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Are Female Political Leaders Role Models? Lessons from Asia

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Abstract

Despite vast research on women's descriptive representation, little is known about its influence on women's political engagement in East and Southeast Asia where gender norms are different from those in other parts of the world. I theorize that the discrepancy between women's political and social rights in the region makes it difficult for women to envision themselves as equal to their male counterparts to play a "man's game" even when they see female political leaders. Using a multi-level modeling analysis with data from the Asian Barometer Survey and various additional sources, I examine the impact of female parliamentarians in the region and find that they significantly reduce women's political engagement. My results suggest that the female legislators' role model effect found in existing literature on western democracies does not apply to East and Southeast Asia. Instead, female political leaders generate a backlash effect on women's political engagement. This research raises implications for the role of context in the effectiveness of women's symbolic representation and calls for further exploration on the connection between women's symbolic and descriptive representation.

Keywords: gender and politics, Asian politics, public opinion

Author's Note: Replication data for this article can be viewed at ShanJanSarahLiu.com

When the Taiwan's female president, Tsai Ing-Wen, along with 43 women, making up 38% of the national legislature and exceeding its quota, were elected in 2016, the international media called Taiwan "the place to be a woman in politics" (Sui 2016). While the emphasis on the success of female politicians overlooks other aspects of patriarchal practices in Taiwan, women's political presence is often seen as overcoming a barrier to gender equality. How such representation might combat the historical exclusion of women in the political process has also been increasingly studied. Some current research is built on the premise that female political leaders fill the void for the "cue" that supposedly enables women to envision themselves as equal counterparts to men—i.e. enabling them to play a "man's game" (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Young 2002; Barnes and Burchard 2012; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Pearson and Dancey 2011; Liu and Banaszak 2017). In particular, some studies find that female legislators signal to the public that women are as capable as men to rule, as well as motivate women to actively engage in politics (Alexander 2012; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007; Beaman, et al. 2009; 2012; Fox and Lawless 2004).

While this cue could be effective in prompting women to participate in politics, overlooked is the role of context in which a cue may be exercised and perceived. Seldom does research consider the possibility that the connection between descriptive and symbolic representation could be context-specific and could hence generate varying expectations and outcomes for women in the political process. Expanding upon Norris and Inglehart's (2001) study on gender and culture, this article argues that the way culture is gendered matters for how the symbolic meaning of women's representation is carried out. I contend that the current understanding of the impact of women's political representation on women's political participation is not generalizable across contexts. In contexts where women's descriptive

representation can indicate gender equality, female legislators can thus act as role models in encouraging women to participate in politics (Atkeson 2003; Hanson 1997). Nevertheless, the symbolic signal of women's political representation can also work differently in other contexts, especially when the cue is not sufficient to stimulate women to envision themselves to be equal to their male counterparts. The link between women's political representation and political engagement becomes more complex in situations where a huge gap exists between power obtained by female leaders in the political structure and (the lack of) power legitimated by ordinary women in the social structure.

This article examines female parliamentarians' influence on women's political engagement in East and Southeast Asia (hereafter ESA). I develop a theoretical framework on how women's descriptive representation in the ESA differs in its translation to symbolic representation.¹ I hypothesize that female legislators in ESA do not serve as role models by increasing women's political engagement. Contrary to what scholars have found, my results demonstrate that female legislators discourage women's political engagement in ESA.

This article contributes to the study of women and politics in two major ways. First, it explores the impact of women's political representation on women's political participation in ESA, a grossly understudied area. While women's representation has been found to have a positive impact on women's political activity, most research is restricted to cases in North America and Europe, with a few exceptions on Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa (Karp and Banducci 2009; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Zetterberg 2009; Barnes and Burchard 2012; Clayton 2015). Whether ESA female legislators provide symbolic cues and stimulate women to take political actions is unknown. To my knowledge, the influence of female parliamentarians on women's political engagement in ESA has not been explored beyond single-case studies. The

lack of a systematic, comparative focus on women's political representation and participation in ESA limits the conclusions that can be drawn from existing models. This research thus broadens the conceptual framework of symbolic representation by considering how the influence of women's political representation might differ by context.

The unknowns make ESA an interesting region to study. Many of the ESA countries have recently undergone democratic transitions, rapid economic growth, and significant variation in women's representation in the national legislature. In 2017, the legislative seats held by women ranged from 5% in Thailand to 38% in Taiwan. Additionally, Indonesia, India, South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand have all elected a woman as the head of the state in the past while People's Republic of China and Mongolia have had women serving as acting presidents. This level of representation of women is unprecedented in Europe and North America and yet is understudied comparatively in ESA.

Second, despite female legislators' positive impact on women's political activity suggested by extant literature, my results illustrate that symbolic representation is multifaceted and that the symbolic presence of women may not always improve gender egalitarianism of a state. The negative correlation in my analysis raises questions on the applicability of western feminist understandings of the role model effect to evaluating women's political representation and participation in ESA.

In the rest of the article, I first provide an overview of current scholarship on the role of female politicians as role models and any lasting societal effects from this development. Second, I unpack the notion that the impact of women's descriptive representation on political behavior may differ in ESA by investigating the unique gender norms in ESA. I then present my data and

methodology, results, and analysis. Last, I conclude by discussing the implications of my findings and identifying areas for further exploration on this topic.

