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Mothers and fathers in parliament: MP parental status and family gaps from a global perspective

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Abstract

Studies of Western parliaments find women experience greater difficulty than men in combining parenting with a career in parliament. Is it the same worldwide? Addressing this issue, we compared the marital and parental status of legislators in 25 diverse parliaments around the world while theoretically exploring whether parliamentary family gaps are due to individual, family, institutional, societal or global-level conditions. Through a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis, we find institutional- and societal-level factors matter. Namely, family gaps between men and women members of parliament (MPs) were narrower under conditions of higher female employment, women in parliamentary leadership and lower rates of child mortality. Thus, motherhood penalties for women MPs are likely to diminish with increases in women's paid employment, better social welfare provisions and more women in parliamentary leadership positions. Our findings also point to the importance of public policies, parliamentary rules and critical actors in reducing time demands on parents who are MPs.

Keywords: Children, Marriage, Mothers, Parliament, Representation, Women

1. Introduction

Although balancing family life with a career in parliament may be difficult for anyone, unequal time demands of parenting seem to create more barriers for mothers than fathers (e.g. Norris and Lovenduski, 1995; McKay, 2007; Thomas and Bittner, 2017). As a result, women MPs may have fewer children than men MPs (e.g. Stalsburg and Kleinberg, 2016; Campbell and Childs, 2017; Franceschet et al., 2017). Recent studies, however, suggest that change is underway. First, researchers have discovered an emerging 'maternal mandate' for women MP candidates to 'place family roles front and centre in order to appear competent, well balanced or sufficiently feminine' (Deason et al., 2015, p. 143). Secondly, studies have observed a 'normalisation' of women in politics (e.g. Joshi et al., 2019) alongside 'a growing acceptance of mothers in politics and a corresponding decrease in voter scepticism of women's abilities to juggle both motherhood and political office' (Stalsburg and Kleinberg, 2016, p. 286).

Nevertheless, mothers in parliaments may still be disadvantaged by campaign funders, media elites and party gatekeepers who inhibit the promotion and selection of mother candidates via 'imputed

discrimination' (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, p. 107; see also Stalsburg, 2010; Bell and Kaufmann, 2015; Deason et al., 2015; Karpowitz et al., 2017).[1]

The basic underlying problem is a perceived care conflict between an MP 'caring for their own children/family members' versus 'caring for their constituents or society as a whole'. Whereas men are rarely seen as facing this conflict due to the common practice of fathers in politics outsourcing care work to others, mothers with young children face much higher levels of scrutiny due to the busy schedules of MPs on top of gendered social expectations that mothers do most of the parenting work themselves (Thomas and Bittner, 2017). This results in women MPs and candidates often having to work a 'double day' or do 'double duty' (e.g. Stalsburg, 2010, p. 377) 'while male candidates enjoy the luxury of delegating family work to others' (Teele et al., 2018, p. 537).

While recent studies conducted in the UK and the USA have suggested that voters no longer object to the participation of mothers with young children in politics and even prefer mothers over childless women (e.g. Stalsburg, 2010; Campbell and Cowley, 2018; Smith, 2018; Teele et al., 2018), it is unclear whether these findings apply elsewhere. In response, this article offers a more global perspective on the family and parental status of MPs. As scholars have noted, ignoring non-Western parliaments in legislative research and failing to incorporate non-Western women in gender research is a major oversight (e.g. Norton and Ahmed, 2013; Dosekun, 2015). Hence, there is great value in globalising our understanding of MP parental status and gendered MP family gaps. Taking a comparative perspective also helps us to better understand how institutional, societal-level and global factors may impact MP family gaps in Western democracies and beyond. For instance, affluent Western states might be expected to have narrower MP family gaps as they are more likely to have welfare states that provide social services such as paid parental leave and day care for children. This can potentially reduce the gap between mothers and fathers in daytime care responsibilities for young children. More established democracies with a long history of civil society participation may also have stronger and more developed women's movement organisations, which may contribute to closing gender gaps (Chiva, 2018).

In non-Western (and particularly developing country) contexts, however, we might expect larger family gaps among MPs because mothers may have no choice but to personally care for their children while married wives in patrilocal societies may be additionally expected to personally care for their parents-in-law and other family members adding to their already disproportionate domestic care responsibilities. Thus, a key question motivating this study is whether marital and motherhood penalties are experienced by all women in parliament, and under which contexts are they more severe? By comparing outcomes across a larger number of countries, we can gain insight into what factors determine the extent of such gendered penalties and, if there is gendered variation in MP family gaps across countries, learn valuable lessons about strategies, interventions and practices to reduce these gaps.

