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Christine Cheng¹ and Margit Tavits²

Abstract

The authors argue that the gender composition of party gatekeepers—those responsible for candidate recruitment—plays a crucial role in either encouraging or discouraging women candidates to run for office. Using an original data set that includes constituency-level information for all parties and candidates in the 2004 and 2006 Canadian national elections, the authors find support for this proposition. Women candidates are more likely to be nominated when the gatekeeper—the local party president—is a woman rather than a man. The results underline the importance of informal factors for understanding women's political underrepresentation.

Keywords

women's representation, gender, candidate selection, informal influences, party politics

What factors influence the low proportion of female politicians? Comparative studies have generally approached this question from a highly aggregate institutionalist perspective. From this rapidly growing body of literature we know that certain country- and party-level variables such as the configuration of the electoral system, party ideology, gender quotas, and cultural and socioeconomic factors all influence the variation in the share of women in national legislatures (Rule 1985; Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Studlar and McAllister 1991; Matland and Studlar 1996; Welch and Studlar 1996; Paxton 1997; Matland 1998; Kennworthy and Malami 1999; Caul 1999; Reynolds 1999; Norris and Inglehart 2003; Paxton and Kunovich 2003).

However, while the effect of institutional factors across and within countries has received considerable scholarly attention, the role of informal influences has not (but see Studlar and McAllister 1991; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Matland and Studlar 1996). Importantly, these types of influences have been virtually untested empirically in the literature on underrepresented groups (e.g., women and visible minorities) and on candidate selection more generally. As Studlar and McAllister (1991, 468) noted, "There have been suspicions and some circumstantial evidence on the inhibiting role of party selection committees, but little firm evidence, at least partly because of the difficulties of collecting reliable data."¹

The purpose of this article is to shed light on some of these potential informal influences on candidate recruitment. Specifically, we investigate the role of party gatekeepers and propose the following hypothesis: local party presidents

who are women are more likely to field women candidates in their constituency. We find support for this proposition with an original data set that includes district-level information for all parties and candidates in the 2004 and 2006 Canadian national elections.

Existing studies have not directly tested this relationship. Caul (1999) and Kunovich and Paxton (2005) look at the aggregate party-level relationship between the share of women in party leadership and the share of female legislators from that party and report somewhat inconsistent results. Niven (1998) and Tremblay and Pelletier (2001) focus on the individual level but use survey data, which are less likely to reveal the subtle effects of informal influences because of social desirability biases in survey responses. These two studies succeeded in capturing the *stated* preferences of party gatekeepers, but we argue in this article that this form of measurement systematically underestimates their *actual influence* on the candidate selection process.

Uncovering the informal pathways by which women can be encouraged or discouraged to participate in politics contributes significantly to our knowledge of women's political representation. For policy makers, understanding

¹University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

²Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO

Corresponding Author:

Christine Cheng, Exeter College, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 3DP, UK

Email: christine.cheng@nuffield.ox.ac.uk

these informal mechanisms and pinpointing them precisely is extremely important for increasing women's political representation and influencing policy outcomes.² Furthermore, informal influences may be important not only for understanding why women are politically underrepresented but possibly also for understanding political underrepresentation in other groups such as visible minorities. More generally, informal influences should also be helpful in specifying candidate selection processes.

The General Importance of Party Gatekeepers

In almost all countries, becoming a candidate for a political party in a given constituency is critical to successfully pursuing public office (Kunovich and Paxton 2005, 509). Winning a party nomination usually requires participation in a process that is controlled (or at least heavily influenced) by the political party in question.³ Political parties are usually also powerful enough to control the pipeline of candidates (Norris and Lovenduski 1993). In this way, they have an indirect effect on how many women get elected. While it is certainly true that parties can and do have the option of directly enhancing women's representation through formal party rules (Erickson 1993; Praud 1998), their informal influence through actors such as local party gatekeepers may be equally important.

There are several distinct ways in which local gatekeepers can influence the nomination process. They can encourage or discourage specific candidates to run and thus alter the candidate pool. This is important since we know that among men and women with similar credentials, women are still less likely to be recruited or encouraged to run or to be promoted from within the party to become candidates (Carroll 1994; Fox and Lawless 2004; Lawless and Fox 2005).⁴ For example, Trimble and Arscott (2003) argue that in Canada, the failure of political parties to adequately support and promote female candidates and the generally masculine political environment are at least partially responsible for the underrepresentation of women in politics. Similarly, Tremblay and Pelletier (2000) argue, also in the Canadian context, that promoting women within political parties is the best strategy to advance the descriptive and substantive representation of women.

