



Gender, presidencies, and prime ministerships in Europe: Are women gaining ground?

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Abstract

To what extent have women made progress in attaining presidential and prime ministerial positions in Europe? We might expect women in this region to have made significant strides in executive office holding, given the more favorable political, cultural, and social conditions women face. At the same time, Europe is not monolithic. The diversity within one large region allows not only for an assessment of the conditions best facilitating women's executive incorporation but also the ability to scrutinize the degree to which they exercise more substantial powers. While Europe boasts the greatest numbers of women executives to date, women face many limits in the type of positions they occupy and powers afforded their offices, although important exceptions surface. Statistically, women's success relates to dual executive structures. Likewise critical is the pipeline from which future leaders are recruited. Prospects for women leaders in Eastern Europe appear less auspicious than for their West European counterparts, further demonstrating women's uneven advances. Numbers, pathways, and political clout shape women's advancement in this historically male preserve, resulting in mixed progress overall.

Keywords

Women, executives, gender, prime ministers, presidencies, Europe

Introduction

To what extent have women made progress in attaining presidential and prime ministerial positions in Europe? In answering this main question, this article focuses on numbers, paths, and powers of women executives in Europe. We might expect women in this region to have made significant strides in executive office holding, given the more favorable political, cultural, and social conditions women face. At the same time, Europe is not monolithic. The diversity within one large region allows for an assessment of the conditions best facilitating women's executive incorporation

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but also the ability to scrutinize the degree to which they exercise more substantial powers. To date, women have gained top executive office in nearly half of all European countries, indicating substantial inroads. Perhaps surprisingly, Europe lacked women presidents and prime ministers until the late 1970s (nearly two decades after Asian women ascended) but, with 32 to date, it now surpasses all regions in terms of numbers. In fact, European cases account for 41% of the entire sample of women leaders. Similar to general trends, more substantial inroads occurred in the 1990s and 2000s. While female executives in Europe succeed under more varied circumstances than do female executives from other regions, the fact that certain conditions still disproportionately facilitate their ascent suggests somewhat limited routes to power. Women also exercise more dispersed and restricted authority than their male counterparts, although important exceptions exist. Regional differences within Europe also surface, further demonstrating women's uneven advances. Numbers, pathways, and political clout shape women's advancement in this historically male preserve, resulting in mixed progress overall.

In attempting to understand patterns of female ascent to executive positions, it is useful to refer to Lijphart's distinction between consensus and majoritarian systems of governance (1999: 2). Most European countries are in the former category. Consensus systems feature more inclusive, negotiated, and conciliated decision making. In contrast, majoritarian ones involve more exclusive, antagonistic, and competitive governance (Lijphart, 1999: 2). Leadership traits in consensus systems correspond to prevailing feminine stereotypes; we should therefore expect more women executives to arise in Europe. Most European states utilize parliamentary systems, where prime ministers govern with cabinets. Positive perceptions of women's abilities to negotiate and collaborate aid women in their pursuit of executive office. Dual executive arrangements (where both a president and prime ministers hold office) may indicate executive dependence and power fragmentation. Institutional arrangements simultaneously aid women's incorporation as political leaders, but stymie women's progress given their more restricted and collectively based authority. Western European executives lead within more consensus structures than do their East European counterparts. Following the transition from Soviet rule, several East European countries invested presidents with powers far surpassing those of prime ministers. Eastern European women, however, fail to obtain dominant presidential posts since the presidential profile involves masculine stereotypes.

Political institutions – executive systems and positions

Political institutions prove significant to women's securing presidencies and prime ministerships. Power differentials seen within and between executive offices intersect with gendered ideologies, shaping women's chances. Women's legislative recruitment depends on their supply and demand (Norris and Lovenduski, 2010); this logic may also inform executive incorporation. Some presidents wield strong powers while others act as symbolic heads of state, representing the unity of the nation. Prime ministerial authority likewise varies. Political systems shape executive powers. Many countries combine features of presidential and parliamentary government within dual executive structures led by a prime minister and president. Women fare better in these systems because of the lower power concentration (Jalalzai, 2008); as such, they may be more in demand for these posts. Further, women's odds of assuming executive office increase because twice as many posts are available. European systems commonly utilize dual executives. We should therefore expect women to gain more footing here.

Hypothesis 1: Dual executive structures are positively associated with women's executive advancement.

A major difference between presidencies and prime ministerships involves routes to power, which also links to demand. Parties select prime ministers whereas the public votes for presidents, whose role goes beyond that of head of state, often known as executive presidents.¹ Appointments to prime ministerships present opportunities for women. Even in a country with a socially conservative electorate, a woman may advance through party ranks, win the respect of her colleagues, become party head and ultimately, prime minister. The distribution of power across the political system, the decision-making functions of executives, and the status of the executive term of office (fixed tenure versus possible removal by no confidence vote) shape women's leadership opportunities. Presidential powers within a presidential system appear very strong. These presidents often assume the role of commander-in-chief and make high-profile appointments. Moreover, as the lone executive, they do not have to share office with others. Lastly, they enjoy fixed terms in office. Prime ministers are appointed and lack fixed terms. Moreover, prime ministerial governance depends upon parliamentary collaboration rather than independent leadership.