The rest of our article is structured as follows. We begin by reviewing literature on parenting and parliament in Western and non-Western contexts followed by an assessment of MP parental and marital status across contemporary parliaments. Examining the family patterns of more than 4000 MPs in 25 countries, we find that while women MPs are indeed more likely to be unmarried, childless or to have fewer children than their male counterparts, 'family gaps' are not uniform across national contexts and are most pronounced in low- and middle-income countries, especially those with higher child mortality. Our exploration of these findings through a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) then provides some clues as to how such gaps might be reduced. Namely, family gaps are likely to diminish with increases in women's paid employment, more comprehensive social welfare provisions and greater presence of women in parliamentary leadership positions. These findings point to the importance of public policies, parliamentary rules and critical actors in reducing time demands on parents who are MPs.

[1] 'Imputed discrimination refers to the anticipated reaction among the electorate to certain social groups. Party members may personally favour a certain category of candidate...but members may be unwilling to choose such a candidate because they expect they would lose votes among the electorate' (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, p. 107.

2. Lessons from Western parliaments

As scholars have recently noted (e.g. Campbell and Childs, 2017; Thomas and Bittner, 2017; Bryant and Hellwege, 2019), the impact of family status on MPs is an important yet understudied aspect of political representation although a growing literature has demonstrated that candidates are assessed differently by voters based on family status (e.g. Deason et al., 2015; Campbell and Cowley, 2018; Smith, 2018). For example, experimental studies have found that women (not men) candidates are penalised by voters if they do not conform to traditional expectations of being married and having children (Stalsburg, 2010; Bell and Kaufmann, 2015). Women candidates are also evaluated more positively by prospective voters if they are married with children (Campbell and Cowley, 2018; Teele et al., 2018). However, mothers of young children are perceived as having less time to fulfil their political duties than fathers with young children (Stalsburg, 2010).

While voters may prefer to have more mothers in parliament, political party elites appear more reluctant to support mother candidates. This is especially the case in safe seats, which comprise the majority of parliamentary seats in both the UK and the USA (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, p. 2). The stereotype that motherhood is incompatible with parliamentary life may cause political gatekeepers to deem mothers as less competitive political candidates (Deason et al., 2015, p. 136). In this sense, political parties (rather than voters) may be the greatest factor effectively excluding mothers from politics. Thus, while party gatekeepers may promote children as assets for male MPs whose campaigns often benefit from emphasising their fatherhood, research finds women tend to de-emphasise their parental status and motherhood experience during campaigns for fear that it may hurt (or at least not help) them politically (Stalsburg and Kleinberg, 2016, p. 305) Relatedly, Smith (2018) found that in the UK parental status is still more controversial for women candidates who are more often forced to defend their personal family choices than men.

Historically, in Western societies there have been fewer women candidates than men due to factors such as socialisation, a gendered ambition gap, differing levels of confidence and women receiving less encouragement to run for office (Lawless and Fox, 2010). Surveys of elected representatives and hopeful candidates in the USA have also revealed that mothers are more likely to take primary responsibility for household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, shopping, dishes and laundry, while being nearly ten times more likely to serve as the primary child-care provider compared to their male counterparts (Thomas, 2002, p. 348; McKay, 2011, p. 728; Bianchi et al., 2012; Fox and Lawless, 2014, p. 400). Such work comes in addition to the long, unpredictable working hours of MPs and the numerous events on evenings and weekends that MPs are expected to attend, not to mention 'disapproval from colleagues, especially other women…for missing political engagements due to family obligations, and [for] neglecting their children if they attend everything' (McKay, 2007, p. 383).

The institutional design of parliaments can also disadvantage mothers. As feminist institutionalists argue, parliaments 'are not gender neutral but have been created to maintain and reflect male dominance' (Wängnerud, 2015, p. 61). As Arneil (2017) points out, numerous parliaments have demonstrated hostility to lactating mothers requesting permission to breastfeed in parliamentary chambers and they have refused to accommodate breaks for breastfeeding or pumping.[2]

Such unequal working conditions have prompted recent calls for reforms to candidate selection mechanisms by party leaders and for creating more 'gender-sensitive parliaments' (i.e. Palmieri, 2011) or 'diversity-sensitive parliaments' (i.e. Childs, 2016) that are responsive to both women's and men's needs to balance work with family responsibilities (see also Krook and Norris, 2014; Wängnerud, 2015).[3]

[2] It was only in 2018 that the US Senate permitted the presence and breastfeeding of infants and the French Parliament opened a nursery.