We also know from Lawless and Fox (2005, 129) that American women would be much more likely to consider political candidacies if party gatekeepers asked them to do so. The support of party gatekeepers could also provide a campaign advantage: local party presidents can offer campaign advice and assist with fund-raising. Even

at the nomination meeting, party gatekeepers can encourage or discourage people to attend, and they can speak in favor of (or against) specific candidates. These are some of the most basic ways that the informal influence of party gatekeepers may significantly help or hinder a woman's pursuit of office. More specifically, we argue that the gender composition of gatekeepers plays a crucial role in either encouraging or discouraging women candidates to run for office.

How Does Gender Play into the Candidate Selection Process?

We highlight three distinct mechanisms where the gender of the party gatekeepers is likely to affect whether the local party candidate is a man or a woman. The first two possibilities are direct mechanisms and the last one is an indirect mechanism.

The first mechanism is that gatekeepers are more likely to directly recruit and promote people like themselves. Studies have associated the presence of female party elites with more female candidates because women are more likely to encourage other women to become active in politics by favoring candidates with female traits or by supporting policies to increase female candidates (Caul 1999; Kunovich and Paxton 2005). This argument is supported by several explanations including psychological research showing that feminine traits are more appealing to women than men (Huddy 1994; Niven 1998), that "similarity breeds attraction" such that women are more likely to support those who are "like" them (Sigelman and Sigelman 1982),⁵ and that women in public office are more likely to support policies targeted toward the advancement of women (Erickson 1997).

In addition to recruitment, we would also expect women gatekeepers to provide other types of direct support to potential female nominees over potential male nominees if the local party nomination was to be contested. This could include making financial contributions, serving as a political mentor, providing campaign advice and assistance, and encouraging party members to vote for an aspiring female candidate. For example, Sainsbury (1993) found that in Sweden an increase in women's political party activities was correlated with the number of female members of parliament (MPs). This study further strengthens the plausibility of this mechanism.

However, a recent survey on how the attitudes of gatekeepers—specifically, local party leaders—might affect the gender of a candidate questions the validity of these arguments (Tremblay and Pelletier 2001). This study found no clear-cut evidence that female party leaders are more women-friendly. Doubts about this causal mechanism have also been raised by others, who argue that

women leaders are tied by party rules and cannot act on their preferences even if they did favor women's candidacies (Lovenduski and Norris 1993). In contrast, Niven (1998) finds evidence of just such a bias—in favor of men. By surveying local party leaders in four U.S. states, he contends that male party leaders explicitly preferred candidates like themselves.

In both of these studies, surveying local party leaders was likely to have systematically underestimated any bias. Most party gatekeepers have a sense for political correctness and, even in anonymous surveys, may be inclined to disguise their true attitudes. While Niven's (1998) study reveals an obvious gender bias resulting from direct questioning, it is unlikely to have captured the full extent of that bias—especially since local party leaders may not have even been consciously aware that they held any gender biases. Thus, statistical tests relying on objective data, such as actual nominations, are particularly well suited to uncovering exactly such biases—if party gatekeepers say one thing but do another, the data should reveal the reality of the situation.

The second mechanism relates to the gender balance of the party gatekeepers' social networks. The mechanism here is simple: women gatekeepers are more likely to know other qualified women who would be suitable parliamentary candidates and are thus more likely to recruit them into the electoral process. As pointed out by Bonnie Dow and Julia Wood (2006, 168), "Professional networks have been shown to facilitate employees' career advancement, increase the success of their socialization, and make important organizational knowledge accessible. Networks, however, also are gendered. Analysis indicates that the uses and effects of informal networks are gendered and racialized." Thus, all else equal, we would expect female gatekeepers to recruit more women.

The third explanation is an indirect signaling effect: the presence of female party gatekeepers sends an encouraging signal to potential female candidates that women are welcome and can be active in politics, creating a virtuous cycle of participation. Seeing successful women in the party should make getting involved in politics, including competing for nominations, less threatening for other women. Regardless of a female gatekeeper's stated opinion about female candidates or women-friendly policies, her mere presence may increase the supply of women interested in public office.

On the other hand, if gatekeepers at the national or local level are dominated by men, this would signal that there is an "old boys' club" at work. This would discourage female candidates from running because they would feel unwelcome and that they did not fit in, creating a vicious cycle that discourages women's participation. We already know that even before any kind of formal

recruitment occurs women are much more likely to perceive themselves as "not qualified" relative to similarly credentialed men (Lawless and Fox 2005; also see Bashevkin 1993).⁶ Consequently, the lack of women in the organizational hierarchy may indicate to other women that there have not been enough women who are qualified for these positions, which may in turn reinforce a woman's self-assessment that she is not qualified to run for office. Such an argument would help explain why women tend to be less ambitious about running for office (Costantini 1990; although see Carroll 1985).