Differences in demand and gendered conceptions of traits deemed necessary for success affect women's prospects. The association of toughness with masculinity favors men in executive positions, while compassion proves a liability for women (Fox and Oxley, 2003; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993). People tend to view leaders as possessing traits that they associate with men, not women (Sczesny et al., 2004). Women's ostensible skills at negotiating and collaborating – rather than the ability to take unilateral, aggressive, and decisive action (Duerst-Lahti, 1997), qualities they would be expected to display as presidents – may explain their relative success in attaining prime ministerships.

While outright discrimination by party elites may work against women's selection (Niven, 2010), there is little evidence to confirm this (Norris and Lovenduski, 2010: 139). Research also fails to support claims of gender discrimination by the public (Borisjuk et al., 2007; McElroy and Marsh, 2010), although results are based on a small number of mainly Western European cases.

Both unified parliamentary systems and especially dual executive systems are common in Europe, although institutions vary regionally. Dual executive systems in Western Europe most often feature a weak president and a dominant prime minister. Eastern Europe established very strong presidents coexisting with weaker prime ministers (Birch, 2008). As prime ministerships, weak presidencies, and dual executive systems are commonplace in Europe, large quantities of women will advance but mainly within less influential positions.

Because qualities related to success within parliamentary systems better correspond with feminine stereotypes, we may expect that in such systems women are more likely to be selected as executives. Weak presidencies, especially prevalent in Western Europe, present less of a challenge for women. Women may also attain even dominant prime ministerships, however, since these still function within collective and dispersed forms of governance. These institutional arrangements simultaneously encourage women leaders' inclusion but also constrict their progress, since they wield more restricted and collective authority. If women fail to gain strong positions we may question their ultimate progress.

Executive systems

Executive systems vary immensely worldwide and have differing impacts on women's successful incorporation as leaders. To authenticate this claim, I first classify systems as one of two basic types – a unified or dual executive. If unified, it is then categorized as either parliamentary or presidential. Dual executives have three possible configurations based on the strength of the presidency: dominant, powerful, or weak (see Table 1).

Table 1. Executive systems.

Unified	Dual
Presidential	Presidential dominance
Parliamentary	Powerful president
	Weak president

Table 2. Executive positions and powers.

Executive position	Number of powers
Presidents	Range: 0–10
Dominant	6–10
Powerful	4–5
Weak	0–3
Prime ministers	Range: –1–7
Dominant	4–7
Weak	–1–3

I evaluate eight specific executive powers, awarding one point for each. I analyze country constitutions, media articles, scholarly works, country reports and websites, and leaders' biographies. Legal and constitutional designs provide a first glimpse into offices and processes. However, reality sometimes diverges from such formal procedures. The Irish and Icelandic presidents are constitutionally stronger than they are in practice. Integrating other sources provides a more comprehensive picture of influence. Some of the most critical powers tend to be stereotypically masculine and hence less accessible to women. Powers analyzed include playing a major role in governmental formation, making appointments, chairing cabinet meeting, vetoing legislation, authorizing unlimited emergency decrees, playing a foreign policy role, influencing defense policy, and dissolving the legislature.

Popular election underscores legitimacy and provides some presidents with an additional point. Further, a partisan identity generally suggests a more substantive role. I deduct one point if prime ministers face presidential dismissal. Presidential points range from 0 to 10; prime ministers' powers vary from –1 to 7.

I generally expect women to be more successful in dual systems and in weaker positions. While women prime ministers within unified parliamentary systems are common, women are seldom presidents within unified presidential systems; nor do they occupy the stronger post in a dual executive model. Since Eastern Europe utilizes more dominant presidencies, women there are less likely to occupy this position. Although women may succeed in dual systems with dominant presidents, they will be relegated to weak premierships. Based on points, I classify executives as one of five types.

Based on the stereotypes relating to gender and executive powers, I expect women to occupy the weaker position in dual executive systems (see Table 2). While women prime ministers within unified parliamentary configurations may also be common, women will seldom be presidents within unified systems or hold the dominant presidency in a dual executive model.

Hypothesis 2: European women leaders are more frequent in dual systems featuring weak presidents as well as dominant presidents, although women will hold the weaker posts in these contexts, particularly in Eastern Europe.

Political institutions – party dynamics

Parties prove critical to women's political success. Weaker party organizations less often promote women since they enjoy lower degrees of control over local parties (Lovenduski, 1993). Still, less competitive parties tend to nominate more women given their limited choices (Lovenduski, 1993). Competition also guides the relative power of parties and the voting public. Generally, voters exercise more sway in marginal districts and parties in safer seats (Norris and Lovenduski, 2010: 135).

Leftist parties appear to be greater advocates of women's parliamentary leadership; they subscribe to more egalitarian gender roles and list more women on prime ballot positions (Kittilson, 1999). Some prominent European women executives, however, particularly Angela Merkel and Margaret Thatcher, gained power on conservative tickets. According to Wiliarty (2008: 491), corporatist 'catch all' parties appeal to many segments of the general electorate while recognizing important societal interests. Corporatist catch all structures are more common among right parties, since they are less concerned with democratic procedures for promotion. The result may be to propel women through the ranks (Wiliarty, 2008). However, based on the greater demand for women candidates, among left-of-center parties, I expect them to be more likely to select women executives.