[3] A 'gender-sensitive parliament' is defined as 'a parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and in its work. Gender-sensitive parliaments remove the barriers to women's full participation and offer a positive example or model to society at large' (Palmieri, 2011, p. 6).

In other words, parliaments have an opportunity to lead in supporting parenting by providing on-site childcare facilities, legally guaranteed paternity and maternity leaves, full-time substitutes for MPs who need to take leave and flexible work-time arrangements that can also serve as a model for other workplaces in society (McKay, 2007; Childs, 2016; Arneil, 2017).[4]

However, currently some parliaments do not even provide certain basic supports (such as paid maternity leaves) that are standard in other public and private sector workplaces. As Bittner and Thomas (2017: 334) observe, 'the discrepancy between support provided for working families throughout OECD countries and lack of support provided for mothers/parents in politics is stark'. The roles of husbands (and extended families) in taking on parental and household responsibilities and supporting mother's careers are also crucial (Schreiber, 2017) as are state benefits and programmes supporting all mothers in society such as parental leaves and publicly subsidised childcare (Bittner and Thomas, 2017, p. 314). Together these findings indicate the need to consider the gendered nature of demands in the private sphere and conditions in political workplaces as barriers to women with children becoming representatives.

3. Mothers and fathers in non-Western parliaments

Taking insights from the literature discussed above which focuses mostly on countries in Europe and North America, we now explore how conditions might differ in non-Western parliaments. Our aim here is to work towards overcoming Western-centric biases in scholarship by developing better awareness of the contexts of parliaments in other world regions including Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. As scholars have noted, in the mostly low- and middle-income post-colonial countries which comprise the non-Western world, political and social conditions diverge considerably from the industrialised West as there are usually fewer women working in the paid labour force and fertility rates tend to be higher meaning that there are more children in the household (e.g. Paxton and Hughes, 2017). For example, in Afghanistan the total fertility rate is 4.6 births per woman with only 21% of women in the paid labour force compared to Iceland where women average 1.7 births and 78% are in paid employment.[5]

Relatedly, in many non-Western countries, dominant religious and secular ideologies sanction a traditionally gendered division of labour where family laws and public policies such as restricting or penalising abortion as is the case in Latin America reinforce 'societal expectations that [women] "should" be mothers' (Franceschet et al., 2017, p. 65).

Another important difference is family structure as it is much more common for people in non-Western countries to live together with extended family members and families are often more cohesive and conventional. For instance, much of Asia practices patrilocalism whereby women are expected to marry, live together with their husband's family, take care of his parents, do household duties such as cleaning and cooking and raise the children (e.g. Joshi and Kingma, 2013). Thus, being married (even without having any children) may bring considerable care obligations to women in many non-Western societies while deviating from heteronormative expectations for women to get married and have children may be less acceptable in contrast to comparatively higher rates of divorce, singlehood and single-parent families in many Western societies. Moreover, women in non-Western contexts who resist the norm of 'male breadwinners and female caregivers' (Franceschet et al., 2017, p. 78) are often heavily stigmatised and socially sanctioned. For instance, when political meetings are held 'in the evenings in restaurants or bars' women MPs who attend (especially those who are married) may experience high 'reputational costs' (ibid, p. 77) such as being labelled inappropriately flirtatious, unfaithful or sexually promiscuous while also facing heightened risks of harassment and physical violence.

[4] For instance, Arneil (2017, p. 47) calls for 'a full range of policies' including 'day-care facilities, rooms for breastfeeding near the chamber, "pumping" rooms and refrigerators/storage facilities, proxy votes, substitutes for women absent from Parliament, and maternity leave policies'.

[5] These data are for 2017–2018. Source: wdi.worldbank.org (accessed on 29 November 2019).

