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Gender Representation in Portuguese Local Governments

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Gender Representation in Portuguese Local Governments

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Doctor Miguel Ângelo Vilela Rodrigues
and
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I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration.

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Representação de Género nos Governos Locais Portugueses

Resumo

Em muitos países, incluindo Portugal, a representação feminina em órgãos eleitos é menor no nível de governo local do que nos níveis nacional e europeu. Assim, a presente tese é composta por três artigos que abordam diferentes aspetos da "Representação de Género nos Governos Locais Portugueses". O primeiro artigo investiga, com base no institucionalismo histórico e na teoria da difusão, os fatores que permitem às mulheres superar o teto de vidro na política local. Utilizando dados das eleições autárquicas de 2009, 2013, 2017 e 2021 e um modelo de regressão de dados em painel, os resultados indicam que partidos de esquerda que adotaram quotas voluntárias, experiência municipal com mulheres na presidência da câmara e contextos eleitorais competitivos aumentam a probabilidade de eleger mulheres para as câmaras municipais. Por sua vez, o segundo artigo avalia o impacto do género dos candidatos políticos nas decisões de voto dos eleitores, considerando simultaneamente o efeito desempenhado por outros atributos dos candidatos políticos. Com base numa experiência de escolha conjunta aplicada a 1.203 eleitores portugueses, os resultados confirmam que o género dos candidatos influencia as escolhas eleitorais. No entanto, e contrariamente às expectativas, os resultados revelam uma ligeira preferência dos eleitores por candidatas do sexo feminino. Análises adicionais revelam que essa preferência pró-feminina é impulsionada por eleitores do sexo feminino e por eleitores de esquerda. Por fim, o terceiro artigo baseia-se nos enquadramentos teóricos dos estereótipos de género e das atitudes políticas em relação ao género para explorar em maior detalhe os mecanismos por detrás das preferências eleitorais observadas no segundo artigo. Em particular, avalia se o viés dos eleitores em relação a candidatas do sexo feminino é moldado pela ideologia e/ou pelas atitudes dos eleitores face ao género. Estas hipóteses são testadas através de uma experiência baseada em vinhetas em eleições locais. Os resultados demonstram que as atitudes políticas dos eleitores em relação ao género influenciam o comportamento de voto, mais do que o alinhamento ideológico tradicional esquerda/direita. Especificamente, eleitores com atitudes progressistas tendem a apoiar candidatas do sexo feminino, enquanto os eleitores conservadores mostram resistência, preferindo candidatos do sexo masculino. Em conjunto, estes estudos aprofundam a compreensão das dinâmicas de género, destacando tanto os facilitadores estruturais como os preconceitos persistentes que moldam a representação das mulheres na política local portuguesa.

Palavras-chave: governos locais; Portugal; quotas de género; representação política das mulheres; viés dos eleitores.

Gender Representation in Portuguese Local Governments

Abstract

In many countries, including Portugal, female representation in elected bodies is lower at the local government level compared to national and European levels. Therefore, the present thesis comprises three articles addressing distinct aspects of "Gender Representation in Portuguese Local Governments". The first article investigates, through the lenses of historical institutionalism and contagion theory, the factors that help women break out of the glass ceiling trap at the local level. This study is based on a dataset from the last local elections (2009, 2013, 2017, and 2021) and uses a panel data regression to calculate the probabilities of electing more women to municipal councils. The results underline that left-wing parties that have adopted voluntary quotas, municipal experience with female mayors, and competitive environments increase the likelihood of electing more women. The second article, in turn, assesses the impact of candidates' gender on voters' decisions while simultaneously considering the effect of other attributes of political candidates. Based on a conjoint experiment on hypothetical local elections conducted with 1,203 Portuguese voters, the results confirm that candidates' gender influences electoral choices. However, contrary to expectations, the results reveal a slight preference for female candidates. This finding is particularly relevant given the persistent underrepresentation of women in Portuguese local politics. Further analyses reveal that female and left-leaning voters mainly drive this pro-female preference. Finally, the third article builds on the theoretical frameworks of gender stereotypes and political gender attitudes to further explore the mechanisms behind voter preferences observed in the second study. Specifically, it assesses whether voter bias toward female candidates is shaped by voters' political ideology and/or attitudes toward gender. These hypotheses are tested using a vignette experiment on local elections. The findings show that voters' political gender attitudes significantly influence voting behavior more than traditional left-right ideological alignments. Specifically, voters with progressive gender attitudes tend to support female candidates, while conservative voters show resistance, preferring male candidates. Together, these three studies deepen the understanding of gender dynamics, highlighting both structural facilitators and persistent biases that shape women's representation in elected office.

Keywords: gender quotas; local governments; Portugal; voter bias; women's political representation.

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List of Acronyms

AMCE Average Marginal Component Effect

BE Left Block

CDS-PP - Christian Democrat Party

CEICSH Ethics Committee for Research in Social and Human Sciences

EU European Union

MA Middle Ages

NUTS Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

OLS Ordinary Least Squares

PCP Portuguese Communist Party

PS Socialist Party

PSD Social Democratic Party

UK United Kingdom

UN United Nations

US United States

1. Introduction

1.1. Theme Definition and Relevance

While governments have traditionally been seen as male-dominated spaces, women are increasingly gaining access to political positions in modern democratic societies (Nyrup et al., 2024). This shift is driven by the need for democratic leaders, who are accountable to their electorates, to address growing demands for gender equality. Nevertheless, significant gender gaps in political participation persist worldwide (Barnes & Burchard, 2013; Robinson & Gottlieb, 2021). As of 2024, women accounted for slightly more than one-quarter of legislators globally[1]. These disparities not only raise normative concerns but also hinder the full realization of women's political potential (Clayton et al., 2019). Therefore, the present doctoral thesis is titled "Gender Representation in Portuguese Local Governments".

Portugal was chosen as the focus of this study because, even though women have long outnumbered men in the country, their political representation has historically been significantly lower. As illustrated in Figure 1, women comprised approximately 52.3% of the Portuguese population in 1976 but held only 5.7% of the seats in the national Parliament (Assembly of the Republic). Nearly fifty years later, in 2022, while the share of the population remained the same (52.3%), their representation in Parliament had increased to around 37%. Although this is a significant improvement, there is still a long way to go before achieving a 50/50 gender balance, and, according to Schwindt-Bayer (2006), women's underrepresentation can be potentially harmful, as it risks neglecting certain interests, creating a bias in the content of political debate.

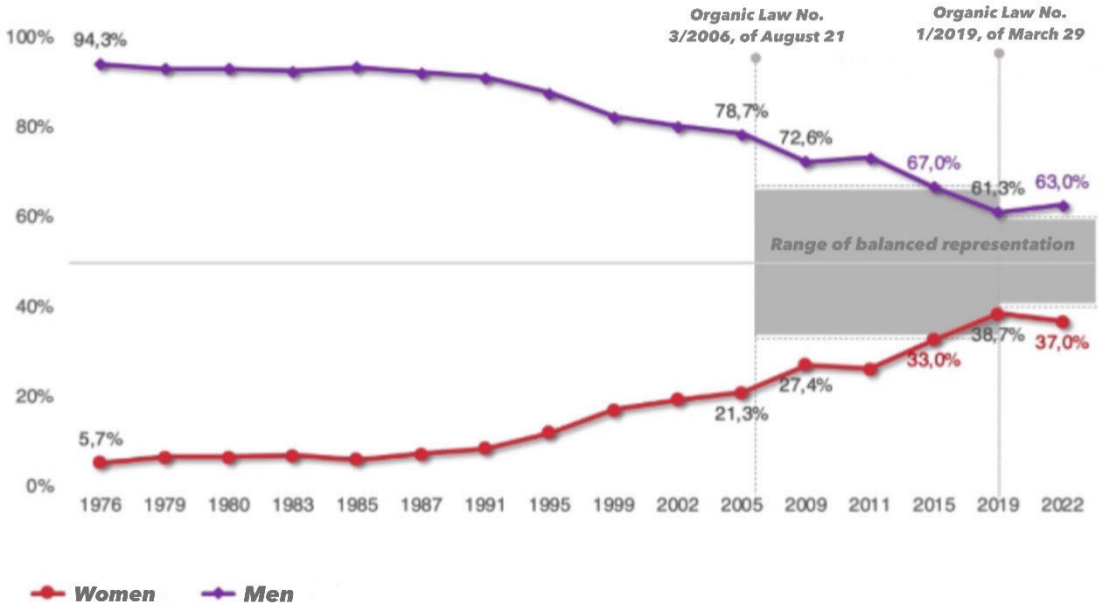
Aware of female underrepresentation in elected public offices, the Portuguese national Parliament adopted a gender quota law in 2006, the so-called Parity Law (Organic Law, No. 3/2006, of August 21). According to this law, all candidate lists submitted for elections to the Assembly of the Republic, the European Parliament, and local authorities should be composed in order to promote parity between men and women (Article 1). Parity is defined as a minimum representation of 33,3% of each sex on candidate lists (Article 2, Paragraph 1), with no more than two candidates of the same sex appearing consecutively on the lists (Article 2, Paragraph 2). Non-compliant lists are subject to the following penalties (Article 4): a) public display of the lists indicating their non-compliance with the law; b) posting of the list's non-

[1] See the data on Inter-Parliamentary Union: https://data.ipu.org/women-averages/?date_month=12&date_year=2023.

compliance status on the website of the National Elections Commission; and c) reduction in public subsidies for electoral campaigns.

In 2019, the quota was raised to 40% (Organic Law, No. 1/2019, of March 29), signaling a more substantial commitment to gender equality in Portugal. In addition, lists that do not comply with the law are now rejected.

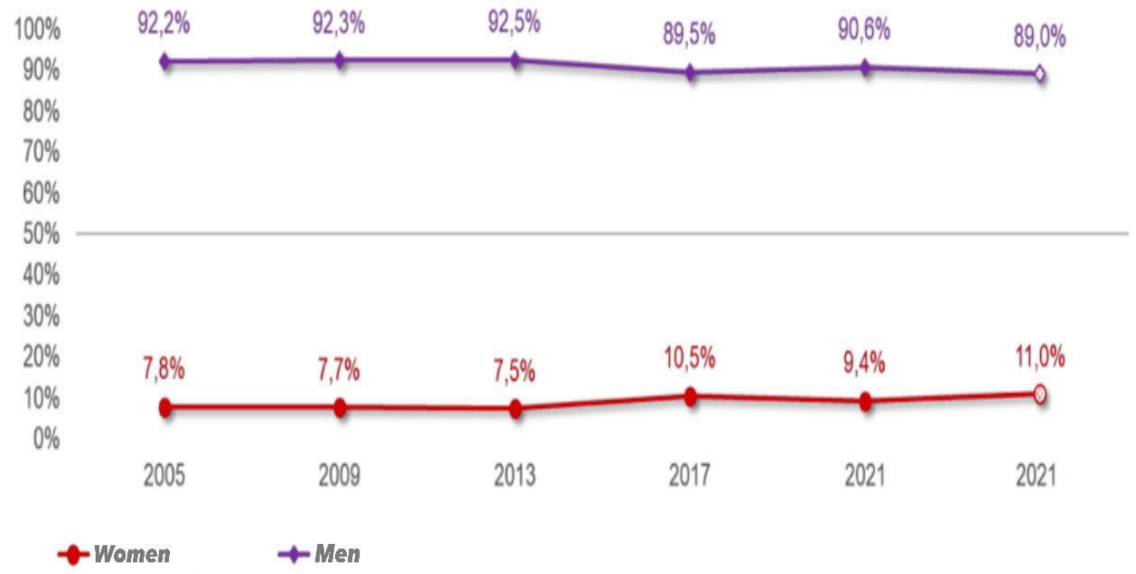
Figure 1: Evolution of the Participation of Men and Women in the National Parliament 1976–2022 (%)



Source: Adapted from *Igualdade de Género em Portugal: Boletim Estatístico 2023* (p. 86), by Comissão para a Cidadania e a Igualdade de Género (CIG), https://www.cig.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/BE2023poder.pdf.

Although the Parity Law targets party lists, its ultimate goal is to achieve effective parity by increasing the number of women elected. However, its impact has varied across different levels of government. While European-level elections have yielded the most positive outcomes for women, in local elections, women have seen the greatest challenges in achieving gender parity. Particularly, municipal elections continue to pose significant barriers to women attaining key positions, such as executive roles and presidencies (see Santos et al., 2018; Rodrigues, 2023). As illustrated in Figure 2, the proportion of female mayors has increased only marginally, from 7.8% in 2005 to just 11% in 2021. Considering these persistent disparities, this research focuses on Portuguese local governments.

Figure 2: Evolution of the Proportion of Men and Women Elected as Mayors (%)



Source: Adapted from *Igualdade de Género em Portugal: Boletim Estatístico 2023* (p. 90), by Comissão para a Cidadania e a Igualdade de Género (CIG), https://www.cig.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/BE2023poder.pdf.

Given that the most direct interactions between citizens and the government occur at the local government level (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2012), investigating the facilitators and barriers to women's political representation in local politics becomes even more relevant. By examining these factors, this research enhances our understanding of gender dynamics within local political institutions, offering insights not only for the Portuguese context but also for broader discussions on gender and governance. Ultimately, studying Gender Representation in Portuguese Local Governments is important for informing policies and interventions that promote gender equality, contributing to a more balanced and democratic political landscape.

1.2. Objectives and Research Questions

The underrepresentation of women in elected bodies remains a persistent issue, particularly at the local government level, where progress has been slower compared to national and European levels (see Henig & Henig, 2001; Eder et al., 2016). This is a general trend in democratic societies, including Portugal. The literature identifies two main reasons for women's political underrepresentation: party bias and voter bias. In Portugal, the Parity Law has compelled parties to include more women on candidate lists, reducing the role of party bias in candidate selection. Given this context, this thesis, through its three articles, aims to contribute to the understanding of "Gender Representation in Portuguese Local Governments" by exploring both the facilitators of female political representation (Article 1) and the barriers women continue

to face, particularly voter bias (Articles 2 and 3). This section introduces these three articles, summarizing their objectives and research questions.

Article 1: A Step Forward to Gender Equality: Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling at Local Level

The persistent female underrepresentation at the Portuguese local government level led Rodrigues (2023) to analyze data from municipal elections before and after the adoption of the Parity Law. The author found evidence that the quota regulation increased the number of women in office immediately after its implementation but later contributed to the formation of a glass ceiling around the legal threshold in Portuguese municipalities. Therefore, the first article examines the factors that can positively influence female representation in Portuguese municipal councils, contributing to the "breaking of the glass ceiling" for women. The central research question is: *What factors contribute to women breaking out of the glass ceiling trap in municipal councils?* To answer this question, the study draws upon two theoretical frameworks: historical institutionalism, which considers the historical development of institutions, and contagion theory, which explores how specific characteristics spread within political contexts. Using a dataset derived from the most recent local elections in Portugal (2009, 2013, 2017, and 2021), a panel data regression model is applied to calculate the probabilities of electing more women to the 308 municipal councils.

Article 2: The Value of Gender: Candidate Attributes and Voter Preferences in a Conjoint Experiment

While institutional factors influence female political representation, voter preferences for candidates' personal attributes, like gender, also play a crucial role in shaping electoral outcomes. In this regard, gender stereotypes may lead voters to perceive female candidates as lacking the necessary skills, attributes, or policy interests to be viable leaders (Fox & Smith, 1998; Lawless, 2004). Therefore, this second article examines whether Portuguese voters rely on candidates' gender when making electoral choices despite having information about other candidate attributes; in addition, it examines whether voter bias towards female candidates contributes to the persistent underrepresentation of women in Portuguese local politics. Specifically, the article seeks to answer two research questions: *(1) Does candidate gender influence voter decision-making, even when other candidate attributes are revealed? (2) Do voters exhibit a preference for male over female candidates?* To answer these questions, the study employs a choice-based conjoint experiment in hypothetical local elections with a representative sample of 1,203 Portuguese voters. By asking respondents to choose between two hypothetical mayoral candidates with

randomly assigned characteristics (gender, age, education, marital status, number of children, local ties, political experience, and ideology), the study isolates the effect of gender on voting decisions and compares its relative impact to that of other candidate attributes frequently present in real elections. This method clarifies whether voters rely on candidates' gender when making their electoral choices or whether other factors, such as the candidates' political experience or local ties, play a more significant role.

Article 3: Are Portuguese Voters Biased toward Women? The Role of Ideology vs. Political Gender Attitudes in a Vignette Experiment

The third and final article builds on the second one. It investigates whether voter bias contributes to the underrepresentation of women in Portuguese local politics and goes further by examining whether this bias is influenced by voters' political ideology and/or their attitudes toward gender in politics. Specifically, the article seeks to answer the following research questions: *(1) Are Portuguese voters biased toward female candidates? (2) Is this bias primarily driven by voters' political ideology (left vs. right) and/or their attitudes toward gender (progressive vs. conservative)?* While previous research has extensively explored these questions in the United States (US), there is limited understanding of how these factors operate in the European context, particularly in Portugal. Therefore, this study conducts a vignette-based survey experiment with over 1,000 Portuguese respondents to provide empirical evidence on the relative influence of ideology and political gender attitudes on voter preferences. By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms underlying women's political underrepresentation, offering insights for policy design and electoral strategies aimed at promoting gender equality in elected office.

In summary, while each article explores different aspects of gender representation in Portuguese local governments, collectively, they offer a comprehensive analysis of gender diversity dynamics in Portuguese local governance.