Hypothesis 3: Women leaders in Europe will be more likely to have leftist party labels. A substantial portion will also lack partisan affiliations.

Coalition governments are common in Europe, given the abundance of multi-party systems, and may favor women thanks to stereotypes of women being consensus driven. Prime ministers also need to appoint members of coalition partners to their cabinets, which may result in more dispersed executive authority, and increase women's chances of gaining executive posts. This depends, however, on women's standing within the coalition parties from which cabinet ministers will be nominated.

Hypothesis 4: Multi-party systems will positively correlate with women executives.

Structural conditions – political pipeline

In contrast to institutions, structural conditions appear less critical to women's attaining political office (Jalalzai and Krook, 2010). Although clearly related to demand, supply involves the political pipeline since legislative and cabinet experience help qualify one for higher executive office. Women's percentages in European legislatures average 25%. Regional differences are significant; women comprise 32% of Western legislatures but only 19% of Eastern ones. Women's presence is highest in the subset of Nordic countries where, on average in 2014, they accounted for 42% of legislators.² The extent of cabinet membership also varies regionally. Women account for 32% of cabinet ministers in Western Europe but only half that (16%) in Eastern Europe. Again, their share of cabinet posts is higher in Nordic countries – 38%.³ Since women normally work their way through other national political institutions before ascending to executive offices (Jalalzai, 2004), women's current percentages may be predictive of their future success.

Hypothesis 5: Countries with higher proportions of women national legislators in the previous decade will be more likely to have women executives.

Hypothesis 6: Countries with higher proportions of women cabinet ministers in the prior decade have a greater chance of being led by women presidents and prime ministers.

Institutional mechanisms, including gender quotas, yield diverse percentages of women legislators and possibly female cabinet members if parliamentarians form the pool of ministers. Quotas typically comprise one of three types: reserved seats; mandated legislative quotas; or party quotas (Krook, 2009). Quotas work best within proportional representation systems with closed lists and high district magnitudes (Htun and Jones, 2002). Left-wing parties are more likely to enforce quota regulations (Davidson-Schmich, 2006; Kittilson, 1999).

In contrast to many parts of the world, Europe tends not to utilize reserved seats or legislative quotas. When Western European countries adopt affirmative mechanisms, party quotas are more common. Even such party measures meet resistance in Eastern Europe because of perceived connections to communism (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2005: 34). This seems to be changing. Among the 43 European countries analyzed in this study, at least 14 of the 24 in Eastern Europe utilized quotas (58%): seven at the party level, six at the national legislative level, and one at both.⁴ Fifteen of the 19 Western European systems employed quotas (79%): 10 at the party level, one at the national legislative level, two at both the national legislative and party levels, and another two at the subnational legislative and party levels. While Western Europe uses quotas more regularly, most do so through parties. In Eastern Europe, countries are as likely to adopt national laws or party ones. While quotas do not directly mandate women executives, they affect the political pipeline of women poised to enter these posts.

Structural conditions – gender parity in society

While educational and professional backgrounds prove important to securing posts, women in the general populace need not achieve parity with men to gain national executive office (Jalalzai and Krook, 2010). Although women would seemingly benefit from greater gender equity in Europe (Galligan et al., 2007; Inglehart and Norris, 2003) this does not necessarily translate into political equality. Most women presidents and prime ministers, however, have accumulated extensive political experience in lower executive and legislative offices (Jalalzai, 2004). Although Europe should pose no exception to this rule, this claim requires corroboration, especially since so many women have only recently gained power.

Hypothesis 7: European women leaders will generally accumulate high degrees of educational and political credentials before rising to power.

Women leaders worldwide surmount many of the obstacles they face in attaining political power through their reliance on unstable contexts (Hodson, 1997), political activism (Richter, 1991), family ties (Jalalzai, 2004), and sudden political openings (Beckwith, 2010; Jalalzai, 2004). Since Western Europe is generally stable, political volatility may be irrelevant. Even here, however, women benefit when political vacuums suddenly open up as male elites get caught up in scandals or suffer from major election upsets. Since even politically seasoned women tend to be excluded from the inner realms of male networks, they are likely to be insulated from such scandals (Beckwith, 2010). In the aftermath of major electoral defeats, remaining high-quality male contenders sometimes withdraw, anticipating greater chances of victory in the future (Beckwith, 2010). In these situations, well-credentialed senior women have their best chance of attaining the position of party head and prime minister (Beckwith, 2010).

Recent political transitions present opportunities in Eastern Europe. Scholars, however, note the complex relationship between communism, democratic change, activism, and women's political status. While communist ideology emphasized women's equality to men, their inclusion in the paid labor force stemmed less from a commitment to female empowerment than to increased labor

productivity; women also failed to obtain equal compensation for their labor (Galligan et al., 2007) and were saddled with burdens of outside employment and domestic roles (Sariban, 1984). According to LaFont (2001: 205):

Instead of truly liberating women, state communism turned into a system that doubly exploited women in their roles as producers and reproducers. Their official glorification, represented in propaganda and the numerous statues of strong women proletarians standing beside their male counterparts, unfortunately, did not reflect the reality of women's lives.