Another difference is that in less affluent non-Western countries, levels of democratic competition may be weaker, parliaments are more often dominated by a single party and the experiences of neo-colonialism and imperialism as in many African nations means that 'factors other than gender figure integrally in the oppression of Third World women' (Tamale, 1999, p. 31). In these contexts, the state may be incapable or unwilling to regularly enforce the rule of law and often collects less tax revenue. As a result, family-supporting policies such as paid maternity and paternity leaves and publicly funded day care services for children are less likely to be properly financed and implemented. Thus, recommendations for the state to play a stronger role through 'family benefits, childcare programmes, flexibility in work-time arrangements, and parental leave for fathers' (Bittner and Thomas, 2017, p. 320) may be less feasible in more corruption-prone and cash-strapped developing countries where the government's economic strategy to catch up to their former colonisers may heavily depend upon providing cheap labour to multi-national corporations headquartered in more affluent countries who are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Under these conditions, we might expect fewer mothers and wives serving as MPs due to having more children, fewer overall resources and less public support. Moreover, those few women who do make it into parliament may tend to lie outside the traditional trajectory for women in their societies as anomalies who have stayed single, focused on their career and avoided having children. Thus, it is reasonable to expect family gaps between women and men MPs will be greater in low- and middle-income countries with the possible exception of (post)-communist countries where (previously) socialist governments put more emphasis on promoting women's education and work in the public sphere compared to most non-OECD countries.

Yet, it is also possible that mothers and wives may have greater opportunities to succeed in politics in less affluent non-Western countries. As scholars have noted, in Latin America, women MPs usually hail 'from the upper or upper-middle classes' (Franceschet et al., 2017, p. 73) as is common in Asia (e.g. Joshi and Goehrung, 2018, p. 364) where the high availability and low costs of employing female domestic servants may enable mothers and fathers from privileged classes to put more time into political careers. As Franceschet et al. (2017, p. 79) observe, 'the ability to outsource care grants upper-class (but not lower-class) women freedom from the burden of caregiving while absolving men of greater shared responsibility'. Moreover, non-democratic regimes are often willing to grant a certain amount of official political space to women because they are perceived as generally non-threatening to the rulers while also offering a degree of legitimacy and the appearance of inclusion to an otherwise authoritarian regime (e.g. Waylen, 1994). Thus, non-OECD country expectations for MP parental status and family gaps are ambiguous: economically (time and money wise) it may be more feasible for middle-class mothers to be in parliament (thanks to servants) but socially (due to family, religious and belief structures) less feasible for mothers in politics due to heavy stigmatisation against women who violate traditional gendered norms.

4. Theory and hypotheses

Based on our review of the literature, our intuition is that family gaps in marital status and numbers of children between men MPs (MMPs) and women MPs (WMPs) may exist in many parliaments around the world, but these gaps should be less severe when there are mechanisms in place that make parliaments (and workplaces in general) more equally accessible to mothers and others. Hence, our study focuses in particular at the societal and institutional (parliamentary) levels of analysis, though we recognise that global-, family- and individual-level factors can make a difference as well.

As Chiva (2018) notes, political institutions like parliaments, which were historically male-dominated, tend to both maintain and reproduce male dominance, but there is notable variation in the extent to which they do so. Clearly, institutional reforms can make parliaments more accommodating towards motherhood by allowing breastfeeding and providing childcare facilities (e.g. Childs, 2016). A general shift in societal attitudes and gendered conduct within traditionally male-dominated political institutions is also important. We believe that parliamentary committee leaders who are women will be a crucial mechanism for such changes. Similarly, the gendered division of labour within a household likely plays an important role in explaining family gaps and we would expect societies with more traditional or rigid gender roles to have larger gaps. We also anticipate that in societies where more women participate in

the formal economy outside of the home, gender roles will become more fluid. Relatedly, in countries with more developed welfare states, women and men will have more autonomy when public policies are supportive of parents (married or single) through provisions like parental allowances, subsidised childcare, prenatal care and paid paternity and maternity leaves.

As we believe these diverse economic, cultural and political components are likely to be important determinants of gendered marital and family gaps among MPs, expanding the universe of cases studied helps us to provide greater clarity regarding both causes of representation gaps and how to close them. Based on previous studies of Western countries, we predict that gendered MP parental gaps may be common, but we also expect to find considerable variation in the degree of these gaps across parliaments. More specifically, we anticipate that countries with more gender-sensitive parliaments, higher levels of economic and political development, more developed welfare states and greater levels of women's labour force participation will have smaller gender gaps when it comes to MP marital status and numbers of children. Thus, we arrive at the following three empirical (H1, H2, H3) and theoretical hypotheses (H4, H5, H6) regarding parliamentary family gaps between WMPs and MMPs:

H1: WMPs are less likely to be married than MMPs. (Marital Gap)

H2: WMPs are likely to have fewer children than MMPs. (Child Gap)

H3: WMPs are more likely to be childless than MMPs. (Childlessness)

H4: MP parental gaps will be lower in countries with more women leaders in parliament.