1.3. Organization

This thesis is structured as follows: After the introductory chapter (Chapter 1), which defines the research theme and its relevance, presents the main objectives and research questions, and outlines the organization of the thesis, Chapter 2 provides a general literature review on the topic under study. This chapter explores four key areas: Gender, Women's Political (Under)Representation, Approaches to

Address Women's Underrepresentation, and The Role of Women in Portugal: A Historical Perspective. Chapter 3, then, marks the beginning of the core research component of the thesis, presenting the first article, "A Step Forward to Gender Equality: Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling at the Local Level". Chapter 4 follows with the second article, "The Value of Gender: Candidate Attributes and Voter Preferences in a Conjoint Experiment". Subsequently, Chapter 5 presents the third article, "Are Portuguese Voters Biased toward Women? The Role of Ideology vs. Political Gender Attitudes in a Vignette Experiment". Finally, Chapter 6 presents the overall conclusion of the thesis, integrating the findings of the three articles, providing policy recommendations, and discussing directions for future research.

2. General Literature Review

2.1. Gender

This doctoral thesis examines Gender Representation in Portuguese Local Governments. To lay the groundwork for this topic, it is essential first to clarify the concept of gender. The terms "gender" and "sex" are often used interchangeably, although they refer to different ideas. The distinction between them became more pronounced after the 1995 Beijing Conference, where "gender" was introduced as a framework for analyzing how biological differences shape social dynamics. Therefore, while "sex" refers to biological and anatomical distinctions, "gender" is more accurately understood as a social, cultural, and political construct, which we will explore in greater detail below.

2.1.1. Meaning of Gender

Sex and gender are both fundamental components of personhood that are relevant to understanding human behavior. Nevertheless, sex refers to the chromosomal pattern that differentiates humans based on their reproductive functioning, often identified by outward features at birth (Schneider & Bos, 2019), while gender refers to the social aspects attributed to sex (Gatens, 1983; Lips, 2020). Common phrases like "soccer or politics are not for women" or "housework is a woman's responsibility" reveal underlying gender assumptions. These statements reflect social constructions of gender because if "being a woman" were defined solely by biological and anatomical characteristics, there would be no rationale for assigning specific activities or roles to women. Therefore, gender encompasses the roles, functions, and behaviors society expects from individuals based on their sex. Additionally, gender carries cultural significance and is one of society's primary categorization systems (Fiske, 1998; Glick & Fiske, 1999).

Research demonstrates that individuals unconsciously categorize others during interactions (Brewer & Lui, 1989; Stangor et al., 1992). According to Simmel (1950): “the first condition of having to deal with somebody ... is to know with whom one has to deal” (p. 307). Similarly, Mead (1934) argues that actors must categorize each other in terms of their relative roles so that the interaction can proceed. Allport (1954) further asserts that categorizing others is an ordinary and necessary process for creating meaning and order in social interactions. Sociological analyses of gender, however, emphasize the pivotal role that categorization plays in both creating and perpetuating gender inequality (Bielby, 2000). Social categorization is seen as a fundamental cause of discrimination, mainly because bias based on categories like gender or race would not exist if people did not routinely categorize others based on these dimensions.

Gender is not only a social construct deeply rooted in cultural and social relations, influencing the roles assigned to men and women, but also a politically significant category and a process through which researchers can analyze how institutions and structures are themselves gendered and have differential implications for women and for men (Beckwith, 2005).

2.1.2. Gender Discrimination Against Women

A historical analysis of the development of gender discrimination provides insight into the social dynamics and prejudices that have targeted various groups, including women. Indeed, different historical periods have established their own social, cultural, and behavioral "norms", often leading to the exclusion and marginalization of individuals who did not conform to these standards (Casarino et al., 2014). For instance, during wartime, physical strength was highly valued, leading to the marginalization of individuals who were physically disabled, as well as older people, children, and women.

Another historical example of discrimination can be found in Ancient Greece, where the Polis was essentially a "men's club". In the city-states, women were excluded from political rights and social standing (Ishay, 2022). Only men were allowed to participate in the citizens' assembly and make decisions that affected the community. Additionally, all civil servants and court jurors were men (Cartledge, 2002). In Ancient Greece, the undervaluation of women was also evident in the arts and philosophy. In art, women were frequently depicted as engaged in domestic tasks. In philosophy, Thales of Miletus expressed his views as follows: *"There are three attributes for which I am grateful to Fortune: that I was born, first, human and not animal; second, man and not woman; and third, Greek and not barbarian"* (Cartledge, 2002, p. 290). Thales' statement highlights not only the preference for men over women but also the discrimination against foreigners.

The Middle Ages (MA) was also marked by discrimination. During this period, those who did not conform to the standards imposed by the Catholic Church were seen as enemies. Men, primarily clergy, tended to regard the opposite sex with open hostility, as women were considered depraved and treacherous daughters of Eve (Brault, 1975). The MA was also marked by the Inquisition, one of the most significant examples of social segregation, in which women were often the most severely punished.

As can be seen, men remained at the center of power over the years. To address this imbalance, many women fought for rights. During the Modern Era, despite the French Revolution (1789–1799)

advocating freedom and equality, women did not benefit equally. Olympe de Gouges[2] addressed this discrepancy in the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen: *"Woman, wake up; the tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe; discover your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies (...). Oh, women, women! When will you cease to be blind? What advantage have you received from the Revolution?"* (Gouges, 1791, p. 92).

The 19th and 20th centuries saw significant contributions from several women activists. In New Zealand, Kate Sheppard led the movement that secured women's right to vote in 1893. In Britain, Emmeline Pankhurst was the prominent leader of the Suffragist Movement and the founder of the Women's Social and Political Union (1903), advocating for women's voting rights. In the U.S., Rosa Parks became a symbol of the civil rights movement when she refused to give up her seat on a bus in protest of racial segregation in 1955. In France, Simone Veil, as Minister of Health in 1974, championed the bill that decriminalized abortion. She later became the first female President of the European Parliament in 1979.

In Portugal, despite the political turbulence experienced in the 19th century, a group of women stood out: Queen Maria II in politics, Antónia Ferreira (Ferreirinha) in business, and Luísa Holstein in philanthropy and the arts. In the 20th century, Carolina Beatriz Ângelo was the first woman to vote (1911), and Maria de Lourdes Pintassilgo became the first and, to date, only female Prime Minister[3] (1979). Natalia Correia and Sophia de Mello Breyner were parliamentarians and writers, and Ruth Garcês was the first female judge, among other notable examples. Despite the significant advances made by these and many other women, discrimination against women still exists, however, in a more subtle and masked way. Currently, the most frequent discrimination against women is related to the labor market, more precisely to the lowest wages compared to men and to the difficulty of accessing specific careers (such as sports, defense, or politics), as well as top positions in private companies and public institutions (Rincón et al., 2017).

[2] Olympe de Gouges, the pseudonym of Marie Gouze (Montauban, May 7, 1748 - Paris, November 3, 1793), was an important French playwright, political activist, and feminist.

[3] Maria de Lourdes Pintassilgo was the second woman prime minister in Europe, two months after Margaret Thatcher took office in the United Kingdom (UK).

2.1.3. The Beijing Conference (1995)

The United Nations (UN) has played a pivotal role in promoting women's rights, with world conferences on women serving as milestones in this process. Of these conferences, the Fourth UN Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, in 1995, stands out as the most significant, not only due to the number of participants it gathered but also because of the substantial progress it fostered and its enduring impact on advancing the status of women worldwide.

Entitled "Action for Equality, Development, and Peace", the Beijing Conference of 1995 was attended by over 17,000 individuals from 189 countries. It was based on assessing the progress made since the previous conferences (Nairobi - 1985; Copenhagen - 1980; and Mexico - 1975) and analyzing the obstacles that must be overcome for women to exercise their rights and achieve their full potential. During this conference, a declaration was unanimously approved, establishing the fundamental principles of political action in the field of gender equality (Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality, 2013). This declaration introduced a new way of approaching equality policies, elevating gender equality to the international agenda as a matter of universal concern and reaffirming that women's rights are, in fact, human rights. The declaration has also played a crucial role in mobilizing governments, civil society organizations, and individuals to work towards achieving gender equality goals (Gondal et al., 2023).

The Beijing Conference was further distinguished by approving a comprehensive action platform, the Beijing Platform for Action, which outlines strategies and pathways for change. Specifically, this platform sets out commitments for action in 12 critical areas on the rights of women and girls, namely: poverty; education and training; health; violence; armed conflict; economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights; media; environment; and the girl child. According to UN-Women (2014), each of these critical areas is accompanied by strategic objectives and a detailed catalog of actions to be taken by governments and other stakeholders at the national, regional, and international levels. The Beijing Platform for Action has also introduced three innovations with transformative potential in advancing women's rights: the concept of gender, the notion of empowerment, and the idea of gender mainstreaming. The concept of gender allowed for a shift from a biologically based analysis of women's situations to one that considers socially and culturally determined patterns. In turn, the empowerment of women, one of the central objectives of the platform, underscores the importance of women gaining control over their development, with support from governments and societies in this process. Lastly, gender mainstreaming seeks to reorganize political processes so that the gender perspective becomes part of public policies in all spheres of government action (Quinn, 2013).

In short, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 are crucial tools for women's empowerment. They represent the most comprehensive global policy framework for promoting gender equality (UN-Women, 2014). Their provisions align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal Number 5 - achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls - and the 2030 Agenda. Achieving gender equality by 2030 requires urgent action to eliminate the root causes of discrimination that continue to restrict women's rights. For this reason, the 2030 Agenda considers gender equality both as a standalone goal and a cross-cutting issue (Odera & Mulusa, 2020).

2.2. Women's Political (Under)Representation

So far, we have clarified the concept of gender, addressed some issues related to gender discrimination throughout history, and highlighted the relevance of the Beijing Conference in promoting women's rights. Our focus now shifts to the specific context of discrimination against women in politics. While some Nordic countries (e.g., Sweden and Finland), as well as few nations in the Americas (e.g., Mexico and Bolivia) and Africa (e.g., South Africa), exhibit relatively high levels of women's representation in national parliaments, many other countries around the world show significantly lower levels of female representation[4]. The literature has explored some explanations for this gender disparity. In this section, we will present three of them. However, before delving into these explanations, it is important to clarify the concept of political representation and distinguish its main dimensions: formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic.

2.2.1. Conceptualization

The concept of representation is neither vague nor simplistic. Instead, it is a unique and complex concept that has maintained its core meaning over time. According to Pitkin (1967), the term "representation" can be applied in various contexts and generally means "*making present in some sense of something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact*" (pp. 8-9). Building on Pitkin (1967), we can identify four distinct but interconnected dimensions of representation: formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic.

First, *formal* representation refers to the rules that structure political representation, including selecting representatives. This involves a binding agreement between the representative and the

[4] See more at: https://www.ipu.org/national-parliaments.

represented, delineating the scope and duration of their relationship. This agreement gives the representative the right to represent (authorization) and the obligation to be accountable for their actions (accountability). Elections are one possibility for appointing representatives (Arnesen & Peters, 2018). Some authors found evidence that elected representatives may be better for citizens' well-being than those randomly selected (see Corazzini et al., 2014).

Second, *descriptive* (or mirror) representation concerns the extent to which representatives reflect the characteristics of the represented, for instance, in terms of race, ethnicity, or gender (Fowler et al., 2014). According to this perspective, an elected body should mirror society, with representative spaces functioning as microcosms of the population. The problem is that, like a map or a mirror, a representative cannot perfectly reflect the entire group they represent. Nevertheless, Pitkin (1967) argues that the central argument favoring descriptive representation is the representative's ability to provide information about those who are not present.

Third, *substantive* representation is "acting in the interests of the represented in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin, 1967, p. 209). This dimension, also known as policy responsiveness, involves representatives enacting laws and implementing policies that address the needs or demands of their constituents (Eulau & Karps, 1977). Therefore, substantive representation focuses more on action than on the characteristics of the representatives.

Finally, *symbolic* representation focuses on how representatives are perceived and evaluated by those they represent (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005). It pertains to the sense of being represented and is linked to emotional and affective public opinions.

According to Pitkin (1967), these dimensions of representation are interrelated and cannot be fully separated. To be truly representative, an institution must achieve a minimum standard across all dimensions. On this subject, there is an intense debate about the importance of descriptive and substantive representation. Some scholars argue against the primacy of descriptive representation, emphasizing that the actions and policies adopted by representatives are more important than their personal characteristics[5]. Conversely, other scholars contend that descriptive representation is crucial for representing excluded groups. They argue that, given the social identity-based exclusion from politics, descriptive representation ensures that all societal members are represented (Meier, 2000a), thereby

[5] The argument is that the physical presence of members of specific social groups is not considered sufficient for representing the interests of those groups.

enhancing democratic legitimacy. In addition, Phillips (1995) and, more recently, Devroe (2019) suggest that descriptive representation facilitates substantive representation by providing representatives with the necessary expertise and experience to advocate for their social group's interests when required. According to Mansbridge (1999), in contexts of group mistrust and uncrystallized interests, the enhanced communication and experiential knowledge of descriptive representatives enhance substantive representation of the group's interests by improving the quality of deliberation. Additionally, descriptive representatives contribute to the emancipation of their social group and signal to society that the perspectives of that group matter (Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 1995; Young, 2002).

Women, having a distinct position and a shared set of problems that characterize a particular interest (Sapiro, 1981a), make their presence in the political arena of great importance. Thus, several measures have been taken in recent years to address the problem of women's political underrepresentation. The introduction of gender quota regulations, for instance, aims to increase the descriptive representation of women in elected public office. Before delving deeper into gender quotas, it is essential to focus on the various factors that hinder women from being elected.

2.2.2. Key Factors Contributing to Women's Political Underrepresentation

According to Ono and Endo (2024), women face gender bias at each of the three stages of the political recruitment process: self-selection to run as a candidate, nomination by political parties, and selection as representatives by voters. Here, we review how gender bias may manifest at each stage of the political recruitment process in order to understand why there is a significant gender gap in political representation.

2.2.2.1 Lack of Political Ambition to Run

The initial phase of the political recruitment process occurs when citizens choose to run for office. In a representative democracy, elections rely on voluntary candidates stepping forward to compete. However, there is a significant gender gap in the willingness of individuals to run, with women being less likely than men to pursue candidacies (Lawless & Fox, 2010).

Kanthak and Woon (2015) examined gender disparities in the emergence of electoral candidates by conducting an experiment. Their study involved 350 participants from the University of Pittsburgh. Each experimental session included 20 participants, evenly split between men and women. The researchers manipulated two aspects of the electoral environment: the election's competitiveness and

the opponent's strength. In one scenario, participants were informed that they would be randomly chosen to represent their group in a legislative body. In another scenario, they were told they would need to compete against another group member in an election. The results show that male and female participants were equally likely to volunteer when representatives were selected randomly. However, when representatives were chosen through an election, women showed a lower likelihood of volunteering as candidates than men. Specifically, women demonstrated less interest in running for office if they perceived their opponents as strong or anticipated an aggressive campaign. They also exhibited reduced interest when they expected scrutiny or criticism from the media or voters regarding personal characteristics such as gender or appearance. Finally, women showed less interest in running when they faced the prospect of sacrificing their personal lives.

As understood, the results indicate that women are averse to elections because they are more concerned about the potential negative consequences of seeking political office. While methods to overcome this gap have been mentioned, such as the presence of female role models (see Foos & Gilardi, 2020), their effectiveness is limited and not yet fully understood (Ono & Endo, 2024).

2.2.2.2. Party Bias

The "party bias" theory posits that parties believe that female candidates are unsuitable for political office and, therefore, tend to adopt strategies that favor male candidates, such as placing them in more desirable seats, ranking them higher on closed lists, or assigning them to less competitive electoral districts (Fréchette et al., 2008). On this topic, Fox and Lawless (2004) and Kenney (1996) argue that political parties employ an asymmetric approach in distributing privileges between men and women and adopt practices that discourage women's participation. These practices may include downplaying women's contributions by placing a higher value on similar contributions made by men or assigning women to routine or simplistic tasks, such as preparing minutes or monitoring the implementation of decisions, while leaving the real decision-making to men. As a result, many women, feeling their contributions are undervalued (or at least less valued than men's), eventually withdraw from participating in political parties.

Some authors further suggest that political parties fail to account for women's specific needs, particularly the reduced time availability due to the unequal distribution of household and family responsibilities. According to Verge and Fuente (2014), participation in political party activities, such as election campaigns, events, or meetings (especially informal meetings that often take place in the

evening), can lead women to feel guilty about time spent on party duties at the expense of family time, a concern less common among men. Therefore, many women avoid taking up roles in political parties and may even decide not to run as candidates.

Numerous scholars have examined the relationship between party recruiters and potential female candidates, concluding that party bias is a key explanation for the shortage of female candidates in politics (e.g., Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Niven, 1998; 2006). According to Gendźwiłł and Żółtak (2020), when parties (the demand side) reach the critical moment of ranking their candidates (the supply side), the perceptions of male party elites lead to gendered outcomes. They argue that parties exclude women from the distribution of rewards, use informal criteria to favor men over women, and often place women in unwinnable positions when considering a female candidacy. The demand side seems to be shaping the supply to its advantage (Verge, 2010).