Women's Symbolic Representation: Female Political Leaders Serving as Role Models

Women's presence in politics has improved throughout time; however, women still remain largely underrepresented on a global average of 22% at the lower house (IPU 2017). Women's political representation is generally coveted as it indicates that a country has high gender development. Nonetheless, women's political representation comes in multiple forms² and the meaning and impact of each form also varies. On the one hand, women's political representation must have substantive implications as female politicians are expected to act in the interest of those with whom they share similar characteristics (Pitkin 1972). On the other hand, women's political representation is desirable because it has an aim to transform society (Phillips 2005). The changes that female politicians bring about should not be limited to their legislative efforts and achievements but also their subversion beyond political institutions, e.g. how they may improve women's societal status or shatter gender expectations.

Departing from female politicians' substantive impact, scholars have increasingly realized that women in politics "stand as symbols for other women" in "enhancing their identification with the system and their ability to have influence within it" (Burrell 1995; Lombardo and Meier 2014). Extant evidence demonstrates that increases in women's political representation lead to increases in women's political engagement—a possible mechanism to influence the political system (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007; Barnes and Burchard 2012; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Reingold and Harrell 2010; Liu and Banaszak 2017). Multiple possible reasons may explain why the presence of women increases women's engagement in some contexts. For example, an

increase in the proportion of female legislators may induce an increase in the number of women-friendly policy proposals and passages; an increase in women's descriptive representation may signal to the public that the government is more open and fair. Although little evidence empirically shows how exactly female politicians serve as role models in inspiring women to participate in politics, this article focuses on the aspect of female legislators serving as game changers as part of the influence of women's symbolic representation. It is built on the postulation that the presence of female parliamentarians itself is symbolic in that it signals to women that they, too, are capable of being game changers and leaders (Alexander 2015; Dolan 2006). This signal is crucial; in societies where women are rarely exposed to women having power, the presence of female political leaders can potentially break sexist assumptions about women's abilities.

The Gender Paradox and its Impact on Female Political Leaders' Role Model Effect in ESA

Current findings show that female politicians can be more than a sheer number by suggesting ways in which women's descriptive representation³ is related to symbolic representation (Celis et al. 2008; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Mendelberg, Karpowitz, and Goedert 2014). Extant evidence links an increased presence of female parliamentarians with an increased trust in government, justice, and political engagement, suggesting that women's presence in politics benefits the gender development of the state (Alexander 2012; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007; Beaman, et al. 2009; 2012; Fox and Lawless 2004). Nevertheless, most of this literature finds the positive influence of women in public office but ignores the role of context in shaping how women respond to female political leaders.

Although patriarchy dominates most societies, including western democracies, the way and the degree to which gender norms are constructed differ across contexts. Context, I argue, is especially important to take into consideration when examining the impact of symbolic representation. Women's symbolic representation is measured through the essence of symbol embodied by female politicians whereas women's substantive representation involves female legislators representing women's interests directly. Such substantive representation of women's interests can be evaluated *after* female legislators are elected office using tangible measures, such as the number of women-friendly policies they sponsor. In contrast, the "meanings, norms, values, and beliefs" that female politicians are attached through symbolic representation occur *prior* to the acts of representing (Lombardo and Meier 2014, 27). The constructions of meaning and the assumptions about the effectiveness of women's representations prior to measuring female politicians' achievements could vary by context as these connotations of symbolic representation are extensions of how gender roles are normalized in each society. Therefore, I argue that women who experience gender culture distinctive from cases that have been explored in existing studies may not necessarily see female political leaders as role models. The gender paradox in ESA, thus, provides a unique opening for investigating the influence of women's political representation on women's political engagement (Erwer 2003; Aleaz 2006; Iwanaga 2008; Bjarnegard 2009).

I approach my theoretical framework in the subsequent sections in three sequences. First, I explain the gender paradox in ESA utilizing examples of the key differences between women's political and social contexts and practices of patrilineality and patrilocality in the region. Second, I explain how these roots of gender inequality unique in ESA may be the rationale for why women in ESA might see female legislators differently from those in other parts of the world.

Lastly, building on the gender paradox in ESA, I present my hypothesis on the impact of female parliamentarians on women's political activity in ESA.

(Dis)Connection between Women's Political and Social Rights

Gender development of a state is often assumed to be consistent across all aspects of women's rights. In countries where women have much access to voting and running for political seats, women are also assumed to have the freedom to drive and work and vice versa. Gender constructions, in ESA, are paradoxical in that women in many parts of ESA are highly represented in the national legislatures and cabinets and yet have lower societal status than men. The regional average of the women's presence in national legislatures in ESA at 19% is similar to that of the world average at 22% (IPU 2017). In the last few years, however, many parts of ESA have experienced a big jump⁴ in women's political presence whereas women's legislative representation has not made significant changes in the United States, for instance. To name a few examples, women's legislative presence in Mongolia increased from 4% in 2009 to 17% in 2016; women's legislative presence in Hong Kong improved from 9.4% in 2009 to 18% in 2016. Although these jumps indicate a trajectory of improvement in women's political representation in ESA, the reality is that the advancement of women in politics is vastly unrelated to the advancement of women's societal status.

