Why Not the U.S.? How Women Become Executives Around the World

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Prepared for delivery at the 2018 Annual Conference of the Southern Political Science Association (January 4-6, 2018; New Orleans, Louisiana)
Abstract

Hillary Clinton’s loss to Donald Trump in the 2016 Election has sparked much interest in why America has yet to elect a female president. There are two bodies of literature on how women reach executive positions around the world. The first has identified three paths to executive positions: family, political patronage, and political activism. In other words, women are more likely to become executives if they have male family members (e.g., a father or husband) in politics, served in the legislature or cabinet, or gained notoriety as a political activist in independence or democratization movements. The second area of research examines institutional and political factors that increase the likelihood of women becoming executives. Empirical results suggest that women are more likely to serve as executives in countries with a dual-executive, a multiparty system, and/or a history of women holding political office. Overall, these two bodies of literature on the paths women take to executive positions and factors that increase the likelihood of a country having a woman executive have developed separately. Thus, this study addresses this gap in the literature by examining how institutional and political factors determine the paths that women take to executive positions for the time period of 1960-2016.
Before the 2016 Election, polls and election predictions pointed towards a Hillary Clinton victory; so, her eventual loss to Donald Trump sparked interest in why American voters have yet to elect a female president. Since journalists and scholars alike labeled Trump as a politically inexperienced, anti-establishment candidate, many political commentators focused on the role of voter sexism in Clinton’s defeat (e.g., Bevan 2017; Cohen 2016; Peck 2017; Robbins 2017). However, sexism is present in the electorates of all of the democracies around the world that have elected women as executives. Scholars studying women executives from across the globe have long since noted that voters possess gender stereotypes that serve as a substantial hurdle to women becoming executives (e.g., Sezesny et al. 2004; Kittilson 1999; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008). Thus, the extant literature, notably Jalalzai (2013), focuses on how women overcome this obstacle by examining the paths of successful women executives and exogenous factors that increase the likelihood of a country having a woman leader. Important but underexplored research questions are: (1) which paths occur most often in different regions of the world?; and, (2) what factors are necessary and sufficient for the path to result in an executive position?

Additional work on how women become executives across the globe, such as this study, will contribute to the existing literature and provide insight into how to break the glass ceiling of the American presidency.

The existing literature has identified three paths to executive positions: family, political patronage, and political activism. Women with male family members (i.e., fathers, brothers, or husbands) who hold political office or serve as government officials are more likely to become executives (e.g., Hodson 1997; Richter 1991; Jalalzai 2004, 2008). Similarly, oftentimes women became executives after having served in the legislature or held a cabinet position (e.g., Jalalzai 2004, 2013; Whicker and Isaacs 1999). Other women executives have less traditional political
experience having gained notoriety as political activists, typically by participating in independence or democratization movements (Hodson 1997; Jalalzai 2013; Katzenstein 1978; Richter 1991; Thompson 2002-2003). Across each of these three paths, the women are relatively highly educated (e.g., Jalalzai 2013). In general, the family path is most prominent in Asia and Latin America; whereas, the political patronage path is common in Africa and Europe (e.g., Jalazai 2013). Interestingly, the political activism path occurs in each of these regions apart from Western Europe (e.g., Jalazai 2013).

A related area of research examines institutional and political factors that increase the likelihood of women becoming executives. Institutional factors focus on how much power is afforded to the executive and whether a nation has a dual-executive (i.e., a president and prime minister) and/or multiparty system. Political factors relate to the number of women serving in the legislative and executive branches, the nation’s political stability, and historical trends involving the advancement of women’s political rights (i.e., suffrage and previous women leaders). With respect to institutional factors, empirical findings suggest that women are more likely to serve as executives in countries with dual-executive and multiparty systems (e.g., Jalalzai 2008, 2013; Hodson 1997). However, the amount of power afforded to the executive does not influence whether women become executives (Jalalzai 2013). Mixed findings have been reported for political factors in which countries with more female legislators and previous women leaders are more likely to have female executives (Jalalzai 2013). Conversely, women are less likely to lead nuclear power states (Jalalzai 2013). Interestingly, the number of women cabinet members, political instability, and longer periods of women suffrage do not appear to influence whether women become executives (Jalalzai 2013).
Taken collectively, these two bodies of research on the paths women take to executive positions and factors that increase the likelihood of women executives have developed separately. Thus, this research is juxtaposed against previous studies, such as Jalalzai’s (2013) groundbreaking work, that do not explain why certain paths are prevalent in certain regions and how institutional and political factors determine the paths that women take to executive positions. Accordingly, this study analyzes women executives from 1960-2016. This study empirically tests whether a country’s institutional and political conditions influence the path a woman executive takes to office. For example, it is likely that the family path is utilized most frequently in politically unstable countries. Overall, the analyses contribute to the existing literature by providing a better understanding of how women become executives across the globe.

**Literature Review**

Prior to Jalalzai’s (2013) groundbreaking work on women presidents and prime ministers spanning 1960-2010, the literature on women executives was largely composed of case studies covering a relatively short time frame and/or a certain country or geographical region (e.g., Bauer and Tremblay 2011; Clemens 2006; Genovese 1993a, 1993b; King 2002; Murray 2010; Opfell 1993; Thompson and Lennartz 2006). These studies provided a wealth of information about women presidents and prime ministers; most notably, (1) women come to power in various different political contexts; (2) women possess different leadership styles; (3) women must overcome political stereotypes; and, (4) “women’s issues” are emphasized differently in each executive’s policy agenda. Furthermore, additional scholars have concluded that a number of institutional, political, and cultural factors must be taken into account to explain a woman’s ascension to power (e.g., Reynolds 1999; Inglehart and Norris 2003; McDonagh 2009). With the
exception of Jalalzai (2013), the existing literature has not utilized a global approach to study a woman’s path to power or factors that increase the likelihood of a country having a woman president or prime minister. Thus, it is unknown whether conclusions drawn about certain women executives, countries, or regions are applicable to all or most women presidents and prime ministers.

**Paths to Executive Power**

In an effort to draw generalizable conclusions from the findings of prior research, Jalalzai (2013) identifies three primary paths that women take to become president or prime minister: (1) family ties; (2) political activism; and, (3) political patronage. Women utilizing the family ties path typically “inherit” power from male family members (i.e., fathers, brothers, or husbands) who hold political office or use those familial connections to launch a political career that culminates in an executive position (e.g., Hodson 1997; Richter 1991; Jalalzai 2004, 2008). However, other women become president or prime minister via the political activism path after leading independence, democratization, or social movements (Hodson 1997; Jalalzai 2013; Katzenstein 1978; Richter 1991; Thompson 2002-2003). Yet, women who are career politicians follow the political patronage path by holding other political offices (e.g., serving in the legislature or the cabinet) prior to assuming the top executive post (e.g., Jalalzai 2004, 2013; Whicker and Isaacs 1999). This section discusses each path in more detail and highlights gaps in the literature.