Niven (1998) explored the foundations of this bias, presenting two key arguments: the Outgroup Effect and the Distribution Effect. According to the Outgroup Effect, party elites, being primarily male, tend to assume all female candidates as an outgroup. Thus, and mainly when the party leader is a man, it is expected that potential female candidates will be seen as an external group in which the standard assumption is that a woman is less politically capable than a man. In this sense, the Outgroup Effect limits the ability to recognize a specific woman as qualified and capable because the general notion is that all are incapable. As Judd and Park (1988) refer, the members of the external group are often grouped in a person's mind so that the quality associated with the group is associated with all individual members. This general assumption impacts recruitment, as party recruiters, when confronted with a woman aspiring to run for office, may actively discourage her candidacy. Dubeck (1976) suggests that female candidates may suffer the Outgroup Effect. He found that young and less experienced men were encouraged by recruiters to run for office, while women with extensive party experience and solid training were only accepted as candidates. Margolis (1979) came to similar conclusions in local government.

The Distribution Effect, on the other hand, assumes that prejudice against women is rooted in the unequal distribution of work roles (Niven, 1998). High-status jobs tend to be allocated to men, giving them a political advantage since party elites often combine job status with political capacity. In other words, a marketplace that reflects a distribution of high-status jobs favoring men increases their political capital and chances of being elected. Another aspect of the Distribution Effect is the salience of the numerically rare. This means that when a woman occupies a position in a male-dominated field, the incongruity raises doubts about her appropriateness for the role (Eagly et al., 1992).

2.2.2.3. Voter Bias

One significant factor contributing to women's political underrepresentation is “voter bias”, which refers to the tendency of voters to prefer male candidates over female ones (De Paola et al., 2014; Giger et al., 2014; Wolak, 2015). Voter bias is rooted in Gender Socialization Theory (Fox & Lawless, 2004), which suggests that men and women are perceived as inherently different and, as a result, play distinct roles in society. Men are often associated with important public jobs that help them build social networks and provide opportunities to run for office. In contrast, women are associated with family responsibilities and less politically active roles (Verge & Fuente, 2014). Consequently, women are expected to perform more domestic tasks and take family obligations more seriously than men. In other words, the idea behind voter bias is that voters associate a candidate's gender with their perceived skills, abilities, and likelihood of success. For instance, Kahn (1996) and Devroe (2019) demonstrate that voters often assume men are more qualified than women, which may explain the lower presence of women in office. Moreover, Major (1993) points out that not only men dismiss female candidates. Women themselves tend to underestimate the merit and performance of female candidates.

Public opinion surveys have revealed significant voter bias against women candidates over the years. The National Election Studies and the National Opinion Research Center General Social Survey posed a key question: "If your party nominated a woman for president, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?" As late as the mid-1970s, nearly 20% of both men and women stated they would not be willing to vote for a female presidential candidate (Ferree, 1974; Schreiber, 1978).

To move beyond mass survey data, several experimental surveys have been conducted to assess voter bias. Most of these experiments involve presenting a male and a female political candidate to students and then asking them to rank the candidates across a series of measures. For example, Sapiro (1981b), who published one of the first experimental studies on voter perceptions of candidate gender, presented a brief portion of a campaign speech by a U.S. House of Representatives candidate to two introductory political science classes. A questionnaire followed the speech. Two questionnaire versions were randomly distributed in both classes: one identified the candidate as John Leeds (a male candidate), and the other identified the candidate as Joan Leeds (a female candidate). The results suggest that respondents showed no evidence of differential evaluation regarding voting intentions. However, they did distinguish between John and Joan by attributing greater chances of success to John. According to Sapiro (1981b), these results may reflect respondents' biases or their awareness that women are less likely to achieve political office as often or as easily as men. The results also indicate that the female candidate

was perceived as more competent in improving education, dealing with health issues, and maintaining honesty in government. In contrast, the male candidate was considered more skilled in handling military matters. Leeper (1991) found similar results in a related study. In this case, voters attributed stereotypical female traits to women, such as being more honest and better at assisting people experiencing poverty, improving education, and dealing with health concerns. In neither of these experiments did the students exhibit bias in their voting decisions. However, both found that participants were likelier to believe that the male candidate would win the election.

In contrast to these studies, Fox and Smith (1998), in a dual sample of Wyoming and California college students, found that bias against women candidates was a determining factor in voting choice, but only in the case of Wyoming. So, Fox and Smith (1998) draw attention to the importance of regional differences in assessing voter bias. In this regard, Giger et al. (2014) demonstrated that the size of a district affects voters' preferences between male and female candidates. Specifically, they found that in smaller districts, men predominantly support male candidates (with 4 out of 5 men voting for male candidates), while women support female candidates only about half the time. In larger districts, however, the voting behavior of men and women becomes more similar, with both genders having a 65% probability of voting for candidates of their sex.

Wolak (2015) used a web-based experiment to investigate whether there is a psychological effect of the candidates' gender on voters' desire to vote. In the experiment, participants were asked to read a newspaper article about a special election contest for an open congressional seat in Pennsylvania. Participants read one of four versions: a race between two male candidates, two female candidates, a male Democrat and a female Republican, or a male Republican and a female Democrat. The only differences between the stimuli concerned the candidates' gender because the substantive details of the candidates and the campaign were held constant. The article described the candidates' backgrounds and positions on three significant issues: economy, education, and energy. After reading the article, the participants were directed to a questionnaire about their likelihood of voting in this election. The results suggest gender differences in people’s propensity to vote. Women were just as likely to say they would vote in this election when both candidates were male or female. However, among men, the increase in the number of women candidates was associated with a lower propensity to vote. When both candidates in the race were described as men, 62% of male respondents said they were very likely to vote in this election, but when both candidates were described as female, only 46% of male respondents said they were very likely to vote. On the question of voting choice, the results suggest that when both candidates

were male, men were 28% likely to say they were undecided about the choice of vote. When the party's candidate was a woman, the likelihood of being undecided increased to 39%. This hesitation to support the female candidate might reflect a bias on the part of men, who have pessimism or negative feelings about female candidates.

More recently, in the Japanese political context, Endo and Ono (2023) conducted a survey to assess respondents' attitudes toward women political leaders. The findings revealed that Japanese voters exhibit bias against women because they hold strong stereotypes regarding male and female politicians in terms of their areas of policy expertise and personal characteristics. These stereotypes are particularly pronounced among male voters, older individuals, and those who support conservative parties.

2.2.3. Women's Political (Under)Representation at Local Level

In many countries, the proportion of women represented in elected bodies tends to be lower at the local level compared to national and European levels (see Henig & Henig, 2001; Eder et al., 2016). This is a general trend in democratic societies, including Portugal. Understanding the underlying causes of this disparity is essential. The literature highlights some possible explanations.

The first explanation concerns the non-international exposure of local elections. In fact, the visibility of the lists in local elections, contrary to what happens in European elections, is minimal and, therefore, can lead to a lower commitment to the descriptive representation of women (Krook, 2002). For instance, when a political party presents a gender-balanced list in a local election, it competes with numerous other lists. Therefore, it may not attract significant media coverage or public interest. In contrast, a political party that fields a 50/50 gender-balanced list in a European election is likelier to make headlines (Espírito-Santo & Santos, 2021). The heightened media coverage associated with European elections often puts more significant pressure on parties to adhere to gender quotas and demonstrate their commitment to descriptive representation, which is not the case at the local level.

Another possible explanation concerns the recruitment base of local candidates, which is predominantly drawn from masculinized domains such as political parties, unions, and local associations (Preece et al., 2016). While male dominance in politics is a widespread issue across all levels of government, local politics faces unique challenges. One key issue is that women receive minimal rewards, whether financial or social, for participating in these male-dominated environments. Political roles at this level often come with limited financial incentives, in stark contrast to the more substantial remuneration

available at higher levels of government (Eder et al., 2016). This disparity makes local political positions less attractive to women, further exacerbating gender imbalance and limiting female representation in local governance.

Finally, there is also the issue of incumbency, or the accumulation of consecutive mandates, which is particularly pronounced in local governments (see Krebs, 1998; Trounstine, 2011). Incumbency provides significant advantages in elections due to the established familiarity and recognition that candidates gain from their previous terms. This prior knowledge of a candidate can create a substantial edge over challengers, as the incumbent's experience and name recognition often overshadow a more rigorous evaluation of their performance or ideological alignment. Consequently, the incumbency advantage tends to perpetuate the dominance of existing officeholders, who are predominantly male, thereby disadvantaging female candidates. This systemic bias reinforces the status quo and hinders the election of women. The cases of male incumbency still have expression in Portuguese local governments. However, its effects (to contribute to the underrepresentation of women) are being partially mitigated through the 'mandate limitation law' (law No. 46/2005). According to this law, mayors and parish council presidents can only serve for three consecutive terms.

In the Portuguese case, some studies also indicate that the persistent underrepresentation of women at the local level may be due to attitudes that are more resistant to incorporating new values in the smaller and rural local governments (e.g., Teixeira, 2016).

2.3. Approaches to Address Women's Underrepresentation

The problem of women's political underrepresentation has prompted the adoption of positive action measures in many countries, particularly after the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Praud, 2012). These measures, designed to combat discrimination, can be divided into "soft" measures aimed at promoting equal opportunities and "hard" measures involving quota systems. Introducing quota systems for women represents a significant advancement toward policies with specific objectives and strategies. Therefore, there is strong optimism that these systems can substantially increase women's political representation. However, implementing quotas also raises significant questions and, in some cases, encounters considerable resistance (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010). Therefore, this section aims to clarify the concept of gender quotas by presenting their types and effectiveness and discussing various arguments for and against their use.

2.3.1. Gender Quotas - Types and Effectiveness

Introducing gender quotas is one way to address the issue of gender imbalance in public office. Most gender quotas aim to increase women's representation, as they remain underrepresented. This is particularly relevant, given that women comprise around 50% or more of a country's population.

Nowadays, gender quotas aim to ensure that women constitute a substantial minority of 20%, 30%, or 40%, or even achieve true gender parity with a 50-50 balance, as seen in France[6]. In some countries, quotas are applied temporarily, remaining in place until the barriers women face are effectively removed. However, most countries with quotas have not set a time limit for their use.

Krook (2007) identifies three types of quotas: reserved seats, legislative quotas, and party quotas. Reserved seats, on the one hand, regulate the gender composition of elected bodies by reserving a specific number or percentage of seats for women, as mandated through either national constitutions or electoral legislation. On the other hand, legislative quotas regulate the gender composition of candidate lists. They are legally binding for all political parties in an election and are mandated through national constitutions or electoral legislation. Party quotas (also known as voluntary quotas), in turn, are adopted voluntarily by political parties. Krook (2009) distinguishes two types of party quotas: the "aspirant quotas", which directly affect the pre-selection process by stipulating that only women can be nominated for specific positions, and the "candidate quotas", which imply that, among the candidates, a proportion of women are selected to be included in the final lists.

These are the main types of quotas currently in use. While reserved seats regulate the number of women elected, legislative and voluntary quotas set a minimum for the share of women on candidate lists, either as a legal requirement or as a measure written into the statutes of individual political parties. In the latter cases, it is essential to regulate the rank order of candidates on the lists to avoid placing women candidates only at the bottom, where they have little chance of being elected. To address this issue, a "double quota" refers to a system that not only requires a certain percentage of women on the electoral lists but also ensures that women candidates are not relegated to the bottom. Argentina, Belgium, and Portugal are countries with legal requirements for double quotas. "Placement mandates" or rules regarding the rank order of candidates, especially at the top of the list, are other terms used for

[6] France was the first country in the world to introduce a compulsory 50 percent gender parity provision.

the same requirement (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2009). Sanctions for non-compliance are also crucial for the effective implementation of quotas.

Verge and Espírito-Santo (2016) state that legislative and party quota systems share the same objective: ensuring effective gender equality in political representation. However, the literature presents differing views on the success of these two types of quotas. While some studies argue that legislative quotas are more effective because they are binding on all political parties and are enforced by the state or courts (Jones, 1998), other studies, such as Leijenaar (1997), contend that party quotas are more effective because they incorporate principles such as equality and democracy. Often, a legislative quota evolves from a party quota. In these cases, parties adapt their organizational rules to comply with the legislation (Meier, 2004).

The literature also includes empirical studies examining the relationship between the nature of quotas, voluntary or mandatory, and the impact of their thresholds on the increase in the percentage of women in national parliaments. For instance, Rosen (2017) analyzed a dataset covering 167 countries from 1992 to 2012 and found that the effect of each type of gender quota varies across countries. Specifically, voluntary party quotas are more effective in developed countries, while reserved seats are only significant in the least developed countries. Legislative quotas, in turn, can have an impact across all countries, but their positive effect is contingent upon accompanying placement mandates that ensure women are placed in winnable positions or on strong sanctions for non-compliance to enforce adherence.

2.3.2. Perspectives on Gender Quotas

Although gender quota policies are considered an important mechanism to address the underrepresentation of women in politics, they are also considered controversial. In this context, various arguments have been put forth in favor of and against introducing quotas. For example, Baldez (2006) states that gender quota laws are (or are not) a good measure depending, in part, on their expected impact. If the goal is to increase the number of women elected to public office, gender quota laws are an effective way to achieve this. The existing literature has shown that the "right" type of quota law adopted under the "right" conditions can lead to rapid and significant increases in the election of women (Norris, 2004). Nevertheless, if the goal is to democratize the candidate selection process as much as possible, it is less likely that gender quota laws are a good option.

2.3.2.1. Supporting Gender Quotas

Proponents of quotas argue that women are just as qualified as men, but their qualifications are devalued and minimized in a male-dominated political system. Therefore, the main argument supporting gender quotas is that they compensate for the barriers preventing women from occupying their fair share of political seats (Dahlerup, 2005; 2006). Quotas do not discriminate against individual men. On the contrary, quotas limit the tendency of political parties to nominate only men and are an effective way to create a more suitable environment for women to run for office (Aldrich & Daniel, 2020). According to Dahlerup (2005), gender quotas are also favorable for voters since their range of choices is expanded as it becomes possible to vote for women candidates. Sacchet (2012) presents four arguments in favor of quotas that align with the perspectives of representation discussed by Pitkin (1967). These arguments are the argument of symbolism, the argument for justice, the argument in favor of difference, and the life experience argument.

First, the argument of symbolism in favor of quotas is based on the idea that increasing the number of women in legislative positions serves a cultural function by exemplifying pathways for other women to pursue a political career and helping reshape established perceptions of women's political competence. Additionally, quotas ensure that multiple women are present in a committee or assembly, reducing the stress often experienced by token women (Dahlerup, 2005).

The argument for justice, in turn, asserts that if some groups have the right to be represented, then all groups should have the same right. In this context, Williams (1998) emphasizes that fair representation is profoundly influenced by the identity of legislators, including whether they belong to historically marginalized groups.

The argument in favor of difference suggests that women, being different from men, can bring unique perspectives, values, and approaches to governance. For instance, women are generally perceived as more ethical and honest than men. Therefore, they can make politics more transparent (Araújo & Tejedo-Romero, 2016; 2018) and less corrupt (Swamy et al., 2001; Dollar et al., 2001; Esarey & Schwindt-Bayer, 2018). In this regard, Baldez (2006) describes politics as a "land of the lost" overrun by outdated figures, predominantly male, due to deeply entrenched sexism that has long excluded women from political power. Gender quotas can thus be seen as a logical step to restore the legitimacy of ethically compromised political parties.

Finally, the life experience argument emphasizes that women, having distinct life experiences from men, can make the political process more inclusive and representative of a broader range of interests and social sectors. One way to ensure that different opinions and perspectives are heard and to limit excesses of power is to guarantee space for members of various social groups to participate in political decision-making.

2.3.2.2. Opposing Gender Quotas

Although gender quotas are implemented in many countries, opponents of quotas argue that they are associated with certain drawbacks (Gonzalez-Eiras & Sanz, 2021). For example, Pande and Ford (2011) highlight at least three concerns: First, quotas can reduce women's incentives to invest if they believe quotas make their advancement easier. Second, quotas can be perceived as unfair and worsen attitudes towards women. For example, women selected through quotas may be stereotyped as less qualified. Third, quotas can even fail to lift the barriers that prevent women from playing an influential role in politics.

Aldrich and Daniel (2020) contend that quotas can do more harm than good because they may allow female candidates to secure party nominations without the necessary qualifications, undermining a competitive process. Bagues and Campa (2021) note that by restricting the pool of candidates, quotas may violate the principle of merit and potentially lead to a decrease in the quality of politicians. To analyze the impact of quotas on the quality of politicians in Spain, the authors examined the educational attainment of municipal council members in municipalities affected by the quota compared to those that were exempt. The overall results suggest that gender quotas have neither decreased nor improved the quality of politicians. Additionally, the results confirm that although quotas have increased the proportion of women among council members, they have not significantly influenced the likelihood of these women assuming leadership roles, such as party leaders or mayors[7]. Therefore, another argument against gender quotas is that they are ineffective in promoting women to leadership positions.

According to Murray et al. (2012), implementing quotas requires reducing the proportion of men. This raises an important question: Why would party elites and legislators, who are predominantly male, support a policy that seems to run counter to their interests? Existing research provides two primary explanations. The first emphasizes ideological incentives, attributing the adoption of quotas to alignments

[7] In contrast, O'Brien and Rickne (2016) found evidence that quotas can have an accelerating effect on women's representation in leadership positions.

with the principles guiding party and national models of inclusion (Meier, 2000b; Opello, 2006; Krook et al., 2009). The second points to electoral incentives, proposing that parties use quotas to attract female voters (Meier, 2004; Davidson-Schmich, 2006). This also represents an argument against gender quotas: the notion that men support quotas not because they believe in their fairness but because they find them convenient.

