

Why Are Fewer Women than Men Elected? Gender and the Dynamics of Candidate Selection

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Why are fewer women than men elected? Research suggests that this is the combined result of: (1) the supply of female aspirants, or the qualifications of women as a group to run for political office; and (2) the demand for female aspirants, or the preference of political elites for male over female candidates. The aim of this article is to reassess this explanation through the lens of recent case studies of female representation in four regions of the world: Africa, Latin America, North America and Western Europe. On their own, each contribution lends support to arguments about either supply or demand, leading their authors to offer distinct recommendations for change: an increase in the number of women who come forward, which is likely to be a slow and difficult process, or the adoption of gender quotas, which are quick but may produce mixed results. Yet juxtaposing these studies also exposes the limits of the traditional supply and demand model of candidate selection. On the one hand, the 'political market' does not operate efficiently towards an equilibrium solution of supply and demand. Rather, ideologies of gender introduce important distortions to the process: the fact that women are under-represented in all countries around the world suggests that both the supply of and demand for female candidates is artificially repressed, leading to low numbers of women in elective office. On the other hand, important variations exist in women's descriptive representation across countries and across political parties. These differences suggest that dynamics of supply and demand are shaped in crucial ways by features of the broader political context, which may include structural conditions but also the emergence of new and sometimes unanticipated opportunities.

A central area of research in political science concerns questions of political representation. Much of this work, both theoretical and empirical, has sought to map out what representation *is* and standards for assessing *how* and *when* it can be said to occur. Most of these studies, following Hanna Pitkin (1967), have paid less attention to the issue of *who* representatives are, arguing that ideas rather than identities should be the core of the representative process (Phillips, 1995). A great deal of feminist research, however, takes issue with this assertion, pointing out that women form a minority of all members of parliament worldwide.¹ This perspective finds resonance with the public at large, who agree that descriptive characteristics do matter: according to a recent global survey, both male and female respondents believe that government is more democratic when more women are present (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005). A broad literature has thus emerged in research on gender and politics that seeks to understand: (1) why women are under-represented in electoral positions; and (2) how their representation might be increased.

Initial work on this topic fell into two broad camps: large-*n* statistical analyses of factors explaining variations across countries and small-*n* case studies of the structures and events shaping patterns of representation in individual states. Despite attempts by both literatures to speak to broader trends, however, most of this research was confined to studies of Western democracies. In the case of large-*n* work, recent efforts to expand the range of

cases considered have resulted in conflicting findings regarding the role of key variables. Whereas earlier analyses attributed a central role to proportional representation electoral systems (Caul, 1999), high levels of female education and labour force participation (McDonagh, 2002) and cultural attitudes favourable to women in leadership positions (Inglehart and Norris, 2003), studies that include a broader range of cases find that many of these factors play little or no role in developing countries (Matland, 1998; Yoon, 2004). In terms of small-*n* research, less is known about broader trends. However, the focus on micro-level dynamics has gone far in accounting for some of these puzzling patterns, showing how features of electoral systems may shape elite and grass-roots strategies (Sainsbury, 1993), why indicators of women's status may bear little relation to the number of female office holders (Goetz and Hassim, 2003), and how a variety of political cultures may lead to the rise of prominent female leaders (Jalalzai, 2004).

This article aims to re-examine these questions by drawing on a host of recent case studies, which collectively address trends in women's descriptive representation across four major regions of the world: Africa (Bauer and Britton, 2006; Britton, 2005), Latin America (Franceschet, 2005), North America (Lawless and Fox, 2005) and Western Europe (Kitilson, 2006; Opello, 2006). Immersed in the details of single cases, these authors present different insights as to why fewer women than men are elected and, consequently, offer distinct recommendations as to how these numbers might be increased. The main contrast between these perspectives can be situated in relation to what has come to be known as the supply and demand model of candidate selection (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). The article begins in the first section by outlining the basic contours of this model, which it fleshes out with evidence from these various contributions. It then considers what might be gained by reading these case studies together – that is, by allowing these findings to 'speak' to one another, rather than treating them on their own as empirical manifestations of a single common trend. In the second section, the evidence presented in each case is subsequently revisited to develop a gendered and comparative critique of the reigning model of supply and demand. The third and final section concludes with some insights for future research on political representation.