H5: MP parental gaps will be lower in countries with more women in the workforce.

H6: MP parental gaps will be lower in countries with higher socio-economic development.

We now turn to a cross-national analysis to see if the evidence supports our hypotheses.

5. Empirical analysis

Systematically studying the family structure of MPs across countries from different world regions has been difficult due to scarcity of data on MPs' family status. Fortunately, however, a number of parliaments have started providing members' biographical data on their websites stating whether they are married or have children (Joshi and Rosenfield, 2013). Thus, for our data collection we searched parliamentary (single or lower house) websites of every country. Since the majority of parliaments do not make family status information available about their members, we collected marital and child status information on MPs from all countries with available data. Through this convenience sampling method, we obtained MPs' marital status from 23 parliaments and their numbers of children for 14 parliaments.[6]

The distribution of parliaments with information available followed no discernible pattern and appeared largely random with the sample covering most of the world's geographical regions. In total, we ended up with a 'medium-n' cross-sectional sample of 25 countries including over 4000 MPs from Africa (Mauritius, Uganda, Zambia), the Caucuses (Armenia, Georgia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan), East Asia (South Korea), Eastern Europe (Belarus, Estonia, Lithuania, Russia), Latin America (Costa Rica), Oceania (French Polynesia, Tonga), South Asia (Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka), West Asia (Afghanistan, Jordan) and Western Europe (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco and Switzerland).

To test our first three hypotheses, we compared whether women and men in parliament had roughly identical marital status and numbers of children as a null hypothesis. By contrast, if women had fewer children or were married less often we interpreted this as indicating that women may be disadvantaged

[6] For Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Zambia we were also able to gather data on MPs' family status for two consecutive parliamentary sessions.

compared to men in being able to combine parliamentary work and family life. Beginning with marriage, we found a significant gap between WMPs and MMPs. As shown in Table 1, the share of men MPs who were married exceeded the share of women MPs who were married in 20 out of 23 parliaments and this gap was statistically significant (as measured by chi-square tests) in the majority of cases.[7]

The median marital gap was 22.5 percentage points and marital gaps ranged from a low of 1.5 percentage points in Iceland (2016) to a high of 44.9 percentage points in Kyrgyzstan (2010) where married MMPs (85.6%) were more than double the share of married WMPs (40.7%).

Table 1. Marital gap by gender among parliamentarians after recent elections

Country and year of election	Married men (% of male MPs)	Married women (% of female MPs)	Marital gap (percentage points)	Chi-square test
Kyrgyzstan 2010	85.6	40.7	44.9***	0.000
Zambia 2006	98.4	54.5	43.9***	0.000
Russia 2016	81.6	38.0	43.6***	0.000
Georgia 2008	92.6	50.0	42.6***	0.001
Zambia 2016	93.9	51.6	42.3***	0.000
Monaco 2013	78.9	40.0	38.9*	0.088
Jordan 2016	97.2	60.0	37.2***	0.000
Kazakhstan 2016	80.8	48.3	32.5***	0.001
Armenia 2012	98.4	69.2	29.1***	0.000
Costa Rica 2018	83.9	57.7	26.2**	0.028
Kyrgyzstan 2015	81.0	55.0	26.0**	0.012
Kazakhstan 2012	89.9	64.3	25.6***	0.002
Bhutan 2008	97.7	75.0	22.7**	0.032
Armenia 2007	95.0	72.7	22.3***	0.005
Uganda 2016	95.3	73.5	21.6***	0.000
Estonia 2014	64.9	48.1	16.8	0.128
Armenia 2017	96.5	83.3	13.2**	0.029
Liechtenstein 2017	77.3	66.7	10.6	0.687
Afghanistan 2010	94.6	85.5	9.1**	0.023
Mauritius 2014	93.2	85.7	7.5	0.478
Tajikistan 2010	95.9	90.0	5.9	0.438
Lithuania 2016	87.4	82.1	5.3	0.470
India 2014	92.0	87.3	4.7	0.186
Iceland 2016	84.8	83.3	1.5	0.869
Tonga 2014	95.2	No women	n/a	n/a
Sri Lanka 2015	87.3	90.0	−2.7	0.801
Belarus 2016	75.0	83.8	−8.8	0.246

Note: Asterisks mark statistical significance via chi-square test: ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.10$. .