An interesting advance in this matter is the analysis by Fréchette et al. (2008). They propose that the incentive to adopt quotas arises from a "male advantage". According to this argument, male incumbents are more likely to be re-elected if they face a female challenger in a majoritarian electoral system. This prospect of re-election provided a rational incentive for incumbents to support gender quota regulation in France. Other studies in France have corroborated the presence of a male advantage. For instance, Murray (2004) examined the unsuccessful application of France's gender quota to the 2002 general election. According to the author, political parties failed to implement parity in the number of candidacies and disproportionately placed women in difficult or unwinnable seats, causing the proportion of women to decrease further between selection and election.

2.4. The Role of Women in Portugal: A Historical Perspective

As already mentioned, this thesis is based on the Portuguese context. In this sense, it is pertinent to present a brief historical summary of the discrimination against women in Portugal and the evolution of their roles over the years. To this end, we take as a starting point the context of April 25, 1974, an essential moment in Portuguese history in which profound changes in the political structure affected the entire social panorama.

Before April 25, Portugal was based on a set of values of passivity for women, which led them to occupy a subordinate position in society. Portugal had been governed for 41 years by a conservative and anti-liberal ideology, where the social division of labor predominated. This regime was called Estado Novo. According to Marques (1972) and Lucena (1976), at that time, the family was the basic unit of society, with different spheres of activity for women and men. While the woman stayed home caring for the children, the man worked to guarantee the family's livelihood. As can be seen, a woman's mission was to dedicate herself to her family and home, being a good housekeeper, wife, and mother. This was a model like the woman of the three Ks of Nazi and fascist inspiration: *Kinder*, *Küche*, *Kirche* (children, kitchen, church). The Catholic Church strongly supported this conception of the role of women in society.

An example of the alliance between the State and the Church was the 1940 Concordat, an agreement whereby courts could not dissolve Catholic marriages.

However, the Estado Novo was not a static period without any social change. When the modernization process accelerated, and there was a shortage of male labor, a reasonable number of women entered the labor market, with 28.4% and 44.3% of women employed in 1960 in industry and services, respectively (Agria, 1968). Although women began moving into the production sphere, they remained primarily confined to serving the family, with only public participation offering a pathway to more profound societal transformation. This shift began on April 25, 1974. Women joined the first workers' organizations and later played public roles in the centers of direct democracy. In 1974, Law No. 621/74 of November 15 was an essential step for women's emancipation, as with this law, the right to vote became universal in Portugal. That same year, three other diplomas allowed women access to all positions in the following careers: local administrative (Decree-Law No. 492/74 of September 27), diplomatic (Decree-Law No. 308/74 of July 6), and magistracy (Decree-Law No. 251/74 of June 12).

Women's participation in the April 25 Revolution was influential in securing these measures and others that guaranteed equality in work, social, political, and cultural participation. However, deepening the revolutionary process was essential to ensure equality was not just legal. Despite the principles of gender equality established in the 1976 Constitution, women continued to face disadvantageous conditions. In the years immediately following 1974, women earned an average of 65% of men's wages for the same work (Romão, 1977). Moreover, specific sectors, such as politics, seemed to exclude women, even informally. In the first decade after April 25, female representation in the National Parliament (Republic Assembly) was almost negligible, and even by 2005, thirty years later, women held only about one-fifth of the seats. It was only with the approval of the gender quota law in 2006 that the need to increase women's political representation was taken more seriously.

Krook (2009) distinguishes two types of quotas adopted in Portugal. First, the voluntary quotas, adopted by the Socialist Party (PS), and second, the legislative quota system, imposed on all political parties through Organic Law 3/2006 of August 21, the so-called Parity Law. The PS was the first political party to promote parliamentary debates and initiatives about gender equality (in 1981, 1998, 2000, and 2006), as well as to adopt an internal quota system of 25% in 1999, after failing its proposed law that suggested a minimum of 25% women on lists for legislative and European elections. The PS discussed other quotas, but only in 2006 was the Parity Law approved. This law established that the lists for the Republic Assembly, European Parliament, and local authorities should be composed to guarantee a

minimum representation of 33.3% of each sex. In 2019, the quota was updated and now establishes that party lists for the Republic Assembly, European Parliament, and local authorities should be composed to ensure parity between men and women, guaranteeing a minimum representation of 40% of each sex (Organic Law 1/2019, 29 March). To comply with these provisions, more than two candidates of the same sex cannot be placed consecutively in the final ordering of the lists. In addition, lists that do not comply with the law are now rejected.

3. A Step Forward to Gender Equality: Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling at Local Level[8]

3.1. Abstract

Gender quota policies have the ability to alleviate the scarcity of women in politics. However, opponents of quotas argue that such policies may constitute, in the long term, a 'glass ceiling'. In Portugal, although there is still a long way to go in terms of gender equality, some municipalities have been successful in electing many women. Therefore, the aim of this article is to investigate, through the lenses of historical institutionalism and contagion theory, the factors that help women break out of the glass ceiling trap at local level. The study is based on a dataset from the last local elections and uses a panel data regression to calculate the probabilities of electing more women to municipal councils. The results underline that left-wing parties that have adopted voluntary quotas, municipal experience with women mayors, and competitive environments increase the likelihood of electing more women.

Keywords: gender quotas; glass ceiling; gender diversity pathways; competition; local governments; Portugal

3.2. Introduction

The last decade has seen significant improvements in gender issues. Nevertheless, many women still face gender discrimination in their personal lives and professional areas. According to Dolan and Hansen (2018) one such area is politics, especially with regard to elected office. In fact, the global average of 26.4 percent female Members of Parliament in December 2022 reveals that parliaments around the world continue to be dominated by men, while women are often underrepresented in decision-making bodies[9].

Although the gender gap in Parliaments is still significant, the 26.4 percent of female representation recorded at the end of 2022 was positive compared to the 14.5 percent recorded in 2002,

[8] This chapter is co-authored with Miguel Ângelo Rodrigues and Francisca Tejedo-Romero and was published in Governance as Ribeiro, B. F. G., Rodrigues, M. Â., & Tejedo-Romero, F. (2025). A step forward to gender equality: Breaking the political glass ceiling at local level. *Governance*, *38*(2), 12902. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12902

[9] Data retrieved from Inter-Parliamentary Union: https://data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=12&year=2022&op=Show+averages&form_build_id=form-wGVmrNWvJD9CQr1fREMBOWSX8LfGamOSUn5extc2WIY&form_id=ipu__women_averages_filter_form (Accessed September 9, 2023).

20 years earlier. The adoption of gender quotas worldwide has contributed to this positive evolution (Childs & Hughes, 2018). According to Rosen (2017) gender quotas are affirmative action laws designed to compensate for gender discrimination in the electoral process. By establishing a threshold, either in party lists or in elected bodies, quotas can circumvent various obstacles for women, boost equal representation, and rebalance the vertical distribution of power within parties and parliamentary structures (De Paola et al., 2014; Krook & Squires, 2006; Verge, 2010).

Notwithstanding their advantages, gender quotas are also subject to criticism. Opponents of gender quotas claim that one undesirable outcome of quota regulation is the possibility that quota provisions will come to constitute a glass ceiling, which will tend to prevent women from being nominated and elected beyond the quota requirement (see Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010; Darhour & Dahlerup, 2013; Kerevel, 2019; and Turnbull, 2019). In fact, after reaching the level of gender diversity required by law, it is highly likely that some parties, will no longer have incentives to go beyond the quota and include even more female candidates in party lists. Consequently, although in the short term a significant positive impact on the number of women elected can be observed (as a result of the initial inclusion of more women on the lists)[10], in the long term this number is likely to stabilize around the legal threshold (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010). This situation is not desirable, since a successful quota must establish a foundation of representation on which women can build beyond the quota in a push for representational parity (Turnbull, 2019).

In Portugal, the gender quota regulation, the so-called Parity Law (organic law, No. 3/2006, of August 21), was adopted in 2006, mandating a minimum of 33 percent representation of each sex on candidate lists. In 2019, this requirement was increased to 40 percent, reflecting a stronger commitment to gender equality in Portuguese politics. This new threshold was first put to the test in the local elections of 2021. Although it applies to party lists, its ultimate goal is to achieve effective parity by increasing the number of women elected. Since its implementation, however, this law has produced different results in different levels of government. While the European level reveals the most positive results for women, the local level is the one that has had the most difficulty in electing women, especially for executive bodies and presidencies (Santos et al., 2018). This situation led Rodrigues (2023) to analyze data from municipal elections before and after the adoption of the Parity Law. The author found evidence that the quota

[10] This depends on the country and the party. Usually, countries and parties that used to elect a high percentage of women before the quota law was adopted, do not suffer almost any impact from its adoption.

regulation increased the number of women in office immediately after its implementation, but later contributed to the formation of a glass ceiling around the legal threshold in Portuguese municipalities.

Although the overall picture is not very positive, some municipalities have managed to elect many women to the municipal council. More precisely, around 27 percent of the 308 Portuguese municipalities, managed to elect women above the quota threshold. Based on these examples, the main goal of this paper is to further understand the factors that led to this situation, that is, the factors that can positively impact female representation in Portuguese municipal councils, contributing to "breaking" the glass ceiling. In this sense, the research question of the paper is as follows: What factors contribute to women breaking out of the glass ceiling trap in municipal councils? To answer this question, we drew on two important theoretical frameworks: historical institutionalism and contagion theory. In addition, we build a dataset from the latest local elections (2009, 2013, 2017, 2021) and using a panel data regression we computed the probabilities of electing more women to Portuguese municipal councils.

Firstly, we found evidence that prior paths of gender diversity increase the likelihood of electing more women. Specifically, we found that the higher the percentage of seats held by those left-wing parties that had already promoted and adopted voluntary quotas before mandatory quotas were implemented, the greater the probability of electing women. By the same token, we found evidence that previous municipal experience with female mayors also increases the likelihood of electing more women to municipal council. Secondly, we found evidence that, through a contagion effect, competitive environments encourage political parties to diversify their lists in order to get more votes, which leads to the election of more women. Finally, we discovered something new and particularly interesting: we found evidence that previous successful female leadership positively influences parties' perceptions of female candidates' electability, making them more likely to be used as a competitive strategy in highly competitive electoral environments.

We believe that the outcomes of the paper are pertinent. First, we add an analysis of a level of government that has not been deeply explored in the case of Portugal. In fact, studies on gender representation in Portugal have mostly focused on national parliament and European elections (e.g., Lühiste & Kenny, 2016; Verge, 2013). It is also relevant to study gender representation on the local level, especially after the 2021 local elections, in which the quota regulation was applied for the first time since its update to 40 percent. Second, we add to the literature that explores how different pathways of gender diversity and political competition play a key role in increasing the likelihood of electing more women to municipal councils in proportional representation systems with closed lists. This is particularly meaningful.

In fact, the observed increase in the number of women in office after the implementation of quotas, followed by the formation of a glass ceiling at the legal threshold is in line with trends documented in previous research. However, we advance the literature by identifying a set of factors that can help women overcome the glass ceiling.

The paper is organized as follows: after presenting a brief literature review on gender quotas and the political glass ceiling, we explore how different pathways of gender diversity and political competition play an important role in increasing the number of women elected. Then, we discuss the research context and the estimation strategies to fit the main goal of the study. Finally, we present the results and the most important findings and conclusions.

3.3. Gender Quotas and the Political Glass Ceiling

One of the most significant institutional developments in representative bureaucracy in the last twenty years is the global diffusion of gender quotas. This suggests that states have begun to identify quotas as a new state-led strategy to incorporate women into public life and, by extension, to promote feminist aims (Krook, 2008) and improve governance outputs (Mechkova et al., 2024). According to Rosen (2017) these quotas are positive action measures that intend to compensate those who face gender discrimination in politics, usually women. In this sense, they specify a threshold, typically a number or percentage of women, and/or men, that must be nominated or selected.

The rapid spread of gender quotas has triggered an explosion of research into their consequences and effectiveness (Krook, 2009). By design, quotas have the potential to remove structural barriers for women and lead to a sustainable gender transformation in politics (Lang et al., 2023). Nevertheless, in practice, quotas seem to generate mixed effects (Krook & Zetterberg, 2017). Especially at national level, several studies argue that, in a first instance, quota policies are a fast track to boost gender diversity (Tripp & Kang, 2008; Paxton & Hughes, 2015). Clayton and Zetterberg (2018) analyzed 139 countries during the peak period of quota adoption and found that, on average, women's representation moved from 11 percent of parliamentary seats in the year prior to the quota's implementation to 21 percent the following year. By contrast, in the long term, while gender quotas may produce certain beneficial effects on the descriptive representation of women, it remains questionable whether they truly lead to a sustainable gender transformation of the political landscape (Erzeel et al., 2023), and specifically to a linear and steady growth in women's presence in politics (Devroe et al., 2021). In this regard, some studies argue that gender quotas carry the risk of breaking the incremental trajectory, contributing to the

formation of a glass ceiling (see Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010; Darhour & Dahlerup, 2013; Kerevel, 2019; and Turnbull, 2019).

According to Folke and Rickne (2016), this metaphor has been used in politics as a blanket statement to describe the stagnation or decline in the proportion of women elected to the top of political hierarchies. The idea is that, despite a slight increase in female representation on party lists as a result of the implementation of legislative quotas, this uptick does not often translate into an increase in the actual number of women elected. Geys and Sørensen (2019) found empirical evidence of the glass ceiling effect in the lack of overlap between the implementation of quota regulation and the presence of women in the rest of the local government bodies. This discrepancy is probably due to the fact that after reaching the level of gender diversity required by law, some parties have no longer incentives to go beyond the quota and include even more female candidates in party lists. If parties do not go over the minimum threshold of the law, and still place female candidates in unwinnable positions, this means that they have not interiorize the spirit of the law (Verge & Espírito-Santo, 2016). On the contrary, political parties that are committed to gender equality do not feel tempted to just stick to the threshold. They, therefore, integrate more women into their lists, allowing women to be elected in greater numbers. In short, parties' commitment to achieving parity is crucial for the implementation of quotas and, consequently, for their success (Kittilson, 2006).

Although this paper follows the definition of political scope proposed by Folke and Rickne (2016), the term glass ceiling is over forty years old[11] and, in general, represents a specific pattern of career disadvantage that can explain the lack of women in the top of public and private organizational hierarchies (see, e.g., Martin, 1991; Baxter & Wright, 2000a, 2000b; Cotter et al., 2001; Mueller et al., 2024). In other words, it is used to describe the unseen, yet unbreachable barriers that prevent women from reaching leadership positions (Kalaitzi et al., 2017), regardless of their qualifications or achievements. Thus, invisible barriers are cultural rather than personal, i.e., they do not relate to women's qualifications or competence but to sociocultural factors associated with gender.

[11] The term glass ceiling was first used by the management consultant Marilyn Loden on May 24, 1978. With this term, she sought to account for the invisible barriers that, in the context of companies/organizations, prevented women from accessing top positions.

3.4. Theory and Hypotheses Development: Making the Way Out of the Glass Ceiling Trap

So far, we have presented a brief literature review on gender quotas and the political glass ceiling. Now, we will elaborate on the theoretical framework that can justify why some factors, namely different pathways of gender diversity and competitive environments, play an important role in increasing the likelihood of electing more women.

The first theoretical argument lies in historical institutionalism. The central claim of this approach is that history matters (North, 1990, p. 100) and, consequently, choices made when an institution is being formed, or when a policy is being formulated, have a constraining effect on the future (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Peters, 2002). This dynamic, known as "path dependency" recognizes that institutions continue to evolve in response to changing environmental conditions and ongoing political maneuvering but in ways that are constrained by past trajectories (Thelen, 1999). Therefore, once particular paths have been forged, a significant effort is required to divert them to another course (Greener, 2005). This logic of path dependency has been employed by gender research throughout the years (see Waylen, 2014; Clavero & Galligan, 2020; Kirlappos, 2024) and, in this paper, we argue that it may have implications for the effectiveness of gender quota regulations.

In fact, when quota reforms are imposed, they either mesh well with pre-existing norms, or they cause conflict (Krook, 2009). In this regard, Verge and Espírito-Santo (2016) show that the legal adoption of quotas does not guarantee the effectiveness of their implementation. This is due to existing gender practices and norms, that is, informal institutions (Waylen, 2014) within parties that limit their effective compliance. Similarly, Verge (2013) stressed that when legislative quotas do not match existing party practices, they become empty gestures with only marginal effects on the number of elected women. The contrary is also true. When there is some agreement between old and new institutions, positive results for women can be achieved. According to Meier (2004), when voluntary quotas have been used by political parties, legislative quotas can stimulate the introduction of other measures and even encourage parties to exceed the minimum quota.

Among the ideological spectrum, it is important to acknowledge that not all political parties are equally likely to introduce voluntary gender quotas. Historically, parties on the left have been significantly more likely than right-wing parties to adopt quotas and pursue active strategies of gender equality, aiming to act as enablers for female candidates (Kittilson, 2006; Rolandsen Agustín et al., 2018). This is a

general trend in the European Union (EU) countries (Avdeyeva, 2010). Furthermore, these parties are characterized by a legacy of strong inner-party women's networks, which put pressure on the party leadership to stick to quota regulations (Lang, et al., 2023). However, not all left-wing parties can be considered promoters of gender equality. Historically, communist parties have rejected feminism on the grounds that it undermines the class struggle (Espírito-Santo & Weeks, 2022). In Portugal, for example, women's representation in the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) stagnated for a long period, from 1995 until only recently (Espírito-Santo & Weeks, 2022). Additionally, the Communists voted against all bills aimed at implementing quotas, arguing that the gender gap in political participation had socioeconomic origins and that such quotas would be merely a pyrrhic solution (Baum & Espírito-Santo, 2012).