Analyzing women's political rights and social rights may be the best way to examine the (dis)connection between women's political power and societal position. According to the CIRI Human Rights Data (2014), women's political rights include the right to vote, the right to run for political office, the right to hold elected and appointed government positions, the right to join political parties, and the right to petition government officials. On the contrary, women's social rights include but not limited to the following: the right to equal inheritance, the right to enter

into marriage on a basis of equality with men, the right to own, acquire, manage, and retain property brought into marriage, the freedom to choose residence/domicile. When analyzing the relations between women's political rights and social rights cross-sectionally, ESA experiences a greater discrepancy between these two rights than other parts of the world, with the exception of Africa.⁵ In most regions, women's political rights and social rights are highly associated in (CIRI Human Rights Database 2004⁶). The higher the numbers displayed in Table 1, the more gender egalitarian the country is. As Table 1 shows, Asia and Africa experience significant differences between women's political and social rights. However, the differences between the two in North America and Europe, on which most studies focus, are insignificant.

[Table 1 about here]

The Practices of Patrilineality, Patrilocality, and Gender Norms

In addition to the great disparity between women's political and social rights in ESA, patriarchal gender dynamics still persist despite its recent modernization, thereby suggesting that women's status in the region is still low (Huang 2015; Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics 2000; Hague 2000). For example, regardless of women's success in securing political seats in ESA, many parts of the region still practice patrilineality through which family membership derives from and is traced through the father's lineage. Japan, South Korea, and Mongolia are the only countries in ESA where both the law and tradition allow inheritance for women (OECD International Development Statistics 2014). Conversely, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Vietnam have established laws that explicitly restrict specific groups of women from inheriting or owning resources and assets. In other parts of ESA where women are legally permitted property ownership and inheritance, customary practices still prohibit them from entitlements.

In addition to patrilineality, most ESA countries also practice patrilocality. When a woman gets married, she loses her maiden identity as she joins her husband's family. A man, in turn, does not leave home and is expected to fulfill filial duties, which include supporting his parents and upholding family religious rituals. The expectations of men to take on the family name, care for the parents, and carry on religious rituals, e.g. ancestor worship, exemplify son preference in the region. As indicated above, patrilineality and patriolocality⁷ are often the basis on which family norms and laws are constructed in ESA (Anderson and Ray 2010; Joshi and Kingma 2013). These gender norms instill a popular preference for sons—a bias that reveals the value and position of women in ESA societies—despite the recently increased representation of women in politics. Not only does this social structure limit women's experiences, presence, and visibility within the public sphere, but it also constantly reminds women that they are inferior to their male counterparts.

The Role of the Gender Paradox in Women's Political Representation on Women's Political Participation in ESA

Female parliamentarians can inspire women to envision themselves as equal players in politics; nonetheless, the role-model effect has only been supported in contexts the gender paradox is not persistent (Studlar and McAllister 2002; Paxton and Kunovich 2003). This difference that sets ESA apart from western democracies calls for a different interpretation of women's symbolic representation in the region. More precisely, as gender culture matters for the degree of gender egalitarianism in political institutions (Inglehart and Norris 2005), the disconnection between women's political power, enacted through representation, and women's social power, enacted in their everyday lives, raises implications for how the gender culture in ESA may be important for how women perceive political leaders.

While limitations exist in directly testing the effect of the gender paradox in ESA in shaping the influence of women's political representation, several possible reasons lead me to suspect that the role model effect observed in other parts of the world may not be repeated in ESA. Despite having access to political institutions, in cases where women's status consistently remains low, such as ESA, women may feel that their political rights do not help them enhance their overall position in society. In other words, access to political means becomes insignificant when women still struggle with fulfilling expected gender roles on a daily basis (Beatman et al. 2009; Beatman et al. 2012; Alesina et al. 2013; Jayachandran 2014). Building on Barnes and Burchard's (2012) argument that "descriptive representation actuates symbolic representation by sending a signal to the so-called 'described' that the political arena represents them and is receptive to their part" (770), how might women in ESA interpret political elites' implicit signal about politics being also a woman's game when they, in fact, are confined by gender norms? While the irony lies in the discrepancy between high political rights and low social rights, I contend that this paradox, although unable to test directly, could be the rationale for the speculated different behavior of ESA women. As the improvement of women's presence in political institutions in ESA does not always sufficiently address low women's the inequalities in social structure, instead of sending a positive signal, ESA female parliamentarians may not be perceived as role models, leading to my hypothesis:

H1a: An increase in women's presence in national legislature does not lead to an increase in women's political activity in ESA.

As suggested by Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers (2007), women's descriptive representation, especially the sheer number of female legislators, may make negative impacts, such as generating a backlash from male gate-keepers. Moreover, Krook (2015)

also claims that there is a possibility of resistance when faced with growing numbers of women in political institutions, particularly in situations where women are unable to be truly treated as equals. Building on their argument, I further contend that women may also have adverse reactions toward female parliamentarians because constituents may suspect that such representation may be a camouflage of gender equality. The failure to transform gender advancement beyond the political presence of women is apparent in Vietnam, for example. In Vietnam, women hold 27% of the legislative seats in 2017 and yet the sex ratio is still severely imbalanced at 1.12.⁸ (IPU 2017; CIA World Factbook 2017). The divergence between women's political status and societal status may be one of the bases for why women may assume that their political engagement makes no difference and thus discourage them to participate in politics. Therefore, my alternative hypothesis states a backlash effect of ESA women's political representation

H1b: An increase in women's presence in national legislature leads to a decrease in women's political activity.

