

The media world versus the real world of women and political representation

Questioning differences and struggling for answers

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6.1 Women, media, and politics

Research studies over at least the last three decades have consistently demonstrated that women are under-represented in news, both as sources and subjects, and as reporters and presenters, in relation to their presence in any given population. If we focus more explicitly on a particular category of women, namely politicians, we observe precisely the same problem, despite their potentially greater newsworthiness as elite actors. Many women politicians, including women who hold the top political job of prime minister or president, are not only under-reported, but when they *do* feature in news discourse, they are often trivialised, sexualised, or commodified, their sex seeming to be the most interesting thing about them from the perspective of journalists.

In this chapter, we look at the relationship of women, politics, and news and explore some of the reasons why the representation of political women seems so problematic. Media professionals will often suggest that fewer women than men politicians appear in the news because there are relatively few women in any given parliament or because most senior politicians – who are inherently more newsworthy than other categories of political commentator, according to traditional notions of news value (see Gans, 1979) – are men. While both explanations are plausible, and likely to explain some of women's under-representation, they are rarely accompanied with any data to show the extent to which they actually *do* explain the presence – or in this case, relative absence – of women politicians in the news. It is precisely this lack of testing such explanations which we set out to address in this chapter.

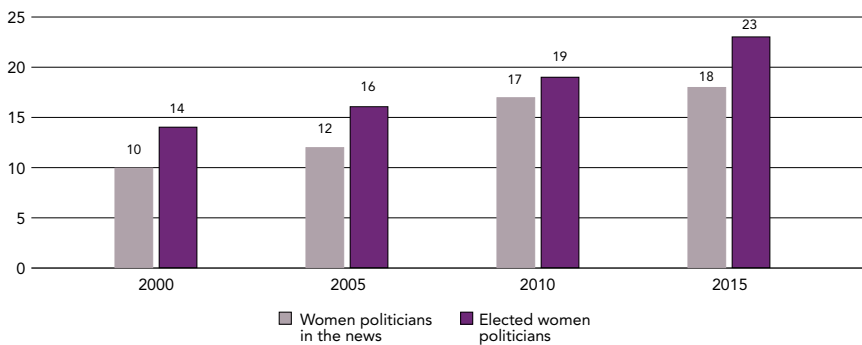
Although there is ample evidence of the under-representation of women politicians in relation to their actual numbers in politics, studies to date have

mostly been conducted in single countries. What those studies show is that there are substantial variations in women’s representation – both in news content and in their presence in legislatures – in different countries and regions of the world. This chapter seeks to describe and explore these cross-country variations. We first discuss the extant literature which has considered the tricky relations between women, politics, and news before turning to the empirical heart of the chapter, which looks at the data drawn from several different studies in order to model possible interpretations for women politicians’ (in)visibility in the news.

6.2 Women politicians and the media: A case to answer?

The relationship between women, politics, and the media has been the focus of many research endeavours over at least the past three decades. Over that time, despite the significant increases in women’s representation in national parliaments (the percentage of women has doubled over the past 20 years, from 12% in 1997 to 24% in 2017), their presence in the strange landscape that is the media world is oddly underwhelming. If we compare the global presence of women politicians in the news and the actual representation of women in the national parliaments, it is clear that there is a substantial gap (see Figure 6.1). Furthermore, the gap in under-representation of women politicians in the news remains largely the same over time.

Figure 6.1 *Women politicians in the real world and their representation as subjects or sources in the news, 2000–2015 (global averages, per cent)*



Comments: While the countries covered by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and those covered by the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) over the 15-year time period identified in Figure 6.1 do not match exactly, there is sufficient overlap to suggest a pattern. Data on women politicians in the real world is taken from IPU and refers to the percentage of women elected to the national parliaments (in lower or single house); data on women politicians (government, politician, minister, spokesperson) in the news are taken from the 2015 GMMP (Macharia, 2015: 25)

Source: GMMP; IPU

Most studies on the topic consider that the problem is two-fold: one issue is women's news media marginalisation in relation to their *actual* presence as political actors on the national and international stage; the other is *how* they are reported when they do receive airtime and column inches. Khan's (1991, 1994), Braden's (1996), and Norris's (1997) ground-breaking work on the representation of candidates in successive American elections in the 1990s re-asserted Tuchman and colleagues' (1978) much earlier statement that women were being "symbolically annihilated" in the news – women politicians as much as any other women. Studies of the European scene in the same decade, including work on the European Elections in 1994, demonstrated similarly depressing findings (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). What these studies describe are exclusions and trivialisations: comparisons with male politicians reveal not simply issues of absence of women, but issues of more negative tone and story focus when women are covered in the news. The news frames identified when women politicians made the news are very different from those associated with men – often more negative and focusing more on style than substance and on the personal rather than the political. What was important about these early studies was their interest in showing both quantitative differences in terms of volume and frequency of mentions, but also the more qualitative aspects of language, tone, and content.

This dual focus was also adopted by the next wave of research in the 2000s, demonstrating the endurance and ubiquity of gender stereotypes in political reportage (Adcock, 2010; Banwart et al., 2003; Bystrom et al., 2001; Gallagher, 2001; Gidengil & Everitt, 2005; Heldman et al., 2005). In her interview-based work with women politicians from diverse parliamentary contexts, from Westminster to South Africa to New Zealand, Ross (2002) argued that women themselves were very conscious of the journalistic impulse to treat them as aberrations, which led them to devise strategies to both cultivate positive relationships between themselves and their respective political lobbies, but also to find ways to subvert the interpretive journalistic lens. However, it was not always a bad-news story, and some researchers have argued that women actually have an advantage over their male colleagues because of their novelty value (see, e.g., Smith, 1997; Devitt, 2002; Banwart et al., 2003).