Based on this, we argue in favor of path dependency rather than party ideology. Specifically, we argue that only those left-wing parties that have adopted voluntary quotas see gender representation as a "law of the party". Therefore legal quotas will encourage them to surpass their previous records. By including more women candidates on their lists, they increase the likelihood that more women will be elected. This can be translated into our first research hypothesis:

H1: Left-wing parties that have adopted voluntary quotas positively affect the election of women.

Also in accordance with the concept of path dependency, some studies have shown that political parties and voters are more likely to nominate and elect female candidates to positions already held by women[12]. This is true even when women compete against men. Turnbull (2019), for example, showed that political parties in India continue to resist nominating female candidates, but are more likely to do so in wards previously represented by a woman. These findings support similar conclusions in the literature (e.g., Bhalotra et al., 2018; Bhavnani, 2009). Furthermore, Alberti et al. (2022) found evidence that women mayors reform local bureaucracies by increasing the proportion of women in the local governments, while Baskaran and Hessami (2018) found that in Germany, female councilor candidates receive more preferential votes when a female mayor has been recently elected to office. According to the authors, one important reason for the electoral gains of female candidates may be that the exposure to a successful female mayor diminishes the anti-female biases of voters. As understood, women who

[12] This is in line with the mechanism presented by O'Brien in several of her papers on the impact of party leadership gender and prime-ministerial gender on the likelihood of nominating women for higher positions at the party level and at the ministerial level (see, for example, Krook and O'Brien, 2012).

manage to attain a key political position appear to have broader implications for the likelihood of other women achieving positions in the same or other branches of government.

Given this data, we argue in favor of spillover effects (Baskaran and Hessami, 2018), specifically that the election of a female mayor in the past positively impacts the election of other women to executive positions, whether as mayors or councilors. Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

H2: Previous experience with female mayors positively affects the election of women.

The second theoretical argument, in turn, is based on contagion theory (Matland & Studlar, 1996) and on the idea that competitive environments, characterized by the presence of many close competing parties, result in faster adoption of gender diversity strategies. According to Simón and Verge (2017), in the political market, parties constantly anticipate or react to the behavior of their competitors in order to attract or maintain electoral support. Consequently, some research states that when certain parties (typically left) begin to actively promote female candidates, giving them more winnable positions, other parties tend to follow their example if those actions are perceived as advantageous in attracting additional votes (Meier, 2004; Reynolds, 1999; Lépinard & Rubio-Marín, 2018; Weeks, 2018). This is particularly pronounced in proportional representation systems (Matland & Studlar, 1996). Research conducted by Caul (2001) corroborates this effect. In a study across multiple countries, Caul (2001) observed that the presence of political parties with gender quotas is one of the major factors explaining why other parties tend to adopt similar measures. This contagion effect also explains the parallel existence of both legal and party gender quotas in the same context (see Meier, 2004), highlighting how competitive pressures drive the widespread adoption of gender diversity strategies that may produce positive results for women. According to Franceschet et al. (2009), in competitive environments where several parties co-exist and larger parties respond to policy innovations initiated by smaller ones, quotas tend to improve women's representation.

Based on the above, we argue that, through a contagion effect, competitive environments will promote gender diversity among all parties, consequently increasing the chances of electing more women. Therefore, our third theoretical hypothesis is:

H3: Competitive environments positively affect the election of women.

Finally, and based on everything discussed above, there is a possibility that when a municipality with a competitive electoral environment elects a female mayor, it signals to political parties that the

electorate is receptive to electing women, especially if the female leadership has been successful. Thus, we aim to assess whether, in subsequent elections, political parties will include more women in winnable positions on their lists as a competitive strategy, given that this has been well received by the voters. To test whether there is a relationship between competition, previous experience, and the strategic positioning of candidates, we will also empirically test the following hypothesis:

H4: Competitive environments foster the election of women in a situation of previous experience with female mayors.

3.5. Research Context

Portugal uses a proportional representation system with closed lists for European, national, and local elections. This means that in Portuguese elections, voters vote for parties (i.e., candidate lists) instead of individual candidates. Plus, all political electoral seats are allocated through the application of the D'Hondt method. Consequently, if party leaders do not include women on the lists, women do not get elected, irrespective of voters' wishes. In order to prevent this situation, Portuguese government adopted in 2006 a gender quota legislation that applies to the parties' candidate lists. By this time, however, some parties had already adopted a gender-inclusive agenda by debating gender issues and implementing voluntary quotas. Therefore, we can divide Portuguese history regarding the adoption of gender quotas into three fundamental periods:

Before 1990: until the end of the 1980s, political representation of women in Portugal was very low. All political parties except the PCP had less than ten percent female representation in the national parliament. In 1988, in order to show their commitment to gender issues, the PS passed a 25 percent internal quota. Still, its implementation was not immediately enforced. It was only in 1999 that the PS honored its own quota for the first time, encouraged by competition with the newly created Left Block (BE) party (Verge, 2013), which fielded about 40 percent women candidates (Baum & Espírito-Santo, 2012).

Between 1990-2006: the period in opposition (1985–95), along with growing social mobilization against women's political underrepresentation, incentivized the PS to increase gender equality (Monteiro, 2011). In this sense, the PS presented a draft law in 1998 which stipulated a requirement of 25 percent of female representation in party lists. Although the proposed bill did not find political support and was ultimately rejected, all parties felt pressured to improve gender balance, which became apparent in

subsequent elections. During this period, the PS (2000 and 2003) and BE (2001 and 2003) discussed other similar bills, but likewise did not succeed[13].

From 2006: after obtaining the majority of seats in 2005 national elections, the PS finally met the conditions to approve a legislative quota in 2006 – the Parity Law[14]. Among the political parties, only the PS and BE, two left-wing parties, pushed for the Parity Law in Portugal. The three remaining parties with parliamentary representation – the PCP (the other left-wing Portuguese political party), the Social Democratic Party (PSD), and the right-wing conservative Christian Democrat Party (CDS-PP) – opposed quotas and have voted against all related bills (Teixeira et al. 2021). According to Parity Law, all candidate lists presented for local, parliamentary, and European elections had to ensure a minimum representation of 33 percent of each sex, with no more than two candidates of the same sex placed consecutively in the final ordering of the lists. Furthermore, it established that non-compliant lists were subject to certain penalties, including a reduction in the public subsidies for campaigns. In 2019, the quota was updated to 40 percent and lists that do not comply with the law are now rejected (Organic Law 1/2019, 29 March).

Although the gender quota law in Portugal applies to the parties' candidate lists, its ultimate goal is to achieve effective parity by increasing the number of women elected. In this regard, however, the Parity Law has produced different results in different levels of government. In the Republic Assembly, women's representation rose from 21.3 percent in 2005 to 38.7 percent in 2019. Also in the European Parliament elections, the impact of the law was evident, with women's representation rising from 25 percent in 2004 to 42.8 percent in 2019. In local governments, by contrast, this growth trend was not so pronounced[15]. In fact, Portuguese local governments display the lowest percentage of women elected compared to the other political bodies, both before and after the quota regulation (Rodrigues, 2023). Moreover, the global pattern remains: low proportion of elected women and lower relative presence of women in executive bodies and presidencies (Santos et al., 2018). This is the reason that led us to focus our study on the executive body (municipal council) of Portuguese municipalities.

In the Portuguese context, election at the municipal level, implies the election of the executive (municipal council) and legislative (municipal assembly) branches. In either cases, all parties have their

[13] All bills can be found online through this website:
https://www.parlamento.pt/ActividadeParlamentar/Paginas/IniciativasLegislativas.aspx

[14] For having proposed this law, the PS received a distinction from the Council of Europe in 2009 – the Gender Equality Prize (Monteiro, 2011).

[15] This is not exclusive to the Portuguese case. Many studies suggest a tendency for the proportion of women represented in elected bodies to be lower at the local level (see Eder et al., 2016).

votes converted into seats. In the executive, the mayor is the head of the list most voted for the municipal council, even if he/she has not received an absolute majority to govern. In turn, the council seats are distributed to the councilors, according to the percentage of votes obtained by those who went to the elections, including those from other party lists or independent movements. This means that in the municipal council, there is a coexistence between winner and losers.

Through a more detailed analysis of the proportion of women elected to the 308 Portuguese municipal councils, as mayors and councilors, in the municipal elections that took place after the implementation of the Parity Law, it is possible to divide the local governments into two groups (see Table 1):

1. First group: in which the number of women elected to the municipal council went from zero to the threshold set by the quota regulation.

2. Second group: in which the number of women elected to the municipal council is above the threshold established by the quota regulation.

Table 1: Distribution of Municipal Councils by Groups

	2009	2013	2017	2021
Group 1	248 (80.52%)	237 (76.95%)	216 (70.13%)	226 (73.38%)
Group 2	60 (19.48%)	71 (23.05%)	92 (29.87%)	82 (26.62%)
Total	308 (100%)	308 (100%)	308 (100%)	308 (100%)

These two groups compare the number of women actually elected with the threshold that applies to candidate lists. At first glance, this may raise concerns about comparability. However, this comparison is feasible. As already mentioned, the ultimate goal of the Parity Law is to increase the number of women actually elected and not just to increase the feminization of the lists. In other words, not only the 'letter of the law' (compliance with the Parity Law on the lists), but also the 'spirit of the law' (the internalization that effective parity is the ultimate goal) must be considered, and, to assess this, we must look at the levels of elected women, as argued by Verge and Espírito-Santo (2016).

Therefore, Table 1 shows that, after the introduction of the law, the number of cases recording a proportion of women in office above the legal threshold (group 2) had been increasing at a steady pace until 2017. However in the last local elections, which took place in 2021, it saw a setback of approximately three percentage points, probably supporting the argument that at some point gender quota regulation may produce a glass ceiling of elected women. Consequently, the present study is relevant since it adds to the literature that explores how specific factors play an important role in increasing the likelihood of electing more women to municipal councils.

3.6. Data and Methods

As reported by the literature, there is a possibility that gender quota regulation could produce a glass ceiling effect. However, this situation is not desirable since a successful quota should establish a foundation of representation that allows women to continue to push for representational parity beyond the quota (Turnbull, 2019). For this reason, it is important to understand the factors that can increase the likelihood of electing more women to the 308 Portuguese municipal councils. This is our main goal. In particular, we want to assess the effect of gender diversity pathways and competition.

The first argument establishes that the election of women is positively affected by those left-wing parties that advocated the introduction of quotas, as well as by previous municipal experience with female mayors. The second argument establishes a positive relationship between competitive environments and the election of women.

To test these theoretical arguments, we chose to estimate the following panel data regression with fixed effects:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta X_{it} + \mathrm{u}_{it,} \qquad (1)$$

Assuming:

$$cov(\mu X) \neq 0$$

The dependent variable is an index on the data of women elected to municipal council. The objective of the index is to evaluate the distance of each municipality to the legal threshold (33 percent until 2017, and 40 percent in the 2021 local elections). The matrix of independent variables (βX_{it}), in

turn, includes two categories: one related to gender diversity pathways and other related to political competition.

In the first case, and in order to test research hypothesis number one, we used a numerical variable ($Party\ Winner_i$) that identifies the political party that won the local government. This is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 when the winning party is the PS or BE, and 0 otherwise. We also used a second variable ($\%Seats\ PS_BE_i$) that represents the percentage of seats in the council won by the two parties that defended the introduction of quotas (PS and BE). As discussed throughout this paper, PS and BE, are the two Portuguese left-wing parties that have historically demonstrated the greatest commitment to gender issues by claiming for more women in politics and introducing voluntary quotas for candidate lists (PS) and for party organs (BE)[16]. Because of this, we expected to see more women elected under PS and BE governments, as well as to find a positive relationship between the percentage of seats won by these parties and the number of women elected.

To test our second research hypothesis, we included a variable that measures the effect of previous experience with female mayors ($WPresident_i$). This is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the municipality has already had a women acting as mayor, and 0 otherwise. As mentioned above, we expect to find a positive effect of female mayors on the election of more women to Portuguese municipal councils.

In the second case, and in order to test our third hypothesis, we used a variable ($Victory\ Gap_i$) that represents the difference between the number of votes obtained by the winning party and by the runner-up. Additionally, we used a second variable ($Diversity_i$) that represents the number of different parties with seats in the municipal council. The argument for choosing these variables is that competitive environments encourage political parties to develop new strategies to defeat their competitors, which can positively affect the number of women elected. Naturally, a political environment is more competitive the smaller the difference in votes between the first and second place, and the greater the number of parties with seats in municipal council.

[16] It should be noted that the PCP, the other left-wing/extreme left-wing party in Portugal, was not considered in the creation of the variables $Party\ Winner_i$ and $\%Seats\ PS_BE_i$. As already explained, this party does not have a path of actions or measures promoting gender equality, such as the adoption of voluntary quotas. In fact, the PCP has consistently opposed such measures, voting against the bill presented by the PS in the national parliament in 1998, as well as against the Parity Law in 2006 (Teixeira, et al. 2021).

In order to test the last hypothesis and obtain an overview that simultaneously considers the pathways of gender diversity and political competition, we included an interaction ($WPresident_i * VictoryGap_i$) variable. Specifically, we used this interaction to test if, in a situation of both high competition and previous experience with female mayors, opposing political parties will place female candidates in top positions on their lists as a competitive strategy, thereby increasing the number of women elected.

Finally, and since it is possible that the election of women is affected by variables other than those presented above, we also included a set of control variables. First, we controlled for the size of the local government ($Electors\ (log)_i$). This is a numeric variable that represents the number of electors in the municipality. This is particularly important because the dimension determines the number of seats in the municipal council. We also controlled for the effect of municipal development ($Development\ Index_i$). It is expected that more developed municipalities are more likely to elect women (Jones & Navia, 1999). Finally, we control for education level ($Education_i$). This variable represents the percentage of high school students who passed at the end of the school year. The reason to include this variable is that local governments with more qualified citizens may be more open to electing women.

3.7. Results and Discussion

The results presented in Table 2 refer to the estimation of the models by fixed effects. Models 1, 2 and 3 are presented as robustness checks for the results of Model 4, which integrates all independent and control variables. In turn, Model 5 is the same as Model 4, but adds the interaction variable. Overall, the results indicate that both gender diversity pathways and competitive environments increase the likelihood of electing more women to Portuguese municipal councils.

In the first case, the result from the variable $\%Seats\ PS_BE_i$ shows that an increase of one percentage point in the percentage of PS and BE seats in municipal council has an impact of 7.678 units on the index, thus confirming our first research hypothesis. This result aligns with the concept of path dependency of the historical institutionalism, which posits that past events influence the present situation. Indeed, left-wing parties with a historical commitment to the representation of women and the promotion of female candidates prove to be significant agents that positively impact the election of women. To test the first hypothesis, we also expected to rely on the $Party\ Winner_i$ variable, however this is not statistically significant.

Table 2: Estimation Results by Fixed Effects

VARIABLES	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
$\%Seats\ PS_BE_i$	8.029*	-	-	7.678*	7.485*
	(4.180)			(4.230)	(4.227)
$Party\ Winner_i$	-2.264	-	-	-2.120	-2.041
	(1.720)			(1.727)	(1.726)
$WPresident_i$	-	5.366***	-	5.451***	7.593***
		(1.597)		(1.599)	(2.043)
$Victory\ Gap_i$	-	-	-0.000275*	-0.000276*	-0.000232
			(0.000144)	(0.000143)	(0.000145)
$Diversity_i$	-	-	-1.433	-1.389	-1.328
			(0.995)	(1.008)	(1.007)
$WPresident * Victory\ Gap_i$	-	-	-	-	-0.000534*
					(0.000317)
$Electors\ (log)_i$	6.061***	5.789***	6.826***	6.652***	6.814***
	(0.708)	(0.707)	(0.797)	(0.795)	(0.800)
$Development\ Index_i$	-0.231**	-0.234**	-0.133	-0.125	-0.133
	(0.0939)	(0.0934)	(0.106)	(0.106)	(0.106)
$Education_i$	-0.0938	-0.0896	-0.100	-0.0670	-0.0786
	(0.112)	(0.112)	(0.112)	(0.112)	(0.112)
Constant	-63.70***	-59.57***	-64.00***	-68.54***	-69.36***
	(12.23)	(11.94)	(12.44)	(12.67)	(12.67)
Observations	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024	1,024
F	18.95	25.76	19.21	14.04	12.82
Test>F	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
R-squared	0.085	0.092	0.086	0.100	0.102
Number of year	4	4	4	4	4

Note: Robust standard-errors are in parenthesis. Significance levels: 1%, ***; 5%, **; 10%, *.

The result of the variable $WPresident_i$, in turn, is positive and statistically significant at 1%, revealing that previous experience with female mayors strongly influences the election of more women. Specifically, a municipality that has previously elected female mayors in comparison to a municipality that

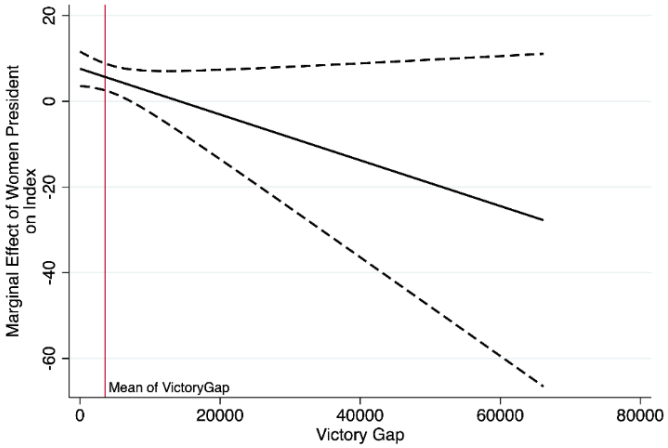
has never been governed by a woman, shows a positive impact of 5.451 units on the index. This finding supports our second research hypothesis.