To assess whether having children impacts the likelihood of serving as an MP, we compared rates of childlessness among men and women MPs. Here again we observed a salient gender gap. As Table 2 indicates, childlessness was more common among WMPs than MMPs in the majority of parliaments, and it was statistically significant in half of the cases (7 out of 14). By contrast, in no parliaments did women have less childlessness than men by a statistically significant margin.

[7] Unless otherwise stated, data on MPs' marital status in Table 1 represent all MPs elected to parliament that year or in that session. For the following countries, data were obtainable for the following number of MPs (out of total MPs): Kyrgyzstan 117/120, Russia 446/450, Zambia (2016) 162/163, Jordan 129/130, Uganda 451/455, Afghanistan 229/249, Mauritius 66/71, Tajikistan 59/63, Lithuania 139/141, India 502/543, Tonga 21/26, Georgia 127/150, Sri Lanka 183/225.

Table 2. Childlessness by gender among parliamentarians

Country and year	Childless men (% of all MMPs)	Childless women (% of all WMPs)	Childless gap (percentage points)	Chi-square test
Armenia 2017	1.2	33.3	−32.1***	0.000
Armenia 2012	4.3	30.8	−26.5***	0.000
Lithuania 2016	8.1	28.6	−20.5***	0.003
Estonia 2014	12.8	27.6	−14.8*	0.059
Kazakhstan 2016	12.8	27.6	−14.8*	0.070
Kyrgyzstan 2015	11.0	25.0	−14.0*	0.093
South Korea 2016	1.3	13.2	−11.8***	0.000
Tajikistan 2010	4.1	10.0	−5.9	0.438
Kazakhstan 2012	5.1	10.7	−5.6	0.307
Iceland 2016	12.1	13.3	−1.2	0.885
Afghanistan 2010	11.4	11.3	+0.1	0.985
Belarus 2016	8.3	5.3	+3.0	0.555
Monaco 2013	5.3	0.0	+5.3	0.600
Liechtenstein 2017	22.7	0.0	+22.7	0.356

Note: Asterisks mark statistical significance via chi-square test: ***p < 0.01, *p <0.10.

Next, we examined the number of children that MPs had at the start of their parliamentary session (i.e. after being elected). As displayed in Table 3, in 13 out of 14 countries, women in parliament had fewer children than their male counterparts and this was statistically significant in 10 out of 13 cases.[8]

Liechtenstein was the only country where women MPs had more children than men MPs, but in this outlying case, there were only three women in the parliament (each of whom had two children). As Table 3 reveals, in most parliaments MMPs had more than two children while WMPs had less than two children. In countries for which we were able to obtain data on two consecutive parliamentary sessions, the gap also widened over time as seen in Armenia from 2012 to 2017, Kyrgyzstan from 2010 to 2015 and Kazakhstan from 2012 to 2016, where child gaps between women and men MPs increased, respectively, from 1.00 to 1.50, 1.33 to 1.64 and 0.77 to 1.15.

As the 'child gaps' depicted in Table 3 best embody the concept of a 'family gap' between women and men in parliament, we used that variable to conduct an exploratory qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to better understand which factors might cause differences across parliaments. QCA is a set-theoretic method using truth tables to analyse the 'logically possible configurations of a given set of causal conditions' (Ragin, 2008, p. 9). One of its strengths is that it recognises that 'a given outcome may follow from several different combinations of causal conditions' (ibid p. 124). As Ciccia (2016, p. 5) notes, QCA is particularly useful for gender research as it can enable extending 'the geographical focus of comparative analysis by reassessing the validity of theories, concepts and indicators developed for the Western world to other regions'. Moreover, QCA is useful for identifying salient factors that contribute to variation in observed outcomes, which is useful for determining potential causes of high or low family gaps and providing insight into how family gaps between women and men in parliament might be reduced.