While these particular studies stressed the importance of visibility, they were rather less concerned with content, but if novelty is the primary focus rather than competence, then it's arguable that such representations can actually be regarded as positive or progressive. A media focus on personal attributes rather than political ones does not help the public understand more about candidates' perspectives on policy and thus inform their voting decisions. On the other hand, and rather more positively, Lachover (2014) took a slightly different approach, focusing explicitly on the narratives adopted by popular women's magazines in Israel when they feature women politicians, and argued that they promote

a more gender-neutral frame than mainstream media and avoid suggesting a tension between being a woman and being a politician. By doing so, this genre of current-affairs media offers an alternative version of women politicians to their audience, which challenges the status quo and potentially enhances the credibility of women to be seen as legitimate political actors.

Over the past ten years, interest in the relationship between women, politics, and news has continued apace, not least because of the significant increase in the number of women who are contesting ordinary seats as well as those competing for the top job – in both instances with varying levels of success. What remains a depressing finding, however, is that despite the upward trend in the number of women politicians as a proportion of elected representatives, especially over the past decade, they still struggle to achieve a significant media presence and are often ignored as potential sources in news stories unless their position demands their inclusion.

In her study of Belgian television news, Vos (2013) aimed to determine if a *political* bias (women are too junior to be of interest to the media) worked with a *media* bias (male journalists like talking to male politicians) to produce a *gender* bias which proscribed women's visibility. She argued that "gender bias is not an illusion due to political gender differences but rather an inconvenient truth" (Vos, 2013: 391), since women were routinely less visible than men, regardless of their seniority and despite their relevance to a particular story. Raicheva-Stover and Ibroscheva (2014) focused on the discursive frames employed by mainstream Bulgarian media to describe women politicians, comparing the pre- and post-Communist era, and suggested that regardless of the prevailing political ideology, news portrayal is heavily stereotyped and draws on normative frames of gendered performance. Similar under-representation persists even in the presumed gender-egalitarian Nordic countries. For example, a study from Norway showed that only 29 per cent of politicians in the news are women, about 10 percentage points lower than their actual numbers as elected county representatives, mayors, and parliamentary representatives (Sjøvaag & Pedersen, 2018).

In other studies, the wives of political men were found to have been invited as sources in news stories more frequently than women politicians (Harmer et al., 2017). Even when political women *are* allowed some media airtime, especially in television panel discussions, they are often passed over in favour of male colleagues speaking, or talked over by male panellists. O'Brien's (2014) study of women's engagement with politics on the flagship current affairs show, *Prime Time*, broadcast by the Irish public service broadcaster RTÉ during the 2011 elections, showed that women constituted around one-third of appearances on the show but were only given 10 per cent of the airtime, demonstrating a double-silencing. The first show she monitored during the campaign featured no women at all, instead comprising six male panellists, a male reporter, and a male presenter. Other contemporary studies show exactly the same proclivity,

be it the proportion of column inches or minutes of television airtime, as much in studies focused on routine politics as those looking at election campaigns (Howell & Singer, 2017). Interestingly, in the UK's 2015 and 2017 general elections, when women took part in the televised leaders' debates (three out of the seven major parties who were given a platform had a woman leader), the public and indeed the media response was favourable, not least because, in order to become party leader, these women had to be good politicians *and* good speakers (Ross, 2015, 2017).

Studies undertaken in non-Western contexts display the same issues of invisibility and trivialisation. In sub-Saharan Africa, both Donkor (2016) in Ghana, and Agbalajobi (2010) and Ette (2017) in Nigeria, found that women politicians in those countries also struggled to achieve media traction, and when they did, their achievements were often yoked to their familial "benefactor". In Donkor's work, for example, she found that when women competed for elected office – and particularly for senior posts – the news media would invariably describe them as the wife or daughter of a prominent man, with the implication that they were either being manipulated or else leveraging their personal relationship. Ette suggests that journalists reinforce a patriarchal understanding of the political process and that the relative absence of women in news discourse reflects the public's perception of women's (poor) political competence. Not only do the media undermine women's agency as political actors, women themselves are sometimes complicit in their own marginalisation. Devasahayam's (2013) study of women politicians in Singapore suggests that women there make a conscious decision to operate like their male counterparts as a survival tactic, with the result that no one is championing the cause of women or equality.

What most contemporary studies show is that, across the globe, the gendered frames observed in earlier studies have been found to be remarkably stable across time. It is perhaps understandable, in a media-saturated environment which regularly threatens to overwhelm us with the sheer volume of text and images, that journalists reach for some catch-all identikit woman-politician frames. However, in doing so, they reinforce and recycle a set of gendered scripts which collapse difference and provoke (often unfavourable) comparisons with the man-politician "norm". The kinds of contemporary frames which routinely describe women politicians and women candidates include a lack of relevant experience, naiveté, incompetence, being overly emotional, inadequate leadership skills or experience, and, most importantly, *not* being men. A very good example is the current prime minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, whose media coverage of her first 100 days in office (she became prime minister on 26 October 2017) focused on the novelty of being pregnant in office and her alleged inexperience, despite her having been a member of parliament since 2008 and a member of the shadow cabinet since 2011. The over-determined nature of this journalistic preoccupation with gendered trait allocation means

that women politicians' alleged lack of those (implicitly *male*) attributes, which are deemed desirable or appropriate for a politician, become important ways through which to undermine women's credibility as political actors – even for women who have already successfully served as prime ministers and presidents, such as New Zealand's Helen Clark (Lawrence & Rose, 2010). In addition to including entirely irrelevant aspects of a woman politician's candidacy – such as her wardrobe, her family, and her domestic arrangements (Kaur & Shaari, 2012) – journalists will often imply that a woman's sex is directly related to her (in)competence and that her personal characteristics should be considered alongside her track record on policy, as much for prime ministers as backbenchers.