Regardless of the exact causal mechanism at play—whether the influence of party gatekeepers is direct or indirect—the results should be observationally equivalent: we expect female gatekeepers to be more likely than male gatekeepers to nominate female candidates.⁷ Previous studies have not directly tested this important relationship. Caul (1999) uses national-level party data and finds a positive relationship between these variables. Kunovich and Paxton (2005) also aggregate party data at the country level and find that the effect is mediated by the electoral system: in a proportional representation (PR) system, the share of women in the party elite is associated with more female candidates, but in single-member district plurality (SMDP) electoral systems, it is associated with more female legislators. Even more indirectly, other studies have argued that a small share of female legislators discourages women from running for office (Welch 1978). Given that these studies use highly aggregate data and come to somewhat inconsistent results, they do not offer convincing evidence of informal influences on women's candidacies. A more direct test of this relationship is offered by Niven (1998) and Tremblay and Pelletier (2001), but Niven's study covers only four U.S. states and presents only bivariate relationships without controls. Furthermore, both studies employ a methodology (surveys), which is likely to systematically underestimate any bias.

Research Design

To test our hypothesis about the importance of party gatekeepers, we need information on the gender composition of the gatekeepers and the gender of the candidates selected in each constituency. Unfortunately, such detailed data are not readily available for most developed countries, let alone for a cross-national sample of all countries. Thus, our country selection needs to accommodate both theoretical considerations and data availability concerns.

We test our argument by examining party gatekeepers in Canada, where the nomination of party candidates is the prerogative of the local party association (Carty and Erickson 1991; Carty, Eagels, and Sayers 2003), headed

by a local party president. The latter is in a position to exercise formal and informal influence over the nomination process.⁸ By observing the relationship between the gender of a given party's local president and the gender of the candidate who is nominated in that constituency, we are able to probe for evidence of a political networking effect that would otherwise be impossible to detect.

Why Choose Canada?

We chose Canada because it is a context that allows the most clear-cut but hard test of the hypothesized relationships and because results obtained in this context are likely to be generalizable to other advanced democracies. First, Canada uses an SMDP electoral system, where each party nominates only one candidate per district. Candidate selection is almost completely determined at the local level (Carty, Eagels, and Sayers 2003; Cross 2006).⁹ The specific details of the process will vary to some extent from party to party and perhaps from province to province, but it uniformly involves holding a nomination meeting where local party members vote on who should represent their party in the federal election (Carty and Erickson 1991). At the nomination contest, local party members put themselves forth as potential candidates, and if there is more than one nominee a vote is held and local party members vote.¹⁰ The nomination meeting is a standard part of the process in becoming a party's official local candidate in a federal election.¹¹

In the Canadian context, the most influential gatekeepers in the candidate selection process are local party presidents,¹² who can and do encourage potential candidates to apply for nomination.¹³ With the exception of incumbency situations where the result is predetermined, we expect gatekeepers to play an influential role in the nomination process—irrespective of whether the nomination is contested. When the nomination is uncontested, we expect that the local party leadership, under the guidance of the president, selects the nominee internally and then subtly (or overtly) conveys to local party members which person has the backing of the local party executive to become the local candidate, thereby implicitly discouraging other potential candidates from seeking the nomination. When party nominations *are* contested, local party presidents are also likely to have substantial influence, but in a more obvious manner, for example, by favoring one candidate over another.

Given that in Canada the candidate selection process is decentralized to the constituency level and local party presidents can actually have both formal and informal influence over who is nominated in their district, this country provides an empirical context that allows a very clear and direct test of the theoretical argument. We can

perform the test by directly observing a match between the gender of the candidate and the gender of the local party leader.

At the same time, Canada provides a hard test because unlike in PR electoral systems, nominating a candidate in a given constituency is a zero-sum game: if a woman is nominated, there is no possibility of nominating a man and vice versa. This is a strategic consideration that parties in SMDP systems need to take into account and parties may choose to “play it safe” regardless of their attitudes about gender equality. In PR systems, this dynamic is less of a problem because many candidates can be nominated in the same district and thus parties can “afford” to have more women (also see Kunovich and Paxton 2005). For our purposes, such an additional constraint should make it more difficult to find the hypothesized relationship. However, if we do find a “women's political network” effect, we can be confident that in less restrictive electoral systems this effect is likely to be even stronger.

Furthermore, even though the proportion of women MPs in Canada is not as high as in leading PR systems, it is a leader in female representation among SMDP countries (Matland and Studlar 1996). Canada has a higher proportion of women in parliament than France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and it has a significantly higher proportion of national female politicians than most new democracies. Public opinion in Canada also supports increasing women representation: 90 percent of Canadians would like to see more women in parliament (Centre for Research and Information on Canada 2004). The fact that Canada is women-friendly compared to other advanced democracies also makes Canada a hard case: because there are fewer attitudinal barriers for women candidates in Canada as compared to most other countries, they are less likely to need an additional boost from informal networks. However, if we are able to detect the hypothesized effect in Canada, we can safely assume that the boost that informal networks give may be even greater in countries where the attitudinal barriers are steeper.¹⁴

Finally, it should also be noted that institutionally Canada is more similar to most advanced democracies than the United States. While much of the gender research on political representation focuses on the American context, the results of these studies are hard to generalize because of institutional idiosyncrasies such as the presidential system, candidate-centered elections, the two-party system, the weakness of parties, and the high costs of electoral campaigns. The Canadian case more closely resembles other advanced democracies with its parliamentary system, party-centered elections, five important political parties, and much lower levels of electoral expenditures. Canada is also similar to other advanced

democracies in that party gatekeepers are crucial to the nomination process. For example, in Ireland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Scandinavian countries, local party organizations decide the nominees. Given the institutional similarities, the results obtained from the Canadian case are likely to be generalizable to other advanced democracies.