Data and Methodology

To answer the question on how the presence of female parliamentarians in assemblies impact women's political activity in ESEA, I employ data from the third wave of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS), which randomly sampled 19,475 respondents in 13 ESA countries in 2010: Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.⁹

Dependent Variable

My main dependent variable of interest is political participation. I operationalize political engagement using four different measures: (1) discussing politics; (2) voting behavior; (3)

campaign activity; and (4) protest. They represent various dimensions of participation, allowing me to paint a picture of overall civic engagement. Although these four indicators are not exhaustive of all possible forms of political action, narrowing my analysis to these indicators allows me to easily compare my results with what has been found in extant studies (Desposato and Norrander 2009; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer; Zetterberg 2009; Barnes and Burchard 2012). One is coded for reported action in a given activity; zero is coded for the individual's lack of experience in participating in a given activity.

Independent Variables

I use the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 2009 data, one year prior to when the dependent variables from the ABS was gathered to measure the percentage of women in parliament in each country as my primary independent variable. Employing the statistics prior to when the surveys were fielded helps negate endogeneity. As Table 2 shows, women's presence in the lower house in 2009 varied from 4.1% in Mongolia to 30% in Taiwan. Most countries in my sample, except for China, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam, have fewer proportions of women than the worldwide average at 18.5% that year.

In addition to including women's political activity in every country, I control for several national-level indicators that may shape women's participation in politics, which is crucial as it is possible that other contextual factors could explain both variation in individual-level political behavior, as well as national-level variation of women's political representation.¹⁰

[Table 2 about here]

Political System

First, I control for the regime type using data from the 2009 Polity IV Project. I then create a binary variable that is coded 0 for authoritarian regime and 1 for democracy. A

democracy is any country that receives a score of 6 and higher in the Polity IV Project. Five out of the thirteen countries in my sample were non-democratic countries in 2009: Cambodia, China, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Although these countries are not fully democratic, some sort of election still occurs. Their non-democratic state should not deter their citizens from engaging in politics as I also examine actions that are not institutionalized by the regime.

Second, electoral systems are found to shape the level of representation that women could have (Lijphart 1999; Matland 2005; Karp and Banducci 2008; Thames and Williams 2010). Electoral systems are found to be more women-friendly as it enables parties to nominate women candidates (Gallagher and Mitchell 2005). Therefore, I control for the type of electoral system by using the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance database (2009) to record each country's electoral system. Majoritarian system is coded 1, mixed system is coded 2, and proportional representation is coded 3.

To ensure sufficient statistical power when examining the impact of contextual factors on individual-level actions in my multi-level models, I must reduce the number of level-2 variables. I do so by creating a political system and development index by combining and averaging the regime type and electoral system. My Cronbach's alpha result shows that the reliability between the two items is at 0.6, indicating that the internal consistency is acceptable.

Women's Labor Force Participation

As women's presence becomes the norm in the labor force, women are also more likely to be part of the political force (Paxton and Kunovich 2003). Therefore, I control for the percentage of women (age over 15) in the labor force, collected from the 2009 World Bank data. Women's participation in the labor force varies significantly by country, ranging from 36% in Malaysia to 79% in Cambodia. It is important to note that although many might anticipate higher

proportions of women in the labor force in industrialized and democratic states, Cambodia is not democratic and certainly not the wealthiest or most industrialized country in my sample and yet has the highest percentage of women labor.¹¹

Individual-Level Controls

I include numerous basic individual-level controls: education, employment status,¹² marital status, and age.¹³ As both the theorized role model and the backlash effects on women's political representation assume that individuals are aware of the presence of women legislators, I control for how much one follows news as an indicator of one's exposure to politics where women's political representation is likely to be mentioned.

Given that I am interested in looking at the influence of country-level women's political representation on individual-level women's political engagement, my data are structured hierarchically. My best strategy would be to conduct an analysis using multilevel modeling techniques¹⁴ to allow me to account for variance in my dependent variable, measured at level-one, but still consider information from all levels of the data (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002; Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005). Furthermore, my cross-level interaction in my multilevel analysis allows me to explore causal heterogeneity and determine how the causal dynamic varies (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). By including a random intercept for each country in my data, I am able to achieve a within-country estimate, which is essential as my respondents are sampled within countries. Due to the dichotomous nature of my dependent variables, I estimate a mixed logistic regression.

Results

I test whether increases in the presence of women in national legislature are correlated with increases in women's political activity. Table 3 displays the results from the multilevel

models estimating the effect of women's legislative presence, national level factors, and respondent characteristics. My results suggest that the increase in women's legislative presence does not lead to an increase in women's political engagement. Columns 1 to 4 in Table 3 show that female legislators have a consistent negative impact on all of the indicators of women's political engagement that I analyze. This outcome shows that my H1b is supported as it contradicts extant theory by showing that female legislators discourage individuals from participating in politics.

