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Abstract

This article presents evidence from 18 European countries showing that where levels of corruption are high, the proportion of women elected is low. We hypothesize that corruption indicates the presence of 'shadowy arrangements' that benefit the already privileged and pose a direct obstacle to women when male-dominated networks influence political parties' candidate selection. There is also an indirect signal effect derived from citizen's experiences with a broad range of government authorities. The article uses data that are more fine-grained than usual in this literature. We conduct an empirical test on a new dataset on locally elected councilors in 167 regions in Europe. Using a novel measure of regional quality of government and corruption we perform a multi-level analysis with several regional- and national-level controls. This study provides a unique picture of the proportion of women in locally elected assemblies throughout Europe and a new way of understanding the variations found.

Keywords

Corruption, empirical research, Europe, subnational variation, women's descriptive representation, women's political representation

Introduction

It is widely recognized that the number of women elected to national parliaments varies across time and across countries. It is also widely recognized that political parties are a key factor in explaining this variation. One lesson to be learned from previous research is that *dedication* matters; when political parties commit themselves to gender equality they seem to find ways of organizing recruitment to elect higher numbers of women (Kittilson, 2006; Lovenduski and Norris, 1993).

A burgeoning field of research strives to clarify the interplay between formal rules and informal norms to explain political parties' recruitment of women: Why is an extra push, a dedicated effort from the parties, needed for women to reach political positions? Fox and Lawless (2010) found that highly qualified and politically well-connected women from both major parties in the USA were less likely than similarly situated men to be recruited to run for public office. They point to an 'integrated ethos of masculinity' as an obstacle to women. Using a similar

line of reasoning, Cheng and Tavits (2011) discuss the different mechanisms at work in informal dynamics that hinder women: Gatekeepers are more likely to recruit and promote people like themselves; there is a lack of women in male party gatekeepers' social networks; and there is an indirect signal effect. If most of the gatekeepers at the national or local level of political parties are men, this signals that there is an 'old boys' club at work' which discourages women's participation.

We believe that recruitment processes need to be viewed in a wide context. As pointed out by recent work in feminist institutional theory (e.g. Kenny, 2013; Krook, 2010), the influential 'supply' and 'demand' framework of

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recruitment of women to political posts (Norris, 1993) would gain from refined understandings of the role of the surrounding context and informal norms embedded in institutions. We contribute to this scholarship by analyzing *corruption* as a potential obstacle to women's representation.

In this study we present evidence from local councils in 18 European countries that shows that where levels of corruption are high, the number of women elected is low. At a general level we suggest that corruption indicates the presence of 'shadowy arrangements' that benefit the already privileged (Johnson et al., 2013). More specifically we suggest that those shadowy arrangements affect the recruitment of women in two ways: (i) they pose a direct obstacle to women when male-dominated networks influence political parties' candidate selection, and (ii) they pose an indirect obstacle when they influence citizens' everyday life experiences and make them reluctant to engage in political matters. We argue that corruption affects broad layers of the population since it signals the absence of equal treatment. Moreover, we argue that it is reasonable to believe that this negative effect is larger for women than for men since women, generally speaking, have less power in society.

The effect of corruption becomes apparent through a comparative study at the subnational level in Europe. This design allows for rigorous controls for other factors affecting the recruitment of women, such as the type of electoral system and gender equality culture. For the purpose of this study, we constructed a comprehensive dataset on the proportion of locally elected female councilors in 167 regions defined by the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) in 18 European countries in the most recent elections for which data is available (our dependent variable). Our main independent variable is the European Quality of Government Index (EQI). The EQI measure gauges the extent that bad governance and corruption are persistent in European regions (see Charron et al., 2011).

In the following sections we first discuss why trends in research on gender and corruption are relevant to the study of women's exclusion from political institutions and then we present the design of this study. The section on methodology presents the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) used in the statistical analysis and describes the data collection process. The results section reports the findings of our empirical analysis. In the concluding section we clarify the contribution made by this study and identify important areas and directions for future research. Taken together, this study contributes a unique comparative analysis of within-country variance in women's local political representation.

Gender and corruption

History is full of examples of powerful female leaders (Indira Gandhi is a case in point) who have emerged from political dynasties with seemingly little aversion to corruption – a concept most often defined as 'the abuse of public

power for private gain'. There is certainly plenty of anecdotal evidence of women being elected in highly corrupt contexts. Systematic research, however, tells an interesting story. In their seminal study, 'Are women really the fairer sex? Corruption and women in government', Dollar et al. (2001) demonstrate that higher rates of female participation in government are associated with lower national levels of corruption. They measure corruption using data from the International Country Risk Guide and include a range of variables in their analysis to control for various underlying institutional characteristics that could be responsible for a spurious correlation. Since that study, the association between women and lower levels of corruption has been reproduced in repeated studies (see Treisman, 2007).

It is relatively uncontroversial to state that there is an association between gender and corruption but the question of causality, however, is the subject of heated debate. The observation that countries with a higher number of elected women generally have lower levels of corruption has produced an assumption among a number of policy-makers that increasing the proportion of women in government will provide a quick fix for corruption (e.g. World Bank, 2001). In contrast, however, Sung launched a rival explanation: the 'fairer system' thesis. This argument contends that 'liberal democratic institutions and spirit increase female participation in government and restrain systematic corruption, but the latter two factors are not causally related' (Sung, 2003: 708). In addition Goetz (2007) argues that it is the opportunities for corruption that differ for women and men (see also Branisa and Ziegler, 2010; Pande and Ford, 2012; Vijayalakshmi, 2008).