With democratic transition, however, women's status, including their legislative numbers, declined at least initially (Galligan et al., 2007; LaFont, 2001). One explanation centers on the eradication of quotas in parliament and local governments (Ostrovskaya, 1994). Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2005: 34), however, argue that claims of women's numerical representation in the former Soviet Union are a myth. Women's percentages varied substantially, but the widespread view that quotas were mandated under communism negatively affected post-transition adoption.

Nationalism initially limited women's feminist organizing, since this collided with building country unity (LaFont, 2001: 215). Tensions continue with the Eastern expansion of the European Union (Forest, 2011; Galligan et al., 2007). As of late, however, the feminist movement has gained ground, leading to women's increased inclusion in civil society and political institutions (Galligan et al., 2007). Several countries have recently adopted quotas at both the legislative and party levels. The resulting increase in women legislators has likely produced opportunities for women to gain presidencies and prime ministerships.

Hypothesis 8: Because of recent political openings, Eastern Europe will witness noticeable gains in women leaders.

Having presented the main arguments and hypotheses, the next sections engage in hypotheses testing. While mostly examining contexts where women held prime ministerial or presidential positions, I extend my focus to include 43 European countries, 19 located in Western Europe and the remaining 24 in Eastern Europe. This enables comparison between environments where women lead and where they do not. I also integrate findings from a logistical regression conducted on 39 European countries to assess the statistical significance of key variables outlined previously. The regression table and variable coding and source information may be found in Appendix 3, <http://ips.sagepub.com/>.⁵

European women leaders

Women gained presidencies and prime ministerships in 20 countries (see Appendix 1, <http://ips.sagepub.com/>). Women attained power in Finland, Lithuania, and Switzerland, while two did so in Ireland. In fact, by extending the time frame, the results are even more impressive, in that women have attained executive positions in nearly half of Europe.⁶ The United Kingdom's Margaret Thatcher was Europe's first female prime minister (1979–1990), while Iceland's President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir (1980–1996) holds the distinction of being the first female president. Europe now leads the world in the numbers of women heads of state or government, with 33 leaders from 1980 to September 2011 (see Appendix 1, <http://ips.sagepub.com/>), including seven serving on an interim basis.⁷ As with legislative trends, substantial gains for women executives occurred in the 1990s and 2000s (Jalalzai and Krook, 2010) and this timing is hardly a coincidence: gaining increased representation in the legislature enabled more women to be tapped for national executive

Table 3. European women leaders, paths, positions, systems.

Systems	
Unified presidential	3
Unified parliamentary	4
Dual executive	19
Total	26
Unified president	3
Unified parliament	4
Parliament with president dominance	4
Parliament with powerful president	7
Parliament with symbolic president	7
Total	25
Position	
Dominant president	0
Weak president	8
Powerful but weaker president	3
Dominant prime minister	11
Weak prime minister	4
Total	26
Paths	
Popular vote	5
Legislative appointment	16
Presidential appointment	5
Constitutional succession	0
Total	26
Temporary appointments	7

Kazimiera Prunskiene (Lithuania) is not reflected in the position classification, since the specifics of the systems seemed unclear; as such, the European total in the second systems category is 25 instead of 26.

positions. Many countries utilized quotas to boost female representation. About equal numbers of top female executives hail from each of the two main regions: 17 from Western and 16 from Eastern Europe. Several women acquired executive posts in the East after a fairly sluggish start, a result of executive office being opened to contestation following democratic transitions.

European women leaders – paths, positions, systems

Dual executive systems

Nineteen of the 26 non-interim leaders (nearly three quarters) emerged in dual executive systems, confirming Hypothesis 1 (see Table 3). Among the 43 countries in Europe, 10 (23%) have unified executive structures and 33 (77%) have dual executive arrangements. That women executives disproportionately ascend in dual executive systems is statistically significant.⁸

Positions and paths

The powers of women leaders vary considerably. Including temporary women leaders holding office through 2011, 19 are prime ministers (58%) and 14 are presidents (42%), thus confirming

women's greater tendency to lead as prime ministers. Given difficulties in assessing powers of interim leaders, I confine analysis to the remaining 26 women executives. Twelve are weak (46%), divided between eight presidents and four prime ministers. Three others are invested with important roles, but still have less authority than the prime minister (12%). Finally, 11 serve as dominant prime ministers (42%). As expected, women tend to hold weaker executive positions. Fifty-eight percent exert less influence. Women are statistically more prone to govern in dominant presidential systems but they occupy the weaker prime ministership *not* the presidency in these contexts. Among the 43 countries, 10 have dominant, 10 weak, and 15 powerful presidencies; nine are unified parliamentary systems and one (Switzerland) features a unified system with a weak president. No women secured dominant presidencies; only three held powerful ones.

I now analyze the 66 male and 10 female leaders in power in 2011. Again, only men (15%) gained dominant presidencies; no women did. Men and women were equally likely to govern as dominant prime ministers (41% and 40%, respectively). At the same time, women disproportionately held powerful (18% and 30%, respectively) as well as weak presidencies (12% versus 30%). Based on these findings, **Hypothesis 2 is confirmed**. I present below additional findings regarding positions and powers.

Returning to the entire sample of female leaders, five ascended through presidential selections and 16 by legislative vote. Thus, while 65% relied on appointment, only 15% rose through popular election, consistent with expectations. These results demonstrate that women serve in systems with less concentrated executive power. Women's progress in achieving executive office in Europe appears to be mixed, although somewhat better than expected. While a substantial number of women are prime ministers and therefore dominant players within their systems, they can be ousted from office at any point and must govern more collaboratively.