The Supply and Demand Model of Candidate Selection

Attempts to explain the descriptive composition of legislatures often begin with a sequential model of political recruitment that progresses from: (1) the large number of citizens who are *eligible* to run for political office; to (2) the smaller pool of citizens who *aspire* to run for political office; to (3) the small group of citizens who are *nominated* to run for political office; to (4) the smallest band of citizens who are *elected* to political office (Norris, 1997). If no mechanisms of distortion are at work, the characteristics of the individuals present at each of these four stages should be roughly the same. Yet this is far from the case: 'legislatures worldwide include more of the affluent than the less well-off, more men than women, more middle-aged than young, and more white-collar professionals than blue-collar workers' (Norris, 1997, p. 6). This fact leads scholars to highlight various types of qualification that may set some groups of candidates apart from others, including their levels of education, party service, legislative experience, speaking abilities,

financial resources, political connections, kinship, name recognition, group membership and organisational skills (Rahat and Hazan, 2001).

Noting the uneven distribution of these features across groups in society, as well as the arbitrary nature of some of these criteria, many feminist researchers attempt to ‘unpack’ these qualifications by exploring what shapes the transition from stage 1 to stage 2, or the *supply* of available aspirants; the move from stage 2 to stage 3, or the *demand* for certain types of candidate; and the shift from stage 3 to stage 4, or the *outcome* of elections. Stated slightly differently, they ask whether the main reason behind women’s under-representation stems from gender differences in political ambition which cause fewer women than men to consider running for political office, biases in the recruitment practices of political elites which lead them to select fewer female candidates than male candidates, or prejudices on the part of voters who prefer to elect men than women. A wide range of evidence has firmly debunked the third explanation: although some early work found that the public was reluctant to vote for female candidates (Ekstrand and Eckert, 1981), most studies find that voters not only vote for male and female candidates at equal rates (Norris *et al.*, 1992; Studlar and McAllister, 1991), but may also vote in greater numbers for women than men (Black and Erickson, 2003). Most subsequent research has thus focused on the relative role of supply-side and demand-side factors, as well as interactions between them, in explaining why women are under-represented in electoral politics and how their representation might be increased.

Although earlier feminist scholars employed the concepts of supply and demand to explain patterns of female representation (Randall, 1982), this model is perhaps most closely associated with Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski’s pioneering study, *Political Recruitment: Gender, Race, and Class in the British Parliament* (1995). According to these authors, supply-side factors affect who comes forward as a potential candidate, while demand-side factors determine which of these aspirants are deemed desirable candidates by political elites. Following the model of the market, this view projects that the descriptive characteristics of those nominated will result from an eventual equilibrium between the forces of supply and demand. However, it also recognises that these dynamics may interact: some applicants may be discouraged from coming forward by perceptions of prejudice by political elites (an instance where demand limits supply), while small pools of certain kinds of aspirant may lead elites to assume that members of those groups are not interested or worthy of nomination as political candidates (an instance where supply limits demand). Despite implicit acknowledgement of these possibilities, most research in this vein, nonetheless, aims largely to determine which set of factors is most important: does the supply of female aspirants, or the demand for female candidates, go further in explaining why fewer women than men are elected to political office?

Supply-Side Explanations

According to Norris and Lovenduski (1995), the two key factors that shape the supply of aspirants are: (1) resources, like time, money and experience; and (2) motivation, such as drive, ambition and interest in politics. This explanation thus focuses largely on the

strategic calculations of potential candidates, in terms of whether or not they feel they are equipped to run for office. In the United States, women's groups tend to interpret this belief in relation to resources: arguing that 'when women run, women win', they concentrate their efforts on raising money, talent spotting and training women to wage effective political campaigns.² In contrast, party leaders often justify their recruitment patterns with reference to motivation, claiming that they would personally like to select more women, but too few women come forward (Dahlerup, 2001; Sanbonmatsu, 2006).