[8] Unless otherwise stated, data on MPs' number of children represent all MPs elected to parliament that year. For the following countries, data were obtainable for the following number of MPs (out of total MPs): Afghanistan 229/249, Tajikistan 59/63, Kyrgyzstan 117/120, Lithuania 139/141, French Polynesia 30/56, South Korea 262/299 and Switzerland 132/200.

Table 3. Female and male MPs' average number of children

Country and year	Female MPs' # of children	Male MPs' # of children	Child gap	*t*-test
Afghanistan 2010	4.29	6.25	−1.96***	0.001
Kyrgyzstan 2015	1.60	3.24	−1.64***	0.000
Tajikistan 2010	3.10	4.61	−1.51***	0.009
Armenia 2017	1.33	2.83	−1.50***	0.000
Kyrgyzstan 2010	1.89	3.22	−1.33***	0.000
Kazakhstan 2016	1.38	2.53	−1.15***	0.001
Armenia 2012	1.46	2.46	−1.00***	0.008
Lithuania 2016	1.36	2.20	−0.84***	0.000
Kazakhstan 2012	1.86	2.63	−0.77***	0.007
Estonia 2014	1.48	2.18	−0.70**	0.012
French Polynesia 2008	2.50	3.00	−0.50	0.201
South Korea 2016	1.53	1.94	−0.41***	0.007
Switzerland 2015	2.20	2.59	−0.39**	0.040
Iceland 2016	2.27	2.61	−0.34	0.153
Belarus 2016	1.47	1.68	−0.21*	0.077
Monaco 2013	2.00	2.21	−0.21	0.345
Liechtenstein 2017	2.00	1.55	+0.45**	0.024

Notes: Asterisks mark statistical significance via a two-sample unequal variance one-tailed t-test: ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.10$.

As the outcome of interest was each country's average difference in the number of children for men and women MPs (i.e. 'family gap') and since our hypotheses are based on graded concepts we used fsQCA using the fsQCA 3.0 software package (Ragin and Davey 2016). We calibrated seven potential causal conditions widely included in studies of women's representation, which we thought might be relevant determinants of gendered family gaps as well. First, we included the female share of parliamentary committee leaders (FLPC). Next, we included several markers of economic and political development including purchasing power parity per capita income (PCI), corruption as measured by the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and political freedom as measured by Freedom House (FH). We also included female labour force participation rate (FLPR) and child survival rate (CSR).[9]

The latter serves as a useful proxy for welfare state development of which public health and child-support programmes are key components. Finally, we included the share of young women (under 40 years of age) in parliament (YFMP) as a demographic measure which may (negatively) influence their numbers of children. The supplementary material for this article contains the raw data (Supplementary Table S1), calibration functions (Supplementary Table S2) and data sources (Supplementary Table S3) along with complex and parsimonious fsQCA solution formulas for high family gaps (Supplementary Table S4) and low family gaps (Supplementary Table S5)[10] as well as additional background information on the countries included in our study (Supplementary Table S6).

For high family gaps between WMPs and MMPs, the 'complex solution' (which identifies multiple coinciding causal conditions) indicates that low per capita income, low child survival rates and a low share of female parliamentary committee leaders all correspond with larger MP family gaps. Similarly, the 'parsimonious solution' (which identifies a single or small number of particularly salient causal conditions) revealed that countries with high family gaps had low child survival rates or few women among parliamentary committee leaders and either low affluence or high corruption.

These results generally support our theoretical hypotheses. First, both the complex and parsimonious solutions make clear that a lower share of parliamentary leadership positions held by women, lower levels of economic development and lower levels of child survival rates strongly correspond with higher MP

[9] This is measured as the child mortality rate subtracted from one.

[10] Solution formulas were obtained after removing all logical remainders and inconsistent rows (i.e. those with consistency below 0.75).

family gaps. This also lends some tentative support to our expectation that family gaps in parliament will be smaller in more gender-sensitive political institutions which are more likely to emerge when women hold a higher share of committee leadership positions. Similarly, these results reveal that lower levels of socio-economic development as indicated by high child mortality rates also coincide with larger family gaps.