Party and party systems

Among the total sample of 33 female leaders, women are slightly more likely to lead leftist or center left ($n = 12$ or 36%) parties than conservative ones ($n = 10$ or 30%). (See Appendix 2, <http://ips.sagepub.com/>.) Nearly one quarter lack partisan affiliations ($n = 8$ or 24%). Partisan independence often coincides with a limited political role: most in the non-partisan group are weak or interim presidents. Finally, three (9%) hail from the center. **Hypothesis 3 is therefore confirmed**. Nearly all European countries feature multiple competitive parties.⁹ Some exceptions include Azerbaijan and Belarus, which have both failed to install a woman executive. While this supports **Hypothesis 4, I was unable to statistically verify** this relationship, probably because of the lack of variation among systems in this region.

Non-interim European women leaders and political experience

While women leaders boast strong political qualifications, there is a regional contrast in this regard (see Table 4). The proportion is low in Eastern Europe – usually under 20%. Statistically, a country's chances of being led by a woman increase when women form a larger share of legislators during the previous decade, confirming Hypothesis 5. This is not the case, however, regarding women's representation in the cabinet, thus providing mixed results for the pipeline hypotheses. Perhaps this is because most female executives ultimately accumulate both legislative and cabinet experience.

Political experience is defined broadly and includes holding official political office, engaging in party work, and organizing in a political movement, including revolutionary or independence struggles (Jalalzai, 2004). Analyzing only formal office underestimates women's political

Table 4. Non-interim European women leaders and political experience.

High	Medium	Low	None
3 (11%)	21 (84%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)
Legislative	Cabinet	Both	Neither
6 (23%)	1 (4%)	16 (62%)	3 (12%)

participation (see Banaszak, 2008). Eight-four percent of non-interim European women executives amassed high levels of experience. They almost always served in legislatures and may have combined this with cabinet credentials (see Table 3). In fact, 67% were legislators and ministers. Only three (12%) had never held formal positions prior to attaining office and they occupied fairly weak positions. Six (23%) initially participated in activist movements; all gained formal office subsequently. **Hypothesis 7 is therefore confirmed.**¹⁰

Do women fail to advance because they do not run? Analysis of women's presidential candidacies suggests that it is not failure to run that explains the dearth of women executives. Of 300 women candidates, over one third were in Europe ($n = 118$).¹¹ More women competed for the presidency there than anywhere else, most since 2000 (Jalalzai, 2013). Only 10 were successful, of whom five were popularly elected. Twenty-two finished in second or third place, usually garnering less than 5% of the vote. More women have been competing for presidencies in Eastern Europe as of late, but dominant presidencies continue to elude them.

Structural conditions

I expected that women's attainment of executive power was linked to political openings, particularly in Eastern Europe. Hence, the analysis includes interim leaders, as political transitions may disproportionately feature temporary executives. At least eight women attained power during transitions (24%), either in the lead-up to democratic opening or just after the fall of communism (see Appendix 2, <http://ips.sagepub.com/>). Six did so in the aftermath of rigged elections.¹² While this provides some support for Hypothesis 8, I did not confirm that unstable contexts in Eastern Europe were positively correlated with women leaders when compared with nearly all of Europe.¹³

Finally, I control for gender parity in society. The Gender Related Development Index values range widely from .738 to .962 (see Appendix 2, <http://ips.sagepub.com/>).¹⁴ There is lower parity in Eastern Europe. Greater gender equality does not positively correlate with women executives.

Since the 1990s, the women leaders who have advanced to executive office in Europe have tended to do so through traditional institutions, although nearly a quarter gained access in part through political activism. When they enter through non-conventional routes, women have the added burden of amassing formal experience.¹⁵ While a majority have served in relatively weak positions, a significant proportion held dominant executive authority. Even they, however, have enjoyed less autonomy and have been prone to unpredictable ousting. Dominant presidencies continually evade women, particularly in Eastern Europe where such presidential posts are more common. Women's success is mixed; nearly all of the strongest and most visible European executive office holders continue to be men. In order to analyze paths, powers, and gender in greater depth, each executive category is now examined separately, with a particular focus on women leaders.

Weak women presidents – Europe

Eight women are mainly symbolic presidents (see Appendix 2, <http://ips.sagepub.com/>). Western European systems are essentially parliamentary, where presidents act as heads of state. In unified

parliamentary systems like Norway, the monarch plays this role. While most ‘weak’ women presidents have been elected by popular vote, exceptions include the presidents of Switzerland, Malta, and Latvia. While popular election does not involve a specific power, it provides legitimacy that bolsters the president’s power base (Lijphart, 2004).

While Iceland’s Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was Europe’s first elected female head of state, she was also one of the weakest. Not listed in Appendix 2 (<http://ips.sagepub.com>) is the procedure for deciding which party forms government when there is no majority, a situation likely to occur given Iceland’s multi-party system. While the president officially signs bills into law, this is a technicality. However, the president can exercise veto power by refusing to sign a bill, thereby requiring that it be decided by referendum (Blondal, 1996). However, all presidents signed bills until 2004. Finnbogadóttir delayed approval of one bill that involved workers’ rights until a women’s strike over their unpaid work had ended (Liswood, 1995). She enjoyed high approval ratings and is considered a female role model (*Iceland Review*, 2014).