In this context, the recent book by Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office* (2005), is a striking new contribution to these debates. Plainly put, they argue that women are simply less politically ambitious than men to seek elective office. They base this assertion on the work they did for the Citizen Political Ambition Study, which combined an original survey in the United States of nearly 3,800 eligible candidates – roughly equal numbers of 'successful women and men who occupy the four professions that most often precede a career in politics' (p. 4), law, business, education and political activism – with in-depth interviews of a representative sample of 200 of these respondents. They hypothesise that this gender gap results from long-standing patterns of traditional socialisation which associate men with the public realm and women with the private. This divide manifests itself in at least three ways: (1) gender-specific family roles and expectations, related to tasks like housework and child-care; (2) ideas of masculinity that permeate existing political institutions, like elected bodies, fund-raising networks and the media; and (3) the 'gendered psyche', a 'deeply embedded imprint that propels men into politics, but relegates women to the electoral arena's periphery' (p. 11). All three lead to differences among women and men in terms of their levels of confidence, desire for achievement and inclination to self-promote.

In designing their study, Lawless and Fox focus on the 'hard case': women who are most likely to have overcome the forces of traditional gender socialisation, because they have already entered and succeeded in male-dominated fields. Yet the authors find that, despite similar levels of political activism and interest, these eligible female candidates are much less likely than men of comparable socio-economic and professional backgrounds to: (1) consider running for office; and (2) launch an actual candidacy. Bracketing the structural and contextual variables that might influence these decisions, Lawless and Fox conclude that women and men may accord different possibilities to the costs and benefits associated with political candidacy. It is worth noting, however, that these self-perceptions are heavily mediated by gender: despite being similarly qualified to run for office, women are more than twice as likely than men to assert that they are 'not at all qualified' to run for office and only half as likely to think that they would actually win. In other words: 'women are more likely than men to dismiss their qualifications to run for office' (p. 96). Further, the study discovers that when party leaders encourage individuals to put themselves forward, they focus their efforts on recruiting men rather than women. This suggests that demand-side explanations are also crucial for understanding patterns of political representation, a possibility that is largely muted in this account and, indeed, in much research on the US case (but see Sanbonmatsu, 2006).

An emphasis on the role of supply-side factors has particular implications for strategies to improve the numbers of women in elective office. At the most basic level, it indicates that women's representation is unlikely to increase without significant shifts in the resources and motivations of women to wage effective political campaigns. Stated slightly differently, the impetus for change must come from women themselves. Yet Lawless and Fox are sceptical that this will occur automatically, even as women's career patterns become more like those of men. On the one hand, the resources at women's disposal are unlikely to expand dramatically, given current patterns of women's integration into the top levels of professions like law, business and higher education. On the other hand, the effects of traditional gender role socialisation are likely to endure, even as women's roles in society continue to evolve and expand. For this reason, they argue, the prospects for change are relatively bleak, even as some individual women are able to succeed in breaking the 'political glass ceiling' to become viable candidates in US elections.

Demand-Side Explanations

Once applicants come forward, their selection as candidates largely hinges on perceptions of their abilities, qualifications and experience. Yet, as Norris and Lovenduski (1995) point out, trends in these assessments are strongly shaped by the preferences and opinions of political elites. Although they may justify their decisions as based on merit, the fact that it is generally impossible for selectors to know all aspirants on a personal level means that many will look to 'background characteristics as a proxy measure of abilities and character' (p. 14). These 'information short-cuts' may take the form of direct discrimination, in which aspirants are judged on the basis of characteristics associated with their group, or imputed discrimination, in which aspirants are overlooked by selectors who would otherwise favour those candidacies but fear that their party might lose votes as a result. There is evidence that suggests, however, that these evaluations are also often influenced by the descriptive characteristics of elites themselves. David Niven (1998) conducted a survey to explore whether local party elites discriminate against women, and if so, what form their biases take. He hypothesised that the low numbers of women might be due to an out-group effect, whereby negative evaluations of female candidates are based on their lack of surface similarity with the predominantly male party elite, or a distribution effect, whereby negative evaluations are based on the relative scarcity of women in high-status positions more generally. He found that male party chairs express a consistent preference for traits associated stereotypically with men, thus providing strong confirmation of the out-group rather than the distribution effect. As a result, he concludes that as long as men continue to constitute the vast majority of party elites, it will be difficult to achieve any substantial gains in women's descriptive representation.