Our study departs from previous research (Bjarnegård, 2013; Johnson et al., 2013; Stockemer, 2011) suggesting that corruption indicates the presence of shadowy arrangements that benefit the already privileged, which in most countries tend to be men. We are also influenced by research showing that the relationship between gender and corruption is stronger in industrialized than non-industrialized countries (Esarey and Chirillo, 2013). In order to move beyond debates on the 'fairer system' thesis (Sung, 2003, 2012) we decided to conduct our study in contemporary Europe where countries are reasonably homogenous in terms of liberal democratic institutions.¹

The effect of closely knit male-dominated networks

As Beck (2003) has argued, patronage networks tend to uphold traditional power relations and thus often reproduce female subordination in politics. Bjarnegård (2013) argues further that certain aspects of clientelism affect the political representation of women, as they are closely related to the indicators of corruption. In a case study of Thailand she shows how clientelism creates a flexible interface between formal rules and informal norms; when formal political institutions are weak, certain types of informal institutions tend to grow strong. According to Bjarnegård, the gender dimension becomes influential:

in clientelist systems, [because] opportunities for electoral corruption are gendered in that only those with access to networks, those with connections within the local or national elite, those with resources to finance corrupt behavior, and those who are already influential in society are in positions to be considered assets in clientelist networks and are the only ones who will be trusted with the sensitive nature of the exchange. (Bjarnegård, 2013: 37)

Stockemer's (2011) explanation of how recruitment processes often exclude female candidates in highly corrupt jurisdictions describes the tendency of under-institutionalized parties, organized on the basis of personal connections and lacking transparent rules of candidate selection, to allow political seats to be bought and public officials to be nominated or appointed through traditional clientelistic networks. When promotion to higher office is contingent upon personal connections rather than merit, women must become either patrons or clients in the male-dominated patronage networks. Thus, women are often excluded from these corrupt networks based on tradition and culture; they also often lack the resources to buy themselves into these networks. This reasoning led Stockemer to assert that corruption 'reinforces traditional networks and prevents women from gaining human and financial resources' (2011: 697).

Clientelism is defined as the exchange of personal favors for political support (see Stokes, 2007). We believe that this type of exchange may also play a role in comparatively formalized systems. In the introduction we referred to studies by Fox and Lawless (2010) and Cheng and Tavits (2011) which build on data from established democracies. More recent research into local politics in Scotland illustrates how participants in the selection process circumvent institutional reforms of parties by adapting elements from past institutional repertoires, namely 'informal and masculinist party practices of local patronage and the privileging of "favorite sons"' (Kenny, 2013: 180).

In sum, what this strand of research points out is how homosociality – in this case, preference for maleness – affects the recruitment of women. There is some evidence that female candidates, in corrupt systems, lack the economic resources needed to buy support. However, in the European context it may be more useful to think of women as outsiders lacking a firmly rooted position in male party gatekeepers' social networks. As outsiders they are not trusted in contexts where 'sensitive exchanges' take place and thus they get locked out of parties' recruitment processes.

The signal effect

Cheng and Tavits (2011) suggest that if most local or national political-party gatekeepers are men, this signals an 'old boys' club at work', which serves as an indirect obstacle to the recruitment of women. While we agree that

it is important to recognize the effect of such signals, we suggest that, in order to get a full understanding of the dynamics at work, it is necessary to include signals from the political system in the broad sense when analyzing the variance in women's representation.

It needs to be recognized that only a small part of most populations interacts regularly with elected representatives and very few citizens are aware of whom the party gatekeepers are. However, encounters with various government authorities are common among citizens and are generally the way citizens 'face the state' (see Lipsky, 1980). Signal effects are informal instruments of norm-diffusion, and it is reasonable to believe that citizens form their beliefs about the political system from their experiences and encounters with a broad range of government authorities.² One can think of corruption as the opposite of impartiality and equal treatment (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). When government authorities are permeated by corruption, citizens receive the signal of a parallel regime that they must adjust to, and there are reasons to believe that this process has gendered dimensions. In most contemporary societies women continue to be underprivileged in both political and economic power. We argue that the advancement of women is particularly dependent on impartial (uncorrupt) institutions that signal that women who come forward will receive equal treatment.

Hence, we believe that citizens – potential candidates for office – are affected by signals from the political system about whether they will receive equal treatment or face discrimination. There is currently a lack of empirical research on how signals from institutions other than political parties may constitute a hindrance for the advancement of women to political posts, so this reasoning is in need of further research and development. The argument we make here is simply that there are good reasons to expand upon the insights of Cheng and Tavits (2011), that is, to recognize the indirect signals of government administrations. Gatekeepers of political parties are important, but citizens – including those who in other circumstances could consider a political career – may be affected even more strongly by the attitudes and behaviors of government authorities.³

In sum, we contend that corruption is a good proxy for the shadowy arrangements that can hinder the advancement of women in elected assemblies en masse, even though individual women may be let in. We have suggested two different mechanisms for this process: the existence of closely knit male-dominated networks with informal patterns of recruitment, which constitute a direct obstacle to the advancement of women; and an indirect obstacle manifest to potential candidates through indirect signals from a broad range of government authorities.

Design and data

In this study we break new ground by focusing on the gender composition of elected assemblies at the subnational

level in Europe. Our study was prompted by the recent publication of other studies showing that corruption and bad governance are more widespread and vary to a larger extent within countries in Europe than previously recognized (Charron et al., 2011, 2013).

While the proportion of women is still low in a number of political institutions throughout Europe, few comparative studies have analyzed the variance in women's political representation at levels below national institutions. This insight informed our collection of data on the proportion of female councilors in local European regions. Even though European countries are heterogeneous in several senses, they are, from a global perspective, quite similar in terms of culture, modernization, and liberal democratic institutions. Our focus on regions within Europe allows us to move beyond the ecological fallacies sometimes present in cross-country studies, in which researchers ignore variances within countries and make national inferences based on observations that are not valid for the entire country (Rydgren, 2007).