As well as the use of gendered frames when reporting on politicians, three other important aspects of the journalistic insistence in using gendered political scripts are the language and tone of their copy and story topic. Analyses of news discourse reveals explicit and strategic differences in the words used to describe women and men politicians, which replicate the kinds of gender-normative behaviours routinely attributed to women and men. More generally – including but not exclusive to the political sphere – there are several popular semantic differentials that have a clear gender orientation: men are assertive, women are aggressive; women are emotional, men are in touch with their feminine side; men are rational, women are unfeeling; and so on. Acknowledging how these unhelpful couplings work, some women attempt to subvert these normative characteristics by playing against their feminine “disadvantage”, but because of the particularities of the media's gendered political logic, women can be viewed positively as credible political actors if they perform well against a male-ordered script, but will often be simultaneously criticised for being too assertive for a woman, but also too aggressive for a politician. Working in the opposite direction, men who lose political authority are described as weak or “upset”, their loss tied inextricably to their dwindling masculinity and the “female” traits of weakness and vulnerability repurposed as symbols of men's defeat (Lünenborg & Maier, 2015).

The casual trivialisation and sexualisation of women politicians is perfectly exemplified by the news media's response to the outcome of the 1997 British general election, which saw the number of women elected to parliament double overnight. Several news outlets greeted this historic outcome by describing the 101 newly-elected Labour women as “Blair's babes”, a strategy which has been used to similar effect in other parts of the world (Cowley & Childs, 2003; Mavin et al., 2010). During the 2008 American presidential elections, Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin were often pictured as warrior figures, but more in the mould of Lara Croft than Boadicea, clad in what Perks and Johnson (2014) rather lyrically describe as “burlesque binds”. In the more recent elections in 2016, Clinton styled herself as the wise grandmother, arguably in the hope of heading off claims that she was past her “sell-by date”, although at 68, she was

still two years younger than Donald Trump, who has never felt it necessary to excuse his age, secure in the knowledge that age is only a negative talking point for women, since men are deemed to improve with the passing of time.

Kasoma's (2014) study of coverage of women politicians in the two most important newspapers in Zambia – the *Post* and *Zambia Daily Mail* – found that women politicians were mostly invisible, but when they *were* featured, the stories tended to be framed around corruption, women's issues, or development. Their marginalisation is in line with so much of the literature that finds the same trend of sourcing women politicians in stories regarded as soft – and thus “appropriate” – topics on which to seek women's views (see, e.g., Ben Salem & Mejbri's 2014 work on the Tunisian press).

Of course, it's not only journalists who marginalise political women, but other politicians as well, some of whom, like journalists, have become adept at using more subtle strategies of critique. Fracchiolla (2011) argues that in media debates during the French presidential elections in 2007, Nicholas Sarkozy's use of extreme politeness – often considered to be a female trait – was used to very good effect, as it provoked an angry and emotional response from his opponent, Ségolène Royal, giving Sarkozy grounds for arguing that Royal was too emotional to be a competent leader. He also paid her numerous compliments, proactively asserting his right to do so and thus putting her in the position of passively “receiving” his attention. These kinds of strategies are clever and sly, their steady accretion building to undermine the potency of women as political actors.

These more qualitative findings from research studies demonstrating the very different discourses adopted for women and men – and which are considerably disadvantageous for women – are important to understand as contributors to the complex problem of women politicians' representation in news. This is because they show that numerical correspondence is only *one* aspect of the problem of gendered media portrayal. If the frequency of women's media visibility corresponds to their frequency in the overall numbers of politicians in parliament, then that could be seen as fair representation by the news media. However, if a closer discursive analysis shows that the tone, language, and focus of stories featuring women and men are different, and that stories about women focus on their sex and style and stories about men focus on their politics and presence, then the overall result for women is not at all fair or even-handed (see also Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007; Lünenborg & Maier, 2015). Indeed, Haraldsson and Wängnerud (2018) suggest that the ways in which the news media frame women politicians have a negative impact on women's likelihood to even consider a career in politics, which is extremely problematic for a well-functioning democracy. Although we don't look at the qualitative elements of news discourse in our analysis, it is useful to bear them in mind when considering the findings we present below.

6.3 Exploring women's (in)visibility in the news: Political representation and the gender-equality landscape

The first and most obvious explanation for women politicians' visibility in the news is, arguably, tied to their representation in their national legislatures. A major flaw of many studies that focus on the presence of women politicians in the media on the one hand, and research on gender and media on the other, is their failure to explore exogenous factors such as the political and sociopolitical environment in which news media operate (Djerf-Pierre, 2007). This has therefore limited the explanatory power of potential interpretations generated on the basis of relatively small-scale national case studies with limited foci. Thus, although studies will often suggest that women politicians are under-represented compared with men, scholars rarely quantify that assertion by including a note of the percentage of women politicians in the relevant legislature. Women's under-representation is therefore mostly described in relation to men, not in relation to their proportion of elected members, with some notable exceptions, such as Lünenborg & Maier's (2015) study of news media coverage of senior women politicians in Germany, which did do precisely that.

In Sweden, the first self-defined "feminist" government was formed in 2015 and included an explicit pledge to be the strongest voice for gender equality and full employment of human rights for all women and girls (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016). It could therefore be argued that the general level of gender equality in a country could relate to how the news media portrays women in politics – and so we ask, could such societal factors be associated with women politicians' media visibility?

6.4 Women in the political newsroom: A sisterly conspiracy?

The second possible explanation for women politicians' visibility relates to intra-media factors. While other chapters explore aspects of production versus representation in broad terms, an additional issue associated with the news presence of women politicians is the character of political news and the cachet that surrounds this particular genre of journalism, which is dominated by men. Studies that have looked at gender and news beats show clearly that horizontal segregation is a visible feature of newsroom cultures, with relatively few women working in hard news sections and ever fewer women getting their copy onto the front page (Bawdon, 2012; Harp et al., 2014; Women's Media Centre, 2017). This is an important issue, since some researchers who have focused on intra-media factors as explanations for how reality is represented in the news suggest that who works (and leads) in the newsroom *could* have an impact on

news content. In other words, more women journalists and more women in top-level positions in media organisations *could* lead to a different kind of news or, at the very least, news with and from a different perspective (Armstrong, 2004; Zoch & VanSlyke Turk, 1998). A key factor to consider, therefore, is whether there is any association between women political news reporters and editors, and the visibility of women politicians in news discourse.