**Family Path.** Many scholars observe that the family path is utilized by women most often in patriarchal, politically unstable countries, such as those in Latin America and Asia (Hodson 1997; Jalalzai 2004, 2008, 2013; Richter 1991). In patriarchal societies, women must capitalize on their family name in order to overcome pervasive gender stereotypes and attain power.
Without name recognition, women fall victim to conceptions that men are better suited for executive positions because they are tough and proficient in national defense issues; conversely, women are considered compassionate and skilled in domestic social policy, which are not viewed as beneficial traits or expertise for presidents and prime ministers (Fox and Oxley 2003; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Sczesny et al. 2004). Women often take the family path to executive positions in politically unstable countries because power can be “inherited” or regained following regime changes often due to the assassination or imprisonment of male leaders (Hodson 1997; Jalalzai 2013). Frequent turnover also benefits women as more feminine qualities, such as collaboration and consensus-building, are viewed as ideal traits for executives who must be able to promote unity in these politically turbulent countries (Jalalzai 2008; Katzenstein 1978; Saint-Germain 1993a).

The family path is extremely common as roughly a quarter of all women who have served as presidents and prime ministers come from political families (Jalalzai 2013). A vast majority of these women are from Latin America and Asia. For example, Mireya Moscoso of Panama followed in the footsteps of her husband, former president Arnulfo Arias and Indira Gandhi’s father, Jawaharlal Nehru, also served as prime minister of India. In addition to tracking the prevalence of the family path to power for women presidents and prime ministers, Jalalzai (2013) finds empirical evidence that the existence of dynastic political families paves the way for women to attain power. However, there are countries with dynastic families, such as Peru, where women have not reached executive posts (Jalalzai 2013). Since Jalalzai (2013) operationalizes family ties to executive power as whether members of the same family have held executive office, men who become presidents or prime ministers after other male family members have held these posts are included in addition to women. Consequently, the literature has not
addressed how one woman becoming president or prime minister via the family path enables more women to rise to power in a similar fashion.

Existing work on the family path has also been unable to adequately explain its prevalence in Latin America and Asia. Although these two regions of the world have experienced political instability and are relatively patriarchal, other regions could also be characterized in this manner. In particular, it is unclear why the family path is not common in the Caribbean, Africa, or the Middle East. Furthermore, the literature has not looked at which political and institutional factors that give rise to women executives influence the usage of the family path. It is possible that additional political and institutional factors can explain a woman’s path to power via family ties. For example, women may take the family path to appointed executive posts in dual executive systems.

**Political Activism Path.** Women in patriarchal and politically unstable countries also tend to take the political activism path to executive positions. In addition to Asia and Latin America, this path is also common in Africa and Eastern Europe (Jalalzai 2013). Participation in an activist movement can help women launch political careers and eventually reach top executive posts for a few reasons. First, as the movement gains momentum, a critical juncture may be reached in which representation in formalized political institutions is needed in order to realize additional change (Jalalzai 2013). Second, and relatedly, female leaders of activist movements running for political office to advance their political agenda already have voters mobilized on their behalf (Jalalzai 2013). The political activism path to executive power tends to arise in patriarchal, politically unstable countries because activist movements tends to focus on women’s rights and democratization (Beckwith 2000). Women are best able to capitalize on their political activist background more so than men because of the fact that political and social movements are often
focused on challenging patriarchy and women draw upon stereotypes that they are maternal caretakers and peacebuilders to justify their political involvement, especially in democratization movements (e.g., Geske and Bourque 2001; Jalalzai 2013; Salo 2010).

Roughly one-third of women participate in activist movements before becoming presidents and prime ministers. Over one-half to three-quarters of women presidents and prime ministers from Africa, Asia, and Latin America were involved in activist movements; whereas, roughly one-quarter of Eastern European women took the activist path (Jalalzai 2013). For example, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Janet Jagan of Guyana, Agatha Barbara of Malta, and Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia all participated in democratization and/or women’s mobilization movements before assuming power.

Although these findings shed substantial light on how women reach executive positions using the activist path, existing work has not explained why this path is seen in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe but not other regions characterized as patriarchal and politically unstable, such as the Caribbean or the Middle East. Similar to the family path, it is possible that certain institutional and political factors lead women to take the family path to executive office. Furthermore, the literature categorizes women as taking multiple paths to office in which there is considerable overlap between the family and activist paths. Although a woman may have been an activist, her familial ties are likely what caused her to get involved in politics. Thus, it is important to classify women as taking one path to office; in particular, the path that launched and steered their career to a top executive post. Excluding women with familial ties to political office will provide more insight into what factors lead women to take the activist path and its prevalence in certain regions of the world.
Political Career Path. Other women become involved in politics and reach top executive posts in a much more traditional fashion than their political activist counterparts by pursuing political careers and holding political office. Most women utilizing this path to an executive position have served as a cabinet minister and/or elected representative at the local, regional, and/or national levels (e.g., Bond, Covington, and Fleisher 1985; Genovese 1993a; Jalalzai 2004, 2013). Nearly all women presidents and prime ministers (79 percent) have held some sort of political office prior to assuming power; however, it is a prerequisite for women in Africa and Europe (Jalalzai 2013). Similar to men, women are able to become executives using the political career path because prior political experience serves as a set of qualifications that legitimizes their election or appointment. However, not all prior political experience is considered equal, and sometimes additional forces may need to be at work for a woman to break the executive glass ceiling.

Becoming a president or prime minister often requires women to wait for an opening, highlight their outsider status, and/or hold cabinet positions that handle foreign affairs or national defense (e.g., Jalalzai 2013; King 2002; Thompson and Lennartz 2006). Women who serve in “feminine” ministries, or those that advance stereotypical “women’s issues”, such as social welfare, education, and healthcare, are less likely to reach executive positions (e.g., Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009; Jalalzai 2013). Conversely, women are more likely to gain executive power after leading “masculine” ministries dealing with national defense, foreign affairs, labor, and transportation (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009; Jalalzai 2013).

In addition to gaining policy experience in “masculine” areas, many women also need to highlight their outsider status when a political opening becomes available. For example, Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel were able to capitalize on their outsider status (Beckwith 2010b; Jalalzai 2013; King 2002). For Thatcher, she was considered an outsider for being a
woman and of a lower socioeconomic status than her male counterparts in the Conservative Party and Tory network (King 2002). Furthermore, Thatcher is considered an “accidental leader” because she was Prime Minister Heath’s only former cabinet member experienced enough to take over power when the Conservative Party wanted new leadership and the British no longer desired a Labour government (King 2002). In the case of Angela Merkel, being a Protestant woman from East Germany allowed her to advance in Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s predominantly Catholic and Western German-dominated government (Clemens 2006). Additionally, as a woman, she was kept out of the Christian Democratic Union’s inner circle, which insulated her from various financial scandals that ruined the careers of several of her male colleagues (Clemens 2006; Thompson and Lennartz 2006).