Explaining the share of female local councilors in the European regions

The dependent variable of our study is the proportion of locally elected female councilors aggregated to a mean for each region. The construction of this variable required a comprehensive collection of new data by the authors, described in the following sections.⁴

We collected data in 18 European countries to ensure we had the most recent figures (as of June 2013) on the gender composition of locally elected councils. Our first priority was to obtain official data from statistical offices and electoral institutions. In some instances – when statistics from official channels were not sufficiently comprehensive – experts, such as scholars specializing in elections or statistics, provided the figures (for a description of sources, see Appendix 1).⁵

What constitutes a local councilor is difficult to define across these diverse institutional settings. For 16 of the 18 countries we studied, we were able to collect figures on categories that we believe are highly comparable, broadly corresponding to municipal councils (i.e. local deliberative assemblies of councilors elected by direct universal suffrage). Two countries (Slovakia and Romania) presented some challenges in meeting these requirements. For Romania, data on municipal councilors is not available to researchers, and so we use figures from their intermediate-level councils. In Slovakia, national authorities had not collected data on the gender composition of local councilors. Instead of excluding the country from this comparison, we used figures showing the sex ratio of the country's mayors. (For more information on the local assemblies in the various countries, see Table 1).⁶ The regions in this study are based on the system of NUTS

and their levels differ in the countries we analyze between NUTS 1 and NUTS 2. Figures on local councilors in each municipality or local division are aggregated to an average value for each NUTS region in this study.⁷ This is a common method of reporting statistics in many of these countries, and we were usually able to rely on official aggregates rather than performing the calculations ourselves.

We believe that our dependent variable is for the most part well operationalized to measure the concept that we are interested in. The percentage of elected women is a standard operationalization in the literature on women's political representation (Wängnerud, 2009). It is, however, challenging to compare local councilors across institutionally diverse contexts, as their mandates and responsibilities differ from country to country. Since they differ, the meaning of being a municipal councilor likely varies to some extent across the different nations. (Appendix 2 lists the responsibilities of municipal councils in the 18 countries studied.) A councilor in a country whose municipal bodies have influence over several policy areas is arguably a more important political actor than a councilor in a country where such councils have fewer responsibilities. This is not especially problematic in our study, because we are not aiming to explain the effect of having a certain share of locally elected women but rather the effect of corruption on the numbers of women elected. (If countries differ significantly with respect to how corruption affects the share of elected women, these differences are taken into account statistically by the random intercept at the country level in our multilevel model).

Since the electoral cycles in the countries we study are not synchronized, the year when the most recent elections were held varies across our sample from 2008 to 2012 (see Table 1 for details). The French data is from 2008, and in three countries – Portugal, the Netherlands, and Denmark (and also in a few Austrian regions) – elections were held in 2009. Since the data on regional quality of government was collected during 2009, and we would prefer the dependent variable to have been measured after our main independent one, this is not perfect. However, we argue that this is not a substantial problem. The EQI variable captures a 'sticky' phenomenon, and it is unlikely that this measure would fluctuate widely over time.

The regional measure of quality of government

In this study we test the effect of shadowy arrangements on the share of elected women. Arguably, it is difficult to find direct measures of closely knit male-dominated networks or norms/signals hindering women. At the same time, this burgeoning field of research needs large-N quantitative assessment and rigorous controls in order to develop. A

Table 1. Comparing local councilors across 18 countries.

Country	Name of local councils	No. local authorities	Year of election
Austria	Municipal council (gemeinderat)	2357	2009–2012
Belgium	Municipal council (conseil communal / gemeenteraad)	589	2012
Bulgaria	Municipal council (obchtinski savet)	264	2010
Czech Republic	Municipal council (zastupitelstvo obce)	6250	2010
Denmark	Municipal council (kommunalbestyrelse)	98	2009
France	Municipal councils (conseil municipal)	36,569	2008
Germany	Local council (gemeinderat)	app 14000	2011
Greece	Municipal council (dimotiko simvoulio)	325	2010
Hungary	Municipal body of representatives (képviselő-testület)	3175	2010
Italy	Local council (consiglio comunale)	8094	2011
Netherlands	Local council (gemeenteraad)	418	2009
Poland	Municipal council (rada gminy)	2479	2010
Portugal	Parish assembly (assembleia de freguesia)	4259	2009
Romania	County council (consiliul județean)	41	2012
Slovakia	Local council (obecné zastupiteľ'stvo in municipalities, mestské zastupiteľ'stvo in cities). Figures refer to mayors (starosta in municipalities, primátor in cities).	2792 (2909 mayors)	2010
Spain	Local council (concejal)	8117	2011
Sweden	Municipal assembly (kommunfullmäktige)	290	2010
UK	Local authority councils	466	2010–1212

Notes: In some countries local elections are not held simultaneously across all regions. Therefore the table reports data across several years for these countries. In Austria, local elections are held at different occasions in the Bundesländer. In the UK, Scotland has a special electoral cycle.

reasonable alternative is therefore to find a proxy for parallel regimes that may affect recruitment processes. While there is no shortage of indicators for levels of corruption or the quality of government in countries (e.g. the International Country Risk Guide rating, the Corruptions Perception Index, and the Worldwide Governance Indicators), there is a clear lack of reliable data on the subnational level. We use the most comprehensive regional governance indicator available, the EQI. This index was assembled in 2009 by scholars at the Quality of Government Institute, at the University of Gothenburg, with funding from the European Commission (see Charron, 2010; Charron et al., 2011). The investigators focused on 18 countries and surveyed approximately 34,000 citizens on three different types of government services (law enforcement, health care, and education). Participants were asked to numerically evaluate three aspects of these services: their *quality*, *impartiality*, and *corruption*. The survey consisted of 16 independent questions related to the three aspects of good governance, which were then combined to create a regional index. The researchers then combined the regional scores with external measures of quality of government in order to complement the regional scores from the survey with a country context. To do so, the researchers introduced a component controlling for these regions' deviation from the national average of the established World Bank's World Government Indicator (WGI).⁸ In this sense the index also gauges corruption in the political sphere. The final index is standardized so that the mean is 0 with a standard deviation of 1. In all, the EQI gauges the quality, impartiality, and corruption of

government authorities in these regions. Higher numbers correspond with lower levels of corruption, partiality, and ineffectiveness, and lower numbers correspond with higher levels of these factors (see also Charron and Lapuente, 2013). We include all regions from the 18 countries that were covered by the EQI.⁹ For a description how the EQI varies across the 167 regions, see Appendix 3. We use the original index as our main independent variable, but we also distinguish between the effects of the different subcomponents.