The Irish Constitution depicts the powers of the president as greater than they are in reality. The Oireachtas (Parliament) holds a dominant role in military and defense matters, as do specific cabinet members. The president requires government authorization for foreign travel and partisan declarations by the president are prohibited. Both Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese, however, increased their influence compared to previous presidents (Hardy, 2008; Sykes, 1993), illustrating the fluidity of authority. They used the symbolic potential and soft power of the office to make the presidency more relevant to 21st century politics (Galligan, 2012). Outside the West, only Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga of Latvia was a weak president. Her powers included a veto and defense role, but although she could propose dissolving parliament, this power was dependent upon obtaining a popular majority. The fact that the president must resign if the referendum is defeated explains why this power is not used.

Weak presidents are particularly vulnerable. They typically serve under stronger prime ministers and are less autonomous. Although they often gain office through popular election, they may have little formal authority. Finally, the fact that many lack partisanship ties highlights their apolitical role. Since systems featuring weak presidencies are the second most common type in Europe, women’s incorporation as executives here is not surprising. Moreover, given the limited powers of such presidents, gains do not signal substantial advancement. At the same time, some have extended the boundaries of their power (Galligan, 2012). By so doing, they may signal that politics is an appropriate realm for women and that women can represent the nation.

Powerful women presidents – Europe

Powerful presidents, most of whom are elected by popular vote, enjoy mid-range influence. While it is the most common configuration in Europe (particularly in the East), only three women fit this category (see Table 5). The Finnish presidency, occupied by Tarja Halonen (2000–2012), is stronger than a symbolic head of state but weaker than an executive president; the prime minister appears to be at least marginally more powerful. Executive institutions were altered just prior to Halonen’s election in 2000, transferring powers to parliament, cabinet, and the prime minister (Holli, 2008); further reforms that would weaken the presidency are currently being debated. This illustrates that as women’s ability to gain office increases, the powers of the office erode.

Dalia Grybauskaitė of Lithuania possesses more power than most female Eastern European leaders. While she appoints many officials, the prime minister officially selects most officials and must countersign all presidential decrees. Although the president exerts defense and foreign policy influence, this duty is carried out with the government. Atifete Jahjaga of Kosovo was selected to assist in setting up popular presidential elections. Her nomination was reportedly pushed by the

Table 5. Powers of European women presidents.

Leader/Country	PV	Party GF	AP	CM	VT	EP	FP	DF	DL	Total powers	Position
Barbara (Malta)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	Weak
Calmy Rey (Switzerland)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Weak
Dreifuss (Switzerland)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Weak
Finnbogadóttir (Iceland)	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	Weak
Jahjaga (Kosovo)	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	5	Powerful
McAleese (Ireland)	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	Weak
Robinson (Ireland)	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	Weak
Vīķe-Freiberga (Latvia)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	Weak
Grybauskaitė (Lithuania)	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	5	Powerful
Halonon (Finland)	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	5	Powerful
Leuthard (Switzerland)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Weak

AP: discretionary appointment powers; CM: chair cabinet meetings; VT: veto; EP: emergency long term or decree powers; FP: central role in foreign policy; DF: central role in defense such as commander in chief; GF: central role in government formation; DL: ability to dissolve the legislature; PV: elected by popular vote.

Note: Coding 0–3: weak or minimal power; 4–5: powerful but not dominant; 6–8: dominant power.

Sources: author analysis of 'Constitution Finder'; 'Worldfactbook' (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>); International Foundation for Electoral Systems Election Guide (<http://www.idea.int/>); Siaroff (2003).

American ambassador to Kosovo, Christopher Dell (Rustemi, 2011). Lacking political experience, she was the compromise candidate, making it unlikely that she would exercise substantial power.

Women do gain positions invested with greater authority. Some, like Halonen, gain international visibility as well. However, they appear limited in strength relative to the prime minister and their policy impacts may be confined to specific domains. Yet they do offer role models to the public, thus possibly inspiring the candidacy of future women leaders and weakening the association of presidencies with masculinity.

Weak prime ministers – Europe

Powers of European women prime ministers

Four women are weak prime ministers (see Table 6). Most have influence regarding the formation of governments and appointment of cabinet ministers; several chair cabinet meetings, although the president is the principal policy player. In addition, presidents are usually charged with defense and foreign policy duties. Presidents frequently handpick their prime ministers, a choice only rarely subject to legislative approval. Weak prime ministers are liable to dismissal by both parliament *and* the president. In only one case can a weak prime minister call a vote of confidence to facilitate early dissolution of the legislature. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, weak prime ministers are more common in Eastern Europe, where semi-presidentialism has become common (Elgie and Moestrup, 2008: 2).

Upon independence, the Ukraine has repeatedly demonstrated the fluidity of powers within dual executive structures; these changes are more often in response to the actions of specific political

Table 6. Powers of European women prime ministers.