In generalizing Thatcher and Merkel’s paths to office, Beckwith (2010b) finds that women can easily take the political career path to office when they can highlight their outsider status and take advantage of sudden executive openings. This is for a few reasons; first, women are often excluded from male-dominated political networks because of their gender; which, in turn, insulates them from political scandals. Second, women will still seek leadership positions after major electoral defeats while their male counterparts often choose to wait for a later date (Beckwith 2010b).

As previously mentioned, 79 percent of women have held political office before becoming president and prime minister (Jalalzai 2013). Nearly all of these women have some combination of experience in the national legislature or cabinet (Jalalzai 2013). Of women with cabinet-level experience, roughly half led “masculine” ministries (Jalalzai 2013). In general, the political career path is most commonly seen in Europe and Africa, but used less frequently in Latin America and Asia (Jalalzai 2013). Interestingly, more women in the legislature increases
the likelihood of a country having a woman president or prime minister; however, this is not the case for more female cabinet leaders (Jalalzai 2013).

Taken collectively, current descriptive and empirical research on the political career path by Jalalzai (2013) confirms the conclusions of existing case study research (e.g., Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009). However, more research is needed in order to understand fully the reasons why women take this path to executive office. Existing research has been unable to explain why the political career path is utilized most often in Africa and Europe. Since it is rarely used in regions where the family and political activist paths are dominant (i.e., Latin America and Asia), it would appear that the political career path does not occur in patriarchal, politically unstable regions. In other words, the political career path is found in politically stable, meritocratic nations with relatively high levels of gender equality. As was the case with the political activism and dynastic family paths, any woman with prior political experience is included in this category. It is possible that removing women who launched their political careers via their family name or political activism will uncover where this path is most prevalent and why. Although it appears that the political career path is dominant in regions where the family and political activist paths are not, it is possible that certain institutional and political factors influence whether a woman takes this path to power. For example, the political career path may be used most often in countries with dual executives in which qualified women in high ranking cabinet positions have a better chance of being appointed prime minister than overcoming gender stereotypes and being elected president.

**Factors Facilitating a Woman’s Rise to Executive Power**

A woman’s ability to rise to executive power tends to be dictated by a variety of factors related to a country’s political institutions, level of female representation in government, and
economic development. Research on political institutions examines how electoral systems, executive structures, quotas, and parties facilitate women obtaining executive power. Two other bodies of work examine how the past and present representation of women in the country’s legislative and executive branch and economic development influence whether women have been able to rise to power. This section reviews the literature in each of these three areas and the need for additional research.

**Electoral Systems.** Electoral systems have long been identified as crucial in promoting female representation in government (e.g., Duverger 1955). In terms of advancing female representation in legislatures, multimember and proportional representation systems lead to more female legislators than single-member majoritarian districts (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Matland 1998a; Rule 1985; Rule and Zimmerman 1994; Paxton 1997; Salmond 2006; Yoon 2010). The benefits from multimember districts depends on the number of seats available. Women are more likely to be elected from districts where several seats are available because there are more opportunities and parties are more conscious about providing male and female candidates on the ballot (Matland 1993; Rule 1985; Taagepera 1994). How proportional representation increases the number of women elected to parliament depends on voter views of party elites and whether parities utilize closed or open lists (Matland 1998b; Rule and Zimmerman 1994; Salmond 2006). Women benefit from closed lists when voters have traditional views of party elites; whereas, women are more likely to reach parliament via open lists when electorates have progressive views of party elites (Matland 1998b; Rule and Zimmerman 1994).

**Executive Structures.** Women are best able to ascend to power as prime ministers, especially those that wield relatively less power (e.g., Hodson 1997; Jalalzai 2008, 2013). Presidential
systems are characterized by a separation between the executive and legislative branches of
government. Thus, presidents enjoy a substantial amount of independence and are typically only
curtailed by the threat of impeachment and/or not being reelected. In contrast to presidential
systems are parliamentary systems. Prime ministers are appointed and can be removed from
office much easier than their presidential counterparts via votes of no confidence or unsuccessful
party elections. However, prime ministers do have more control over policymaking than
presidents as the position requires collaborating with parliament to ensure the government runs
smoothly.

Women come to power more often in parliamentary and semi-presidential systems for
two reasons (e.g. Jalalzai 2013). First, the appointment system is conducive to women taking the
political career path to office in which they work their way up in the party and/or government
(Hodson 1997; Whicker and Isaacs 1999). Second, presidents are often thought of in general, and
by voters, in “masculine” terms. Presidents must be strong, quick decision makers who garner
the respect necessary to be commander in chief. Female politicians are perceived to be more
collaborative and consensual, which are ideal qualities for a prime minister (Duerst-Lahti 1997).

The level of power afforded to presidents and prime ministers differs throughout the
world, so Jalalzai (2013) examined whether the amount of authority associated with each
position impacts a woman’s ability to become an executive. Jalalzai (2013) finds that just over
half of all female presidents (54 percent) wield a significant amount of power as 46 percent have
relatively little authority. Dominant female presidents tend to come from Latin America and Asia
while weaker female presidents are from Western European countries with dual-executive
systems in which the president is the chief of state (Jalalzai 2013). Nearly all female presidents
are from countries with multiparty systems, but those with more power belong to centrist or
leftist parties (Jalalzai 2013). Similarly, over half of the women executives who are prime ministers (59 percent) possess substantial amounts of power relating to a variety of government tasks, such as appointments, foreign affairs, and defense (Jalalzai 2013). Those with less power often have no foreign affairs or defense power and cannot chair cabinet meetings (Jalazai 2013). Again, nearly all of the women prime ministers (79 percent) hail from countries with multiparty systems. Regional patterns are also evident in which weak prime ministers hail from Africa and Eastern Europe and dominant prime ministers are from Western Europe.

Overall, Jalalzai (2013) concludes that the level of power is not necessarily dictating a woman’s ability to seize executive power as institutional and party structures appear to dictate each president and prime minister’s level of power. Instead, it is the nature of the position that lead more women to become prime ministers. Prime ministers must focus on building consensus and such a skill is considered a “feminine” trait; thus, making women ideal for the position. However, prime ministers can be easily dismissed by the president and/or legislature, which puts women in an extremely vulnerable position once they’re reached executive posts.