National-level control variables

Our model includes a test for several alternative explanations for the variance of our dependent variable. We use both national-level and regional-level variables for this purpose. The six national-level controls are *type of election system*, *gender equality culture*, *legislative gender quota at the subnational level*, *voluntary party gender quotas*, *degrees of democracy*, and *location inside or outside of Central and Eastern Europe*. The role of election systems has a long history in research on women's representation (e.g. Duverger, 1955; Norris, 1993). Numerous studies find that women's presence is favored by electoral systems with party lists, proportional representation, and large districts (see Kittilson, 2006). To account for this aspect we controlled for the election system and created four dummy variables (mixed-member proportional system, two-round system, party-list proportional system, and first-past-the-post system).¹⁰ Cultures with gender equality, in which women have opportunities for upward mobility, have been widely acknowledged to

correlate with the number of women in elected seats (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Although the concept of gender equality is quite difficult to gauge empirically, a reasonable alternative is to use a measure of women's participation in the labor force (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2008; Stockemer, 2011). This measure has been shown to be significant in previous analyses of women's participation in local politics and in comparing national averages in Europe, thus it makes sense to include this factor as a control (Wide, 2006). The indicator included in our analysis measures the ratio of women to men in the active labor market.¹¹

It has been shown that, especially in more recent democracies, legislative quotas are important (Dahlerup, 2006; Krook, 2009; Paxton et al., 2010). To gauge the effect of quotas we created dummy variables for countries with legislative gender quotas at the subnational level.¹² Besides legislation, important determinants of the number of women elected include voluntary acts by political parties, such as the implementation of gender quotas or other voluntary gender-specific measures within parties (Freidenvall, 2006; Studlar and McAllister, 2002). It should be noted that the number of women elected has also increased in parties that have never adopted quotas. Thus, one can expect a 'contagion effect' (see Matland and Studlar, 1996) in party systems in which one party has adopted voluntary quotas (such as a zipper system for party lists), which in turn may also have a positive impact on the share of female candidates in other parties (Kittilson, 2006). To gauge this effect we introduced dummy variables for countries with political parties that have adopted voluntary gender quotas.¹³ And because democracy has been argued to affect the share of elected women (e.g. Sung, 2003) we included a measure for the degree of democracy.¹⁴ This indicator of democracy gauges the levels at which citizens of different countries are granted political rights and individual liberties (Teorell et al., 2013). It therefore captures aspects of the 'input side' of the democratic process – how democratic decisions are being made – whereas the concept of 'quality of government' captures the 'output side' – how these decisions are implemented (see Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). We also included a dummy variable to account for whether the country belonged to Central and Eastern Europe.

Regional-level control variables

Numerous studies have found that modernization in a broad sense often tends to correlate with high gender equality and a high presence of elected women (e.g. Inglehart and Norris, 2003). It has been found that countries with higher economic development and a highly educated population tend to elect a larger share of women. To account for these effects, regional measures of per capita GDP and levels of education were included as regional indicators of modernization.¹⁵ The measure for per capita GDP was averaged for the years 2007–2009, and – as is standard procedure with skewed variables – logarithmically transformed. The measure for

education is the percentage of the population having completed a tertiary education.

Potential endogeneity

Before we report the findings from our empirical test, a discussion on the possible challenge of endogeneity between the share of locally elected women and the regional quality of government is warranted. With the debate on the causal relationship between gender and corruption in mind, one could posit that the proportion of women in local councils would affect the governance in these regions, directly or through feedback mechanisms (see Wängnerud and Grimes, 2012). We have two reasons to believe that this possible confounder does not constitute a large problem. Firstly, we rely on the empirical results where studies using a time-series design have failed to find any significant effects on national levels of corruption from having a large share of elected women in parliament (Bjarnegård, 2013; Sung, 2012). Secondly, we believe that there are even fewer theoretical reasons to suppose that politicians elected at the local, rather than the national, level would have enough influence to begin to eradicate corruption and partiality in government. In order to address the potential endogeneity problem in our analysis we would, ideally, need time-series data on both women's representation and regional governance. As this data does not exist, we made every effort to measure our dependent variable using data collected later than the EQI data on quality of government. We are therefore cautious with our claims and do not attempt to end the debate on causality between gender and corruption. However, we still believe that providing the robust results of correlation in this cross-regional sample is in itself a substantial contribution to progress in this area. We are also confident that we have no potential problem of spurious relationships in our model. As mentioned, Sung (2003) attributed the correlation between corruption and women's representation across nations to 'liberal democracy'. Besides analyzing only countries that are declared 'free' in the Freedom House Index and classified as 'democracies' in the Polity IV score,¹⁶ we also controlled for the degree of democracy in our model.

Methods

To gauge the effect of quality of government on our dependent variable we first analyzed the bivariate relationship between the proportion of elected women and the EQI factor. Second, we built a multilevel model with two regional-level covariates (per capita GDP and educational attainment) and six national-level factors (electoral system type, female labor force participation, legislative gender quotas on the subnational level, voluntary party quotas, degrees of democracy, and whether

the country belongs to Central and Eastern Europe). Using data structured across two different geographical stages, we deemed HLM the most appropriate analytical method (Goldstein, 2010).¹⁷ In our multilevel model, 167 European regions are nested within 18 countries.

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

For summary statistics of the variables included in the model, see Appendix 4. It should be noted that for the dependent variable that we analyze below we include data from all 18 countries, thus including the two countries (Slovakia and Romania) that are admittedly measured a bit differently. Our rationale for this is based on thorough analysis and several tests to ensure that these two countries do not significantly alter our results. We have run the same model using a slightly altered dependent variable (with only one or neither of these countries) and the results were very similar to those reported below. This further strengthens our belief that the process of corruption and partiality that affects the recruitment of women is present in both county and municipal councils.¹⁸

Results

The distribution of our dependent variable demonstrates a large variance in the proportions of locally elected women between countries but, more importantly, also within the nations in this study. The difference between within-country regions, with the lowest and the highest shares of women, exceeds 10% in most countries in our sample. The variance in the share of locally elected female councilors is graphically illustrated in Figure 1.

In Denmark, for example, the region of Syddanmark has an average of 28% women in local assemblies, compared to 39% in Hovedstaden. In Greece, the 12% female share of councilors in the region of Kentriki Ellada stands in contrast to the region of Attica's mean proportion of 24%. In Italy, too, this difference is clearly visible. While the councils in Emilia-Romagna average 28% women, those in the region of Campania are made up of only 10% women. The numerical distribution of the share of locally elected women in each country is illustrated in Figure 2. The detailed figures for each region are listed in Appendix 5.