In the second case, regarding competitive environments, the $Victory\ Gap_i$ variable is statistically significant and shows that there is a reduction in the number of women elected as political competition decreases (the contrary is also true). Specifically, a decrease in the index is observed when the difference between the winning party and the runner-up increases by one vote. The coefficient of this variable, presented in Table 2, is obviously modest since one vote cannot have such a big impact on the dependent variable. Unfortunately, the $Diversity_i$ variable does not appear to be statistically significant. Still, we have confirmed our third hypothesis, at least partially. In this way, competitive environments are important contagion-driving mechanisms for gender diversity.

Finally, and as mentioned in the previous section, we also included an interaction variable ($WPresident_i * VictoryGap_i$). According to the negative coefficient of this variable, we can conclude that the increase in the victory gap (which implies less competition) negatively influences the election of women in a situation of previous experience with female mayors. In symmetrical terms, this means that competitive municipalities foster the election of women when they have experience with female mayors. This situation is illustrated in Figure 3 below and, in fact, as the difference in votes between the first and second runner-up decreases, the marginal effect of the $WPresident_i$ on the index increases.

This finding is quite interesting. A competitive municipality that has elected a woman mayor demonstrates to political parties that the electorate is open to electing women, especially when the female leadership has been successful. Thus, political parties begin to include more women in winnable positions on their lists as a competitive strategy since this has been well received by the voters.

Figure 3: Interaction between $WPresident_i$ and $Victory\ Gap_i$



Note: Dashed lines give 95% confidence interval.

Regarding control variables, we found significant evidence that larger local governments ($Electors\ (log)_i$), with more seats available in the municipal council, favor the election of more women as expected. This result is in line with the literature that has found that larger district magnitudes favor women's representation (see, e.g., Matland, 1993; Matland & Brown, 1992). However, not all control variables met our initial expectations. While the $Education_i$ variable is not statistically significant, the $Development\ Index_i$ appears statistically significant in Models 1 and 2, but not significant in Models 4 and 5[17]. In this sense, we decided not to analyze its coefficient.

3.8. Conclusion

The local government level is an important training ground for women in their ascendant political careers. Nevertheless, women have been deeply underrepresented at the local level. This a general trend in democratic societies (Verge, 2010), which includes Portugal. To address this situation, and increase the representation of women in political office, Portuguese authorities implemented a legislative quota in 2006 - the Parity Law - which mandated 33 percent gender diversity on party lists for local, national, and European elections. Although this law has led to an increasing trend in women's representation at all levels of government, the local government level continues to present some difficulties in electing women, especially above the quota established by law. In other words, there is a glass ceiling effect at the local level (Rodrigues, 2023). Therefore, the main objective of this article is to assess the factors that can increase the likelihood of electing more women to the 308 Portuguese municipal councils, thus helping women to break out of the glass ceiling trap.

Based on the estimation results of the models, we found evidence that the higher the percentage of PS and BE seats on the municipal council, the higher the number of women elected as mayor and councilors. This evidence is relevant because it allows us to conclude that the history of political parties influences the present situation, as contended by path dependency. Specifically, the left-wing parties that, prior to the legal adoption of quotas, were already treading towards a path of gender diversity (whether by adopting voluntary quotas or promoting initiatives to pass pro-equality bills), are the most likely to elect women.

[17] Realizing that this variable is not significant, we thought of replacing it with a variable concerning whether the municipalities are rural or urban. However, this variable did not prove to be significant either, so we decided to leave it out of the model.

Also confirming the importance of path dependency, we found evidence that local governments with previous experience with female mayors are more likely to elect women in the future. This probably happens because the exposure to successful female mayors reduces the prejudice of politicians and voters against women. An alternative reason may be that female mayors can achieve better local governance results than men in the same position, leading voters to recognize their effectiveness and elect them again. This question of whether the quality of politicians differs by gender is an interesting topic to explore in the future.

Regarding the political environment, we found that competitive environments, characterized by a small difference in votes between the first ranked party and the second one, contribute, through a process of contagion, to the election of more women. As Franceschet et al. (2009) point out, in competitive environments, larger parties tend to follow innovative actions adopted by smaller parties (such as including more women in winnable positions) if those actions are perceived as advantageous. This finding is important as elections for local governments in Portugal have recently registered an increasing number of candidacies from new independent movements and small parties.

Finally, we found evidence that in a situation of high competition and previous experience with female mayors, opposing political parties will place female candidates in top positions on their lists as a competitive strategy, thereby increasing the number of women elected. Therefore, the study introduces new insights on the relationship between competition, previous experience with female mayors, and the strategic positioning of female candidates.

In conclusion: the implementation of gender quota regulation is not a magic solution. Although it constitutes a fast track to boost gender diversity in the political sphere, it does not seem to be as effective at achieving true parity in elected office, since the quota constitutes both a floor and a ceiling of elected women in most municipalities. This leads to an average of only 26.6 percent municipal councils exceeding the threshold of 40 percent women after the 2021 local elections. As discussed throughout this paper, a successful quota should establish a foundation of representation on which women can build beyond the quota in a push for representational parity. In this sense, the theoretical contribution of this article is both relevant and novel. While our findings align with documented trends of increased female representation after the implementation of quotas, followed by a glass ceiling at the legal threshold, we advance the literature by identifying specific factors - prior experience with quotas, municipal experience with female mayors, and competitive environments - that can help women overcome the glass ceiling at the local level. First, the level of government with the greatest difficulties in electing women, and second, the one

that has received the least attention from scholars. This paper also contributes to empirical research by analyzing the most recent electoral data.

The implications of the research results indicate the probable application of these findings for future research studies, for instance, in countries with gender quota regulations in place and with similar historical experiences to Portugal.

4. The Value of Gender: Candidate Attributes and Voter Preferences in a Conjoint Experiment

4.1. Abstract

This study investigates the impact of candidate gender on voters' electoral choices through a conjoint experiment in hypothetical local elections in Portugal. In addition to gender, the experiment considers seven other key candidate attributes: age, education, marital status, number of children, local ties, political experience, and ideology. Results indicate that candidate gender influences voting decisions. However, contrary to expectations, voters in Portugal exhibit a slight preference for female candidates. This finding is particularly relevant given the persistent underrepresentation of women in Portuguese local politics. Further analyses reveal that female and left-leaning voters mainly drive this pro-female preference. Additionally, education, political experience, and local ties emerge as the most influential candidate attributes in the conjoint analysis. These findings suggest a shift in gender biases among certain voter groups while reinforcing the importance of multiple candidate characteristics in shaping voter preferences and, consequently, election results.

Keywords: Gender, candidate attributes, voter preferences, conjoint experiment, Portugal.

4.2. Introduction

When choosing a political candidate, voters weigh various factors that influence their decision. Among these, party affiliation or ideology is widely recognized as one of the strongest determinants of voting behavior (Campbell et al., 1960; Rahn, 1993; Green et al., 2002; Stauffer & Fisk, 2022). However, candidates' personal characteristics also shape electoral outcomes (Campbell & Cowley, 2014). Especially at the local government level, which is the level of government "closest" to citizens (Pina et al., 2007; Ivanyna & Shah, 2014; Bilsky et al., 2021), attributes of candidates serve as important informational shortcuts, providing voters with clues about the behavior they might expect from politicians once elected. Among these attributes, gender[18] stands out as a key factor shaping voters' perceptions of candidates' competence and electability (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Holman et al., 2016).

[18] Biological sex is probably the most appropriate term to compare voters' reactions to male and female candidates since the concept of gender is more understood as a social construct. However, the literature usually uses the term gender to refer to the simple dichotomy of male/female, so we follow the same trend.

Such perceptions are largely influenced by the prevalence of gender stereotypes (Ruprecht & Zumbrunn, 2024). In this regard, female candidates are typically viewed as more sensitive, compassionate, warm, caring, and oriented toward social issues (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Bratton & Ray, 2002; Bolzendahl & Brooks, 2007; Holman, 2014; Rodríguez-Garcia, 2015; Kantorowicz-Reznichenko et al., 2024) whereas male candidates tend to be seen as more rational, decisive, ambitious and effective leaders in crisis management (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Lawless, 2004; Holman et al., 2016). These perceptions may lead voters to view female candidates lacking the necessary skills, attributes, or policy interests to be viable leaders (Fox & Smith, 1998; Lawless, 2004), ultimately resulting in lower electoral support for women.

This issue is particularly relevant in the Portuguese context, where women remain significantly underrepresented in local politics despite the implementation of gender quotas in 2006[19] (Santos et al., 2018; Rodrigues, 2023). For example, in the 2021 local elections, only 9.4% of the 308 Portuguese municipalities elected a woman as mayor, 29 women in total, marking a decline from the 32 elected in the previous cycle (in 2017). This persistent disparity raises concerns about the role of candidates' gender in voters' decisions. Specifically, whether voters rely on candidates' gender when making electoral choices, despite having information about other candidate attributes, and whether they prefer male over female candidates. In this context, this study explores two important questions: (1) Does candidate gender influence voter decision-making, even when other candidate attributes are revealed? (2) Do voters exhibit a preference for male over female candidates? Drawing on existing research on electoral behavior and gender stereotypes (e.g., Teele et al., 2018; Ono & Burden, 2019), we anticipate that gender will be a salient factor in electoral choices, even when voters consider other candidate characteristics. In addition, we expect voters to demonstrate a preference for male candidates when making their decisions.

To test these expectations, we employ a conjoint survey experiment in a sample of 1,203 Portuguese citizens of voting age. Specifically, we asked respondents to choose between two hypothetical mayoral candidates, each varying in eight personal attributes, namely gender, age, education, marital status, number of children, local ties, political experience, and ideology. This experimental approach offers two key contributions. First, it allows us to isolate the effect of gender on voters' decisions and compare its relative impact with other critical voter cues present in real elections, such as other personal attributes and political ideology. This enhances the external validity of our findings compared to traditional survey

[19] In August 2006, the Parity Law (Organic Law, no. 3/2006, of August 21) was enacted in Portugal.

experiments (Hainmueller et al., 2014). Second, it examines whether the persistent underrepresentation of women in local office reflects a voter preference for male candidates. Voters may (rightly or wrongly) associate male candidates with greater experience. If voters value experience, their preference for male candidates may stem from gender bias, actual experience differences, or both. The conjoint design allows us to assess these confounding explanations separately and in a clear manner (Ono & Burden, 2019).

Our findings confirm that candidate gender does influence voter decisions, as expected. However, Portuguese voters slightly prefer female candidates. This aligns with recent studies showing that voters are not necessarily less likely to support women and, in some cases, may even prefer them (Teele et al., 2018; Clayton et al., 2020). Nonetheless, this result appears counterintuitive in the Portuguese local context, where women remain significantly underrepresented. A deeper empirical analysis reveals that two factors primarily drive this preference. First, female voters support female candidates for mayor, whereas male voters do not display a significant gender-based preference. Second, left-leaning voters are more likely to back female candidates, while right-leaning voters show no clear gender bias. These findings suggest a shift in gender biases among certain voter groups and provide new insights into the dynamics shaping political representation in Portugal. Therefore, political parties seeking to attract female and left-leaning voters could benefit from nominating more women. This strategy may not only provide an electoral advantage but also contribute to reducing gender disparities in political representation.

The conjoint analysis results also reveal that candidate education, prior political experience, and local ties emerge as the strongest predictors of candidates' electoral success, while personal characteristics such as marital status and number of children show no significant impact. This suggests voters prioritize candidates' qualifications, political experience, and connections to local communities over private life details. Future research could build on these insights to examine whether similar patterns emerge at other levels of government or in electoral systems with different degrees of gender parity.

The article is structured as follows: The next section outlines the theoretical framework and the research hypotheses. This is followed by a description of the methodological approach employed to achieve the study's primary goals. The subsequent sections present and discuss the main and complementary results. Finally, the paper concludes by summarizing the main findings and examining their broader implications.

4.3. Theory and Hypotheses Development - Gender as a Determinant of Voting Decision

When voting for a political candidate, voters are influenced by various factors. Among these, studies have shown that partisanship is one of the most significant determinants of electoral behavior (see Campbell et al., 1960; Rahn, 1993; Green et al., 2002; Stauffer & Fisk, 2022). However, given that voters often lack the resources, time, or interest to deeply inform themselves about all candidates in an election, it is important to recognize that they also rely on heuristic cues to form judgments about candidates (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). In this paper, we highlight the importance of a candidate's gender.

Ono & Burden (2019) argue that voters often use a candidate's gender as a proxy for other useful information. This is done through stereotyping, the process of simplifying and categorizing an individual based on their group membership. In this context, both theory and evidence suggest that gender stereotypes shape perceptions of both female and male candidates' personality traits and policy competencies (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Specifically, women are generally viewed as more emotional, caring, compassionate, honest, passive, and more interested in and competent in addressing social issues, such as poverty, childcare, healthcare, and education. In contrast, men are often seen as more tough, competent, decisive, strong leaders, and with a greater competence to handle crises and legislate on economic, military, foreign policy, and security issues (Sapiro, 1981b; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989; Leeper, 1991; Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Kahn, 1996; Bratton & Ray, 2002; Huddy & Capelos, 2002; Lawless, 2004; Dolan, 2010; Holman, 2014; Kantorowicz-Reznichenko et al., 2024).

These gendered perceptions shape how voters assess candidates' suitability for office, which may influence voters in choosing or rejecting a candidate (Dolan, 2014; Ruprecht & Zumbrunn, 2024). Thus, while some voters may prefer female candidates, particularly in contexts of political renewal or when social issues are at the forefront, others may favor male candidates, mainly when matters related to economic development or public safety are central to the election.

The tendency of voters to rely on stereotypes to fill informational gaps and simplify their decision-making process suggests that gender is not merely a neutral characteristic but a key determinant in shaping electoral outcomes. This influence persists even when other candidate characteristics are considered. For instance, Teele et al. (2018) randomly assigned gender, age, number of children, occupation, years in politics, and spouse's occupation to hypothetical political candidates and found that

a candidate's gender significantly impacts voting decisions without being overshadowed by other candidate attributes. Even though party affiliation or ideology can be powerful determinants, gender may be a difficult-to-ignore factor, especially in local elections, where the emotional connection between voters and candidates tends to be stronger. In such contexts, gender can serve as an additional filter voters use to assess candidates' suitability for office. Therefore, we put this expectation to the test through the following research hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The gender of a political candidate influences voting decisions even when other candidate information is available.

While gender influences voting decisions, the direction of this influence is less straightforward, that is, some voters may prefer male candidates, while others may favor female candidates. Research on gender stereotypes, however, suggests that these stereotypes may disadvantage female candidates by shaping perceptions of their leadership capabilities (Fox & Smith, 1998). Specifically, voters often associate political leadership with traits traditionally attributed to men, such as competence and decisiveness, aligning them more closely with expectations of political success (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Lawless, 2004; Schneider & Bos, 2014). As a result, female candidates may be perceived as lacking the necessary qualities to be effective leaders, which can contribute to a preference for male candidates at the polls (Dolan, 2014).

A considerable body of research has explored voter stances toward candidate gender, with some studies finding a preference for male candidates (e.g., Lawless, 2004; Paul & Smith, 2008; Ragauskas, 2021; Bieber & Wingerter, 2022). However, the evidence remains mixed. While earlier public opinion surveys indicate a clear preference for male candidates (Ferree, 1974; Schreiber, 1978), more recent experimental studies, often exploring outcomes such as respondents' evaluations of candidates and vote choices in hypothetical races, have yielded more favorable results for female candidates. Specifically, while some of them show that respondents do not rate women and men candidates differently on favorability or likely effectiveness (e.g., Brooks, 2013), other studies[20] show that respondents favor women over men (e.g., Fridkin et al., 2009). Still, some studies suggest that the increasing acceptance of female politicians may be because voters consider women who reach the top of the political ladder to be more

[20] A related body of research examines women candidates' electoral success, analyzing election returns to determine whether voters discriminate against women candidates, but it has also produced mixed conclusions. For instance, Black and Erickson (2003) found that among similarly situated women and men candidates, women had a small vote advantage in Canada. At the local level, Anzia and Bernhard (2022), found that women have greater advantages over men in city council than mayoral races.

qualified and hardworking than their male counterparts (e.g., Milyo & Schosberg, 2000; Anzia & Berry, 2011; O'Brien & Rickne, 2016; Besley et al., 2017).

As can be seen, whether voters prefer a male representative over a female remains an open question. In our case, we anticipate that Portuguese voters will exhibit unfavorable attitudes toward women, particularly in the context of local elections. Despite the gender quota regulation implemented in 2006, women remain significantly underrepresented in Portuguese local politics, especially in top positions such as executive roles and presidencies (Santos et al., 2018; Rodrigues, 2023). This persistent underrepresentation leads us to formulate and test the following research hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Portuguese voters prefer a male candidate over a female.