**Quotas.** Quotas do not directly impact a woman being elected or appointed to an executive position. However, they influence the ability of a woman to become a president or prime minister, especially those taking the political career path. Quotas seek to increase female representation in a nation’s legislature. A few different methods may be employed: reserved seats, legislative quotas, or party quotas (see Krook 2009). Findings suggest that quotas are best able to create gender parity within a nation’s legislature in proportional representation systems where multiple seats are available per district and parties use closed lists (Htun and Jones 2002). Quotas are also most successful in countries dominated by leftist parties, which are more supportive of advancing gender equality (Davidson-Schmich 2006; Kittilson 1999). Quotas tend
to be ineffective for two reasons: (1) significant and immediate consequences are not attached to failing to meet the mandate; and/or, (2) they are difficult to implement in light of current political institutions and candidate selection practices (Jones 1998; Krook 2009; Schmidt and Saunders 2004).

Parties. Parties play an integral role in a woman’s ability to become a president or prime minister via the nomination process. Consequently, a woman being considered for an executive position depends upon a party’s structure and ideology. A variety of factors relating to the structure of any given party have been postulated as impacting a woman’s ability to advance her political career to the top executive post; for example, the party level (local or national) that selects candidates, the formalization of the candidate selection process, the pervasiveness of gender discrimination, and the information available on each candidate (Jalalzai 2013; Norris and Lovenduski 2010). The literature has found that weaker parties with less control over their local affiliates and less competitive parties with few members to choose from nominate fewer women candidates for all political offices (Lovenduski 1993). However, leftist parties tend to nominate more women, especially to executive positions, as gender equality is an important party platform (Davidson-Schmich 2006; Kittilson 1999).

In addition to a party’s internal structure, a country’s party system can also influence whether a woman can rise to executive power. Multiparty parliamentary systems are routinely found to increase the likelihood that a country has had a female executive (Jalalzai 2013). This is often because a coalition government is in place in which the prime minister must be able to bring the parties together by building consensus; which, is a task considered best suited for females who are more collaborative than their independent male counterparts (Jalalzai 2013).
Female Representation in Government. The literature tends to assume that as female representation in government increases, so too does the odds that a country will have a female executive (e.g., Jalalzai 2013; Reynolds 1999). The longer that women have had the right to vote, the more women who serve in the legislature and the cabinet; which, should lead to women eventually breaking the executive glass ceiling (e.g., Reynolds 1999). Jalalzai’s (2013) empirical results do not find that the length of time that women have had suffrage or the number of female ministers increases the likelihood of a country having a female executive. However, women are more likely to become presidents and prime ministers in countries with high numbers of female legislators and previous women rulers (Jalalzai 2013).

Although these results are mixed, they accord with the observations of previous work that finds that women do not benefit universally from gaining suffrage. For example, larger gains in female political representation should be expected in Western countries where women obtained suffrage after prolonged periods of activism (Caraway 2004; Reynolds 1999). Yet, some women gain rights gradually as was the case in Australia and the United Kingdom. In Australia, white women were granted the right to vote in 1902, but Aboriginal women could not vote until 1967 (Henderson and Jeydel 2007). In the United Kingdom, women gained suffrage in 1918 with a voting age of 30; whereas, the voting age for men was 21 (Jalalzai 2013). It took ten years before the voting age was equalized between men and women (Jalalzai 2013).

Economic Development. A country’s level of economic development is typically associated with the power of the executive. Economically developed countries, and their leaders, tend to have more influence over worldwide economic issues and foreign affairs (Jalalzai 2013). Since foreign affairs, economics, and defense are considered “masculine” issue areas requiring male leadership, it is not surprising that many female executives possess little power and hail from
lesser developed, politically inconsequential countries, such as Jamaica and Panama. As Jalalzai (2013) points out, relatively little research has been conducted on the relationship between economic development and whether women are able to break the executive glass ceiling. Jalalzai’s (2013) results suggest that a country’s level of economic or human development does not impact whether it has a female president or prime minister. However, women are less likely to head countries with nuclear weapons; thus, highlighting the gender stereotypes that make it difficult for females to secure executive positions with significant amounts of power over “masculine” policy areas (Jalalzai 2013).

Unanswered Questions. In examining the impact that economic development, political institutions, and female representation in government have on whether a country has a female executive, there are two areas ripe for additional research. First, is whether there are any regional patterns that arise when examining these factors. Regional patterns have been identified by Jalalzai (2013) in regard to executive structures, but it is likely that this is also the case for the other aforementioned factors. One reason for this gap in the literature is that most studies do not opt for a global approach and instead focus on certain regions or individual cases (e.g., Davidson and Schmich 2006; Htun and Jones 2002; Jones 1998; Matland 1993; Yoon 2010). Second, it is unclear how a woman’s path to executive office is dictated by most of these factors. It is apparent how some political institutions, such as executive structures and quotas, are conducive to advancing women taking the political career path to become president or prime minister. However, it is likely that the other aforementioned factors impact women taking the political career path or the family and activist paths. For example, countries with substantial female representation in government may cause women to take the political career path and not the family or activist path. Similarly, women with family ties to executive office may be at an
advantage in a presidential system where name recognition helps overcome voter stereotypes. Overall, these avenues for future research require attention.

The Dynamics of the Paths Women Take to Executive Office

As the preceding literature review highlighted, the two bodies of work on women presidents and prime ministers around the world have developed separately. The first area of literature examines the paths that women take to executive office; whereas, the second identifies various factors that increase the likelihood of a country having a female executive. The most apparent gap in the literature stems from neither body of literature fully engaging with the other. Specifically, it is unclear which factors lead women to take which paths to top executive posts. Within each line of work there are other unanswered questions. For example, why is any given path only found in certain regions, but not other similar regions? Are there regional patterns with respect to which factors propel or impede women from becoming president or prime minister?

Reviewing the literature also shows that most studies are descriptive and focus on one or a few cases or regions (e.g., Escobar Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009; Htun and Jones 2002; Thompson and Lennartz 2006; Yoon 2010). Additionally, outside of recognizing that certain factors and paths propel women to executive positions, the literature has noticed that many women become president and prime ministers on an interim basis and/or stay in office for relatively short periods of time (e.g., Jalalzai 2013). However, previous work typically excludes these women from their analyses or selects other cases (e.g., Jalalzai 2013). Another issue relating to which women executives are included in studies relates to the time frame of most analyses. Most scholars focus on a particular time frame, for example, Jalalzai’s (2013) empirical analysis spans 2000-2010. Since the first female executive, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, began serving in 1960, such studies exclude many women presidents and prime
ministers. In light of these gaps in the literature, this study examines which factors lead women to take each path to executive office. The next section develops empirically testable hypotheses.