We now proceed to analyze the determinants of this observed variance. From the scatter plot in Figure 3, a strong bivariate relationship between regional quality of government and the average proportion of locally elected women is evident. This relationship is positive, and based on this first analysis it is apparent that regions with less partiality, corruption, and ineffectiveness tend to be those with a higher share of female councilors. This can be seen clearly in some countries. In Greece and Italy, for instance, the regions with the worst EQI score are generally the ones with the lowest proportion of women in elected positions. Sweden, on the other hand, shows little variation in either of the two main variables across regions, but shows a correlation between low levels of corruption and partiality within government and a high presence of locally elected women. To complement this general picture with even more robust results, we proceed to report findings from the multivariate model.

Our multivariate HLM analysis basically confirms the findings that regional quality of government has a substantial effect on women's representation in the European regions. As evident in Model 2 shown in Table 2, when only the effect of EQI is reported, this relationship is positive and significant at the 99.9% level. When our regional- and national-level control variables are introduced, this effect is slightly decreased, but still strong. In our full analysis, Model 4 in Table 2, we still observe positive and significant coefficients from EQI on our dependent variable when all our independent variables are taken into account. More specifically, the size of the coefficients indicates that a one-point increase in regional governance should predict an average increase of approximately 2.3% in female councilors. Taking country-level variations into account, we can also see that our model explains a large share of the variance within countries.

The statistics reported in Table 2 indicate that our full model indeed has a good fit and explains a substantial part of the variance in the proportion of locally elected women in European regions. The control variables show surprisingly few significant effects, but most of them have the anticipated sign of direction. Notably, per capita GDP has a positive and significant effect. Unsurprisingly in view of the literature on women's political representation, regional prosperity is an important determinant of the share of female representatives on local councils. It should also be noted that the main findings remain robust if we exclude the Romanian and Slovakian regions from this analysis.¹⁹

To further challenge the robustness of these results we performed extensive tests to disentangle nuanced effects from subcomponents of the regional governance index. As described in the section on data, the EQI was constructed to gauge three components of public services: *quality*, *impartiality*, and *corruption* (together consisting of 16 survey items) for each region (see Charron et al., 2013). The three subcomponents of the EQI measure slightly different concepts, and thus it is warranted to investigate whether these components

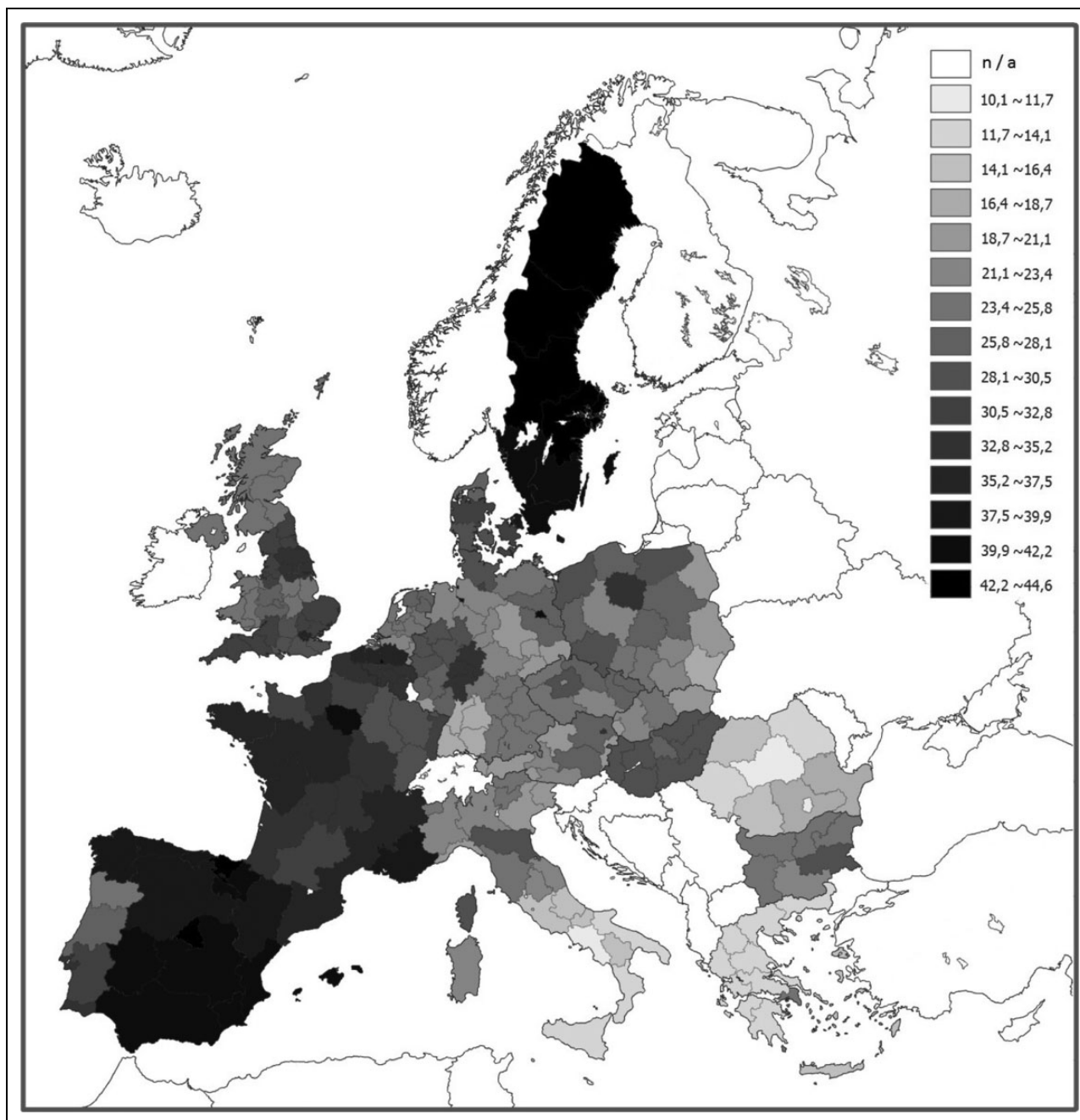


Figure 1. Locally elected female councilors in the European regions (percent).