The fsQCA solution formulas for low MP family gaps (i.e. 'outcome negation') were largely the inverse. The single parsimonious solution for low family gaps rested on a single causal condition—high child survival rates. The complex solutions involved either the combination of affluence, low corruption, political freedom, women's employment and child survival (i.e. Iceland, Estonia, Lithuania, South Korea and Switzerland) or high corruption, few young women in parliament, low affluence and low political freedom together with high women's employment, high child survival and many female leaders of parliamentary committees (Belarus). Here we found interesting divergence. Despite being a relatively corrupt and un-democratic middle-income country, Belarus has fairly high levels of (i) women's paid employment, (ii) women's leadership in parliament and (iii) child survival resulting in (or at least coinciding with) a low family gap between women and men in parliament. Thus, the case of Belarus represents an outlying and alternative path to low family gaps in parliament where gender-specific variables pertaining to employment and leadership have mattered more than general conditions of social, political and economic development such as affluence, political freedom and low corruption.

Another outlier in our sample was arguably Iceland, which featured no statistically significant child gap or marital gap between male and female parliamentarians. A likely contributing factor to this achievement is the structure of its universal welfare state which has fostered social citizenship by containing extensive public provisions including public day care for children. Iceland's parental leave policy pays three months each for the mother's leave, father's leave and shared parental leave thereby contributing to gender equality by incentivising both parents to take an active role in early parenting (Marinósdóttir and Erlingsdóttir, 2017). Iceland also has a relatively gender-sensitive parliament whereby if an MP needs to take a leave of absence due to maternity or paternity leave, a substitute (i.e. 'the next person on the electoral list') simply fills in for them, thus freeing up MPs to meet care responsibilities when the need arises (Palmieri, 2011, p. 94). Lastly, under its multi-party proportional representation electoral system, women comprise a fairly large minority (currently 38.1%) of Icelandic MPs despite there being no mandatory government gender quotas for parliamentary seats.[11]

Thus, countries following the path of either Iceland or Belarus might likewise be able to reduce gendered MP family gaps.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we found provisional support for our expectation that women in parliament are generally more likely to be unmarried, childless or have fewer children than men in parliament. This mirrors the findings of Bittner and Thomas (2017, p. 313) that 'women in politics are less likely to be mothers than men in politics are to be fathers'. Yet, at the same time, we also documented that family gaps are generally more severe in non-Western parliaments. Thus, the effect of lower labour costs (i.e. easier outsourcing of care) did not typically trump social and cultural obstacles against politicians who are mothers. Among Western industrialised countries, we also observed that some parliaments have smaller family gaps than others. Moreover, the lack of any significant family gap in Iceland tells us that it is possible in at least some contexts to eliminate such gaps.

While cross-sectional data have their limits, we have been able to significantly expand our empirical knowledge about MP family status and identify causal conditions present in cases of high and low parental gaps. Though all five proposed levels of analysis (individual, family, institutional, societal and global) may be important, our macro-oriented cross-national and cross-sectional research design focused primarily on two (parliamentary/institutional and societal) though we hope future studies will be able to

[11] Some Icelandic political parties require women to comprise 40% of candidate lists.

test the other three levels. Our fsQCA also revealed that, at societal and institutional levels, women's participation in paid employment, welfare state development and women's parliamentary leadership all play important roles in shaping MP family gaps. Our study also demonstrates that women who are (or plan to be) mothers in non-OECD parliaments may often need even greater help than their counterparts in more stable, affluent, Western societies.

To conclude, we suspect that changes in the institutional and societal-level factors examined here can contribute to closing gender gaps in two ways. First, at the societal level, feminist mobilisation and changing gender role perceptions along with greater levels of women's participation in the paid workforce and a more developed welfare state help to address supply-side issues of women's political representation by providing baseline conditions for more qualified women candidates. Both Western and non-Western countries can thus conceivably reduce these representation gaps through the adoption of social welfare programmes that better support care work for both men and women and by reducing inequalities in the gendered divisions of labour within the family unit. As more women enter parliament and gain positions of political influence, such as parliamentary committee leadership posts, they are likely to contribute to institutional reforms that make parliament more compatible with parenting. Secondly, parliaments as institutions can be transformed to become more gender sensitive and responsive to members' needs to give and receive care (Palmieri, 2011; Wängnerud, 2015; Childs, 2016; Thomas and Bittner, 2017). Such reforms would make serving in parliament compatible with women and men MPs who lead both traditional and non-traditional family lives, including those who are single parents or those caring for elderly parents or loved ones with special needs. By reforming parliamentary institutions and rules in ways that take care work into account rather than assuming such labour is handled by other members of MP's families could thus reduce one of the longest standing gendered barriers to representation in parliaments across the globe.

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