**Democratic, Economic, and Human Development**

Politically unstable countries are often characterized by regime changes that occur because of coups and/or the assassination or imprisonment of the current leader. Since power can be “inherited” or gained via other undemocratic means, women can often become executives using their family name (Hodson 1997; Jalalzai 2013). Similarly, some women gain notoriety by participating in activist or democratization movements in these politically unstable, undemocratic countries; which, can launch their political career and set them on their path to becoming a president or prime minister (Jalalzai 2013). Women are able to overcome gender stereotypes that men are best suited for executive positions because politically unstable countries look towards women to serve as peacemakers and consensus-builders after politically tumultuous periods in history (Geske and Bourque 2001; Jalalzai 2008, 2013; Katzenstein 1978; Saint-Germain 1993a; Salo 2010). In light of these findings from prior research, the following hypothesis can be derived:

*H1: Women in countries with low levels of democratic institutionalism more likely to take the family or political activism path to become a president or prime minister.*

Politically unstable and patriarchal societies tend to coincide with one another. In patriarchal societies, women need familial ties in order to launch political careers that eventually lead to an executive position (e.g., Hodson 1997; Jalalzai 2004, 2008; Richter 1991). Familial ties help women overcome gender stereotypes that view men as better suited for executive positions that must handle “masculine” issue areas, such as national defense (Fox and Oxley 2003; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Sczesny et al. 2004). Patriarchal societies also lead women to
take the political activist path to power because the movements are oftentimes focused on
fighting against female oppression (Beckwith 2000). These women are able to bypass gender
stereotypes by highlighting the need to be involved in formal political structures to advance the
movement and/or justify political involvement by highlighting the need for women to serve as
caretakers and peacebuilders (Geske and Bourque 2001; Jalalzai 2013; Salo 2010). Overall, the
research suggests the following hypotheses:

H2: Women in countries with patriarchal societies are more likely to take the family or political
activism path to executive office.

Intertwined with political instability and patriarchy is a country’s level of economic
development. Lesser developed countries are typically patriarchal and unstable; whereas,
economically developed countries have higher levels of gender equality and democratization.
Economically developed countries also have more influence over “masculine” issue areas, such
as the global economy and foreign affairs. Thus, despite higher levels of gender equality, women
typically struggle to break the executive glass ceiling. Regardless, high levels of economic
development appear to facilitate women taking the political career path to office in contrast to
their female counterparts in developing countries who are required to take the political activist or
family path. In accordance with these theoretical considerations, it is predicted that:

H3: Women in economically developed countries are more likely to take the political career path
to executive office; while, women in developing countries take the family or political activism
path.

The extant literature has identified a number of factors related to political institutions that
impact whether a country has a female executive. The first of which is a country’s electoral
system. Multimember districts and proportional representation systems are associated with
increasing the number of women in the legislature (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Matland 1993, 1998a; Rule 1985; Rule and Zimmerman 1994; Paxton 1997; Salmond 2006; Yoon 2010); which, should lead to a woman eventually serving as president or prime minister (Jalalzai 2013; Reynolds 1999). If having a sizeable pool of women qualified to be an executive within the government helps one ultimately become president or prime minister, this requires that women take the political career path to office. As such, it is predicted that:

**H4: Women will take the political career path in countries with proportional representation systems.**

Another political institutions-related explanation for a country having a female executive is the executive structure itself. It is easier for women to come to power in parliamentary and semi-presidential systems because they can be appointed and the duties of a prime minister are conducive to the stereotypical perceived strengths of women (Duerst-Lahti 1997; Hodson 1997; Jalalzai 2013; Whicker and Isaacs 1999). Presidents are typically thought of in “masculine” terms because as commanders in chief, they must be quick and authoritative decision makers. However, prime ministers must be collaborative and consensual to unify parties in the legislature and work towards a common policy agenda (Duerst-Lahti 1997). In addition to “feminine” governing styles being valued in parliamentary and semi-presidential systems, the appointment system allows women to work their way up while bypassing voters possessing gender stereotypes. Overall, this body of literature suggests:

**H5: Women are more likely to become executives via the political career path in countries with semi-presidential and parliamentary executive structures.**

Additional political institutional factors that influence a woman’s ability to break the executive glass ceiling are quotas and political parties. Quotas seek to increase female
representation in government and are most effective in nations with proportional representation multi-member systems where parties use closed lists (Htun and Jones 2002). Additionally, quotas have their intended effect most often when the nation is dominated by leftist political parties that already support advancing gender equality (Davidson-Schmich 2006; Kittilson 1999). The literature on the role of parties in increasing female representation in government also identifies leftist parties, but also multiparty systems, as helping women advance through the political ranks. Multiparty systems typically occur in countries with parliamentary executive structures and lead to female executives because the resulting coalition government requires a prime minister that possesses stereotypical “female” leadership skills that focus on collaboration and consensus (Jalalzai 2013). Taken collectively, the role of parties tend to help women advance their political careers by advancing through the ranks to eventually become a president or prime minister. Thus, parties, in addition to quotas, appear to help women who are taking the political career track to office. This expectation is summarized in the following hypotheses:

H6: Women in countries with national legislative quotas tend to take the political career path to executive office.

H7: Women are more likely to become executives using the political career path in countries with multiparty systems.

H8: Women are more likely to become presidents and prime ministers via the political career path if they belong to leftist political parties.

The literature has also recognized that it is easier for women to become presidents and prime ministers when there are multiple women serving in the national government and/or a woman has already broken the executive glass ceiling (e.g., Jalalzai 2013; Reynolds 1999). Another factor related to increasing female representation in the national government is the
length of time women have had suffrage as it facilitates women becoming involved in politics and launching political careers (e.g., Reynolds 1999). In general, it appears that women benefit from more females being in government positions if they are taking the political career path to executive office. Yet, many activist movements are centered around women’s rights in which political activists will launch political careers to further the cause. Thus, it is also possible that women on the political activist path benefit from women having gained suffrage (Jalalzai 2013).

Overall, women taking the family, political activist, or political career paths to executive office should benefit from following in the footsteps of a previous woman leader who has already defied gender stereotypes. These expectations are summarized as follows:

**H9:** *An increased number of women in national government positions increases the likelihood that a woman will take the political career path to executive office.*

**H10:** *Women are more likely to become presidents and prime ministers via the political career or political activism path in countries where women have long had the right to vote.*

**H11:** *Having a previous female leader will lead women to take the family, political activist, or political career path to executive office.*

**Data and Methods**

The aforementioned hypotheses will be empirically tested by examining all women who served as a president or prime minister throughout the time period of 1960 through 2016. As previously mentioned, this improves upon prior research that is restricted to a certain time period, region, or cases (e.g., Escobar Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009; Htun and Jones 2002; Jalalzai 2013; Thompson and Lennartz 2006; Yoon 2010). Each female president and prime minister is included once unless she served nonconsecutive terms (e.g., President Ivy Matsepe-Casburri of South Africa) or changed positions (e.g., Chandrika Kumaratuna who
went from serving as Prime Minister to President of Sri Lanka). In which case, the women are included multiple times in the dataset. The remainder of this section will discuss the data and methods used in this study.