4.4. Methodological Design

Research Context

Portugal employs a proportional representation system with closed lists for European, national, and local elections, meaning voters cast their ballots for parties (i.e., candidate lists) rather than individual candidates. All electoral seats are allocated using the D'Hondt method, which means that if women are not included on candidate lists, they will not be allocated elected office positions, regardless of voter preferences, as the D'Hondt method allocates seats based on the candidates presented in the party lists. To mitigate this possibility, the Portuguese government introduced a gender quota legislation in 2006, requiring a minimum proportion of 33% of female candidates on party lists for local, national, and European elections. However, the impact of this law has varied across different levels of government. In the National Parliament, women's representation rose from 21.3% in 2005 to 33% in 2024[21]. In the European Parliament elections, it increased from 25% in 2004 to 38,1% in 2024[22]. However, progress has been more limited at the local level. Portuguese municipal governments continue to exhibit the lowest percentages of elected women before and after the quota law (Rodrigues, 2023). Furthermore, the broader trend remains unchanged: a persistently low proportion of women elected to executive roles and presidencies (Santos et al., 2018).

[21] Data sourced from: https://www.cig.gov.pt/area-igualdade-entre-mulheres-e-homens/indicadores-2022/poder-e-tomada-de-decisao/.

[22] Data sourced from: https://results.elections.europa.eu/pt/equilibrio-de-genero-eurodeputados/2024-2029/.

At the local government level, elections determine both the executive (municipal council) and legislative (municipal assembly) branches. Within the executive branch, the mayor is the candidate leading the most-voted list, regardless of whether they secure (or not) an absolute majority. The remaining municipal council seats are distributed among councilors according to the proportion of votes received, including those from competing party lists or independent movements. In this study, we focus our experiment on the executive branch of local government, as the municipal council provides a valuable institutional setting to analyze voter preferences. Specifically, we examine the attributes of mayors who play a central role in local governance. Since candidate lists are multi-nominal, voters often lack familiarity with all listed candidates. As a result, they are more likely to focus on those in top positions, particularly the mayoral candidate. Freier and Thomasius (2016: 3) note that "political successes and failures are often attributed to individual political decision-makers". Since mayors are arguably the most influential figures at the local level, voters must carefully evaluate their attributes, as these characteristics serve as signals for potential policy outcomes.

The Choice-Based Conjoint Experiment

Many voters begin their evaluations of candidates by examining their attributes and making stereotypical assumptions based on that information (Dolan, 2014). However, even candidate attributes about which people have some knowledge are rarely compared with others to measure their relative impact on voters (Campbell & Cowley, 2014). Even the well-established literature on the influence of candidate gender does not typically compare the magnitude of its effects with other candidate attributes.

To address this gap, we designed a conjoint survey experiment that was carried out in Portugal[23]. The Ethics Committee for Research in Social and Human Sciences (CEICSH) of the University of Minho approved this study (approval: CEICSH 125/2024) on September 25, 2024 (see Annex A). In addition, all participants provided written consent before participating in the study. The survey experiment had two main objectives: first, to assess the impact of candidate gender on voters' choices, alongside other key candidate attributes, and second, to assess whether the persistent underrepresentation of women in Portuguese local governments reflects a voter preference for male candidates. To achieve these goals, a representative[24] sample of 1,203 Portuguese citizens of voting age was presented with two hypothetical

[23] The survey was conducted by Domp S.A. between September and November 2024. Domp S.A.is a nationally certified survey firm that adheres to the highest ethical research standards, including ensuring the protection of respondents' data.

[24] To ensure the sample's representativeness of the Portuguese population, we applied quotas in respondent selection based on gender (50% male, 50% female), age (three categories: 18–34 years, 35–54 years, and 55+ years), region (we use the second level of the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics - NUTS II), and education level (two categories: higher education and no higher education).

mayoral candidates displayed side by side, each defined by eight randomly assigned attributes. Participants were then asked to choose one candidate to support for office. Specifically, the experiment began with the following introduction:

"Suppose municipal elections are approaching, and the two individuals presented below are running for mayor in your municipality. Please carefully analyze the characteristics of both candidates and answer the questions below."

Respondents were then asked:

"Which candidate are you most likely to support/vote for? Even if you are unsure, please indicate one of the two."

As understood, this question mirrors real-world voter decision-making, where voters must choose a single candidate from a set of competitors with varying personal characteristics. Additionally, it follows the traditional choice-based conjoint experiment (Hainmueller et al., 2014), the most widely used conjoint analysis approach.

Variables

The forced-choice outcome, in which respondents selected one of the two candidate profiles to support, is the study's dependent variable, while candidate gender is the independent variable. The remaining attributes, in turn, function as control variables, chosen for their theoretical relevance and their potential to influence voters' decisions. These attributes are age, education, marital status, number of children, local ties, political experience, and ideology. The specific attribute levels assigned to each profile were randomized. Randomization is fundamental in conjoint designs, as it enables causal inferences about which attributes are more determinant in respondents' choices and which specific levels of those attributes are more positively or negatively evaluated by voters. In our experiment, the attribute levels were informed by existing literature on voter preferences for candidates (e.g., Darcy et al., 1994; Dolan & Ford, 1997; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Teele et al., 2018; Horiuchi et al., 2020) and are listed in Table 3.

Age is often used in electoral campaigns to either undermine or promote candidates. According to Campbell and Cowley (2014), older candidates are alternately depicted as frail and vulnerable or as wise and experienced, while younger candidates are described as either 'novices' or as dynamic and

forward-looking. Since little is known about how voters respond to a candidate's age, including this variable in our analysis is relevant.

Table 3: Conjoint Analysis Attribute Levels

Gender
(Baseline = Male)
Female
Age
(Baseline = 29)
45
65
Education
(Baseline = No higher education)
Bachelor's degree
Master's degree
Doctoral degree
Marital Status
(Baseline = Married)
Single
Number of Children
(Baseline = 0)
1
3
Experience
(Baseline = No experience)
1
4
8
Local Ties[25]
(Baseline = Insider)
Outsider
Ideology
(Baseline = Left)
Right
Center
Center-Left
Center-Right

By contrast, candidates' education seems important to voters, serving as a key informational shortcut to assess their quality and competence. Overall, voters tend to find political candidates with a university degree more appealing than those without one (Hainmueller et al., 2014). This is particularly

[25] Insider - born in the voters' city; Outsider - born elsewhere.

relevant in the case of female candidates, as many women have yet to achieve parity in political office despite their rising levels of education and professional success.

Regarding marital status and number of children, some studies suggest that voters favor candidates who are married and have children (e.g., Clayton et al., 2020). One possible explanation for this preference is the symbolic importance of "family values" for voters. Gimenez et al. (2017) show that women are more likely to be elected if they are perceived as successful in both their careers and family lives. However, achieving success in both areas is more challenging for women than for men, as household and family responsibilities often burden women more (see Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). In other words, these findings point to a double bind (Teele et al., 2018): on the one hand, female candidates without husbands and children, who would have more time to dedicate to politics, may face higher levels of voter disapproval; on the other hand, those with larger and more demanding families, who have less time for political work, tend to receive greater voter approval.

Regarding local ties and prior experience in lower elective offices, Shugart et al. (2005) argue that these attributes provide voters with substantive cues about politicians' understanding of local needs. In the first case, being born in the locality signals potential familiarity with the region and its interests. Studies seem to agree that politicians with local ties tend to be more focused on the needs of their locality than non-locals (e.g., Carozzi & Repetto, 2016). In the second case, regarding prior experience, several studies, primarily from the US (Erikson, 1971; Gelman & King, 1990; Butler, 2009), but more recently from proportional electoral systems (Dahlgaard, 2016; Kotakorpi et al., 2017), demonstrate that holding prior office brings tangible electoral benefits. The underlying idea is that previous experience in local politics signals that a candidate is not only knowledgeable about local problems but also capable of addressing them (Tavits, 2010).

Finally, we included ideology as a variable in our analysis, as studies have shown that ideology (and partisanship) is one of the most significant determinants of electoral behavior (see Campbell et al., 1960; Rahn, 1993; Green et al., 2002; Stauffer & Fisk, 2022). Voters often rely on ideological alignment as a heuristic when evaluating candidates, sometimes prioritizing it over other personal attributes. By including this variable, we aim to assess the extent to which ideological preferences shape voter decisions compared to other candidate characteristics.

Methods

We follow the approach proposed by Hainmueller et al. (2014), whose fully randomized conjoint analysis non-parametrically identifies the Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE), that is, the marginal effect of a specific attribute over the joint distribution of all other attributes. For instance, the AMCE for the attribute measuring a candidate's gender measures the average difference in the probability of a candidate winning if she is female compared to male, where the average is computed given all other possible combinations of the other attributes.

The AMCE can conveniently be estimated without bias with a linear regression model, where we include an observation for every individual profile and regress the dependent variable (i.e., selected a profile or not) on all levels of each attribute (except the reference level for each attribute) (Hainmueller et al., 2014, pp.14-15). We can use a simple linear regression because each attribute was randomly assigned independently of all other attributes. To get unbiased estimates of the variance (since each respondent sees two profiles), the standard errors need to be corrected for within-respondent clustering (e.g., using "cluster" in Stata 18; see Hainmueller et al., 2014, pp.16-17).

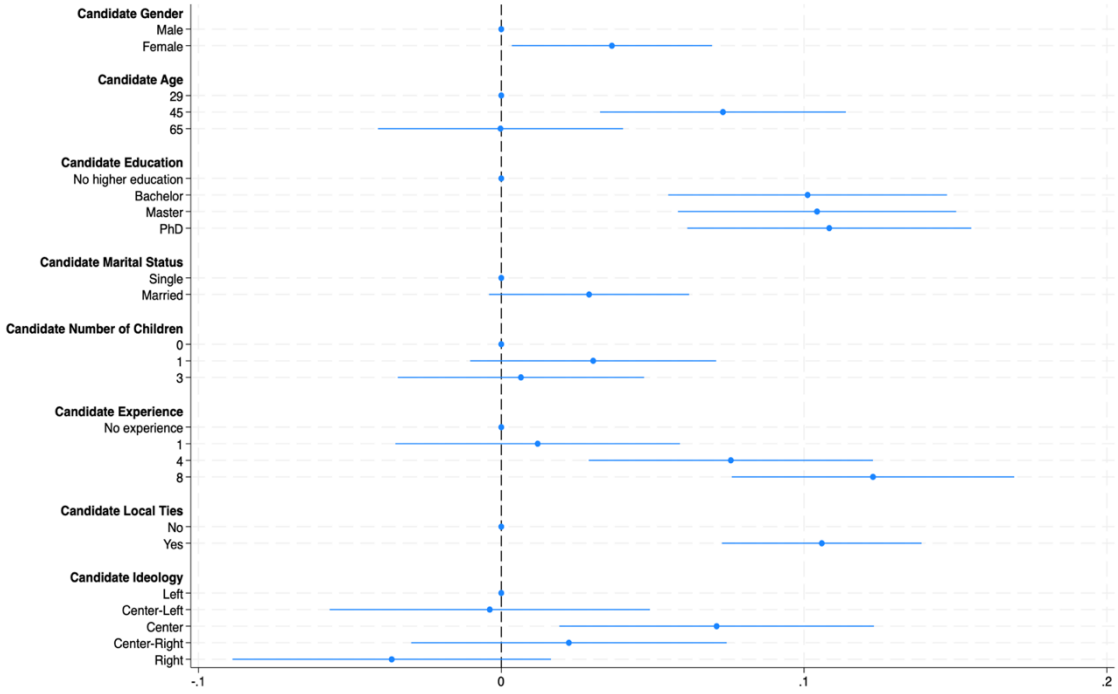
4.5. Results and Discussion

Figure 4 presents the estimated AMCEs, where the solid blue circles indicate the point estimates and the horizontal blue bars represent the 90% confidence intervals adjusted for clustering at the respondent level. When interpreting Figure 4, it is important to consider the role of confidence intervals in assessing statistical significance. If the 90% confidence interval crosses the zero line (the dashed vertical line), this suggests that the effect is not statistically significant at the 90% confidence level. Conversely, if the confidence interval does not intersect the zero line, the effect is considered statistically significant, providing evidence that the attribute influences voting decisions.

Regarding the effect of candidate gender, the results show that the confidence interval for the female category does not cross the zero line. This indicates that the effect is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level, providing evidence that candidate gender influences voting decisions. This finding supports Hypothesis 1, which posits that candidate gender remains influential even when other candidate

attributes are accounted for. While gender is not the most dominant factor (as we'll see below), its statistically significant effect highlights its relevance.

Figure 4: Average Effects of Hypothetical Candidate Attributes on Respondents' Preferences



Note: Blue solid circles represent the estimated average marginal component effects of each attribute level on the probability of choosing a hypothetical politician containing that attribute level, compared against a politician with the baseline level for the same attribute. Blue horizontal bars represent 90 percent confidence intervals robust to clustering at the respondent level. The solid blue circles without horizontal bars denote the attribute value that is the reference category for each attribute.

In relation to Hypothesis 2, which predicted a preference for male candidates among Portuguese voters in local elections, the results contradict this expectation. Although modest, the preference for female candidates is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level. Specifically, all else equal, respondents were 3.7 percentage points more likely to choose a female candidate over a male candidate. This finding raises the possibility of social desirability bias (Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Streb et al., 2008; Krupnikov et al., 2016). However, because the conjoint experiment required respondents to choose between candidates with randomly assigned personal attributes, our specific focus on gender was probably not apparent to them. Therefore, this result may indicate a shift in gender bias, with voters showing greater openness, or even a slight preference, toward female candidates. In fact, this finding is consistent with recent candidate choice survey experiments that demonstrate a positive effect of female

gender on voting decisions (see the review in Schwarz & Coppock, 2022[26]). Nevertheless, this trend is particularly noteworthy in the Portuguese context, given the historical underrepresentation of women in local politics despite the implementation of gender quotas.

Beyond gender, the conjoint experiment results reveal how other candidate attributes shape voter preferences and decisions. Education is one of the strongest predictors of voting decisions, with candidates holding bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees showing statistically significant positive effects. This aligns with the findings of Hainmueller et al. (2014). Notably, the effects for master's degree holders surpass those for candidates with only a bachelor's degree, while the effects for PhD holders exceed those for candidates with a master's degree, highlighting a clear preference for advanced qualifications.

Prior political experience also presents a statistically significant impact. Candidates with more experience in local politics (4 and 8 years) show more positive effects than those with no prior experience, with the AMCEs for candidates with 8 years being particularly pronounced and statistically significant. This suggests that voters favor seasoned politicians, likely associating them with greater competence and political efficacy. These findings are consistent with previous research, which shows that prior officeholding brings tangible electoral benefits (Erikson, 1971; Gelman & King, 1990; Butler, 2009; Dahlgaard, 2016; Kotakorpi et al., 2017). As Tavits (2010) argues, political experience signals not only knowledge of local issues but also a candidate's capacity to address them.

Candidates with local ties (i.e., born in the locality) also receive significant positive support from voters. The AMCE for this attribute is positive and statistically significant, reinforcing the idea that the electorate highly values familiarity with local issues and a personal connection to the community. This finding is consistent with prior studies emphasizing the electoral advantages of local ties in understanding local needs (e.g., Shugart et al., 2005; Carozzi & Repetto, 2016).

Regarding candidate age, only being 45 years old shows a statistically significant positive effect. This suggests a preference for middle-aged candidates, likely perceived as balancing experience and vitality. In contrast, candidates aged 29 and 65 do not exhibit significant effects, suggesting that voters

[26] Schwarz and Coppock (2022) examined 67 studies using candidate choice survey experiments in the form of conjoint or vignette designs from all over the world and reanalyzed them using a standardized approach. They found that the average effect of being a woman (relative to a man) corresponds to a gain of approximately two percentage points.

may perceive them as either too inexperienced or beyond the ideal age for local political leadership, respectively.

Our results also indicate that candidates positioned in the center of the ideological spectrum receive higher voter support probably because their moderate and conciliatory stance is seen as more attractive. This result aligns with Ezrow (2005), who conducted a macro-level analysis of party positioning and election outcomes across Western Europe from 1984 to 1998 and found that parties benefit electorally by positioning themselves closer to the median of the electorate.

Finally, marital status and the number of children do not exhibit statistical significance. These findings indicate that personal life attributes, such as being single or married and having different numbers of children, are not decisive factors in shaping voter behavior in the context of local elections.