Notes: The figures refer to the most recent elections available (see Table 1 for details). The variable is the share of locally elected female councilors aggregated to a mean of each region. For the exact share of elected women for each region, see Appendix 5.

each produce similar estimates. By using the subcomponents as single predictors in three separate models we examined whether they produce different effects on our dependent variable. Table 3 reports these findings, using only the full models with all independent variables included.

While the effect of the EQI on women's representation is largely consistent within its subcomponents, the component related to corruption seems to be the strongest predictor (see Table 3). When the three components are used as

single predictors in separate models they all have positive and significant effects on our dependent variable. However, the coefficients from the quality indicator and the impartiality indicator are smaller than the effect reported from the full EQI. In contrast, the effect from the corruption indicator is larger than the other two subcomponents and also larger than the coefficient from the full EQI. More precisely, as can be seen in Model 4 of Table 3, a one-point increase in the corruption indicator predicts an

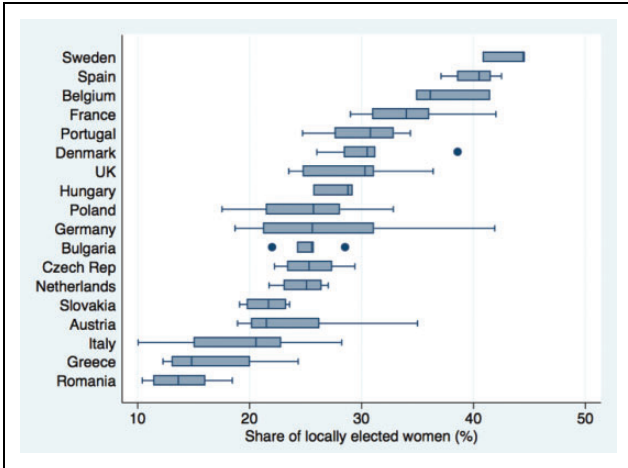


Figure 2. Distribution of the share of female councilors (percentage) in the regions of each country.

Notes: The figures refer to the most recent elections available (see Table 1 for details). The variable is the proportion of locally elected female councilors aggregated to a mean of each region. The exact figures for each region are listed in Appendix 5. The boxplots are ordered along the mean value of the regions in each country. Moreover, the boxplots report the 25th and 75th percentiles of the distribution through the lower of upper hinges of each box. While the whiskers refer to 1.5 of the interquartile range, the single dots are the extreme outliers in this distribution.

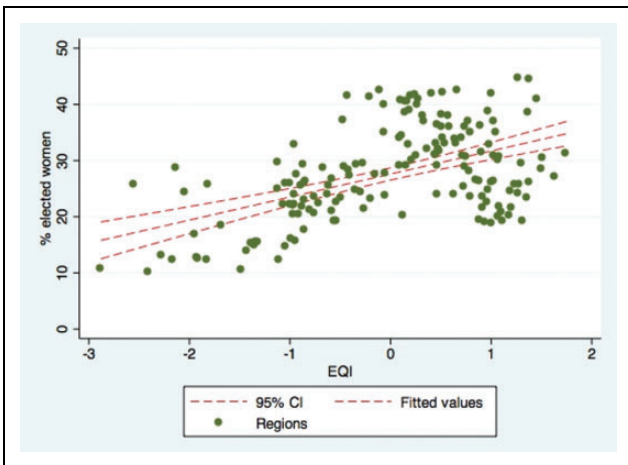


Figure 3. The regional share of female councilors and quality of government.

Notes: EQI refers to the European Quality of Government Index, where higher values indicate less corruption and partiality as well as higher quality in government services. This data originates from Charron et al. (2011).

average increase of female councilors of approximately 2.7%. Moreover, the model with the indicator for corruption included as the main predictor has the highest fit of all four models reported in Table 3.

We have used the term ‘quality of government’ as a proxy measure gauging the potential obstacle from a direct ‘network effect’ and an indirect ‘signal effect’ for the

advancement of women in elected assemblies. Of the three subcomponents of our empirical index, it is quite possible that the corruption indicator is a better proxy measure for the existence of closely knit male-dominated networks with informal patterns of recruitment, whereas the impartiality indicator is more closely related to the indirect signals from government authorities of equal treatment. However, these distinctions are not yet mutually excluding since perceptions of corruption should also include signals from the bureaucracy. To analyze this issue further one would need an even more fine-tuned measure of different types of corruption in political and administrative bodies.

Conclusion

In this study we analyzed a novel dataset of the proportion of locally elected female councilors in Europe. This article is one of the first to study the variance of women’s local political representation within countries in a comparative perspective. Our findings suggest that the quality of regional governance exerts a substantial influence on women’s local political representation in European regions. This research design allowed us to hold constant national-level factors that have been argued to be important for women’s representation. Thus, we were able to observe the impact of quality of government on women’s political representation with greater certainty than studies focused on comparing nations. This finding contributes specifically to the debate on gender and corruption. Sung (2003: 718) observed that ‘gender equality and government accountability are both great achievements of modern liberal democracy’ and thus downplayed the possible effect of government quality on women’s representation. In earlier literature on between-country comparisons, such reasoning is difficult to question. However, this study of female representation at the subnational level encourages us to challenge this assertion. If Sung was right, then we should not observe such wide variance in numbers of elected women between regions in the countries we studied. Controlling for a range of determinants, our model still indicates the significant and substantially important impact of our regional measure of quality of government on women’s representation.

In our empirical test we relied on cross-sectional data, and we therefore need to remain cautious when making inferences. Although we do not claim to propose a final answer to the debate of causality between the representation of women and levels of corruption, our findings clearly advance this field of research. For future empirical research it would be worthwhile to study how this relationship holds in a time-series analysis at the subnational level. This would of course require a continuous effort, as regional data on governance and women’s local representation are currently limited. For now, the test performed in this article constitutes a significant contribution, and we urge other scholars to continue this conversation.