**Dependent Variables**

This study focuses on explaining why women take one of three paths to executive office: family, political activism, and political career. As a result, the dependent variables in this analysis are the paths that women take to office. A variety of biographical sources, mainly Jalalzai (2013), are consulted to determine which path a woman took to executive office. Unlike previous research (e.g., Jalalzai 2013), women are only coded as taking one path to office. In particular, the most dominant path that launched them towards becoming president or prime minister. As such, any women with a familial tie to political power are automatically coded as taking the family path to office. Women who participated in democratization, women’s rights, or any other social or political movements are coded as following the political activist path to the top executive post. Lastly, women who began their careers by running for lower political offices and continued to work their way up the government ranks are coded as taking the political career path to the presidency or premiership.

Initial coding reveals that no woman begins on the political activist path. Instead, participation in political activism occurs in tandem with having familial ties to political power or while holding lower political office. In accordance with these findings, women are coded as only taking the political career or family path or taking either path in conjunction with actively participating in political, social, or democratization movements. In sum, a series of dichotomous variables are created in which women taking each path are coded as one and zero for all others. The paths are as follows: (1) family path (e.g., Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunda of Sri
Lanka); (2) family path and political activism (e.g., President Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua); (3) political career path (e.g., Prime Minister Julia Gillard of Australia); and, (4) political career path and political activism (e.g., Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko of Ukraine).

**Independent Variables**

**Democratic Institutionalism.** A common way to measure the level of democratic institutionalism in a country is using Freedom House scores (Coppedge et al. 2011). Freedom House scores are available on a yearly basis starting in 1972 and range from 1, or most free, to 7, or least free. For women serving as presidents and prime ministers after 1972, democratic institutionalism is coded as the country’s political rights Freedom House score the year she took office. For women serving prior to 1972, the 1972 political rights Freedom House score is used as this score typically changes very little over time for any given country included in the dataset.

**Patriarchy.** Patriarchy, or the level of gender inequality, is often measured by the Gender Development Index (GDI) that was introduced by the United Nations Development Program in 1995 (e.g., Jalalzai 2013). The GDI is a ratio of the gaps between men and women on the factors included in the calculation of the Human Development Index (HDI): health, knowledge, and standard of living. For the purposes of this study, limiting the time frame to 1995 eliminates roughly a quarter of the cases. Since the GDI is based on the HDI, which is available starting in 1975, it is an adequate measure of gender inequality. Yearly HDI data is available from the United Nations Development Program starting in 1990; however, it has been calculated every five years starting in 1975. Consequently, patriarchy is coded as a country’s yearly HDI score for women taking office starting in 1990 or after. For women taking office between 1975 and 1990, patriarchy is coded as the five year HDI score closest to the year they assumed power (e.g.,
President Corazon Aquino of the Philippines took office in 1986 so patriarchy is coded as the Philippines’ 1985 HDI score.¹

**Economic Development.** It is fairly common to measure economic development using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (e.g., Barrington 2012; Cracolici, Cuffaro, & Nijkamp 2010; Payne and Nassar 2015). Consequently, this study uses data from the World Bank on GDP in current U.S. dollars to measure economic development. This data is available for the entire time span of the study, so economic development is coded as the country’s GDP the year the woman took office.²

**Proportional Representation.** Proportional representation is measured using data from the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, which provides the electoral system used for the lower chamber of the national legislature. This data indicates that countries have can have one of three electoral systems that utilize some form of proportional representation: list proportional representation, mixed member proportional representation, and parallel or segmented representation. List proportional representation involves voters in multi-member districts reviewing lists of candidates for each party and casting ballots for parties. Parties receive a proportion of seats based on their overall share of the vote, and winning candidates are selected by starting at the top of the list. Countries with mixed member proportional representation systems allocate seats to remedy discrepancies between the national and district results for each party. For example, if a party receives 15 percent of the national vote but no district votes, the party will be awarded seats to increase its representation in the national legislature to 15 percent by selecting candidates from the party’s candidate list. Parallel systems combine plurality and proportional representation systems by giving voters two different ballots in which certain seats are reserved

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¹ Due to time constraints, this variable has not been coded yet and will not be included in this paper’s empirical analysis. However, any feedback on data sources, coding, etc. are welcome.

² See n1.
for candidates and others for candidates from parties receiving a certain percentage of the vote. In order to take into account the various forms of proportional representation systems used worldwide, this variable is coded as one if a woman hails from a country using any of the three aforementioned systems and zero otherwise.

**Executive System.** Countries can have one of three executive system: presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential. Data on each country’s executive system is obtained from Elgie’s Semi-Presidential Blog. Three separate dummy variables are constructed to indicate the executive system of the country at the time each woman took office. Women are coded as one on the variable that represents her country’s executive system and zero for the others. For example, Jamaica has a parliamentary system, so Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller is coded as one on the parliamentary executive system variable and zero on the variables for presidential and semi-presidential systems.

**Quotas.** There are three different types of quotas that can be used: reserved seats, legislative quotas, or party quotas (see Krook 2009). Reserved seats quota systems provide women with a certain number or percentage of spots in the national legislature. Legislative quotas require political parties to nominate a specific percentage of female candidates. Party quota systems are adopted by parties themselves to ensure that a particular number or percentage of its candidates are women (Hughes, Paxton, and Krook 2017). Reserved or legislative quotas are those that can best facilitate the advancement of women to executive posts because, unlike party quotas, all women benefit from these systems. Data on whether a country has a reserved or legislative quota system is obtained from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance Gender Quotas Database. A dichotomous variable is constructed in which women presidents and
prime ministers from countries with a reserved or legislative quota in effect when she took office are coded as one and all other women executives are coded as zero.³

**Multiparty Systems.** Whether a woman hails from a country with a multiparty system is measured following the approach used by Jalalzai (2013). Using data from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems Election Guide and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), multiparty systems are those in which there are more than two competitive parties. This dichotomous variable codes multiparty systems as one and all other countries as zero.

**Party Ideology.** There is dearth of longitudinal data on the ideology of political parties across the globe. For example, the Manifesto Project covers numerous parties in roughly 50 countries beginning in 1945; which, is too few nations for the purposes of this study. A similar issue is encountered when attempting to use the Comparative Parties Dataset that covers parties in 21 countries from 1950-2006. In order to remedy these issues with data availability, data on each woman president and prime minister’s party is collected from a variety of biographical sources, in particular Jalalzai (2013). Parties described as leftist or center-left are coded as one on this dichotomous variable and all other parties are coded as zero.