Leader (country)	Appointment	PR	GF	AP	CM	EP	FP	DF	DL	Total	Position	EU
Brundtland (Norway)	Legislative	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	5	Dominant	No
Ciller (Turkey)	Presidential	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	5	Dominant	No
Cresson (France)	Presidential	-1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	Weak	Yes
Greceanii (Moldova)	Presidential (legislative approval)	-1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	Weak	No
Jaatteenmaki (Finland)	Legislative	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	5	Dominant	Yes
Kiviniemi (Finland)	Legislative	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	5	Dominant	Yes
Kosor (Croatia)	Presidential (leg. approval)	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	Dominant	No
Merkel (Germany)	Legislative	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	Dominant	Yes
Planinc (Yugoslavia)	Legislative	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	5	Dominant	No
Prunskiene (Lithuania)	Legislative	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	4	Dominant	No
Radicová (Slovakia)	Legislative	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	4	Dominant	Yes
Sigurðardóttir (Iceland)	Legislative	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	Dominant	No
Suchocka (Poland)	Legislative	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	Weak	No
Thatcher (United Kingdom)	Legislative	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	Dominant	Yes
Tymoshenko (Ukraine)	Presidential (leg. approval)	-1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	Weak	No

AP: discretionary appointment powers; PR: presidential removal; CM: chair cabinet meetings; EP: emergency long term or decree powers; FP: central role in foreign policy; DF: central role in defense such as commander in chief; GF: central role in government formation; DL: ability to dissolve the legislature.

Sources: author analysis of 'Constitution Finder'; 'Worldfactbook' (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>); International Foundation for Electoral Systems Election Guide (<http://www.idea.int>).

leaders than to institutional rules and processes (Birch, 2008). Overall, the president has exercised the bulk of power since independence (Protsyk and Wilson, 2003). Yuliya Tymoshenko served as prime minister twice. Her first term ended after seven months, when President Yushchenko dismissed her government. Constitutional reforms taking effect in 2006 placed more restrictions on presidential appointment and dismissal of the prime minister, as well as on presidential governmental formation. Tymoshenko regained her post in 2007. After two failed votes of no confidence in 2007 and 2008, and an unsuccessful presidential bid two years later, she lost a confidence vote in 2010 (Levy, 2010).¹⁶

The French case also proves instructive. President François Mitterrand appointed Edith Cresson prime minister in 1991 after forcing Michel Rocard to resign. Mitterrand sought Cresson's support as he prepared for the 1993 elections and may have thought her appointment would attract women voters (Jensen, 2008: 49). Because both hailed from the Socialist Party, he enjoyed wide latitude in nominating her and retaining her, which thereby reduced her influence. She enjoyed little independent power, instead appointing Mitterrand's friends to the cabinet (Liswood, 1995: 122). However, rather than always toeing the party line, Cresson was outspoken and when the Socialist Party performed poorly in the 1992 local elections, Mitterrand demanded her resignation (Jensen, 2008: 50).

These examples demonstrate a liability common to all prime ministers, that is, susceptibility to untimely ousting. They may be further hindered by lack of autonomous powers. Given these major vulnerabilities, it is not a sea change for women to be appointed to these positions.

Dominant women prime ministers – Europe

Eleven women have served as dominant prime ministers, exercising powers, notably including foreign affairs and defense, which are widely considered to be masculine domains. They also exercise great policy power through the ability to make cabinet appointments. Prime ministers chart their preferred course, but steer policy through their ministers. They intervene when the cabinet is divided. Like all prime ministers, they can be ousted from office at any point and exercise power in collaborative governance. In addition, as previously discussed, collaborative governance favors women, who are typically portrayed more as consensus driven than as autonomous actors. Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway governed for a substantial period of time as a dominant prime minister but unlike most European prime ministers, especially those in unified systems, she lacked the ability to call an early dissolution of Parliament (Strom and Swindle, 2002).

Dominant prime ministers usually serve in dual systems with a weaker or symbolic president. Overall, although prime ministers can exercise substantial influence, their autonomy and powers are less than the strongest presidents. Nor can they dismiss the president, unlike dominant presidents who share power with weaker prime ministers.

German chancellor Angela Merkel exemplifies the power and vulnerabilities of dominant prime ministers. The single most important policy actor, she is more influential than the Federal President. However, her cabinet appointees are invested with authority over their respective policy domains, while she resolves conflicts among the ministries. German governments are coalitional. Prime ministers in coalitions share power with their cabinet, comprised of both fellow partisans and coalition partners. As Buckley and Galligan note, 'It is not unusual for the chancellor to have little or no input into the choice of cabinet representatives by the coalition partners' (2011: 144). Merkel appointed a greater share of ministers from coalition partners than from her own party during her first term, further dispersing her powers. Like many of her female counterparts, Merkel's path was that of indirect election, although she still required a majority vote in the Bundestag before officially becoming Chancellor (Helms, 2006). Merkel's security is generally greater than most prime ministers, as a constructive vote of no confidence in the Bundestag requires a majority vote for a successor. Finding a consensus replacement is difficult (Parks, 1997).

While these cases demonstrate the variety of paths and powers that women in Europe enjoy, each example also indicates constraints that women face, which hinders their progress. Perhaps most telling is the complete absence from Europe of dominant women presidents.