Given that parties play a central role in candidate selection processes around the world, it is no surprise that most feminist scholars tend to acknowledge the importance of supply-side factors, but place greater emphasis on demand-side explanations of women's under-representation. A typical example of this approach is Susan Franceschet's study, *Women and Politics in Chile* (2005). While she recognises that women in Chile are generally sceptical of the value of engaging in party politics, she argues that most of the evidence

points to political parties as the main barrier to increased female representation. This is because parties have largely resisted the adoption of legislative quotas which could help raise the number of viable female candidates; their meetings are characterised by an 'exaggerated aggressiveness and ... a patronizing attitude toward women, especially toward young women' (p. 86); and they have largely monopolised formal politics in the post-transition period, undermining attempts by women to participate in politics outside the existing party organisations. These dynamics of exclusion are exacerbated by the bargaining among parties that often occurs in Chile in the run-up to elections: although each party may have clear rules for candidate selection, the practice of conferring with coalition partners may lead one party to withdraw its candidate in favour of one nominated by the other party. It is at this stage, Franceschet notes, that women are the most disadvantaged: even if a woman succeeds in winning her party's support, her party may later bargain away her candidacy in the course of its negotiations. In this 'intense competition for political posts' (p. 88), the support of the party president is crucial for getting nominated *and* for being elected.

A number of other recent contributions, however, focus almost exclusively on the limiting role of demand, even as they explore the ways in which it may be increased through the strategic mobilisation of women inside and outside the political parties. In *Challenging Parties, Changing Parliaments: Women and Elected Office in Contemporary Western Europe*, for example, Miki Caul Kittilson (2006) examines the degree of women's integration into political parties and parliamentary office in ten Western European nations from 1975 to 1997, seeking to identify the conditions under which women have made greater gains in some parties and countries than in others. Similarly, Gretchen Bauer and Hannah E. Britton aim to understand in *Women in African Parliaments* (2006) why women in Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda, but not Senegal, have made major inroads into national parliaments despite the presence of pervasive gender inequality, patriarchal social relations and historically male-dominated politics. In both volumes, women's strategies and shifts in broader contextual conditions open up opportunities for significant changes in candidate selection practices, especially the adoption of various types of gender quota policy.

While embracing a similar approach, the theoretical focus of *Gender Quotas, Parity Reform, and Political Parties in France* (2006) is slightly distinct. Although recognising the importance of women's activism, Katherine A. R. Opello asks: why do parties respond to these pressures? When are parties more likely to take steps to recruit more female candidates? To answer these questions, she analyses the history of gender quotas in France, comparing the adoption of party quotas by the Socialist party (PS) in the 1970s and 1980s and the adoption of a national quota law in the 1990s. She argues that variations in attention to women's representation, as well as success rates of the various measures pursued to achieve this end, are due to a combination of party ideas and electoral incentives. The fact that the PS has been more open to using quotas for women than the Gaullist parties, she argues, can be traced back to differences among the parties with regard to women's rights: while the PS has taken progressive and egalitarian positions on these issues, the conservative parties have tended to favour promoting women's traditional roles inside the home. Yet

these ideological stances have not been absolute over time. As Opello observes, 'there are several instances where French political parties changed their program or organizational structure when they faced an election because they thought it would attract a significant portion of the electorate' (p. 65). More specifically, the PS came out in support of gender quotas at times when the party faced elections and party leaders believed that women constituted a significant voting bloc whose votes were needed for electoral victory. The Gaullists, while sceptical of quotas more generally, similarly threw their support behind reforms to the constitution and the electoral law as they sought to improve their electoral prospects in the late 1990s. These patterns indicate that parties exercise enormous power and discretion over candidate selection procedures (Murray, 2004), which can occasionally be revised when they serve the interests of the party, for example in attracting key voter constituencies.