**Female Representation in Government.** There is limited data available on the percentage of women in a country’s cabinet or legislature. The most comprehensive data that is available from the World Bank measures the percentage of seats held by women in the national parliament on a yearly basis beginning in 1990. Starting the quantitative analysis at 1990 would exclude a substantial number of women presidents and prime ministers. In an effort to deal with the lack of longitudinal data, an interval variable ranging from 1-10 is created to measure female

³ See n1.
representation in government. A value of 1 indicates that the percentage of seats held by women in the national parliament is between 0-10 percent, a value of 2 represents 11-20%, and so on and so forth with 10 representing a country with 91-100 percent female legislators. For women entering executive office prior to 1990, female representation in government is coded using the country’s 1990 value. It is assumed that the country will not have had a higher percentage of women legislators at any point prior to this year. For women executives serving from 1990 onwards, this variable is coded in accordance with the percentage of women legislators serving in the country the year she took office.4

Women’s Suffrage. Data on the year women gained suffrage is obtained from the Inter-Parliamentary Union. For each woman president or prime minister, this variable denotes how long women have had the right to vote at the time in which she entered office.5

Previous Female Leader. This variable denotes whether the woman is the first to break the executive glass ceiling in her country. Consequently, women who are not the first to serve as a president or prime minister in her country as coded as one and all other women are coded as zero.

Control Variables

Region. Women tend to take certain paths to executive office within certain regions of the world. In particular, the family path is common in Latin America and Asia; the political activism path is used in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe; and, the political career path is common in Africa and Europe (e.g., Jalalzai 2013). In order to test the validity of these observations and uncover additional regional patterns, it is important to control for region. As such, a set of dummy variables are constructed for each global region: Europe, Latin America,

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4 See n1.
5 See n1.
Africa, North America, Oceania, Asia, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. Women are coded as one on the variable that corresponds with the region of the world their country is located and zero on all others.

**Ascension to Office.** The literature recognizes that it may be easier for women attain executive posts in appointment-based, rather than election-based, systems because females can circumvent voters that possess gender stereotypes and assume the office of prime minister that is more conducive to female leadership styles (e.g., Duerst-Lahti 1997; Hodson 1997; Jalalzai 2013; Whicker and Isaacs 1999). In order to account for this possibility, a dichotomous variable is created that codes appointed women as one and elected women as zero.

**Interim Executive.** As briefly mentioned, previous work has observed that many women serve on an interim basis for relatively short periods of time (e.g., Jalalzai 2013). Many studies omit temporary leaders; but, in order to fully understand the dynamics surrounding which path a woman takes to executive office, it is important to include these women in the analysis. However, it is important to differentiate between interim and non-interim leaders. As such, this dichotomous variables codes interim female presidents and prime ministers as one and all others as zero.

**Methods**

The dependent variables are dichotomous indicators of which path a woman took to executive office (see Appendix A for descriptive statistics), so logistic regression analysis is needed to test the aforementioned hypotheses (Menard 1995). The diagnostic tests did not reveal any issues with multicollinearity. The chi-square for each model in Table 1 and Table 2 are statistically significant at the .1 level or just shy of meeting this threshold, which indicate that the
independent variables tend to accurately explain whether a woman takes each path to office.\textsuperscript{6} The reduction of error and Nagelkerke $r$-square statistics reveal that the models have moderate explanatory power (Nagelkerke 1991). The models tend to underestimate whether a woman takes each path to become president or prime minister. Nevertheless, the next section discusses the effect various different factors have on the path women take to top executive posts.

Results

Family Path

The results of the empirical analyses explaining the conditions under which women take different paths to executive office are shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Starting with the family path in Table 1, few of the independent variables are statistically significant. Proportional representation systems are associated with increasing, rather than decreasing, the likelihood that a woman takes the family path to office (rejects $H4$). Women are better able to reach executive office via the family path if another woman has already served as the country’s president or prime minister (supports $H9$).\textsuperscript{7} Two of the remaining independent variables that did not achieve conventional levels of statistical significance are signed as predicted: democratic institutionalism and leftist political party ideology. Women in democratic countries who belong to leftist political parties are less likely to take the family path to office (rejects $H1$ & $H8$). The remaining variables are not signed as predicted in which women are more likely to reach executive office via the family path in multiparty systems (rejects $H7$). Also, semi-presidential and parliamentary executive systems facilitate women using the family path to secure an executive position much more so than presidential systems (rejects $H5$).

\textsuperscript{6} The tolerance levels for all the independent variables are above the recommended cutoff of .2 (Menard 1995).
\textsuperscript{7} Future iterations of this research will provide predicted probabilities using SPost in Stata 14 for all statistically significant variables (Long and Freese 2005).
Interesting findings do result from the control variables. As Table 1 show, no women in Africa, the Middle East, North America, Oceania, or the Caribbean took the family path to become president or prime minister. As indicated by the existing literature (e.g., Jalalzai 2013), women in Asia and Latin America are more likely to reach executive office via the family path than women in Europe. This relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level for Asia and the .05 level of Latin America. Whether a woman serves as an interim executive has no bearing on whether she takes the family path to office. Yet, there is a positive relationship between this variable and the family path indicating that women with familial ties to office may be selected to serve as interim presidents or prime ministers. Women who are appointed to their executive offices do not tend to take the family path to office, and this relationship is statistically significant at the .1 level.

Slightly different results are evidenced for women with familial ties to office who participated in political activism movements. The only statistically significant variable is democratic institutionalism in which morer politically unstable countries encourage women to the family activism path to executive office (supports H1). In examining the remaining independent variables, most are signed in the expected direction: proportional representation system, semi-presidential system, parliamentary system, multiparty system, and female predecessor. In other words, women are less likely to become a president or prime minister via the family activist path in proportional representation systems and multiparty systems (rejects H4 & H7). Women are also less likely to reach executive office by taking the family activist path in semi-presidential and parliamentary systems than presidential systems (rejects H5). In fact, no women took this path in semi-presidential executive systems. As was the case with the family
path, women who have familial ties to office and participated in activist movements are better able to become executive leaders if another woman has already broken the glass ceiling (*rejects H9*). Only the variable measuring whether a woman belongs to a leftist political party is signed not as predicted. Here, leftist political parties help women reach executive office (*rejects H8*).

Again, interesting relationships emerge from the impact the control variables have on whether women take the family activist path to office. Women did not reach executive office using this path in Africa, the Middle East, North America, Oceania, the Caribbean, or Europe. As would be expected, there is not a statistically significant difference between women from Asia and Latin America. However, the results indicate that women in Asia are actually less likely than their female counterparts in Latin America to take this path to executive office. Unlike the family path, no interim leaders reached executive office through this path. There is a positive relationship between women appointed to office reaching executive office via the family activist path; however, this relationship is not statistically significant.

**Political Career Path**

The results from Table 2 show that relatively few variables achieve statistical significance and explain when a woman reaches an executive position via the political career path. As expected, women are more likely to take the political career path to office in semi-presidential and parliamentary systems than presidential systems (*supports H5*). Also, as predicted, women are also more likely to become presidents and prime ministers via the political career path in multiparty systems (*supports H7*). Of the statistically insignificant variables, two are signed as expected: democratic institutionalism and leftist political parties. As countries become less democratic, women are less likely to take the political career path to executive office (*rejects H1*). Women are better able to reach executive office via the political career path
if they belong to leftist political parties (*rejects H8*). The two remaining independent variables are not signed as expected: proportional representation and previous female leader. It appears that women are less likely to take the political career path to office in countries with proportional representation (*rejects H4*). Interestingly, having another woman break the executive glass ceiling does not appear to help women on the political career path become presidents and prime ministers (*rejects H9*).