The results from the 2015 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) – a global study that examines the gender representation in the news on a single day – showed that women had a byline in 31 per cent of political news stories, compared with 50 per cent of science and health news, 39 per cent of finance and economy stories, and 39 per cent of social and legal news stories (see also North, 2016). As Figure 6.2 demonstrates, not only is political journalism the least likely to recruit women reporters, but their relative absence has shown very little change over time, despite the fact that more women are entering the journalism profession than ever before. In fact, Figure 6.2 actually shows that if anything, there has been a slight decline in political stories written by women over the past five years, from 33 per cent in 2010 down to 31 per cent in 2015.

Figure 6.2 Women and men with journalism credits for political news stories in television, radio, and press, 2000–2015 (per cent)



Source: GMMP (Macharia, 2015: 24)

Lastly, based on the literature to date, we would expect structural patterns in both media and politics to have an impact on the visibility of women politicians in the news, so we also test that assumption in this chapter.

6.5 Method

The analysis is a cross-sectional secondary analysis of data from a number of sources with different foci – gender and media, but also politics and society. The variables are drawn from four different datasets (see Table 1): the GMMP, the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF), the Quality of Gov-

ernment (QoG) Institute, and the World Economic Forum (WEF). We draw on the dataset which comprises the most recent data available from each of the constituent databases, mainly from 2010–2015. The construction of such a cross-sectional dataset allows us to make use of latest available data for the largest number of countries.

The cross-sectional approach was chosen mainly due to large gaps in the available data. Although GMMP is conducted every fifth year since 1995, only 31 countries have participated in all rounds. Also, not all participating countries have political news or politicians in the data collected (no political stories, no politicians, or both). Additionally, there are also quite large gaps in the data available for the independent variables, which makes it difficult to construct a dataset where all variables are matched by year. To pool the available data into a cross-sectional dataset allows us to include 129 of the world's countries in the analysis (see also Chapter 1 for a discussion on methodological issues).

The two main dependent variables for our analysis are retrieved from the GMMP, which is part of the GEM dataset (Färdigh et al., 2020). GMMP is the largest study of gender and news in relation to the number of countries and range of media it monitors. Although the latest data from the project (2015) includes online as well as offline news stories, for this chapter, we focus exclusively on the traditional media of television, radio, and the press, since there is significantly less data available on Twitter and online news stories. The two dependent variables are therefore 1) the visibility of women politicians as subjects or sources in *any* news story across television, radio, and the press (DV1), and 2) the visibility of women in stories coded as politics and government across television, radio, and the press (DV2):

- DV1 – women politicians as subjects or sources – draws on the GMMP variable, gender of news subjects in major occupational group, politician, female (gmmp_gonsp_f),¹ and measures the share of women news subjects in the major occupational group (of politicians) in newspapers, television, and radio on a scale ranging from 0 (no women) to 100 (all women).
- DV2 – women as news subjects or sources in political stories – draws on the GMMP variable, gender of news subjects in major topic areas – politics and government, female (gmmp_gonspg_f), which measures the share of women news subjects in topics about politics and government in television, radio, and the press on a scale ranging from 0 (no women) to 100 (all women).

We chose these two different ways of understanding the relationship between women, politics, and media since the literature suggests that when women politicians do appear in news stories, they often appear in soft news items on a

range of topics, and that the spouses of political leaders appear more frequently in hard news stories about politics than women politicians.

The GMMP reports employ country-weights in their analyses to account for differences in population and the size of the media sector in different countries when calculating global averages, but in this study, we use unweighted data: each country is given the same weight. Since the GMMP only surveys the news output on a single day, data collected for individual countries may be biased because of specific events or circumstances on that particular day. However, there is no reason to believe that, even where this is the case, such bias operates differently for women or men. Also, some countries only provide analyses of a limited number of news outlets. Extreme outliers (i.e., country observations with extreme values) based on small sample sizes (few news stories analysed) are thus excluded from the analyses: Vanuatu, Samoa, Macedonia, Ireland, Chad, Haiti, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Niger, Solomon Islands, St. Lucia, Congo, Gabon, and Burkina Faso.²

As for independent variables, we consider what factors could be in play in determining the visibility of women politicians in the media. The literature review suggests that there are three areas of potential influence: 1) the political environment, specifically the proportion of women who are elected representatives in any given parliament or legislature; 2) the broader sociopolitical landscape that supports or inhibits gender equality; and 3) women's presence in the news industry in reporting and decision-making roles. To test the potential influence of each of these factors, we chose three indicators.

The proportion of women as elected representatives is indicated by the variable, share of women in lower house, and has been retrieved from QoG (Teorell et al., 2017; data originally from the IPU, or Inter-Parliamentary Union). It measures the percentage of women elected representatives in lower- or single-house national parliaments.

The broader gender equality landscape is measured with the Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) score, produced by the World Economic Forum (WEF) and retrieved from QoG. This is the most extensive and widely used measure of the gender gap in society and examines the gap between women and men in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

Women in the news industry is measured by two variables: women political reporters (the share of political news stories produced by women reporters in TV, radio, press) has been retrieved from GMMP; top-level women media managers was retrieved from IWMF (Byerly, 2011) and measures the percentage of women who report to boards of directors and comprises the most senior staff, including publisher, chief executive officer, director general, and chief financial officer.