My graphs further illustrate the effect of women's political representation on both men's and women's political engagement. Figures 1 to 4 display that the level women's political engagement is lower than men's across the board. Additionally, Figure 1 to 4 demonstrate that as the percentage of female parliamentarians increases, both women and men become less likely to discuss politics. Specifically, as Figure 1 shows, when women hold about 4% of the legislative seats, the predicted behavior in women having political discussions is on average 0.46 points lower than men. The gender gap in political discussion remains somewhat the same as women's political representation reaches 30% at the legislature—the gap is reduced by 0.003 points. Looking more closely, as women's political representation increases from 4% to 30%, women's engagement in political conversations on average decreases 0.56 points, which is the same amount of decrease in men's engagement in political conversations on average.

Figure 2 shows that as the percentage of female parliamentarians increases, both women and men become less likely to vote. Specifically, when women hold about 4% of the legislative seats, the predicted behavior in voting is on average 0.05 points lower for women than men. The gender gap in voting reduces slightly as women's political representation reaches 30% at the legislature—women on average are only 0.05 points less likely than men to vote. More

specifically, as women's political representation increases from 4% to 30%, women's engagement in voting on average decreases 0.34 points, which is the same for men's engagement in political conversations on average.

Figure 3 depicts the gender gap between women's and men's campaign activity, which does not diminish as women occupy more seats in the legislature. When 4% of the national legislature is women, the predicted campaign activity for women is on average 0.56 points lower than that for men. When women reach 30% of the national legislature, their campaign activity on average is 0.62 points less likely than that of men. Looking more closely, women's campaign activity decreases by 1.55 points and men's also decreases by 1.55 points as women's political representation changes from 4% to 30%.

Figure 4 illustrates the influence of women's political representation on women's protest action. When 4% of the parliament is women, women are 0.33 points less likely than men to claim that they have protested. When women reach 30% of the parliament, women's likelihood to campaign for a candidate or party is 0.33 points lower than that of men's. The gender gap in campaign activity persists as it does in political discussion and voting behavior. The gender gap also does not diminish with the increases in women's political representation. More specifically, as women's political representation increases from 4% to 30%, women's protest behavior on average decreases 0.18 points, which is the same for men's protest engagement on average.

Discussion

Overall, I find support for my H1b; women's political representation and women's political engagement are negatively correlated—women's presence in ESA national legislatures strongly reduces women's engagement in all types of political activity. My results suggest that not only does the role model effect through women's symbolic representation not work

effectively in ESA, but female politicians in ESA are the opposite of role models. Women have adverse reactions toward female politicians. Instead of symbolizing gender equality, female legislators in ESA send a different kind of cue to the public. My models are insufficient in explaining why and how exactly the backlash effect occurs. However, as previously speculated, the gender paradox may create an environment in which it is difficult for women to envision themselves as equal to their male counterparts and further desire to play “a man’s game” despite women’s political presence, thus inducing the negative correlation between women’s political representation and participation.

My study does not directly test whether it is the key differences between the political and social contexts that are at work. Hence, the question remains: why does the presence of female political leaders discourage women’s political participation? One explanation could be that when female politicians fail to improve gender equality, as shown by the disassociation between women’s political status and societal position, their presence may be seen as symbolic as they can be merely considered as tokens to diversify the government (Pitkin 1967; Kanter 1977). In other words, even when women see women holding legislative seats, the symbolic effect of women’s political representation becomes limited because gender norms still confine women in a lower position within the social structure and prevent them from achieving real power.

Not only does potential tokenism marginalize the influence of women’s representation, but it also conveys ideas other than gender equality by delivering a false promise to society. Moreover, although the presence of women in politics may illustrate a diversified government and the defeat of gender-based discriminations in the political arena, female politicians’ actual willingness or power to advocate for women’s rights reflects how they may affect women to

view political leaders with skepticism (Dahlerup 1988; Childs and Krook 2009; Clayton; Kittlson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012). Might the high profile of female political leaders and yet the lack of success in transforming women's status raise concerns among women about female politicians' abilities and representation over time? For instance, might the corruption scandals and impeachment of former South Korea president, Park Geun-hye, shape the future prospects of women being nominated and elected? Tsai Ing-Wen, president of Taiwan, for example, is known for the lack of women's advocacy on her agenda. Might the fact that Tsai's cabinet only comprise of four women, a number much lower than previous cabinets, influence female voters' decisions in 2020 should she run for her second term? The contextual cause of a backlash in women's political behavior under the impact of women's symbolic representation remains to be explored in future research to understand fully the adverse reaction toward female political leaders and its consequences.

