CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ARTICLE

Crisis and Gender in Legislative-Executive Relations

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The interaction of the legislative and executive is gendered in nature. Gender shapes what actors in these two institutions demand from each other. This pattern is visible, for instance, in the distinct policy priorities of women and men in parliament (e.g., Allen and Childs 2019; Bäck and Debus 2019; Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019) and in the ways that women engage and oversee related government initiatives. At the same time, gender influences the strengths and weaknesses that actors in the legislature and executive ascribe to each other and, hence, their mutual assessment. Members of parliament (MPs) and party gate-keepers, for instance, tend to favor men for the most influential and well-resourced portfolios, since they believe that masculine traits are necessary or suitable to succeed in governmental positions, and membership in men-dominated political networks remains an important route to qualify for minis-terial office (see, e.g., Annesley, Beckwith, and Franceschet 2019; Krook and O'Brien 2012). Change in these dynamics is scarce or occurs only gradually, meaning that the ways in which executive-legislative interactions are gendered are usually stable.

Crises reshape this pattern. Political actors demand urgent action either as a consequence of external shocks and/or when an existing condition transforms into a salient problem. These situations can disrupt, alter, and even replace basic political and social structures and norms (see, e.g., Strolovitch 2013, 2021) and hence transform political decision-making. When a problem is deemed to constitute a crisis, the demands placed on those involved in the political decision-making process change crucially. Pressure to act in a timely manner is even more pronounced than in normal times, and the lack of information, time constraints, and complexity leads to high levels of uncertainty (Rosenthal, Boin, and Comfort 2001, 6–7). This uncertainty disrupts the regular cooperation

between political actors in the legislature and executive and thus potentially changes the role of gender in this process. Focusing on parliamentary democracies, in this essay, we lay out a research agenda surrounding the question of *how crises change the way legislative-executive relations are gendered.*

Shedding light on how crises alter expectations about the capacity of both men and women to serve in parliament or government enhances our understanding of how prejudices against women characterize the interaction between the legislature and the executive. Thus, this contribution focuses on how the perceptions of MPs and MExs (members of the executive branch) influence their direct interaction, rather than how these actors take voters' aspirations into account (but see Davidson-Schmich, Jalazai, and Och's essay in this Critical Perspectives section). We present the idea that different categories of crises shape MPs' beliefs about the attributes of a good MExs and vice versa. "Act fast – give slack" crises (e.g., earthquakes) call for rapid decision-making by MExs and weak legislative oversight by MPs, thereby reaffirming ideas about men's more pronounced capabilities as politicians. By contrast, "transform together – build trust" crises (e.g., democratic backsliding) require fundamental changes to the political system and have the potential to positively influence views about women in politics (though see Reyes-Housholder, Saurez Cao, and Le Foulon in this section). We explain these patterns using theories of gender stereotypes and homosocial networks. Taking into consideration the type of event—and actors' specific expectations about effective crisis management strategies and how these expectations correspond to ideas about women in politics—shows how crises transform the role of gender in legislative-executive relations and opens up new avenues for future research.

Gendered Expectations and Legislative-Executive Relations: from Normal Times to Crisis

Legislative-executive relations illustrate how institutions and their interactions are gendered. Institutional rules and norms force executives to rely on the support and benevolence of the legislature to enact policies and efficiently organize state affairs (Strøm 2000). MExs require the support of MPs belonging to the same party (Norton 1993), and complex legislative processes provide room for MPs to influence government policies (Saalfeld 2014). When considering the likelihood of getting policy proposals successfully through parliament, ministers assess how much effort it takes to convince MPs to support the legislative initiative. During this process, MExs are likely to believe that men representatives are the more reliable allies. Theories of homosocial capital suggest that trust between group members is more pronounced than trust between members of different groups (Annesley, Beckwith, and Franceschet 2019). As most MExs are men, they should be more likely to trust men MPs. Given that these patterns are part of political socialization, powerful networks are likely to remain relatively closed to women.

The legislature also relies on the government as a trustworthy agent that takes care of state affairs in a reliable and competent manner. MPs expect MExs to display strong political leadership, including toughness and decisiveness—traits that are typically associated with masculine behavior. Thus, men are perceived to be better suited for leadership positions, especially for the most influential and resourceful ministerial posts. Additionally, men MPs tend to profit from membership in homosocial networks, since it allows them to informally discuss and influence actions of men in government. As a result, the relationship between the executive and legislature mirrors gender inequality in broader society, with both gender stereotypes and homosocial networks defining how men and women work within—as well as the interaction *between*—these institutions.