The original sources and statistics for each included variable is presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Variable statistics

	Mean	Min	Max	Std Dev	N	Source
Women politicians as subjects or sources	17	0	47	9.5	129	GMMP
Women as news subjects or sources in political stories	16	0	55	10.5	134	GMMP
Share of women in lower house	22	0	64	12.0	136	QoG/IPU
Global Gender Gap Index	0.702	0.56	0.88	0.056	122	QoG/WEF
Women political reporters – TV, radio, press	36	0	100	22	132	GMMP
Top-level news media managers	26	0	58	14.3	57	IWMF

Comments: N = number of country observations. Cross-sectional data comprising the most recent data available from each of the constituent datasets, using 2015 as the target year. The share of women in the lower house variable (*qog_ipu_l_sw*) is taken from the QoG Institute (Teorell et. al., 2017) dataset and was originally retrieved from the IPU, and measures the share of women in the lower or single house parliaments in per cent. The GGI variable (*wef_ggi_score*) is taken from QoG but is originally from WEF and examines the gap between women and men in four fundamental categories (sub-indices): economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. The variable ranges from 1 (equality) to 0 (inequality). The women political reporters – TV, radio, press variable (*gender of reporters in major topic areas – politics and government, female, gmmp_gorpg_f*) is taken from the GMMP and measures the share of women (and men) reporters in topics about politics and government published or broadcast in newspapers, television, and radio; it varies between 0 and 1. The top-level news media managers variable (*top-level women, share of women-variable, iwmf_tlms_f*) is taken from the IWMF dataset (Byerly, 2011) and counts the percentage of women who report to boards of directors and comprises the most senior staff including publisher, chief executive officer, director general, and chief financial officer: the scale ranges from 0–100, with 0 indicating no top-level women. Outliers with small sample size (few stories analysed in GMMP) are excluded: Vanuatu, Samoa, Macedonia, Ireland, Chad, Haiti, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Niger, Solomon Islands, St Lucia, Congo, Gabon, and Burkina Faso.

Source: GMMP (1995–2015); QoG/IPU; QoG/WEF; IWMF (Byerly, 2011)

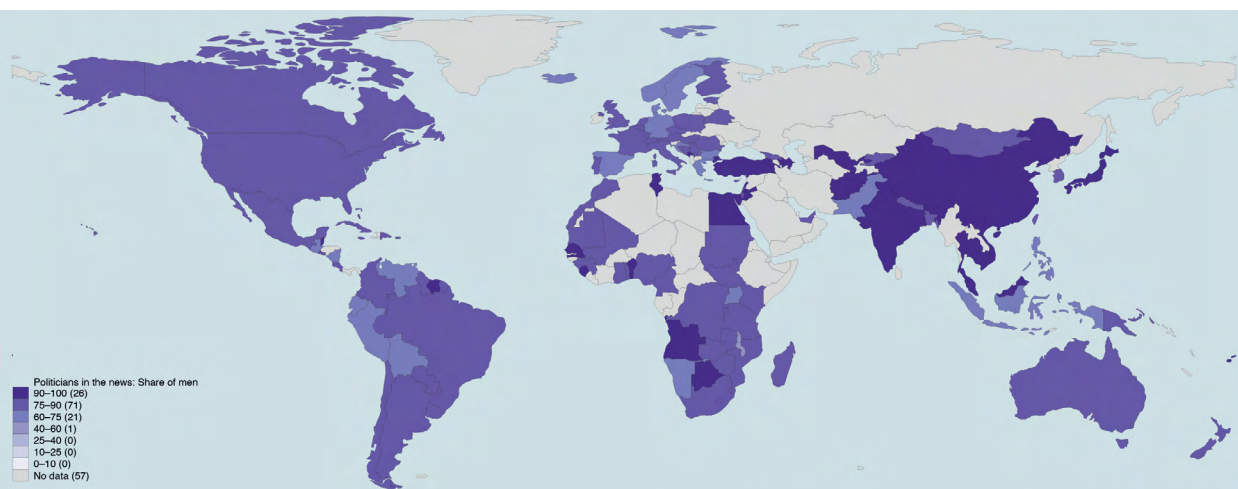
6.6 Testing our assumptions:

The relationship between political representation and the visibility of women in political news

We begin the results section by showing a snapshot in the form of a map displaying the dominance of men politicians in the news across the globe (see Figure 6.3). The cross-sectional dataset includes 129 countries, and there are a few countries from where we lack data.³ As Chapter 1 argues, there is a relationship between gender equality in society and participating actively in GMMP, which means that the grey fields in the map (where data are unavailable) most likely represent countries with lower levels of gender equality, both in the news and in society.

Still, the global map provides an interesting picture of national differences. In 81 per cent of the countries studied by GMMP, men received 75 per cent or more of the visibility given to politicians. Eight countries had no women politicians at all in the news. Only two of 129 countries in the analysis showed that the visibility of women politicians reached at least 40 per cent.

Figure 6.3 *Men politicians' visibility as news subjects or sources across the world's news media*



Comments: $n = 119$. The map displays the latest available data on men politicians' visibility in the news from each country, mostly from 2015. The scale varies from 0 (no men) to 100 (all men). Outliers with small sample size (few stories analysed in GMMP) are excluded. Antigua and Barbuda (100% men), Barbados (68%), Cape Verde (69%), Grenada (100%), Malta (80%), Mauritius (94%), St. Vincent and the Grenadines (83%), Seychelles (89%), Tonga (100%), and Serbia and Montenegro (92%) are missing due to the design of the statistical package used to construct the map.

Source: GMMP (1995–2015)

This means that although women politicians are much less visible than men in the news in most countries, there are still significant cross-national variations. In explaining these cross-national differences, we were interested in exploring the relative influence of different factors on the visibility of women politicians in news stories: political representation, the broader gender equality landscape, and women in the news industry. We considered each of these factors in turn. First, we produced bivariate correlations between the independent variables and the visibility of women politicians in the news expressed as two dependent variables. We used Pearson's correlation coefficients, and the correlations are indicated by the symbol r (see Table 6.2). Secondly, we performed a linear regression analysis to examine which of our independent variables had the most power in predicting our main dependent variable, women politicians' visibility in the news (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.2 *Bivariate correlations between women's visibility in political news and their actual representation in the legislature, the Global Gender Gap Index, Women political reporters, and top-level women media managers (Pearson's r)*

	Women politicians share of subjects or sources in all news stories	Women's share of subjects or sources in politics and government news
Share of women in lower house	.436*** (125)	.307** (129)
Global Gender Gap Index	.528*** (112)	.374*** (117)
Women political reporters – TV, radio, press	.112 (125)	.101 (132)
Top-level women media managers	.315* (54)	.142 (56)

Comments: n = number of country observations (in parentheses). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. The correlation between women politicians' share of subjects or sources in all news stories and women's share of subjects or sources in news stories on politics and government is .676***. Outliers with small sample size (few stories analysed in GMMP) excluded. See Table 6.1 for details of the variables included in the table.