Data and Measures

This study concentrates on the 2004 and 2006 Canadian national elections. We consider this to be a reasonable compromise between picking an unusual election (which is a possibility when using data from just one election) and the practical constraint of obtaining the necessary data.

The unit of analysis is a candidate representing a given party in a given constituency. Canada currently has five significant political parties including the Bloc Québécois (BQ), the Conservative Party of Canada (Conservatives), the Liberal Party of Canada (Liberals), and the New Democratic Party (NDP). The Green Party of Canada (Greens) rounds out the list as a party that is still very small but has a presence in almost every electoral district during these two elections. All of the major parties, with the exception of the separatist BQ, are also national parties, and all are included in our empirical analysis.

The dependent variable, *female candidate*, is coded 1 for female and 0 for male candidates. The independent variable, *female president*, measures whether or not the local party president is female, and it is coded in a similar manner.¹⁵ Table 1 shows the proportion of female party presidents and candidates by party and in total. About 26 percent of all candidates and 25 percent of all local party presidents in our data set are women. These figures are lowest for the Conservatives and highest for the BQ and the NDP (see Table 1).

To accurately estimate the effect of the party president's gender on the candidate's gender, we need to control for confounding factors. It is especially important to account for variables that may influence both the likelihood of having a female president and a female candidate. We have controlled for as many alternative explanations and confounding factors as is practically possible.

First, it is possible that both female candidates and female party presidents are more likely to emerge in districts that have a larger pool of eligible women or where the local population may be more sympathetic to women having active political careers.¹⁶ These effects can be captured in several different ways. The simplest way to measure the former is by looking at the number of women who are eighteen and older as a share of the voting age population. We have labeled this variable *share of women 18+ in the district population*.¹⁷ The minimum value for

Table 1. The Share of Female Local Party Presidents and Female Candidates by Party

	Female presidents (%)	Female candidates (%)	n
Conservative Party of Canada	20	14	261
Liberal Party of Canada	23	25	614
Bloc Québécois	30	27	92
New Democratic Party	30	33	515
Green Party of Canada	23	25	158
Total	25	26	1,651

this variable is 47.6 percent, and the maximum value is 55.6 percent.

Women-friendliness can also be measured more directly. *Share of female candidates since 1980* represents the ratio of female candidates to the total number of candidates who have contested elections in a given district since the 1980 election.¹⁸ Because a party's own history with female candidates in a given district might also influence both the party president and the party candidate being a woman, we also control for *share of female party candidates since 1980*. This indicator represents the ratio of female candidates from a given party in a given district to the total number of candidates from a given party who have contested elections in a given district since the 1980 election.¹⁹

Previous research on women's political representation in Canada has found that women are more likely to be underrepresented in more electorally competitive parties (Bashevkin 1993). Districts where a party is not competitive are less desirable (Carty, Eagels, and Sayers 2003), and therefore it is easier for women candidates to get nominated in these as opposed to competitive districts where the party candidate has a realistic chance of winning (Studlar and Matland 1996). We measure party *competitiveness* in a district by calculating the difference between a given party's district vote share and that of the winner.

In terms of ideology, leftist ideas generally favor gender equality and an active role for women in society (Norris 2004). Therefore, we would expect that in districts that are more left wing, there are more female party presidents and more women wanting to run as candidates. To account for the district ideology, we take the share of votes cast at the district level for the two most left wing parties—the Greens and the NDP—and compare it with the proportion of votes cast for these two parties at the national level. If this difference is negative, then the district is more left wing and presumably also more women-friendly than the nation as a whole. If this difference

is positive, then the district is more right wing and less women-friendly than the national average. This variable, called *district ideology*, should capture the contextual factors that may affect both our dependent and independent variables.