Pointing to the importance of demand-side factors leads to quite different prescriptions for increasing women's descriptive representation. When the selection of candidates depends heavily on the views and initiatives of parties, the onus for change lies not with women but with political elites. The question that concerns this literature is thus how parties might be pressured or inspired to alter their recruitment strategies. While there is no single formula for success, the key stimulus – at least as suggested by these accounts – appears to be women's mobilisation in favour of gender quotas (see also Dahlerup, 2006; Lovenduski *et al.*, 2005). In Western Europe, these campaigns tend to be party based: women's groups are most effective when they align with a dominant faction inside the party which can be convinced of the need to offer new kinds of candidate (Kittilson, 2006, p. 35), especially when the party is unsure about its electoral support (Opello, 2006). In contrast, women's efforts in Latin America more often entail organising across party lines (Franceschet, 2005), while those in Africa offer a combination of party and cross-party strategies (Bauer and Britton, 2006). As a result of these various campaigns, gender quotas have now been adopted in more than a hundred countries around the globe, most within the last fifteen years. Although these policies are intended to raise the number of female candidates, their varied effects draw attention to the continued presence of bias in candidate selection processes: some quotas produce dramatic increases in the number of women in elective office, but others lead to stagnation and even decreases in the numbers of women elected (Krook, 2009). These patterns reveal that while quotas may compel elites to recruit more female aspirants, their presence may not be enough to shift the dynamics of demand, especially if they are seen, often unfairly, as a means for promoting the selection of 'less-qualified' candidates over 'more-qualified' ones.

Critiques of Supply and Demand as a Model of Candidate Selection

The model of supply and demand thus provides the dominant framework for analysing women's access to political office in countries around the world. However, there are good reasons to question the appropriateness of this model for theorising patterns of political representation. First, it implicitly assumes that the 'political market' operates efficiently, producing an eventual equilibrium between the forces of supply and demand. Yet many economists remain doubtful of the validity of this model in explaining economic markets.

Instead, they point to a host of possible distortions which may be introduced through the many formal and informal rules and norms that govern individual and collective behaviour (North, 1990). Second, the model of supply and demand cannot in itself account for why women are under-represented in politics in every country in the world. Without a theory of gender, it is difficult to explain the pervasiveness of this pattern if women's access – like men's access – is simply a question of resources and motivations, on the one hand, and abilities and qualifications, on the other. Third, the tendency to speak in general terms about whether supply-side or demand-side factors are more important overlooks crucial variations across countries and across political parties. A closer look at these various accounts together, however, provides key tools for elaborating a gendered and a comparative critique of the model of supply and demand.

A Gendered Critique

Women are a majority of the world's population, but form only a small minority – 18.4 per cent – of all members of parliament worldwide (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009b). This fact alone suggests that norms and practices of gender must operate to lower both the supply of and demand for female aspirants. This possibility is explicitly acknowledged by Norris and Lovenduski (1995), who observe that the supply of female candidates is shaped strongly by ideologies of gender, which lead women to have fewer resources of time and money and lower levels of political ambition and confidence. Similarly, they provide direct evidence of the gendered nature of demand, which causes selectors to overlook female aspirants as less competent or pass them over for selection due to unsubstantiated concerns about voter bias. These patterns indicate that 'sex', understood as biological differences between women and men, and 'gender', the social meanings given to these biological differences, distort the efficient operation of the 'political market' in ways that exclude women, regardless of their actual desires and qualifications to come forward as political candidates.