Table 2. Predicting the share of elected women: Results from the HLM analysis.

Fixed intercept	27.454*** (1.818)	27.441*** (1.515)	-77.328 (64.235)	-131.535 (87.257)
EQI		3.284*** (0.693)	2.873*** (0.747)	2.303*** (0.712)
Education			0.004 (0.084)	-0.091 (0.117)
Logged GDP per capita			5.086*** (1.625)	7.798*** (1.673)
Party quota			3.554 (6.826)	9.654 (9.963)
Subnational legislative quota			13.436 (8.148)	21.820 (11.373)
List PR election system			-2.305 (7.941)	-8.981 (11.628)
TRS election system			-9.175 (13.927)	-23.845 (19.500)
MMP election system			-2.551 (8.762)	-10.253 (12.624)
Female labor force participation			96.484 (62.363)	141.259 (89.067)
Level of democracy			-2.890 (5.992)	-4.175 (8.000)
Central and Eastern Europe			10.982 (5.840)	25.826*** (7.976)
Random intercept	7.528 (1.365)	6.224 (1.153)	7.019 (1.767)	8.628 (5.630)
Model for log GDP/c slope				0.000 (0.000)
Model for education slope				0.310* (0.104)
Log likelihood	-502.1402	-491.3139	-457.9795	-455.10864
AIC	1010.28	990.6278	943.9589	942.2173
BIC	1019.634	1003.1	987.6109	992.1052
Observations	167	167	167	167
Number of countries	18	18	18	18

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

Table 3. Robustness check: The nuanced results from EQI in the full HLM analysis.

Fixed intercept	-131.535 (87.257)	-159.802 (97.535)	-159.980 (87.806)	-143.666 (80.319)
EQI	2.303*** (0.712)			
Quality (component 1)		1.513* (0.601)		
Impartiality (component 2)			1.857** (0.719)	
Corruption (component 3)				2.660*** (0.797)
Education	-0.091 (0.117)	-0.119 (0.123)	-0.124 (0.121)	-0.058 (0.114)
Logged GDP per capita	7.798*** (1.673)	8.223*** (1.697)	8.754*** (1.663)	7.302*** (1.687)
Party quota	9.654 (9.963)	8.957 (11.171)	8.595 (10.146)	10.592 (9.268)
Subnational legislative quota	21.820 (11.373)	20.586 (12.798)	21.352 (11.530)	21.278* (10.566)
List PR election system	-8.981 (11.628)	-6.085 (13.000)	-8.320 (11.795)	-6.008 (10.855)
TRS election system	-23.845 (19.500)	-22.235 (21.969)	-22.840 (19.787)	-22.619 (18.124)
MMP election system	-10.253 (12.624)	-10.723 (14.086)	-11.654 (12.789)	-8.805 (11.782)
Female labor force participation	141.259 (89.067)	145.399 (100.400)	143.733 (90.717)	140.793 (82.391)
Level of democracy	-4.175 (8.000)	-1.971 (8.989)	-2.173 (8.074)	-2.564 (7.340)
Central and Eastern Europe	25.826*** (7.976)	26.857*** (8.913)	27.208*** (7.976)	25.021*** (7.976)
Random intercept	8.628* (2.801)	9.888* (3.043)	8.667* (2.863)	7.998* (2.630)
Model for log GDP/c slope	0.000* (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Model for education slope	0.310* (0.104)	0.351*** (0.104)	0.339* (0.102)	0.283* (0.104)
Log likelihood	-455.10864	-457.1859	-456.82979	-454.88115
AIC	942.2173	946.3718	945.6596	941.7623
BIC	992.1052	996.2597	995.5475	991.6502
Observations	167	167	167	167
Number of countries	18	18	18	18

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

There is always a trade-off between new insights and reliable measures. We can empirically demonstrate that there is a correlation between the EQI and the share of women elected to local councils throughout Europe. However, we can only give theoretical arguments for the existence of shadowy arrangements and the mechanisms that constitute an obstacle to the advancement of women. Future research should strive

for additional measures and look deeper into the relative strength of the suggested mechanisms.

We firmly believe that research on the role of political parties in recruitment processes and the election of women needs to take into account the broader context outlined in this study. Our findings blur the classical distinction between supply and demand factors (see Norris, 1993) since supply – whether

women come forward – seems to be strongly related to qualities embedded in political institutions. Political parties do not operate in a vacuum, and research on clientelism tends to show complex dynamics between various elites in society (see Stokes, 2007). The upshot of our study highlights that if dedicated parties want to make a difference they have to, in some contexts, not only find new ways of organizing their own recruitment processes but also ways to reform government authorities in the broad sense.

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Notes

1. As will be described, in our statistical model we include controls for whether the country belongs to Central and Eastern Europe.
2. A large body of literature underpins the argument that the design of political institutions affects citizens' political attitudes and behaviors (see Kumlin and Rothstein, 2005; Soss, 1999).
3. While we use the language adopted from Cheng and Tavits (2011) on *indirect* and *direct* effects, we acknowledge that there is a similarity here to the influential argument of 'supply' and 'demand' factors in political recruitment (see Norris, 1993). However, we agree with scholars (e.g. Kenny, 2013; Krook, 2010) who argue that the supply and demand framework needs to acknowledge the context of institutions. In short, supply – whether women come forward – seems to be strongly related to qualities embedded in political institutions (the demand side).
4. Previous scholarly comparisons of subnational representations of elected women have provided little insight into the reasons for variations across and within countries. At best some organizations have provided an overview of the national averages of locally elected women (CEMR, 2008; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013). See, for instance, Rigon and Tanzi's (2012) study of Italy, Smith et al.'s (2012) study of US cities, and Wängnerud and Sundell's (2012) study of Sweden for exceptions.
5. For a detailed description of the dependent variable, see Sundström (2013).
6. We will discuss how we performed the same models for the dependent variable, but with these cases excluded, and how this did not seem to alter our main findings significantly.
7. In Belgium, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK we study NUTS 1 regions. In Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain we study NUTS 2 regions.
8. For a detailed description of the survey and the index, see Charron et al. (2013, 2014). For extensive sensitivity tests between national WGI scores and the regional measure of quality of government, see Charron (2010).
9. An exception is Bolzano in Italy, which does not have local councilors as the other regions of Italy do. In our multivariate analysis we also 'lose' four French territories as missing cases, as no data on educational attainment was available for these regions.
10. Data is taken from the Electoral System Design database at www.idea.int/esd/.
11. Retrieved from Eurostat at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/region_cities/.
12. Retrieved from the Quota Project: www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.
13. Retrieved from the Quota Project: www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.
14. We use the imputed Freedom House/Polity score, available from the QoG Dataset (Teorell et al., 2013).
15. The data was generously made available by Charron et al. (2013) and originated from the official figures reported to the Eurostat database.
16. See www.freedomhouse.org/ and www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm.
17. Using a linear model to estimate the predictors of the percentage of elected women is standard in this literature (see e.g. Smith et al., 2012).
18. The literature on women's representation sometimes notes that the Nordic countries are difficult to compare with other settings (Rosenbluth et al., 2006). We see no problem with including the regions of Denmark and Sweden in this analysis. Constituting 5% of our sample, they do not drive our results to any significant extent.
19. The BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) and AIC (Akaike Information Criterion) statistics provide criteria for selecting models. Briefly, a lower BIC implies a better fit and the preferred model in terms of information loss is the one with the minimum AIC value.