Discussion and conclusions

Women have made important strides in attaining executive office in Europe. At the same time, there are clear limitations. Political institutions appear critical to women's success, with dual executive

structures especially auspicious for women's executive aspirations. The types of positions and executive institutions common in this region are the very ones that correspond to feminine stereotypes, which helps explain why more women have gained a foothold here. Substantial numbers hold relatively weak authority under dominant presidents. Executive selection processes vary, however. Women face the most durable glass ceilings in obtaining dominant presidencies. To date, there has yet to be a dominant female president of a European country in France or in Eastern Europe, where such presidencies are common. This article also demonstrates a range of possibilities for women leaders. Some, like Angela Merkel, play important domestic and international roles. Even in Eastern Europe, women have gained ground in securing powerful presidencies.

The political pipeline shapes women's chances. Women's rise in legislative institutions in the 1990s may partly explain women's gains in presidencies and prime ministerships in the 2000s. Women executives often obtain extensive legislative experience before entering office, although they also regularly first access politics through activist movements. Such combined experiences appear unique to women. While activism offers important opportunities to women in Eastern Europe, it may also constitute an additional stage in the path to power.

Women are more likely to attain office as non-partisans, particularly the office of heads of state. Slightly greater numbers of women rise to power on leftist party labels, nearly all from within multi-party systems. Europe's tendency to have multi-party systems probably explains women's recent advances in their executive aspirations. Despite the increased number of female presidential candidacies, few women win these contests, an illustration of the continued obstacles to their true incorporation.

This article raises questions for future research. Do women presidents and prime ministers in Europe act on behalf of women's policy interests and appoint more women to political positions? Do they heighten women's political interest, engagement, and efficacy? Women often hold weaker and more dispersed authority, but whether this is due to specific gender stereotypes held by party leaders and the public remains unclear and likely requires experimental research. More research analyzing candidate strategies is also needed. To what extent do women candidates employ gendered tactics in their pursuit of office and which prove most successful?¹⁷ Since women executives disproportionately govern in Europe, further regional analysis would be most helpful in addressing these questions.

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Notes

1. 'Executive presidents' exercise substantive powers in addition to ceremonial functions, in contrast to those who serve solely as heads of state. The latter are often, although not always, selected by political bodies such as parliaments, local legislatures, or a combination. In fact, Lijphart (2004: 104) suggests it is important not to popularly elect presidents if that office is primarily ceremonial; otherwise they might become more active political participants than intended.
2. The percentage and average of women in the lower house in February 2014, data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, available at: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.
3. The percentage of women in ministerial positions in January 2014, data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, available at: http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wmnmap14_en.pdf. Averages calculated by the author.

4. Author analysis of Quota Project Database, International IDEA, and University of Stockholm, available at: <http://www.quotaproject.org>.
5. The dependent variable consists of women executives in office during 1980–2010 (1: yes, 0: otherwise), that is, women prime ministers or presidents coming to power between 1980 and 2010. A temporary female leader came to power in East Germany, which later unified with the West.
6. Several more women gained executive office in Europe after the end of my time frame in December 2010: Prime ministers include Helle Thorning-Schmidt (Denmark), Laimdota Straujuma (Latvia), Erna Solberg (Norway), and Alenka Bratušek (Slovenia). Presidents include Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf (Swiss Confederation) and Atifete Jahjaga (Kosovo). In addition, Slavica Đukić-Dejanović (Serbia) served as Acting President.
7. As a point of comparison, through 2010, a total of 79 women leaders gained power throughout the world. European women, therefore, comprise over 40% of women executives, a larger number than in any other region (Jalalzai, 2013).
8. Of the 39 countries utilized in the regression dataset, 31 utilize dual executive systems. Significance <.10 level.
9. In the dataset, only two of 39 countries had two-party contexts: the United Kingdom (which had a female prime minister) and Azerbaijan. With recent electoral results, the United Kingdom seems to be heading towards having more than two competitive parties. Belarus was excluded for reasons previously provided. Interestingly, two-party systems were associated with women leaders, but given the lack of variation, there is reason to believe this result is not reliable.
10. Few differences in political experience surface between male and women leaders except for women's much greater tendency to be political activists before their rise to executive office. Results significant at the <.01 level and based on comparisons with their male predecessor.
11. I analyze data from the Guide to the Female Presidential Candidates link from the Worldwide Guide to Women's Leadership website, available at: http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/woman_presidential_candidates.htm. I focus only on presidential candidacies because these are easier to track than prime ministerial contests.
12. Another two led on an interim basis, but during major political transitions.
13. In fact, less politically fragile countries in Eastern Europe are more likely to have women leaders. This is based on the 39 countries in the dataset. Significant at the <.1 level.
14. This captures women's levels of poverty, education, and life expectancy rates in relation to men's from the United Nations Human Development Reports. 1 indicates perfect parity with men in these domains. In fact, countries with lower levels of parity are more likely to have women leaders. This is based on the 39 countries in the dataset. Significant at the <.1 level.
15. In comparing women leaders with their immediate predecessors, only Pawlak (Poland) and Djuranovic (Yugoslavia) appeared to have activist backgrounds.
16. She began serving a prison term for abusing her authority when signing 2009 gas contracts with Russia; these allegations were widely believed to be false and politically motivated (Zhinko, 2012). She gained release in March of 2014, when President Yanukovich was toppled by Parliament (Erlanger and Kramer, 2014).
17. While Murray's (2010) collection examines some recent presidential bids, it analyzed only a handful of cases. Further, little is done to link strategies to the types of powers candidates are competing for.

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