There are many additional ways in which norms and practices of gender shape the supply of female candidates by influencing the path and ability to hold public office. At the most basic level, the move from aspirant to candidate 'involves relying on and utilizing the types of backgrounds, experiences, and characteristics that have historically been impressed upon men, but discouraged among women' (Lawless and Fox, 2005, p. 12). This leads many men to overestimate, and many women to underestimate, their qualifications to run for political office. Further, similar features are often interpreted differently for women and men: 'given traditional attitudes marriage and children may prove an advantage for a man but a disadvantage for a woman' (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, p. 116). When women's family connections do facilitate their selection as candidates, this generally occurs in a manner that feminists might not endorse. As Franceschet notes, in the case of Chile, the large number of women who are named as candidates tend to be the wives or daughters of high-profile male politicians (2005, p. 88). This is an ironic twist on the more general trend for women to be closed out of the political system due to their lack of access to the various support networks that male politicians enjoy, especially for financing political campaigns. Yet even when women do come

forward, they face ongoing challenges to their participation related to the masculine biases built into existing political institutions and practices. In Chile, this is manifest in the tendency for meetings to be held in the evenings, 'reflecting male preferences, schedules, and wifely or maternal supports' (p. 90). These stresses are compounded by social norms that frame 'women's public activism ... as a transgression' such that 'women who spend too much time away from their families are considered to be acting selfishly by pursuing their individual interests over those of their families' (p. 91). Taken together, these gendered norms and judgements have the effect of drastically reducing the available supply of female aspirants, including those who have already held political office.

The demand for female candidates, in turn, is highly gendered as well in ways that largely work against the selection of women. In Chile, as Franceschet (2005) observes, the electoral system compels parties to put forward candidates who have a very high chance of winning majorities. This concern often leads parties to refuse women in favour of men, who are believed – often incorrectly it seems, at least according to a wealth of international evidence – to be more appealing to voters (p. 88). In other countries, however, these processes of discrimination appear in a more subtle guise, expressed not openly in public discourses but embedded more privately in individual-level gender expectations and stereotypes (Lawless and Fox, 2005, p. 24). The potential for change, interestingly, also comes in highly gendered forms. In studying their pool of eligible candidates, Lawless and Fox (2005) discover that receiving the suggestion to run from a party leader, elected official or political activist increases the likelihood that an individual – male or female, Democrat or Republican – will consider running for political office. Yet they find that women are significantly less likely than men to receive this type of encouragement. Echoing Niven's (1998) conclusions, this may simply be due to the fact that men form a large majority of those already in positions of political power. Kittilson's (2006) study suggests that this may indeed be the case, at least in Western Europe. In her statistical analysis, she finds that 'women's presence among the party leadership is the single most important mechanism for initiating women's gains in parliament' (p. 37). Although she acknowledges that these 'women must be willing to "let the ladder down" to other women within the party' (p. 37), this does not alter the outcome of the analysis: a strong statistical correlation between the proportion of women on party executive committees and the percentage of party representatives who are female. As such, the demand for female candidates is shaped not only by gendered norms of competence, but also the gender identities of those in charge of soliciting aspirants and nominating candidates.

A Comparative Critique

While fewer women than men have been elected to parliaments around the world, it is also true that some countries have witnessed much higher numbers of women in politics than others. In fact, attention to global figures masks substantial cross-national variations: countries like Rwanda and Sweden have nearly equal numbers of women and men in their national assemblies, while states like Kyrgyzstan and Saudi Arabia have no female members at all (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009a). At the same time, some political parties recruit greater proportions of women than others, such that in many cases

'variation in the proportion of women to men is even greater across parties than across nations' (Kittilson, 2006, p. 8). The presence of these diverse patterns points to a need for caution when making generalisations about the relative role of supply-side vs. demand-side explanations of women's under-representation. When the findings from one country or region are compared with those from another, it soon becomes apparent that the supply of and demand for female aspirants is mediated in important ways by features of the broader political context. These trends suggest that the dynamics of supply and demand may be distorted in positive and negative directions by structural conditions as well as the rise of new and sometimes unforeseen opportunities.