Crisis situations create stress for legislative-executive relations because they distort the equilibrium in place during normal times. Under pressure, different expectations become important for MExs and MPs when assessing the competency of their counterparts. MPs expect MExs to deal with the crisis in an appropriate manner and evaluate whether the minister has the necessary resources to address the emerging challenges. At the same time, MExs expect MPs to offer adequate support for their crisis management activities and make assessments about whether MPs have the skills helping them to navigate the crisis.

The expectations that crises create concerning the ideal reaction of actors in each institution change the gendered dimension of legislative-executive relations, as shown in Figure 1. Different crises categories shape MPs' expectations about the traits and skills that are desirable in an MEx, as well as MExs' beliefs about the characteristics that MPs should ideally possess to overcome the challenging situation. During crises categorized as "act fast – give slack", MExs need to react quickly, while MPs should be open to provide unquestioned support for executive decisions. In "transform together – build trust" types of crisis, MExs are supposed to develop new common ground, and MPs should establish trust for these actions among the broader public. Since these expected behavioral patterns are systematically linked to actors' gender, crises can reaffirm or transform beliefs about women's ability to be valuable players in the executive and in parliament.

Act Fast – Give Slack

In "act fast – give slack" crisis situations, MPs expect task-oriented, directive, or transactional leadership from ministers. A typical scenario is an external shock like a natural disaster. For instance, earthquakes are urgent situations in which leaders need to take decisions quickly. Many subordinates need to be coordinated, and responsibilities have to be clearly defined. However, similar pressure to act can emerge when an existing condition transforms into a salient problem, for example, in case of a financial crisis. Leaders have to choose from a set of possible solutions, and, to avoid deadlock, a direct leadership style is considered crucial. Moreover, the definition of clear goals and their accountability appears desirable. Since such behavior is typically associated with men
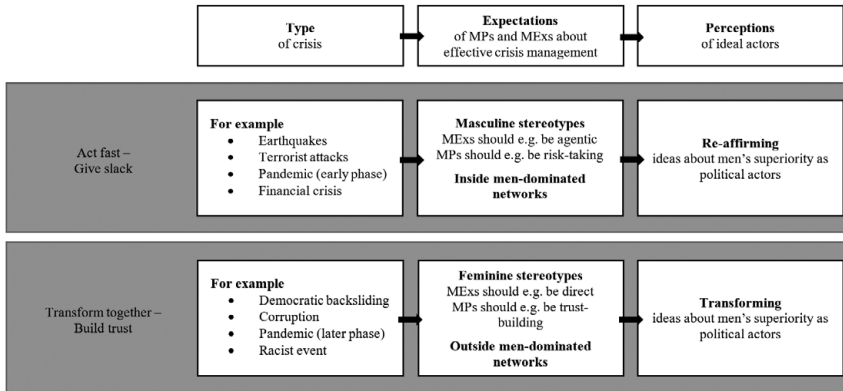
Figure 1. How crises shape the role of gender in legislative-executive relations.

(Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001), MPs perceive men ministers to be more suitable in addressing these types of crises.

Turning to expectations of the executive toward the legislature, during "act fast – give slack" crises, ministers should favor MPs who provide unquestioned support for their decisions. MPs' openness to limit formal and informal oversight because of time pressure allows executives to react in a fast manner. However, MPs must be willing to risk undesired action by the government if they give up their right to question all facets of the measures proposed by the government. An example of such a situation is the early phase of a pandemic, during which legislative oversight is set aside to allow the government to react quickly to changing crisis circumstances. During these crises, which demand more leeway for governments and lower levels of MPs' involvement, men are probably perceived as the more reliable allies in parliament. First, feminine traits of compromise orientation and consensus seeking make women less appreciated partners during crises that need reactive behavior, because ministers might believe they are more likely to insist that the parliament has a voice in the decision-making process. Second, women's absence from men-dominated high-trust networks makes women MPs less reliable allies for MExs who have to take risky decisions under time pressure. Overall, crises falling into this category lead actors to form additional expectations about the role of gender for the inter-action of legislative and executive and reaffirm ideas about men's superiority as agents and reliability as principals.