Ideology might also matter at the party level. The literature on women's political representation in Canada and the United States, as well as cross-nationally, has noted that leftist parties are more open to and active about encouraging women to participate in politics (Erickson 1997; Tremblay and Andrew 1998; Caul 2001; Norris 2004). Therefore, similar to district environment, the party environment may also lead to a higher proportion of female presidents and female candidates in some parties (Tremblay and Pelletier 2001). To control for this possibility, we include party dummies leaving the Greens as the reference category.²⁰

Other party-level effects may increase or decrease the likelihood of female candidates being nominated. For example, some parties, notably the NDP and the Liberals, and the BQ to a lesser extent, have adopted internal policies and programs to encourage women's representation in the party, with the NDP making the most concerted effort to enhance the political opportunities of both women and visible minorities (Erickson 1998; Cross 2004).²¹ Consequently, the share of female members is somewhat higher in these parties than in the other two (Young and Cross 2003). For example, in the NDP, gender parity for local party executives is mandatory under most, if not all, of the constitutions for federal NDP electoral district associations.²² The actual implementation of this mandate may vary according to local capacity, but where the capacity exists this policy is taken seriously.²³ Since the existence of such affirmative action policies can be measured only at the party level, the party dummies are effectively capturing this party-level effect as well.

Furthermore, the incumbency effect may influence the likelihood of a woman being nominated. Incumbents are more likely to be men, and they have an advantage in the nomination process because of name recognition and resources (Schwindt-Bayer 2005). The effect of incumbency may be so strong as to override the effects of other variables since incumbents receive their party's nomination almost automatically.²⁴ Therefore, this variable may have a direct effect on the dependent variable, candidate gender, and it may also influence the relationship between the local party president's gender and the candidate's gender. *Incumbent* is coded 1 for a candidate who sat in the previous parliament and 0 otherwise.

Whether or not a nomination is contested may also influence the nature of the candidates (Carty, Eagels, and Sayers 2003), including their gender. Nominations were contested in about one-third of the cases included in our

analysis. These cases are coded 1 to operationalize the variable *contested nomination*.

Socioeconomic and cultural variables may also influence how women-friendly a district is. For example, districts where income and education levels are higher may be more receptive toward women in politics. We control for this by including the *share of college graduates in the district population* and *average household income* (measured in thousands of Canadian dollars) in the analysis.²⁵ These variables are highly correlated, but because we are not interested in determining the independent effect of each, including them simultaneously is not problematic. Cultural variables that may influence the women-friendliness of a district include the *share of English speakers in the district population* and the *share of Catholics in the district population*.²⁶

Previous research suggests that there may also be regional differences in the representation of women (Carbert 2002). To address this possibility, we divided the provinces into five regions, where West includes Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan; East includes New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island; North includes the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon; and Ontario and Quebec are listed as separate regions. The analysis includes region dummies, leaving Quebec as the reference category. Finally, we also control for the election year because our data are pooled across two elections.

Analysis and Findings

The dependent variable is binary, which is why we use a probit regression to analyze the data. The results of this regression analysis are presented in Table 2. As hypothesized, the local party president's gender has an expected positive and significant effect on the gender of the candidate. Having a woman as the local party president significantly increases the probability that the party candidate from that constituency will also be a woman.

The substantive effect of this variable is better grasped by calculating the predicted probabilities. When all other variables in the model are held at their mean (for continuous variables) or median (for categorical variables) value, the probability that the candidate will be a woman is 0.23 if the president is male and 0.29 if the president is female. The discrete effect of a president's gender on a candidate's gender is 0.06. That is, the probability that the candidate will be female is 6 percent higher in the case of a female party president than in the case of a male one. The effect is not very large, quite likely because there are other factors, including immeasurable characteristics such as candidate quality, that determine who is selected. Nonetheless, the effect is significant, indicating that even if the bias is small, it is systematic.

The effect of president's gender remains significant even after controlling for the potentially confounding effects of incumbency and the district and party contexts. The role of most of the control variables was to determine whether the relationship between president's gender and that of the candidate emerges only because they are both related to a third underlying factor. The results indicate that the relationship is not just an artifact of a district or a party being friendlier toward women in party politics. While no causality can be determined using nonexperimental data, the results strongly suggest that there is a systematic pattern whereby the presence of a female local party president enhances the likelihood of a female candidate being nominated.

Several of the contextual effects are significant, too. The most substantial effect was that the more female candidates there were in a given district in the past quarter century, the more likely a party was to nominate a female candidate in 2004 and 2006. This effect is sizable for both the district-level and the party-in-district-level measures: in a district where there have been no female candidates since 1980, the predicted probability that the 2004 and 2006 candidate was a woman is only 0.18. This predicted probability increases to 0.23 in districts where 18 percent of all candidates have been women (the average value on this variable) and to 0.36 in those districts where women have historically been the best represented in the candidate pool (using the real maximum value on this variable), that is, where the female share of all candidates has been 58 percent. For the party-in-district-level measure, for a party that has not had any female candidates in a given district, the predicted probability that the recent candidate was a woman is 0.17. This predicted probability increases to 0.23 for the average value on this variable and to 0.51 for the real maximum value on this variable, that is, for parties where all previous candidates (since 1980) in a given district have been women.