Source: QoG/IPU; GMMP

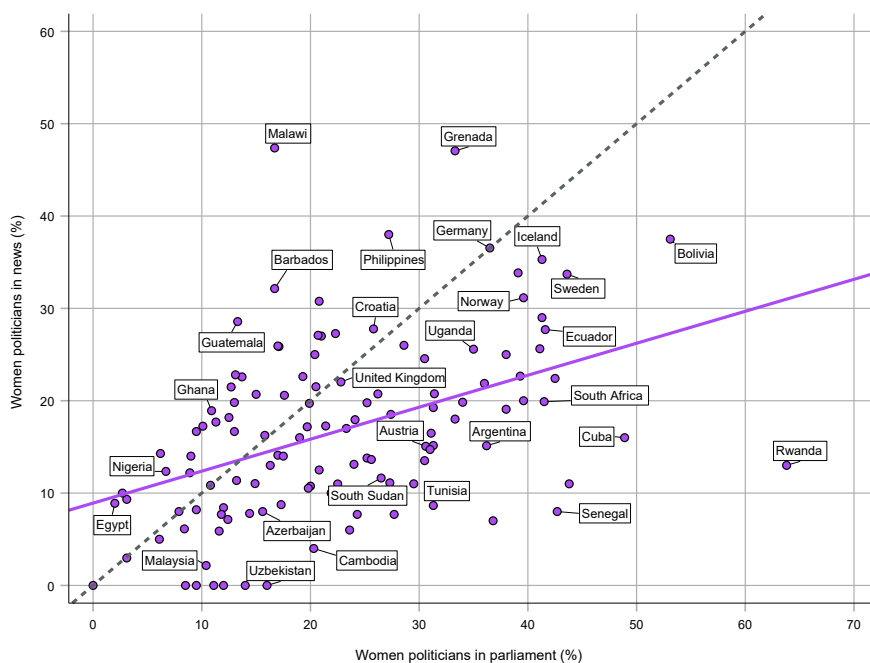
Political representation

The most obvious predictor of women politicians' visibility in the news is, arguably, their representation in their national legislature, so we conducted a simple bivariate correlation analysis, measuring the strength of the relationship between the share of women in the lower house (SWLH) and our two indicators of women politicians' visibility in the news. Firstly, we assessed the relationship between SWLH and women politicians as news subjects or sources in *all* news categories across television, radio, and press. We found a positive significant relationship between the two variables ($r = .436$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the proportion of women politicians in the real world was associated with their share of media visibility as news sources or subjects relative to men.

Figure 6.4 visualises this relationship in a scatterplot. We can further see in this scatterplot that in most of the countries included in our study, the proportion of women politicians is relatively small, with the exception of a few countries and regions such as Scandinavia. The scatterplot also shows that few countries have high numbers of women politicians *and* high visibility in the media. The dashed line shows what the relationship would be if the number of women politicians predict perfectly their representation in the news. In less than one-third of the analysed countries, women politicians are over-represented in the news in relation to their actual presence in parliament; in more than two-thirds of the cases, women are under-represented in relation to their actual numbers. In 36 per cent of the countries, women's under-representation exceeded 10 percentage

points, whereas the opposite was true (women being over-represented by 10 percentage points or more) in only 4 per cent of the countries.

Figure 6.4 *The relationship between the number of women politicians in the lower (or single) house in national parliaments and women as subjects or sources in the news*



Comments: $n = 125$ (number of countries). The purple line shows the linear relationship between the share of women in the lower house and women politicians as subjects or sources. The grey dotted line shows the fiction that the number of women politicians predict perfectly their representation in the news. Regression for fitted regressions line ($y = 8.91 + 0.35x$), Pearson's $r = .436$ ($p < .000$), $R^2 = .190$. Outliers with a small sample size (few stories analysed in GMMP) are excluded.

Looking deeper into the data, the under-representation is often larger in countries with higher levels of gender equality; countries where women politicians are over-represented are, in several instances, countries where women lack status and freedoms. This seemingly surprising result suggests that a legislative underpinning of gender equality is no guarantee that women's political voice will be given equal visibility with men or, in fact, vice versa. It also shows the importance of understanding global trends and patterns in relation to individual country differences, mirroring a key finding from European research focused on senior women in media industries, which found significant differences between the EU27+ which could *not* be explained by looking at the gender equality landscape, nor by the existence (or otherwise) of in-house gender equality policies (EIGE, 2013). The purple line in Figure 6.4 is the one that best fits the actual distribution of the observations. It illustrates that even though the vis-

ibility of women in the news increases as their actual representation improves, the increase is not proportional. Indeed, an increase of women politicians by 1 per cent in the real world is only associated with an increase in their visibility in the news by 0.3 per cent (see also Table 6.3).

We then tested the relationship between SWLH and *all* women as subjects or sources in news stories about politics and government and found a similar, but somewhat weaker, relationship between the two in relation to stories published in newspapers or broadcast on television or radio ($r = .307$, $p < .001$). This suggests that the number of elected women politicians also predicts women's overall visibility in political news, but to a lesser extent than for the first independent variable.

The gender equality landscape

The literature, including previous reports from the GMMP, suggests that countries – and indeed regions – that perform well against social, economic, and cultural indices of gender equality are more likely to include women's views and voices in news media. In this part of the discussion, therefore, we consider the predictive power of the Global Gender Gap Index, which showed a moderately strong, positive relationship with the visibility of women politicians as news subjects ($r = .528$, $p < .001$) and a significant but weaker relationship with women as news subjects or sources in stories about politics and government ($r = .374$, $p < .001$).