One of the most commonly cited reasons for variations in women's political representation is the electoral system (see also Tremblay, 2008). Although they mention it only in passing, Lawless and Fox (2005) recognise that supply-side problems are particularly prevalent in the US, explaining that 'other democracies with relatively patriarchal histories tend to have a greater proportion of women in politics because they do not have the winner-take-all and single-member district systems prevalent in the United States' (p. 12). This structural feature exacerbates the effects of traditional gender socialisation, because while parties are important, their diminished role in candidate selection in the US means that changes in women's representation are much more reliant on the numbers of women who come forward. All the same, the role of electoral systems should not be exaggerated. As Kittilson (2006) notes, 'explanations based on fixed institutional characteristics deliver little leverage on explaining change over time' (p. 5). The supply of female aspirants may depend as well on the profile of those who vote and are members of a particular party. In British elections, Norris and Lovenduski (1995) find that supply seems to be a bigger issue for the Conservative party while demand appears to play a greater role in the Labour party. Conservative women tend to be middle-aged with traditional roles inside the home or elderly pensioners with few formal educational qualifications; while fewer women come forward, the proportion of female aspirants and candidates is roughly the same. In contrast, women in the Labour party form a much higher percentage of aspirants than selected candidates, due at least partly to the importance of trade union connections which enable men more readily to gain sponsorship and foster constituency contacts (pp. 116–8).

The supply of female aspirants is also shaped by a range of more fluid conditions, stemming from changing political circumstances. In some countries, these are related to feminist strategies *vis-à-vis* party politics, the key dilemma being whether or not to engage with the existing political parties (Kittilson, 2006). When women remain outside, their chances of being selected as candidates are very small indeed (Franceschet, 2005). In others, changes in gender relations during years of civil conflict contribute to an increased pool of female aspirants. Women in these states are often drawn into the struggles in ways that increase their resources and interests in a political career: they spend time in exile, which may afford them access to training and education that they could never have received at home, or at home as community organisers and combatants in armed struggles (Bauer and Britton, 2006, pp. 12–3). Post-conflict reconstruction, as well as democratisation more generally, in turn provides opportunities for these women to come forward as

aspirants, although in many cases 'women have had to work hard to actualize the promises made by the male leaders of the democracy movement' (Britton, 2005, p. 27). All the same, the willingness of women to stand for office may wane over time: in the case of South Africa, over one-third of female MPs elected in 1994 left parliament in 1999, believing that 'their skills as grassroots activists did not match the professional skills Parliament demanded' (p. 3). As a result, the profile of female MPs shifted from women with activist backgrounds to those with university-level education and prior experience in elected office.

The contextual factors that shape patterns of demand, in turn, can be grouped into three categories: political structures, women's strategies and political parties. Although a great deal of research discusses features of the electoral system, noting that women tend to be elected in higher numbers in proportional representation as opposed to majoritarian systems, the focus of much of the recent literature has been gender quotas (Dahlerup, 2006; Krook, 2009). In Western Europe, most major jumps in women's representation can be traced back to the adoption of party measures aimed at increasing the number of female candidates, as well as the presence of rules governing the gender composition of internal party committees (Kittilson, 2006; compare Lovenduski *et al.*, 2005; Russell *et al.*, 2002). In Africa, similar patterns are observed following the creation of new political institutions and the approval of new constitutions and electoral laws (Bauer and Britton, 2006). However, few of these struggles were won overnight: in both regions, quotas were largely the result of sustained mobilisation by women's groups to ensure that parties made and kept their commitments to include more women. In Chile, however, important opportunities were missed at the moment of democratic transition, when female activists largely retreated to civil society as political parties began to take centre stage, leaving only a weakened and fragmented women's movement to pressure parties to nominate more female candidates (Franceschet, 2005). In Africa, a similar scenario was avoided, at least partly due to help from the international women's movement. Not only had women in some countries learned new ideas for political inclusion during their years in exile abroad, but through regional and global meetings they continued to exchange lessons on 'best practices', which they later mobilised to have applied to their own constitutions and electoral laws (Bauer and Britton, 2006; Britton, 2005).