These findings suggest that women-friendliness in the district and in the party matter for female representation (also see Palmer and Simon 2006). Consequently, we would expect more female candidates to step forward in constituencies that have a demonstrated record of being women-friendly. This result is also consistent with the possibility that the same set of causal mechanisms that operate with respect to female local party presidents are also operational with former female MPs and that, in fact, these former MPs may be extremely influential local party gatekeepers.²⁷ For example, Caul (1999) found that there was a correlation between the presence of women on the national party executive and the number of future female MPs. Our result is also consistent with experimental field research conducted in West Bengal, India. At the level of the Village Councils (Gran Panchayat), Beaman

Table 2. The Effect of Local Party President's Gender on the Candidate's Gender

	Probit coefficient	SE
Female president	.174**	.081
Incumbent	-.069	.117
District ideology	.002	.003
Share of women 18+ in the district population	.063**	.029
Share of female candidates since 1980	.968**	.426
Share of female party candidates since 1980	.972***	.188
Competitiveness	-.0002	.003
Contested nomination	.0166	.087
Share of English speakers in the district population	.001	.003
Share of college graduates in the district population	.018	.018
Average household income	.001	.003
Share of Catholics in the district population	.001	.003
Year 2006	.066	.073
Region dummies ^a		
West	.025	.171
East	-.107	.203
North	.678	.458
Ontario	-.019	.162
Party dummies ^b		
Bloc Québécois	-.060	.303
Conservatives	-.368**	.171
Liberals	-.0005	.149
New Democratic Party	.132	.136
Constant	-4.798***	1.585
χ^2	120	
N	1,567	

Note: Dependent variable is *female candidate*

a. The reference category is Quebec.

b. The reference category is the Green Party.

** $p \leq .05$, two-tailed. *** $p \leq .01$, two-tailed.

et al. (forthcoming) found that in districts that had been randomly assigned to double the fraction of female ward seat candidates and winners over the course of ten years, male perceptions of female leader effectiveness were increased dramatically. Moreover, this effect persisted even after the local female leader had left office. Exposure to female leaders over time appears to have a direct causal effect at the local level in reducing bias against women (also see Bhavnani 2009).

In sum, districts with a significant historical record of female candidates are more likely to nominate women candidates in the future. Similarly, parties with a women-friendly history in a given district are also more likely to nominate women candidates in that district in the future. These are interesting findings that need to be further explored in

greater detail—a task that is beyond the scope of this article and merits a separate study. For our purposes, these variables serve as controls to accurately test our theory about the influence of local party presidents. The fact that such strong indicators of women-friendliness do not undermine the independent effect of the gender of local presidents on the gender of candidates increases our confidence in our main finding.

As for other control variables, the results also show that district ideology does not matter for whether or not the candidate will be a woman. More left wing districts do not necessarily provide a more encouraging environment for women considering political candidacy. However, the probability of having a female candidate varies somewhat by parties. Recall that the Greens is the reference category. Compared to the Greens, only the Conservatives are significantly less likely to nominate a woman. The coefficients for other parties are not significant, indicating that the likelihood of a woman candidate in these parties is not significantly different from that for the Greens. To more directly check whether affirmative action policies matter, we ran an alternative analysis replacing party dummies with a dummy that coded BQ, the NDP, and the Liberals—the three parties that use affirmative action—as 1 and the other three parties as 0.²⁸ The effect of this variable was statistically significant and positive, indicating that parties that do have affirmative action policies are more likely to nominate women candidates.

Other control variables do not reach the conventional levels of statistical significance. This does not necessarily mean that they have no effect on the dependent variable. Rather, as mentioned above, several of these variables are highly correlated, and therefore their independent effects are impossible to determine. These independent effects are also not of interest here.

To reiterate, it is important for our purposes that a strong and robust relationship between president's gender and candidate's gender emerges despite the fact that powerful controls—especially those measuring the eligibility pool, the history of women-friendliness, and partisan effects—which can potentially confound the hypothesized relationship, are included in the model. We realize that our tests cannot prove causality and simply show correlation, as is usually the case with statistical analysis. However, we have, within the limits of the data, carefully controlled for as many potential confounding factors as is practically feasible. Having exhausted the limits of our data and research design, we have been unable to disprove our hypothesis, which is at least suggestive that we are capturing a true effect. Additional analysis might be able to provide more conclusive evidence about causality. Such analysis requires using a different research design

and methodology—preferably field experiments or, as a weaker alternative, in-depth case studies of a carefully selected representative sample of nomination contests. Such an undertaking would be an important extension of our study, but it is beyond the scope of a single journal article.

Conclusion

In this study, we have explored how the gender of the local party president influences the gender of the legislative candidate in that district. We present strong and robust results that parties can significantly influence the electoral success of women through informal influence. Even if party leaders are not directly responsible for their party's nomination process, the leadership can informally encourage preferred candidates to contest nominations or, even less directly, send signals about who would be welcome and would fit in with the existing local party elite. This is an important insight that other studies have missed. Future research on women's political participation and on candidate selection more generally needs to take such informal factors into account.

