23.6	GR1	13.9
ES11	37.9	FR83	29	UKN	23.5	ITF6	13.1
ES24	37.9	FR43	29	UKL	23.5	RO21	12.6
ES51	37.1	FR21	29	DEG	23.3	ITG1	12.4
FR51	37	DEA	28.8	CZ06	23.2	GR2	12.3
FR71	37	HU3	28.8	ITC1	23.0	ITF4	12.3
FR52	37	PL62	28.7	SK02	22.8	RO42	12.2
UKI	36.4	BG34	28.6	DE9	22.6	RO32	10.7
BE2	36.1	DK03	28.5	ITE3	22.5	RO12	10.4
AT13	35	ITD5	28.2	ITC4	22.3	ITF3	10.1
FR24	36	UKG	28.1	CZ01	22.2		
FR53	36	PT16	27.7	PL41	22.1		
FR81	36	PL43	27.5	BG42	22.1		
FR61	35	CZ05	27.5	ITG2	21.9		
BE3	34.9	CZ08	27.2	PL21	21.8		
PT17	34.4	NL1	27	NL4	21.7		
FR63	34	CZ07	26.6	AT21	21.6		
FR30	34	DEB	26.5	AT32	21.5		
FR23	34	AT12	26.2	ITE2	21.4		
UKE	33.8	AT22	26.2	PL33	21.2		
FR72	33	PL11	26.2	ITC3	21.0		
FR26	33	DK05	26	AT34	20.7		
DE7	33	DE4	26	SK04	20.5		
PT15	32.9	PL12	25.9	PL31	20.4		



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<sup>i</sup> In the introduction we referred to Kittilson's (2006) finding that, for the advancement of women, it is important that the party organization has ties with organizations outside the party because these provide points of access for women. In our study we investigate the reverse situation, where there are few points of access.

<sup>ii</sup> See Rigon and Tanzi's (2012) study of Italy, and Wängnerud and Sundell's (2010) and Svaleryd's (2009) studies of Sweden for exceptions.

<sup>iii</sup> We will discuss how we perform the same models for the dependent variable but with these cases excluded, and how this does not seem to alter our main findings significantly.

<sup>iv</sup> In Belgium, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Netherlands, Sweden, and U.K., we study NUTS 1 regions. In Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain, we study regions at the level of NUTS 2.

<sup>v</sup> For a detailed description of the survey and the index, see Charron et al. (2013). For extensive sensitivity tests between national WGI scores and the regional measure of quality of government, see Charron (2010).

<sup>vi</sup> An exception is Bolzano in Italy, as this region does not have local councilors as the other regions of Italy do. In our multivariate analysis we also "lose" four French territories as missing cases, as no data on educational attainment was available for these regions.

<sup>vii</sup> Data is taken from the Electoral System Design database at <http://www.idea.int/esd/>

<sup>viii</sup> Retrieved from Eurostat at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/region\\_cities/](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/region_cities/)

<sup>ix</sup> Information retrieved from The Quota Project <http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview>

<sup>x</sup> Information retrieved from The Quota Project <http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview>

<sup>xi</sup> The data was generously made available from the data used by Charron *et al.* (2013) and originated from the official figures reported to the Eurostat database.

<sup>xii</sup> See [www.freedomhouse.org/](http://www.freedomhouse.org/) and <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>

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