Additionally to my findings demonstrating that gender and politics in ESA could signify a departure from western feminist understanding of the connection between women's political representation and participation, unforeseen in my results is that women's representation also has a negative impact on men's political activity. Not only do the outcomes suggest that female legislators' negative impact could affect beyond the population of women, but they also raise important implications for the role women's political leadership on men's political engagement. What might explain the decrease in men's political behavior as they experience higher presence of women in politics? When women reach larger presence in the institution that the institution itself is diversified, women's presence is likely to also alter the political process for men. While the lack of regendering of social structure that ESA women experience could lead to women's unwillingness to engage in politics, this enhanced presence of women could also deter men from

playing in a “game” that is no longer dominated by men. Men’s reduced political activity could also be seen as a way in which they question women’s place in politics. Furthermore, although men do not necessarily need role models to envision themselves as political leaders, could the disconnect between women’s political and social rights, tokenism, and hereditary politics signal a weak and perhaps a less trust-worthy democratic process that men are inclined to reject? If this were the case, what might women’s political representation in ESA mean to democracy promotion (Carothers 2006; Rupnik 2007)? These are explanations and questions that require further consideration.

Conclusion

Female parliamentarians’ negative impact on women’s political participation found in my study on ESA offers a mechanism to conceptualize women’s symbolic representation and evaluate its effect. This article makes several contributions to research that links women’s descriptive with symbolic representation. First, by examining the effect of women’s political representation on women’s engagement in ESA, it explores an area that has previously been ignored. To my knowledge, this is the first systematic study that examines cross-nationally women’s political representation in this region. It also raises implications for the culturally constructed gender dynamics and expectations, which may further become the foundation of political institutions and transform into a unique society of its own (Risman 1998; Inglehart and Norris 2001). My analysis demonstrates that gender patterns also differ across scale. These multidimensional patterns lead to the assumption that the degree to which patriarchy persists in ESA varies from that in other contexts and further the understanding that women in ESA respond to female political leaders differently (Haque 2003).

Second, my findings show that the influence of women's political representation in ESA differs from what has been found in other parts of the world. Contrary to extant literature that suggests the role model effect of female politicians, this study illustrates a backlash effect on women's political engagement in ESA. The gender paradox could be the rationale for why it may be difficult for women to visualize or contextualize benefits they might gain from women's political representation, hence feeling uninspired to engage in politics. Their reduced political activity could also be a product of them feeling that their political participation would not necessarily make a difference in their daily experiences, deterring them from investing time and energy in political activity. Although my study does not identify if the gender paradox is what leads to inimical reactions toward female legislators, I suspect that it contributes to this negative correlation and support further investigation.

Moreover, as most ESA countries are new democracies, Svoboda's (2013) "trap of pessimistic expectations" might help explain the reverse effect of female political leaders. Individuals may easily be disappointed and further become disengaged in political matters as they have yet to experience the fruit of politics. If female parliamentarians in ESA are not completely or successfully fulfilling female constituents' expectations, their position in politics would not only symbolize their lack of substance but also disappoint female citizens to an extent in which they see no meaning in participating. Such an effect could be more obvious in newer democracies. Nonetheless, further testing is needed to confirm the cause of a backlash.

Also, women's political representation supposedly signals the legitimacy of the polity; however, its discouragement of men's political engagement raises implications for how men envision their own position as gender equality may gradually improve. Might it be because of the process in which women are elected that influences how individuals respond to women's

leadership? For instance, the former prime minister of Thailand, Yingluck Shinawatra, and several other prominent female political figures are examples of female leaders who ran and got elected as they followed a husband, brother, or father.¹⁵ Might citizens respond negatively toward female politicians if they reached office through kinship or other less democratic or merit-based means? Future exploration on the linkage between the backlash of women's symbolic representation and the legitimacy of democracy is also crucial.

Although his study makes several contributions, it also has limitations. While my analysis implies that discrepancy exists between political representation of women and actual opportunities for women, future research considerations may include a time-series analysis on cross-sectional data to observe how changes overtime influence women's political behavior. Also, given the constraints of data availability, this paper only examines the traditional notions of political engagement. Specifically, all the four forms of political actions that I examine—political discussions, voting behavior, campaign activity, and protest action—are closely associated with electoral institutions and relative low risks. With the ease of transportation, protest participation has also been considered only borderline unconventional participation in comparison to decades ago when the monetary cost of protest could be much higher (Dalton 2013; Liu and Banaszak 2017). Yet these commonly analyzed types of political actions arise from research mostly done by scholars in the western context. The transnational feminist understanding of political engagement needs to be explored to ensure that ESA women's civic engagement is fully comprehended.

In conclusion, understanding the multi-dimensional impact of women's descriptive representation allows us to evaluate current policies regarding women's representation. It also allows us to examine the current status of women in the political arena as well as in other

spheres. It is vital to determine whether women's representation provides a true sense of equality as representation gives the opportunity to question the political structure and participate in the decision-making process. Although it certainly is desired to have women in a government, women's political presence is only beneficial to society when it can make positive changes for women beyond political institutions. The broader implications do not only lie in the importance of gender equality in political institutions, but also that it is only meaningful if such equality accompanies fundamental entitlements and rights for women. Therefore, the results from this study help understand the area and the extent to which gender equality still needs to improve. To conclude in the words of Pitkin (1967) and Dahlerup (1988), what is important is perhaps not the presence of women in political institutions but how they act and what they do.

¹ Many scholars study the adoption of quota laws as a form of women's symbolic representation; however, this article departs from examining the effectiveness of affirmative action, explored in current studies (Tan 2015; Huang 2015; Yoon and Shin 2015; Barnes and Cordova 2016; Clayton 2015; Zetterberg 2009; Beaman et al. 2012). Instead, it focuses solely on how women's descriptive representation serves as a symbolic indicator to induce women's political engagement.