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Appendix I

Sources from which data was collected

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

Note: A more thorough description of these sources is available in Sundström (2013).

Appendix 2

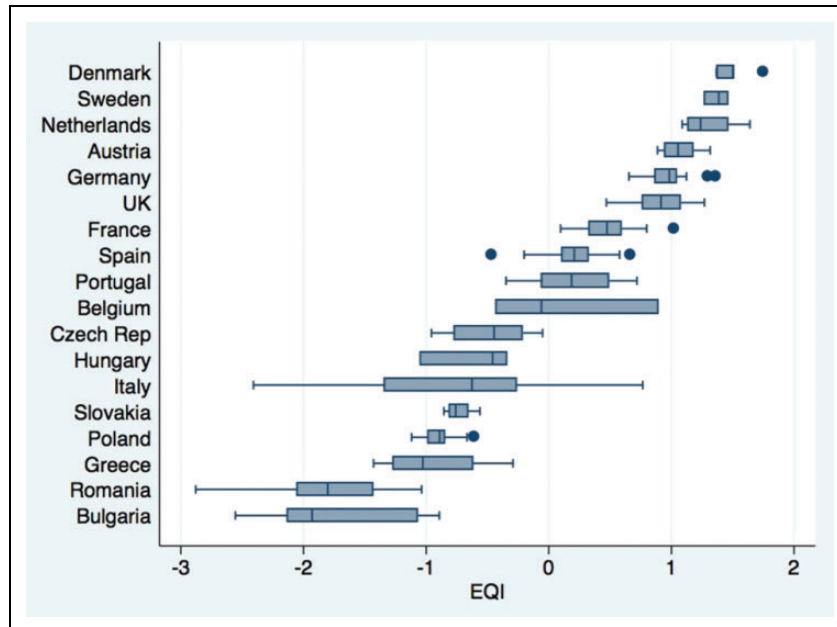
Responsibilities of local councils across 18 countries

	Water and sewage / sanitation	Public order / safety / police / emergency/ fire	Spatial / urban planning and land / territorial local development	Social services/ social policy	Roads and household refuse / waste management	Urban transport / public transport	Healthcare	Culture / sports and youth / leisure	Education	Environment/ agriculture / forests	Local finance and taxation	Employment/ assistance to unemployed	Local economy/ municipal budget	Public services / maintenance / public lights	Tourism	Cooperation with other municipalities	Housing / residence / energy	Integration of refugees	Economic development / industrial services
Austria	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					
Belgium	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				
Bulgaria	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x						
Denmark			x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x				x		x
Czech Republic	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x			x		x				
France (country)			x	x	x			x	x	x			x						
Germany	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x			x						x
Greece			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x						x
Hungary	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x			x						x
Italy			x	x	x	x		x	x	x			x						x
Netherlands		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x							
Poland			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x									
Portugal				x	x	x	x	x	x	x									
Romania (county)	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					x				x
Slovakia	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x									
Spain	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x				x					
Sweden	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x								x
UK	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x									x

Notes: This information was retrieved from a comparison of municipal responsibilities across Europe performed by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (www.ccre.org/en/membres/).

Appendix 3

The variance in quality of government in the European regions



Notes: EQI refers to the European Quality of Government Index, where higher values indicate less corruption and partiality as well as higher quality in government services. The boxplots are ordered along the mean value of the regions in each country. Moreover, the boxplots report the 25th and 75th percentiles of the distribution through the lower and upper hinges of each box. While the whiskers refer to 1.5 of the interquartile range, the single dots are the extreme outliers in this distribution. This data originates from Charron et al. (2011).

Appendix 4

Summary statistics for the variables in the model

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Share of elected women	167	27.60246	8.252306	10.04	44.5565
EQI	167	-0.0011182	1.016937	-2.87937	1.74988
Logged GDP per capita	167	9.853323	0.6516282	7.953688	11.00957
Education	167	22.39371	8.044362	7.6	42.9
Female labor force participation	167	0.7588922	0.0621198	0.634	0.875
Democracy	167	9.784588	0.3169401	8.92	10
List PR election system	167	0.6347305	0.4829538	0	1
TRS election system	167	0.1317365	0.3392213	0	1
MMP election system	167	0.1616766	0.3692612	0	1
FPTP election system	167	0.0718563	0.2590265	0	1
Subnational legislative quota	167	0.5329341	0.5004147	0	1
Party quota	167	0.7784431	0.4165434	0	1
Central and Eastern Europe	167	0.2647059	0.4424798	0	1

Appendix 5

The share of locally elected women in the European regions
(NUTS-codes and average percentage women for each region)

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

Notes: Each NUTS-region has a code, where the two first letters refer to the country, followed by a regional denominator. ITF3, for instance, refer to the south Italian region Campania.