Women in the news industry

As discussed previously, there is some support for the idea that more women as producers of news (as journalists and editors) could make a difference to news content. For this third factor, then, we looked at two independent variables: women political reporters on television, radio, and press, and senior women media managers. We found no significant correlation with women political reporters, but a moderately strong positive correlation with women media managers. This may suggest that cultural shifts in relation to gender, and indeed any other forms of equality, are unlikely to take place unless there is direction and commitment from the top, regardless of the overall number of women journalists in an organisation.

Predicting women politicians' visibility in the news – a multivariate analysis

The final step of our analysis was to examine if and how well our chosen independent variables can predict women politicians' visibility in the news. Table 6.3 consists of three regression models which test the relationship between the

visibility of women politicians in the news and the two independent variables previously shown to be significantly correlated with women's visibility.

Only about 18 per cent of the cross-country variations in women politicians' visibility in the news can be attributed to their actual presence in legislatures around the world (model 1: $R^2 = .184$, $p < .001$). The broader gender-equality landscape, as measured by the GGI, turns out to be a somewhat better predictor and "explains" almost twice as much of the variation (about 27% in model 2). On the other hand, since the global gender gap in political representation is part of the GGI, the results tell us that gender gaps in other areas of society seem to be just as (or more) influential as gender gaps in political representation for the representation of women politicians in the media landscape.⁴ If we include both the share of women in the lower house and the GGI in a multivariate analysis (model 3), the share of women in the lower house becomes insignificant, and the explained variance is not much better than in model 2. The fact that the GGI includes the share of women in the legislature as part of the index could explain this result.

Table 6.3 *Women politicians as subjects or sources in the news predicted by the share of women in the lower house and the Global Gender Gap Index*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Share of women in lower house	0.3*** (0.1)		0.1 (0.1)
Global Gender Gap Index		84.5*** (13.0)	70.7*** (18.3)
Constant	8.9*** (1.7)	-41.8*** (9.1)	-34.5** (10.9)
N	125	112	111
Adjusted R^2	.184***	.272***	.275***

Comments: N = number of countries in the analysis. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, **** $p < 0.001$. OLS regression, standard errors in parentheses, unweighted b -coefficients. The variable scales are: women politicians as news subjects or sources in per cent (0–100); share of women (lower or single house) in per cent (0–100); GGI (0–1). Collinearity statistics for model 3: highest VIF = 1.769. Outliers with small sample size (few stories analysed in GMMP) are excluded.

Source: GMMP; QoG/WEF

6.7 Conclusion and discussion

The first and perhaps most important contribution of the study is to provide global *evidence* for what has previously only been *suggested* in studies of single countries: women politicians are systematically under-represented in the news in relation to their actual numbers in legislatures across the world. Although there is a positive relationship between women's actual political representation

and the visibility of women politicians in the news, the association is fairly weak and disproportional. An increase in the number of women parliamentarians by 1 per cent in the real world is only associated with 0.3 percentage points increase in their visibility in the media world.

In terms of explanations, our analysis shows some interesting results with some potentially contradictory findings. If we consider the three aspects which we believe *could* have an influence on the visibility of women politicians in the news – political representation, the gender equality landscape, and women in the media industry – some had some predictive power at the level of individual variables and others did not. For example, there was a positive relationship between the proportion of women politicians in the real world (or at least in lower houses or single-house parliaments) and their frequency as subjects or sources of news in *any* genre, as well as the visibility of women in general in political news, although the latter was slightly weaker than the former. When we looked at the GMMP data to determine trends in the visibility of women politicians in the news across time, we found that while their actual numbers are rising across the world, their visibility in the media world remains low in many countries. One possible explanation is that they become less newsworthy as they become more “ordinary”, and this resonates well with the “novelty-value” thesis (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012). Or, that they remain on the backbenches and are thus too unimportant to use as sources, or that they *are* promoted to senior posts but are given less prestigious portfolios and are therefore less interesting and newsworthy for journalists, both of which echo the “news values” thesis.

The GGI was also positively related both to women politicians’ visibility in *all* news genres, and women’s visibility in *political* news. Given that the GGI is a composite variable which includes a number of sociopolitical dimensions, this suggests that environments which enjoy multiple gender-equality elements are the ones which are most likely to enable women’s political voice in the media. However, as we mentioned earlier, this finding obscures significant differences between countries, so there is not an entirely straightforward or inevitable link between the broader gender-equality landscape and the visibility of women’s political voice.

When we consider the other possible explanations for women politicians’ lack of media visibility, research suggests that the sex of political journalists and editors *could* make a difference, but our analysis only partially bears this out, as only one of the variables (women media managers) showed any predictive power, and the few studies which *have* explored the relationship between journalists and their sources have produced mixed results. Although it’s not possible to determine exactly why these studies have produced results that are so starkly opposed, reasons could include sample size, geographical scope, media type, and time period. Interestingly, the GMMP 2015 report suggests that the

sex of journalists is significantly correlated with the presence of women across all genres and formats of news content (Macharia, 2015). However, when we focus in on political news stories written by women journalists and the visibility of women in that particular genre of news, the correlation between the two is not significant. How might we account for the apparent difference in gender salience between all news genres and explicitly political news? One explanation is that so-called hard news beats have more rigid routines in relation to newsworthiness, so journalists are less likely or able to exercise discretion about who is considered a “legitimate” source, and therefore, they seek out sources who are routinely asked to comment, such as senior political figures, most of whom are men (see Minić, 2013). Another possible reason is that the women who do manage to penetrate this prestigious beat are unwilling to move against the orthodoxies of the political newsroom or their colleagues, fearing either rejection or harassment, both of which experiences have been amply documented in research on the gendered newsroom (see North, 2016). Yet another reason could be that women (and indeed men) quickly become acculturated to the working norms in which they find themselves and come to believe that their practice is in fact “natural” and neutral and simply follows (normative) journalism conventions, rather than recognising such “norms” as the outcome of a set of prescribed and male-defined assumptions about whose voice is important and whose is not.