² Pitkin (1967) differentiates political representation into four types: formalistic, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic. This article focuses on the connection between women's descriptive and symbolic representation.

³ Studying the impact of quota systems is a major way in which the effect of women's symbolic representation is explored. Although there are mixed results about the impact of quota systems (Burnet 2012; Marques-Pereira and Nolasco 2001; Lawless 2004; Beaman et al. 2012; Zetterberg 2009; Holli 2011; Baldez 2016), women's descriptive representation is generally found to have a

positive impact on women's political engagement (Atkeson 2003; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Coffee and Bolzendahl 2010; Alexander 2012; Alexander 2015). Consequently, to address the gap in current literature on the relationship between women's descriptive and symbolic representation in ESA, I analyze how women's descriptive representation makes a difference for their symbolic representation by investigating female politicians' impact on women's political activity.

4

⁵ Although Africa experiences a greater difference in women's political and social rights than that in Asia, I suspect that Africa is an outlier because it has exceptionally high representation of women in political institutions. Several African countries have the largest representation of women. For instance, 64% of the lower house in Rwanda is women (IPU 2016). This high level of women's presence is largely due to the civil war Rwanda has experienced, leading to the low supply of men as political candidates and high supply of women as political leaders.

⁶ I use the 2004 CIRI Human Rights Database to measure this indicator instead of more up-to-date indicator because measures of women's social rights have discontinued since 2005. In order to make the comparison between women's political and social rights, I use the most recent data that allows me to examine the relations between women's political and social rights.

⁷ There are other aspects of the patriarchal culture in ESA that may be distinct from other regions of the world. However, I emphasize patrilineality and patriolocality, which both result in the preference for sons and the devaluing of daughters to show that ESA women's every day experiences may be vastly disconnected from what goes on in the political arena. Even if there is

political representation of women, women in the region are still bound by these traditional gender norms.

⁸ The sex ratio is the ratio at birth of men to women in a population. In most natural scenarios, the sex ratio tends to be 1:1. Nevertheless, in societies where sons are preferred over daughters, the sex ratio at birth (male/female) would be higher.

⁹ I recognize that the patterns of women's representation in China and Vietnam might be different because of they are communist regimes. However, given that only two out of the 13 ESEA countries in my sample are communist, I omit creating dummy variables for the two. Instead, I include a dummy variable for the democratic development of the state, detailed in the "Independent Variables" section.

¹⁰ .See Table 4 in the Appendix for the summary of descriptive statistics of each variable.

¹¹ Ideally I would like to include national-level measures of women's political rights and social rights to control for women's status in society. However, the CIRI Human Rights Data discontinued its measure of women's social rights in 2007. Moreover, the measure of women's political rights in the 2007 CIRI Human Rights Data is unavailable in Japan and Hong Kong, resulting in a reduced number of countries. Consequently, the unavailability of data in two out of the 13 countries I examine would lead to an ineffective multilevel modeling analysis. To compensate this shortage of 2007 data, as well as to offer a robustness check, I include an analysis that includes the differences between women's political rights and social rights, using 2004 CIRI Human Rights data. The number of countries in the robustness check model is reduced to 12 due to systematic missingness of social rights indicator in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, as Table 5 in the Appendix suggests, the effect of women's parliamentary representation on different types of women's political activity still holds. The similarities of the

influence women's representation with or without the control of country-level women's rights suggest that the impact of ESA female politicians is robust.

¹² Education and employment status of the respondents indicate the amount of resources and networks that an individual has in engaging in and being recruited into political activity (Schlozman et al. 1999; Schussman and Soule 2005).

¹³ Respondents' marital status and age are considered biographical availability that is found to play an important role in one's political activity (McAdam 1988; McAdam 1992; Miller et al. 1999).

¹⁴ One limitation of multilevel modeling is in the number of level two variables I could incorporate, particularly given that the number of countries in my sample is small. To ensure that my results are sound, I include an additional model using ordinary least square clustered standard errors method. While OLS clustered errors method makes fewer assumptions; however, it still allows me to analyze my clustered data and more importantly, it allows me to include more country level controls to ensure confirm the effect of women's political representation. In this additional model, I include GDP per capita, gender inequality index, and quota. In addition to the roles that political systems play in shaping the opportunities that citizens have in engaging in politics, a state's overall development indicates the resources available for its citizens to engage in politics. Thus, I use GDP per capita to measure and control for the overall level of development in each country, collected from the 2009 World Bank data. For the convenience of observing the effect of GDP per capita, I divide it by 1,000 and normalize it across countries. To confirm the robustness of my results, I control for the adoption of quota laws by utilizing data from Quota Project that examines whether the polity has implemented legislative quotas. My

findings from this additional model show that the negative effect of women's political representation on women's political engagement analyzed in my multilevel models holds.

¹⁵ Although men also become leaders through their affiliations with former politicians and kinship, women's rarity in the political arena may draw attention to their connections. In other words, because women are traditionally perceived as having no place in politics, when they are present, their qualities may be questioned through emphasizing their kinship.