Our study complements previous studies that show a positive correlation—at least under some conditions—between the share of women MPs from a given party and the presence of women in that party's executive (Caul 1999; Kunovich and Paxton 2005) by providing more precise, individual-level evidence of the informal influence that party leaders can have on female representation. Our findings also complement studies employing surveys of party leaders in gauging gender preferences for candidates (Niven 1998; Tremblay and Pelletier 2001). Our results suggest that female (male) local party leaders may not just prefer but actually do support and promote the nomination of female (male) party candidates.

The results of this study provide important policy implications. If the goal is to increase the share of women in parliament, then one effective way to do so without making any constitutional changes (e.g., changing the electoral system) is to make changes at the party level. Our findings underscore the importance of informal factors within party structures and their effect on the political underrepresentation of women. Parties have a substantial impact on the candidate selection process, not just formally but also informally through female office holders at the constituency level.

If diversity is desired, then policy makers wary of implementing large-scale institutional changes may want to focus on these more informal mechanisms for influencing outcomes. To this end, a long-term policy goal of political parties could be to systematically recruit and promote women into the local party executive. With the exception

of the NDP, none of the major Canadian parties currently have such a policy in place.²⁹ While this policy may be difficult to implement and enforce given the decentralized nature of the Canadian political system, efforts to recruit women into the local party executive could be modeled on similar efforts undertaken by the Ontario and federal NDP and the federal Liberals to recruit female MP candidates (Cross 2006; Praud 1998; Young 2000). Efforts would also need to be made to ensure that women do not get shuttled into the secretary role, which would simply result in the political version of “pink collar ghettos” (Bashevkin, 1993). A final concern with this policy is that it may incite backlash from male party members who could choose to express their dissatisfaction with such a policy by actively working against female candidates or simply expressing their open dislike for them (Beaman et al. 2009)

Based on our findings, another simple and effective task that political parties could undertake is to target districts that have not traditionally fielded female candidates and to actively recruit women in those districts. While it has been an ongoing concern in Canada that women are fielded as candidates in districts where a party is not competitive (Bashevkin 1993), our study suggests that such a cohort of female candidates—whether or not they were ultimately successful in being elected to parliament—still had a significant impact on the future candidacies of women who later sought to run for office in that district.

Because of the fact that we analyzed only Canadian data, broad generalizations cannot be made. However, we would expect the basic argument to travel well across different countries with different electoral systems. Furthermore, as we explained above, Canada is a difficult case in that it employs SMDP, which is less favorable to female politicians than other systems. Thus, in countries with electoral systems that are more favorable to women (e.g., PR), we would expect to find an even more pronounced networking effect. The results reported here should also be observable in countries where parties nominate their candidates locally. The underlying logic of the argument, however, should be even more generalizable in that we might expect that the gender composition of the party *selectorate* for choosing candidates, whether it includes convention delegates, the national-level party leadership, or just the party leader, may significantly influence women’s opportunities to become candidates. Our results suggest that these are potentially avenues for fruitful research.

Future research on women’s political representation and representation for other underrepresented groups should consider incorporating the effect of informal factors into the theoretical argument for a more complete understanding of these dynamics—especially in a comparative

context. An important challenge for this future research is to untangle the exact causal mechanism that has produced the findings in this study and to discover if there may be other causal mechanisms at work. The general literature on candidate selection and internal party politics may equally benefit from taking informal influences seriously. To date, these studies have mostly focused on the effect of formal institutional mechanisms on the nomination process. Informal factors themselves may be invisible and thus hard to observe and study, but as we have shown, their effects on outcomes may be systematic and significant.

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Notes

1. We would like to underscore not only that it is difficult to gather reliable data on informal influences but also that these effects are difficult to measure and systematically capture—posing a significant barrier to studying their effects.
2. A variety of studies have shown that female politicians behave differently from male politicians on policy issues (Gerrity, Osborne, and Mendez 2007; Kathlene 1994; Swers 2002).
3. The United States is a key exception.
4. But see Norris and Lovenduski (1993).
5. In this experiment, white women voters displayed a pro-woman bias in supporting a white woman over a white man. However, this bias disappeared when the white women voters had to choose between affiliating with their gender (black woman) versus race (white man).