Transform Together – Build Trust

In "transform together – build trust" crisis situations, MPs favor an interpersonally oriented, participative, and transformational leadership style by MExs. "Transform together – build trust" crises can emerge if a preexisting problem in the political system becomes salient as a result of a critical event. The increasing salience of the issue for new groups of citizens puts political actors under pressure to act (see, e.g., Strolovitch 2021). A corruption scandal serves

as a good example, since leaders have to carefully rebuild interpersonal relations within the administration and transform existing structures in a way that prevents future abuse. A racism crisis triggered by the death of a minority group member after police violence is also a suitable illustration, because leaders have to credibly question the status quo and encourage all members of the police to commit to fighting discrimination. However, a relevant crisis can also emerge outside the political system. For instance, in a pandemic—a crisis caused by an external shock—protest against containment measurements (e.g., masking or vaccination mandates) can lead to large-scale protest movements. In this case, as a result of an external shock, a new protest group forms uniting a diverse set of citizens who do not agree with the political actors' risk assessment of the virus. In all these scenarios, the requirements concerning the leadership style match those stereotypically associated with women (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001), so MPs should perceive women to be the more promising executives during such times.

Moreover, "transform together – build trust" types of crises might lead MExs to expect MPs to be actively involved in dealing with the crisis, in particular by creating trust and legitimacy to government action or democracy more broadly. A typical example is an autocratic backlash, meaning a situation in which democratic institutions have to recover legitimacy. A later phase of a pandemic can be another typical case because the executive demands that the legislature help create confidence in policies oriented toward response and recovery once the crisis extends over a longer period. If regaining the trust of the population is one of the most urgent priorities of governments, women should be perceived as reliable partners by MExs. To begin with, MExs might count on women MPs to proactively engage in trust-building activities, since women are expected to be more community oriented and less selfish than men and to behave in morally correct ways (e.g., Braun et al. 2017; Eckel and Grossman 1998). Moreover, women tend to be excluded from powerful networks, and, by bringing in outsiders, MExs can signal political change to the public or MPs and hence recover trust. Consequently, crises belonging to this category have the potential to transform actors' expectations about women as legislators and members of the government.

In sum, we argue that executive-legislative relationships are gendered and that crises can reaffirm or transform ideas about men's superiority as political actors. "Act fast – give slack" crises (e.g., earthquakes) call for rapid decision-making and reaffirm ideas about men's more pronounced capabilities as politicians. "Transform together – build trust" crises (e.g., democratic backsliding) require fundamental changes in the policy-making process and have the potential to positively influence views about women as political actors.

Future Research

To enhance our understanding of the way legislative-executive relations are gendered, future research should take into consideration the type of crisis, the

expectations of effective solution strategies that a specific crisis creates for actors, and how these expectations align with stereotypically feminine and masculine traits as well as with membership in homosocial networks. When applying this framework, particular attention should be paid to the way contextual factors reinforce or mitigate the patterns outlined here. To begin with, the short-term effects of crises on the perception of women in politics are likely to be contingent on long-term changes in societal values. On the one hand, we observe growing support for gender equality in many countries around the world. On the other hand, backlash against women's increasing access to powerful positions materializes. Moreover, while in this essay, we concentrate on parliamentary democracies distinct dynamics could occur in presidential governing systems. The stronger focus on individual politicians and lower emphasis on party governance and government-opposition dynamics in presidential systems might create more transformational power of crisis in comparison to parliamentary systems in which cabinets are selected by parliamentary majorities.

Within similar governing systems, at the party level, the ideology of those in government and the parliamentary majority could be decisive since ideology influences the share of women in parties, as well as political actors' commitment to gender equality and women's inclusion into politics more broadly. The reinforcing effect of "act fast – give slack" crises on ideas about men's enhanced ability to govern might be more extensive in ideologically right-wing parties. By contrast, ideologically left-leaning parties might be more receptive to the way "transform together – build trust" crises promote the perception of women's equal political competencies. Taking these or related aspects into account, and outlining how they modify the extent to which crises shape the way legislative-executive relations are gendered, could add new perspectives to well-established patterns in the field of politics and gender.

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