*<Insert Table 2 about here.>*

Before moving onto the results for the political activist career path, it is worth discussing the control variables in this model. Every woman who has become a president or prime minister in North America or Oceania have taken the political career path to office. The only statistically significant relationship that emerges is from the region control variables is that women from Asia are less likely that women from Latin America to take the political career path. Women from the Middle East and Europe are also less likely to become presidents and prime ministers via the political career path. Conversely, women from the Caribbean are more likely to become executives using this path than their female counterparts from Latin America. Neither of the other two control variables are statistically significant. Women who serve as interim executives are more likely to take the political career path; whereas, women appointed to executive office are less likely to reach office via this path.

In examining the factors that explain whether a woman participates in political activist movements while taking the political career path to executive office, two variables achieve statistical significance. In contrast to the political career path, women are less likely to take the political career activist path in semi-presidential and parliamentary systems than presidential systems (*rejects H8*). A couple of the variables are signed in the expected direction. Proportional
representation systems are positively associated with women taking the political career activist path to executive office (rejects H4). Similarly, women belonging to leftist parties are more likely to become presidents and prime ministers via the political activist path (rejects H8). The majority of the remaining independent variables are signed in the opposite direction as expected. Women are more likely to take the political activist career path in politically unstable countries (rejects H1). Although this result is in direct contrast with the predictions relating to women taking the political career path to office, it does accord with women using the activist path to reach executive positions. Multiparty systems and previous female leaders do not appear to encourage women to take the political activist path to executive office (rejects H7 & H9).

As far as the control variables, there are no statistically significant relationships. Beginning with the region variables, it is worth noting that no women from North America or Oceania took the political career activist path to executive office. Only women from Europe and the Middle East appear to be more apt to take this path to executive office than women from the Caribbean. Conversely, women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are less likely to become presidents and prime ministers using this path. In regard to the other control variables, interim leaders do not tend to take this path to executive office; however, appointed women do appear to utilize this path to reach the presidency or premiership.

Discussion and Conclusion

There are two bodies of literature on women presidents and prime ministers: the paths women take to office and the factors that help females reach executive posts. This study united these two areas of research in an effort to explain which factors lead women to take the three different paths to executive office: family, political activist, and political career. Furthermore, this study utilized a global empirical approach, analyzed all women executives, categorized
women as taking only one path to office, and accounted for some women serving on an interim basis. These considerations are in an effort to improve upon prior work that is mostly descriptive, focuses on one or a few leaders or regions, codes women as taking multiple paths to office, and excludes interim leaders from analyses (e.g., Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009; Htun and Jones 2002; Jalalzai 2013; Thompson and Lennartz 2006b; Yoon 2010). Overall, there are three key findings.

First, the political activism path to office is not a dominant path that propels women into executive office. All of the women presidents and prime ministers who participated in political activism movements were already on their way to executive office via the family path or the political career path. This study took this into account and examined women who took the family activist path separately from those reaching executive office using the political career activism path. In general, the results reveal very little about which factors lead women to take either path while simultaneously participating in activist movements. In accordance with expectations and observations from prior research, women do tend to reach executive office via the family activism path in politically unstable countries. However, this is not the case for women who took the political career activism path. The results also revealed no women have used the family activism path in countries with semi-presidential executive systems. Yet, women are less likely to use the political career activism path in semi-presidential and parliamentary executive systems. This is also the case in multiparty systems; but, this result is not evidenced when examining women taking the family activism path to executive office.

The regional patterns reported by previous studies did not materialize as women in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe are not more likely to participate in political activism movements while on the family or political career path (Beckwith 2000; Jalalzai 2013). The
family activist path also only appears in Asia and Latin America; whereas, the political career activist path is found in all regions of the world with the exception of North America and Oceania. Since the family activist path is only used in two regions, the empirical model analyzes a small number of cases (N=25). Although this reduces confidence in the results, the findings for each variable are still relatively similar to that of the family activist path.

The second key finding of this study is that relatively few independent variables explain why a woman takes each path to executive office. With respect to the family path, only whether a country utilizes proportional representation and has had a previous female leader explains if a woman reaches executive office in this way. Different variables explain whether a woman uses the political career path. In particular, women are more likely to use this path in semi-presidential and parliamentary executive systems than presidential executive systems. Additionally, women tend to take this path to become president or prime minister in multiparty systems. Although these factors tend to predict whether a country has a female executive (e.g., Jalalzai 2013), they are unable to fully explain why women take each path to office.

The third and final key finding of this study is that very few regional patterns emerge. Women are more likely to take the family path in Asia and Latin America than Europe. Similarly, women are less likely to take the political career path in Asia than Latin America. The most striking finding is that only women in Asia, Latin America, and Europe have taken the family path; whereas, women only take the political career path in North America and Oceania. These findings somewhat accord with previous research in which existing studies have observed that the family path is common in Asia and Latin America (e.g., Jalalzai 2013). Overall, it appears that various institutional and political factors, not the region itself, explain which path a woman takes to become a president or prime minister.
Despite uniting research on the paths that women take to office and the factors that explain whether a country has a female executive, there are still numerous opportunities for future research. For example, first, more work is needed to determine why women take each of the different paths to executive office. Since this is a working research project, it is possible that once the additional variables (i.e., patriarchy, economic development, quotas, female representation, and women’s suffrage) are included in the empirical analysis additional insight will be gained into how women become presidents and prime ministers via each path. Such research will also begin to explain why certain paths are dominant in certain regions but not others. Second, relatively little is known about which factors explain how long a woman stays in office. Another opportunity for future research would be to explore the length of tenure of women presidents and prime ministers. Overall, this study can help facilitate a number of additional studies.
## Appendix A: Summary Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Dependent Variables</strong></td>
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N 133
References


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†p < .1, *p < .05, **p<.01 (two tailed tests)

N: 25

Model Chi-Square: 44.90 (two tailed tests)

Reduction in Error: 37.50%

Nagelkerke R-Square: .61

Family Path Omitted Category: Europe; Family Activist Path Omitted Category: Latin America
Table 2. Logistic Regression Results on Political Career Paths to Executive Office

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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Political Career Activism Path</th>
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†p < .1, *p < .05, **p<.01 (two tailed tests)

| N              | 126                  |                                  |
| Model Chi-Square | 65.95**             | 19.76                           |
| Reduction in Error       | 50.00%          | 0%                               |
| Nagelkerke R-Square     | .55                | .25                              |

Political Career Path Omitted Category: Latin America; Political Career Activist Path Omitted Category: the Caribbean