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Table 1 Differences in Women's Political and Social Rights in 2004, by Region

	Women's Political Rights	Women's Social Rights	Difference
Africa	1.9	0.7	1.2***
Asia	1.7	1.0	0.7***
Europe	2.3	1.9	0.4
Latin America	2.2	1.9	0.3
North America	2.5	2.5	0.0
Oceania	1.3	1.7	0.3

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2 Percentage of Women in the National Legislature in 2009, by Country

Country	Percentage
Cambodia	16.3
China (PRC)	21
Hong Kong	9.4
Indonesia	11.6
Japan	11
Korea, South	15
Malaysia	10
Mongolia	4.1
The Philippines	21
Singapore	24.5
Taiwan	30
Thailand	11.7
Vietnam	25.8
Average	16.7

Table 3 The Impact of Women Legislators on Political Participation

	Political Discussions	Voting Behavior	Campaign Activity	Protest
National-level				
Female * % MP	0.01 (0.005)**	0.01 (0.006)*	0.02 (0.008)**	0.02 (0.009)**
% MP	-0.02 (0.021)	-0.01 (0.022)	-0.06 (0.035)**	-0.01 (0.020)
Women's labor participation	-0.01 (0.011)	0.02 (0.012)	0.01 (0.019)	-0.00 (0.010)
Political system	-0.27 (0.298)	0.57 (0.320)*	-0.61 (0.568)	0.11 (0.286)
Individual-level				
Female	-0.40 (0.089)***	-0.17 (0.117)	-0.74 (0.132)***	-0.58 (0.164)***
Age	-0.07 (0.089)	0.08 (0.112)	-0.22 (0.137)	-0.23 (0.156)
Education	0.18 (0.008)***	-0.08 (0.010)***	0.02 (0.013)	0.04 (0.015)**
Employed (=1)	0.15 (0.038)***	0.26 (0.047)***	0.11 (0.064)*	-0.09 (0.071)
Married (=1)	0.06 (0.044)	0.96 (0.051)***	0.28 (0.077)***	-0.19 (0.080)**
Follow news	0.47 (0.013)***	0.16 (0.017)***	0.33 (0.027)***	0.13 (0.028)***
Constant	-0.83 (0.993)	-0.75 (0.985)	-1.62 (1.657)	-2.38 (0.985)
# of countries	13	13	13	13
# of observations	18,773	16,669	14,643	18,944

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 1 The Predicted Influence of Female Legislators on Men's and Women's Discussion over Political Matters

Figure 2 The Predicted Influence of Female Legislators on Men's and Women's Voting Activity

Figure 3 The Predicted Influence of Female Legislators on Men's and Women's Campaign Activity

Figure 4 The Predicted Influence of Female Legislators on Men's and Women's Protest Action

Appendix

Table 4 Descriptive Summary of Variables in East and Southeast Asia

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	N
Vote	3.09	0	4	18,998
Contact	0.26	0	2	19,260
Campaign	0.20	0	1	17,678
Collective action	0.23	0	2	19,303
Female	0.50	0	1	19,419
Age	32.07	18	88	19,420
Education	5.56	1	10	19,352
Employed	0.64	0	1	19,290
Married	0.74	0	1	19,309
Following news	3.81	1	5	19,280
Political development	1.21	0.5	2	19,467
% of women in labor	50.8	16.8	79.3	19,467
% MP	16.6	0.3	30	19,467
Differences between women's political and social rights	0.75	0	3	19,476

Table 5 The Impact of Women Legislators on Political Participation, Including the Difference between Women's Political and Social rights

	Political Discussions	Voting Behavior	Campaign Activity	Protest
National-level				
Female * % MP	0.01 (0.005)**	0.01 (0.007)*	0.02 (0.008)**	0.02 (0.009)**
% MP	-0.02 (0.022)	-0.02 (0.022)	-0.07 (0.025)**	-0.01 (0.016)
Women's labor participation	-0.01 (0.011)	0.01 (0.011)	0.01 (0.013)	-0.00 (0.008)
Political system	-0.27 (0.298)	0.70 (0.328)*	-0.12 (0.431)	0.23 (0.231)
Difference between women's political and social rights	-0.01 (0.146)	0.17 (0.157)	0.42 (0.181)**	0.34 (0.110)***
Individual-level				
Female	-0.46 (0.095)***	-0.14 (0.124)	-0.76 (0.133)***	-0.62 (0.173)***
Age	-0.14 (0.097)	0.11 (0.112)	-0.24 (0.139)	-0.23 (0.164)
Education	0.17 (0.008)***	-0.08 (0.010)***	0.02 (0.013)	0.02 (0.016)
Employed (=1)	0.12 (0.039)***	0.27 (0.048)***	0.12 (0.065)*	-0.12 (0.073)
Married (=1)	0.05 (0.045)	0.98 (0.052)***	0.27 (0.077)***	-0.21 (0.081)**
Follow news	0.47 (0.014)***	0.15 (0.017)***	0.32 (0.027)***	0.13 (0.028)***
Constant	0.11 (0.940)	-1.04 (0.977)	-2.12 (1.243)	-2.42 (0.852)
# of countries	12	12	12	12
# of observations	17,7624	15,976	13,956	17,791

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.