When we think about these “gendered journalism” factors, perhaps it is not so surprising that the correlation here is not significant, since there is some evidence to suggest that when women do achieve senior editorial positions, they do not necessarily initiate changes resulting in different content (Beam & Di Cicco, 2010; Everbach, 2006). A large-scale survey of journalists in 18 countries showed no significant gender differences in their professional role conception (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012). In addition, many women journalists do not believe that their sex has any influence on how they “do” journalism (see Joshi et al., 2006). When Rebekah Wade became the *Sun*’s first female editor in 2003, her first editorial intervention on the day she took up her appointment was to superimpose her head onto the body of the Page 3 model of the day, captioned as “Rebekah of Wapping” (Ross, 2017). On being appointed the first female editor of the *New York Times* in 2011, Jill Abramson broke a run of more than 160 years of male domination, but said that readers would not see the difference, because a good story is always a good story whoever writes it. Sandra Mims Rowe, on the other hand, who became editor at Portland’s *Oregonian* in 1993, suggests that in her own early days, she promoted the same kind of sex-denying rhetoric, but as she got more involved in the job, she realised that gender was *always* an issue: “Of course there is a gender component. We are a combination of our life experiences, and that is a factor in news judgment” (cited in Ricchiardi, 2011: 32). It is an unfortunate irony that the post-feminist

clamour which surrounded Abramson's ground-breaking appointment was re-animated three years later when she was dismissed for, allegedly, being "difficult" – a phrase which is only ever used about a woman – although asking questions about pay parity may well have been seen by some board members as being rather awkward (Kitch, 2015). There are indeed two fundamental flaws in the otherwise rather attractive argument that more women reporting on politics should result in a more accurate coverage of women politicians. One is the assumption that all women journalists are the same and share the same values, and the other is that individual women can make change happen on their own. Sex alone is an insufficient predictor of change: what is necessary is the will and commitment to understand why gender equality is important and to then promote it in news organisations.

In conclusion, what our analysis shows is that the aspects of the relationship between gender, politics, and news that many researchers, including the authors, believe *could* be influential are found not to have quite the predictive power as expected. There seems to be no obvious relationship between the presence of women political reporters and the visibility of women politicians in news discourse, although women in senior management positions in media organisations did seem to have some explanatory power in predicting their presence. The proportion of women politicians in national parliaments was related to their media visibility to some extent, but was uneven across different countries, and increases in the numbers of women politicians were not always reflected by similar increases in their media visibility – and in any case, was never proportional. The broader gender-equality landscape appears to have greater predictive power, but again, there was no neat link between the two in all cases. The contradictory findings, and the relatively low level of "explicable" variation, could be partly attributed to the limitations of the GMMP data. Although it is a formidable undertaking to do a content analysis of the news media in over a hundred countries, it only covers the news during a single day and is therefore vulnerable to extraordinary events taking place which can skew the data. For example, on the monitoring day in 2015, a major news story across Europe was the crash of a Germanwings aircraft, which killed 150 passengers and crew; consequently, German Chancellor Angela Merkel featured heavily in many news reports. To overcome the problem of "extraordinariness", studies undertaken over a more extensive period could produce more consistent and reliable results. However, it is also the case that where such extended studies *have* been undertaken – albeit looking at the broader gender-media landscape rather than focusing on the political aspects – they have produced findings very similar to the GMMP (see, e.g., Ross & Azzalini, 2017).

There are no easy fixes or solutions for improving the visibility of women politicians across the news-media landscape, but our results prompt the consideration of a medium to long-term, two-pronged approach which *could* start to

effect a shift. Firstly, more women must stand as candidates in winnable seats, for them to first win and to then to take up the political portfolios which journalists are more inclined to cover, given the journalistic proclivity to privilege senior and powerful politicians. Of course, in making such a suggestion, we are conscious that the ways in which women politicians are (often negatively) reported in news media can impact women's willingness to even consider a political career (see Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018). While we didn't look at causal direction in our analysis, it would seem unlikely that positive reportage would discourage women from entering politics. So, second, and simultaneously, we need to raise awareness of gender (in)equality amongst the next generation of journalists so that they start their professional careers with more open, inclusive, and critical minds. Women journalists are not all the same, nor are women editors, nor are women necessarily more inclined to include more stories about women or source more women in their stories simply because they share the same sex. As O'Brien (2017) argues, being a female editor does not simultaneously mean that she is also a feminist one. What *does* make a difference is an ideological belief in diversity and equity: that all voices matter and that diverse content serves a diverse audience. What is crucial for change, therefore, is not only a generation of journalists who believe that gender diversity is good in its own right, as well as supporting the aims of a democratic society, but that at the executive level of news-media management, senior staff show a willingness to progress equality and diversity from the top down.

Notes

1. In order to allow for proper identification across studies and to link each variable to its original source, each variable name in the GEM dataset has been assigned a prefix that contains a reference to the original dataset followed by the original variable name. The variable is retrieved from the GMMP and the original variable name is `gonsp_f`, therefore it is named `gmmp_gonsp_f`.
2. It should be noted that the results remain similar when all countries are included, with the exception that the positive correlation between women politicians as news subjects or sources and the share of women in the lower house becomes weaker and insignificant.
3. GMMP included 114 countries in 2015.
4. We also conducted tests where we added a series of control variables that indicate the general level of development in a country: GDP per capita, the Human Development Index (retrieved from United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]), and educational levels (mean years of schooling, retrieved from UNDP). All these tests yielded the same overall results as in model 3, with a significant *b*-coefficient for the GGI (varying between 70.8 and 75.0, $p < .01$) and an insignificant *b*-coefficient for women in the lower house (varying between 0.06 and 0.10, $p = ns$). None of the control variables yielded significant coefficients ($p > .05$). However, no multicollinearity problems were detected (highest VIF = 2.536).

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