The potential of these various reforms is strongly conditioned on the nature and structure of parties and party systems. Research on Western Europe and North America finds, for example, that left-wing parties tend to be more open than right-wing parties to recruiting more female candidates. As Opello (2006) explains, this difference stems from the generally distinct positions each type of party takes with regard to women's rights: socialist parties frequently seek to promote changes in women's status, while conservative parties are often more interested in preserving women's traditional roles. These differences translate into quite different policy stances regarding the desirability of quotas, with left-wing parties more likely to adopt such measures than right-wing parties (Kittilson, 2006). When parties have a centralised governing structure, strategies to reform party selection practices can be incredibly effective, whether these initiatives come from the bottom up or are initiated from the top down (Kittilson, 2006). Conversely, weak and

decentralised parties pose a greater challenge. Parties in the US, for example, exert little control over who is nominated to run for political office and provide only minimal financial and logistical support. Thus, individuals who run must, on their own, 'raise money, build coalitions of support, create campaign organizations, and develop campaign strategies' (Lawless and Fox, 2005, p. 12), often twice in competitive races where they must contest primaries as well as elections. These differences in party structures suggest that party-based solutions might work well in Western Europe, Africa and Latin America, but might not be appropriate or effective in the US. Further, prescriptions for change may be difficult to replicate, in light of the crucial importance of opportunities afforded by moments of rapid political change.

A Case for Gendered and Comparative Research on Candidate Selection

Why are fewer women than men elected? Earlier research suggests that this is the combined result of: (1) the qualifications of women as a group to run for political office; and (2) the desire or willingness of party elites to select female candidates. The aim of this article has been to reassess this explanation through the lens of recent studies which together address trends in female representation across four major regions of the world: Africa, Latin America, North America and Western Europe. Read on their own, these various contributions lend greater support to one side or the other of the supply and demand model of candidate selection: Lawless and Fox (2005) interpret women's under-representation in US politics in terms of the lower rates of political ambition among women as compared to men, while Bauer and Britton (2006), Britton (2005), Franceschet (2005), Kittilson (2006) and Opello (2006) largely view women's exclusion through the lens of party demand. This difference in opinion leads these authors to offer distinct recommendations for change: those who focus on the supply side argue that increases will only occur as more women come forward, which is likely to be a slow and difficult process, while those who emphasise the demand side assert that the key to change is the adoption of gender quotas, which are quick but may produce mixed results.

Juxtaposing these studies exposes the limits of the traditional supply and demand framework for analysing candidate selection. In contrast to the economic model, the 'political market' does not operate efficiently towards an equilibrium solution of supply and demand. Rather, ideologies of gender introduce important distortions to the process: the fact that women are under-represented in all countries around the world suggests that both the supply of and demand for female candidates is artificially repressed, leading to low numbers of women in elective office. At the same time, however, important variations exist in women's descriptive representation across countries and across parties. Upon closer inspection, these differences suggest that dynamics of supply and demand are shaped in crucial ways by features of the broader political context, which may include structural conditions but also the emergence of new and sometimes unanticipated opportunities. Untangling these effects will require further in-depth case studies which more explicitly situate the findings of one case in relation to the findings of other cases (compare

Gerring, 2004). The research contained in these excellent volumes constitutes a first step towards the elaboration of a gendered and comparative understanding of the dynamics of descriptive representation.

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Notes

- 1 Between 2003 and 2007, women constituted 50 per cent of the members of the National Assembly for Wales. However, after the most recent elections, this proportion dropped to 47 per cent.
- 2 Three key organisations in the US context are the National Women's Political Caucus, which trains and supports pro-choice female candidates, regardless of party affiliation; EMILY's List, which aims to elect more pro-choice Democratic female candidates; and WISH List, which seeks to elect more pro-choice Republican women.

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