6. Lawless and Fox (2005) also find that actors such as political culture, family responsibilities, and political ideology are not relevant for explaining the difference in women's ambitions.
7. Our empirical test cannot adjudicate among the various different causal mechanisms proposed. It is likely that all of them contribute to the hypothesized relationship. We leave disentangling the separate effects to future studies and focus on establishing the general empirical patterns that would follow from the causal mechanisms as the necessary first step in this line of argument.
8. We recognize that there is variation in the amount of influence exerted by a local party president on the candidate selection process and that this depends on the party and the constituency.
9. For the most part, national party headquarters do not intervene in this process, but occasionally "safe" seats are sought for prominent party candidates such as party leaders without a seat in the House of Commons or "star candidates." In these situations, the national party leader—who must sign the nomination papers for all of the party's candidates—effectively bypasses the local selection system. This is true for all parties in Canada. However, such incidents are rare and receive extensive, and usually negative, media coverage, which makes parties quite reluctant to override the local process.
10. Very occasionally, irregularities in the nomination contest process (e.g., changing the venue or time of the nomination meeting at the last minute) do occur to benefit a particular candidate, but this type of a situation would only underscore our argument about the importance of local party presidents.
11. For a more extensive discussion of this process, see Cross (2004).
12. We realize that the entire local party executive may play a role in influencing the nomination process. Unfortunately, testing this proposition was not possible because information on the proportion of women among the local party executives is virtually impossible to obtain. In most cases, the national parties themselves do not keep historical records of this information or may have never collected it to begin with.
13. For example, there is often general agreement as to which person is "next in line" for the local nomination. In this sense, gatekeepers are key to the process of encouraging some individuals to step forward and others to hold back.
14. The view that Canadians have women-friendly attitudes is contested. As noted above, Trimble and Arscott (2003) argue that Canada has a relatively masculine political environment, which may be responsible for the underrepresentation of women in politics. Furthermore, Sylvia Bashevkin (2009) argues that Canadians in particular are not comfortable with the idea of powerful women in politics. If Canadian attitudes are less women friendly than hypothesized, then informal influences are more likely to have an effect than in a more women-friendly environment.
15. For the gender of the local presidents, we searched for specific references to the person (pictures, newspaper articles, and any references to him or her and other grammatical clues in English and French) and, if necessary, by referring to naming Web sites and performing image searches based on the first name using Google. In the few cases where uncertainty remained, we contacted the local party presidents directly by email. We also benefited from the Liberals' lists because they listed titles (Mr. or Ms.) in the data that they provided to us.
16. Ideally, we would be able to control for this by measuring the presence of politically active women in a given constituency in each party (e.g., the proportion of female party members). Unfortunately, not all of the parties collect such data.
17. The data source is Statistics Canada (2006).
18. Note that the electoral district boundaries have been redrawn three times through Representation Orders 1987, 1996, and 2003. As a result, the current set of electoral districts (Representation Order 2003) had to be mapped back in time. This was done systematically by examining population data from Transposition Orders. Districts were assigned "predecessor" status if they had contributed the largest percentage population to the new district. This rule was then repeated on previous Transposition Orders to obtain a history of district names that was then matched up against a historical database of candidate information.
19. The results do not change if all three of these variables are excluded or if they are excluded one at a time. However, since they are all significant when entered in the model simultaneously, we decided to keep them in the analysis to perform a more accurate and conservative test of our main hypothesis. Another measure that we used was the ratio of female members of parliament (MPs) to the total number of MPs elected from a given district since 1980. Including this variable together with, or instead of, the ones mentioned above does not change the results.
20. In an alternative analysis, we measured party ideology directly using the data collected by Benoit and Laver (2006), which are based on experts' rating of the five parties on the left-right scale ranging from 1 (the most left wing) to 20 (the most right wing). Using this alternative measure does not change the main results.
21. For a discussion of the range of policies enacted to encourage female candidates in the federal New Democratic Party (NDP), see Cross (2004, 70). It is also important to note that while both the Liberals and the NDP have publicly stated goals for women's representation, it is the processes and not the outcomes that are mandatory.
22. The requirement for gender parity on the local party executive is written into the model constitution for federal districts; this model is used as the default constitution for local NDP associations. Although the model constitution can be altered or modified, changes must be approved at

both the local level and the provincial level. The section on affirmative action reads, "At least one half of the elected members of the Executive, Convention delegates, and Provincial Council delegates shall be women. The Executive shall ensure that members of Affirmative Action Target Groups, as designated by Provincial Council, are encouraged to seek Executive positions."

23. In some districts, the policy is not enforced because there are not enough volunteers (Linda Macaskill, pers comm., March 2, 2009).
24. In 2004, the redistricting process resulted in very occasional competitions between sitting MPs. We note this phenomenon with interest, but these cases are very limited in number and do not affect the robustness of our findings.
25. The data source for both variables is Statistics Canada (2006). As Matland and Studlar (1996) argue, these variables are highly correlated with, and therefore effectively control for, urbanization.
26. The data source for both variables is Statistics Canada (2006).
27. A robust test of this theory would be difficult since time series data on active party membership by gender at the district level probably do not exist.
28. We recognize that this variable is slightly problematic since the Liberals did not institute their affirmative action policy until the 2006 election.
29. This was confirmed by Brad Field and Linda Macaskill (NDP), Daniel Loison (Liberals), Ryan Sparrow (Conservatives), Mark Kersten (Greens), and Marie Josée Grenier (Bloc).

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