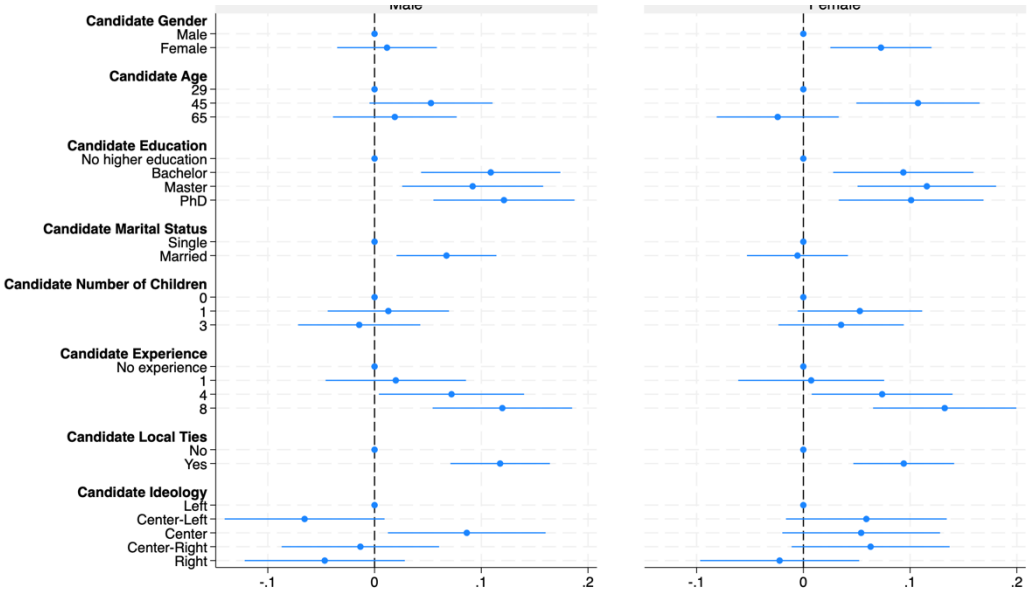
Overall, the conjoint experiment results highlight clear differences in the relative importance of candidate attributes in shaping voter decisions. Education, political experience, and local ties emerge as the most influential factors, with strong statistically significant effects. Therefore, candidates with advanced degrees, extensive political experience, and local connections seem favored. Attributes like gender, age, and ideology also influence voter decisions, although their effects are more modest than the dominant factors. In this case, women, middle-aged individuals, and those with centrist ideological orientations are preferred. In contrast, marital status and the number of children show no significant impact, suggesting that voters prioritize professional qualifications, political experience, and strong community connections over private life details.

4.6. Complementary Results from Voter Subgroup Analysis

Given the unexpected preference for female candidates observed in the overall model (Figure 4) - particularly considering the persistent underrepresentation of women in Portuguese local politics - we conducted additional analyses to explore subgroup heterogeneity and potential moderating factors that might elucidate this pattern. Following Teele et al. (2018), we estimated the AMCE separately for two key respondent subgroups: gender and ideology.

In the first place, and acknowledging the gender-affinity literature, which suggests that strong gender preferences may be influenced by the respondent's own gender, we examined whether female respondents drive the observed pro-female preference (Philpot & Walton Jr, 2007; Dolan, 2008). Therefore, Figure 5 presents the AMCEs disaggregated by voter gender. Due to the very small number of respondents who self-identified with a different category, we used a binary male/female categorization.

Figure 5: Average Effects by Respondent Gender



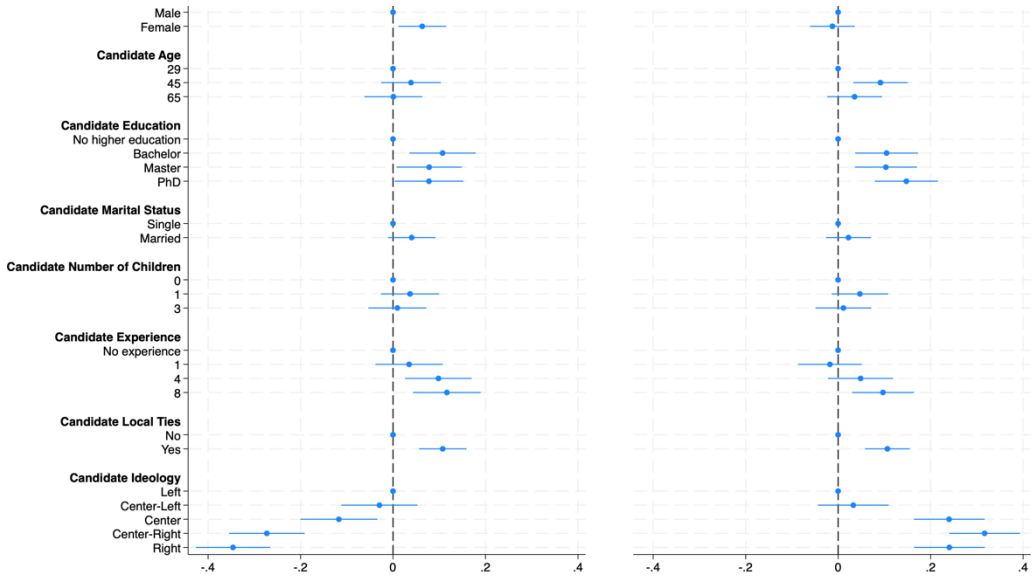
Note: Blue solid circles represent the estimated average marginal component effects of each attribute level on the probability of choosing a hypothetical politician containing that attribute level, compared against a politician with the baseline level for the same attribute. Blue horizontal bars represent 90 percent confidence intervals robust to clustering at the respondent level. The solid blue circles without horizontal bars denote the attribute value that is the reference category for each attribute.

The results show that female voters exhibit a statistically significant preference for female candidates, as evidenced by the 90% confidence interval not crossing the zero line. In contrast, male voters do not display a statistically significant preference based on candidate gender. Some scholars highlight the phenomenon of "same-gender voting" (e.g., Dolan, 2008; Holli & Wass, 2010; Giger et al., 2014), referring to the tendency for men to prefer male candidates and women to prefer female candidates when both are present in the candidate pool. However, in this case, evidence of same-gender voting is observed only among female voters. Several explanations have been proposed to account for this pattern. Some suggest that women have a "baseline preference" for same-gender representation (e.g., Sanbonmatsu, 2002), while others argue that women's "gender consciousness" and sense of group

loyalty may drive them to support candidates who represent their group interests (e.g., Tolleson-Rinehart, 1992).

In the second place, we examine whether voters' ideology accounts for the observed pro-female bias (Alexander and Andersen, 1993; Koch, 2000, 2002). Therefore, Figure 6 presents the AMCEs disaggregated by respondents' ideological orientation. To measure ideology in the survey experiment, respondents were asked to identify the political party to which they had the greatest affinity. Based on their responses, we created a binary variable coded as 0 for left-wing parties and 1 for right-wing parties.

Figure 6: Average Effects by Respondent Ideology



Note: Blue solid circles represent the estimated average marginal component effects of each attribute level on the probability of choosing a hypothetical politician containing that attribute level, compared against a politician with the baseline level for the same attribute. Blue horizontal bars represent 90 percent confidence intervals robust to clustering at the respondent level. The solid blue circles without horizontal bars denote the attribute value that is the reference category for each attribute.

The results indicate that left-leaning voters exhibit a statistically significant preference for female candidates while right-leaning voters do not display any significant preference based on candidate gender. This finding may be attributed to left-wing ideologies often emphasizing values such as gender equality, which can foster greater openness toward female candidates. This interpretation aligns with existing literature that highlights the role of gender stereotypes in shaping voter preferences. Gender stereotypes can manifest in various forms, including beliefs about traditional gender roles, traits commonly associated with men and women, and assumptions about issue competencies based on gender (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). These stereotypes may contribute to a more favorable perception of female candidates among left-wing voters. For example, given that leftist ideologies typically advocate for social welfare and gender

equality, such voters may be inclined to view female candidates more positively than their male counterparts (Lefkofridi et al., 2019). Similar patterns have been observed in Denmark, where Dahl and Nyrup (2021) conducted a candidate choice experiment, revealing that left-wing voters clearly prefer female candidates. In contrast, right-wing voters do not exhibit any significant gender bias.

These subgroup analyses offer valuable insights into the overall results. The observed preference for female candidates in the aggregate model can be largely attributed to the combined influence of female voters and left-leaning voters, both of whom exhibit a statistically significant preference for female candidates. This dynamic helps explain why, despite the persistent underrepresentation of women in Portuguese local politics, the effect remains significant at the 10% level in the full sample. These findings underscore the role of voter gender and ideological orientation as critical moderators of candidate gender preferences, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of electoral behavior in the Portuguese context.

4.7. Conclusion

This study provides new insights into how candidate attributes influence voter preferences and decisions in Portuguese local elections, with a particular focus on gender. Our findings confirm that candidate gender does influence voter decisions. Nevertheless, and contrary to traditional expectations about gender bias in political representation, our results reveal a statistically significant preference for female candidates. These findings challenge prevailing assumptions that voters inherently favor male candidates and suggest a possible shift toward greater acceptance or even a slight preference for female political leadership. Further analysis indicates that female and left-leaning voters primarily drive this pro-female bias. Female respondents clearly preferred female candidates, aligning with theories of gender affinity (Tolleson-Rinehart, 1992) and same-gender voting patterns (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Similarly, left-wing voters showed a significant inclination toward female candidates, likely reflecting the values of gender equality associated with leftist ideologies (Lefkofridi et al., 2019). In contrast, male and right-leaning voters did not display statistically significant gender-based preferences.

Beyond gender, our findings confirm the substantial influence of other candidate attributes, particularly education, prior political experience, and local ties. Candidates with higher education levels, extensive political backgrounds, and strong community connections received the highest levels of voter support, reinforcing the idea that competence and familiarity with local issues are key determinants of

electoral success. While gender plays a meaningful role, it operates within a broader framework of qualifications and experience that voters prioritize when making electoral decisions.

These results carry important implications for electoral dynamics and gender representation in Portuguese politics. Despite the persistent underrepresentation of women in local governance, our findings suggest an evolving political landscape in which female candidates are increasingly viewed favorably, at least among certain voter subgroups. This trend may indicate a gradual erosion of traditional gender biases, potentially fostering greater gender parity in political representation over time. Moreover, political parties seeking to mobilize female and left-leaning voters could benefit from nominating more female candidates, leveraging this voter preference while addressing gender disparities in political leadership.

Nevertheless, some limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported data in a survey experiment may be influenced by social desirability bias, even though the randomized design mitigates this risk. Additionally, the binary categorization of gender and ideological orientation simplifies complex identities and political attitudes, potentially overlooking nuanced variations within these groups. For instance, while left-wing voters are often assumed to prefer female candidates, it is worth considering whether this preference stems from ideological alignment or from holding more progressive attitudes toward gender. In fact, some right-wing voters may also exhibit progressive views on gender, challenging the binary assumptions often made in political analysis. Future research should further explore this dynamic, the intersectionality of candidate attributes and voter characteristics, as well as longitudinal changes in gender biases across different electoral contexts.

5. Are Portuguese Voters Biased toward Women? The Role of Ideology vs. Political Gender Attitudes in a Vignette Experiment

5.1. Abstract

Existing theories on women's political underrepresentation typically focus on factors shaping the supply and demand for female politicians. On the supply side, research emphasizes party bias, attributing women's underrepresentation to party selection practices. On the demand side, studies suggest that voter preferences may hinder women's access to the office. While substantial evidence supports party bias, demonstrating voter bias has been more challenging. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence that voter bias contributes to women's political underrepresentation. Building on theories of gender stereotypes and political gender attitudes, the analysis explores whether voter bias is shaped by political ideology and/or attitudes toward gender. The hypotheses are tested through a vignette-based survey experiment conducted on a sample of more than 1,000 Portuguese voters. The findings advance the understanding of voter bias in European contexts, highlighting that voters' political gender attitudes significantly influence voting behavior more than traditional left-right ideological alignments. Specifically, voters with progressive gender attitudes tend to support female candidates, while conservative voters show resistance, preferring male candidates.

Keywords: women's political underrepresentation; voter bias; ideology; political gender attitudes; vignette experiment.

5.2. Introduction

The descriptive representation of all members of society is crucial for enhancing the legitimacy of democratic systems (Arnesen & Peters, 2018). Consequently, it is widely recognized that the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions is a significant issue that governments must address. This concern is supported by the fact that at least 100 countries and territories worldwide have adopted some form of gender quotas (Bush & Zetterberg, 2021). Nevertheless, there is no consensus on the primary factors responsible for the underrepresentation of women in elected office. On the one hand, extensive research suggests that political parties play a key role in shaping candidate selection, often favoring male candidates (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; O'Neill & Stewart, 2009; Esteve-Volart & Bagues, 2012; Gendźwiłł & Żółtak, 2020). On the other hand, some studies have focused on the idea that it is

the voters who impede women's access to the office (see Black & Erickson, 2003; Le Barbanchon & Sauvagnat, 2022). While numerous studies provide empirical evidence supporting party bias, it has been more challenging to identify voter bias in the data, and most studies indicate that women are not disadvantaged at the polls (e.g., Hayes & Lawless, 2016; Bridgewater & Nagel, 2020; Schwarz & Coppock, 2022).

A recent body of work, however, suggests that the lack of evidence supporting the electoral disadvantage of women might not necessarily reflect an absence of voter bias but rather reflect voters' assumptions that, given the traditional gender barriers women face in pursuing a political career, those who achieve a party candidacy and run for office must be more competent and qualified than their male counterparts (e.g., O'Brien & Rickne, 2016; Besley et al., 2017). Furthermore, while some studies have even found evidence of voters' preference in favor of women, this pattern is not universal, as the cultural and political context in which research is conducted has led to different findings. While studies in some countries show a positive effect of female gender on candidate choice (Clayton et al., 2020), the estimates indicate a negative effect in others. This is the case, for instance, in Jordan (Kao & Benstead, 2021), Tunisia (Blackman & Jackson, 2021), and Japan (Ono & Yamada, 2020).

As understood, whether voter bias exists and contributes to the low percentage of women in politics remains unclear (see the review in Krook, 2018). Therefore, this paper contributes to the literature by addressing the following questions: Are Portuguese voters biased toward female candidates? Is this bias primarily driven by voters' political ideology (left vs. right) and/or their attitudes toward gender (progressive vs. conservative)? Given the ideological diversity among voters, we first hypothesize that voter bias is not universally present but rather specific to certain ideologies. More specifically, we propose that right-wing voters are more likely to exhibit bias against female candidates, thus contributing to women's underrepresentation. By contrast, we hypothesize that left-wing voters may exhibit bias in favor of female candidates. These expectations are grounded on the theoretical framework of political gender stereotypes, which posits that the beliefs, traits, and issues attributed to women and men lead right-wing voters to form negative perceptions of female candidates (Sanbonmatsu, 2008), while left-wing voters are more likely to form positive perceptions (Lefkofridi et al., 2019). The influence of ideology on voter bias against women has been extensively explored in the US (see King & Matland, 2003; Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Saltzer

& McGrath, 2024). However, little is known about how this dynamic operates in Europe[27], particularly in Portugal, underscoring the need to address this issue.

We also propose a complementary pathway to understanding voter bias, suggesting that it may also be shaped by voters' attitudes toward gender in politics (progressive vs. conservative). While right-wing views are often associated with greater resistance to gender equality and female representation, this relationship is not necessarily automatic. Therefore, beyond ideology, it is important to account for voters' specific gender-related attitudes. Drawing on the theory of political gender attitudes (Van Der Pas et al., 2022), we hypothesize that voters with more conservative gender attitudes are likely to exhibit bias against female candidates, while those with more progressive attitudes are more likely to favor them.

To fulfill the study's objectives and test our expectations, we conducted a vignette-based survey experiment on hypothetical local elections in Portugal, gathering over 1,000 responses. The empirical findings indicate that, in Portugal, voting behavior based on candidates' gender is strongly influenced by voters' political gender attitudes rather than their political ideology. Specifically, voters with progressive gender attitudes tend to show greater support for female candidates, while those with more conservative gender attitudes exhibit resistance, preferring male candidates. These findings have important implications for the design of gender equality policies and political campaigns. They suggest that efforts to promote women's political representation may be more effective if they focus on shifting conservative societal views on gender roles and female leadership.

Regarding the article structure, the following section provides a brief literature review on the supply-side and demand-side explanations for women's political underrepresentation. This is followed by a section presenting the theoretical framework and research hypotheses. The subsequent section describes the methodological approach employed in the study. Then, the results are presented and discussed. Finally, the paper concludes by summarizing the main findings and exploring their broader implications.

[27] Some exceptions are Glaurdić and Lesschaeve (2023).

5.3. Supply-side and Demand-side Explanations for Women's Political Underrepresentation

Existing theories typically group the potential causes of the persistent gender gap in electoral politics into factors that shape the supply and demand for female politicians (Karpowitz et al., 2017; Holman & Schneider, 2018).

On the supply side, the literature emphasizes party bias, which connects the underrepresentation of women to the practices and decisions made by political parties (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Murray et al., 2012; Fortin-Rittberger & Rittberger, 2015). The core idea of party bias is that political parties tend to adopt strategies favoring male candidates, such as placing them in more desirable seats, higher positions on closed lists, or less competitive electoral districts. Additionally, parties often organize their day-to-day operations with little consideration for women's needs, such as the time constraints arising from the unequal distribution of household chores and child-rearing responsibilities (Verge, 2015). Several studies have examined the origins of party bias (Margolis, 1979; Judd & Park, 1988; Niven, 1998), with the prevailing argument in the literature being linked to the Outgroup Effect. This posits that party elites, being predominantly male, tend to perceive female candidates as an outgroup (Niven, 1998). Because members of the outgroup are generally perceived as weaker compared to the male-dominated ingroup, political parties judge and select their candidates based on a profile shaped by male elites. Empirical research supports this argument. Gendźwiłł and Żółtak (2020), for instance, demonstrated that once women acquire more electoral capital, the negative bias of party elites in ballot rankings becomes more pronounced, making it harder for women to be placed in viable positions. Party bias is not only imposed by male members but also perpetuated by political women. According to Galligan and Clavero (2008), elite political women often accept politics as a male-gendered environment and rarely challenge party structures that favor men, further entrenching existing biases and inequalities.

On the demand side, the literature points to voter bias that favors the chances of a male candidate being preferred by voters over a female (Fréchette et al., 2008; De Paola et al., 2014; Giger et al., 2014; Wolak, 2015), thereby reducing the chances of female candidates being elected (Gonzalez-Eiras & Sanz, 2021). According to Koenig et al. (2011), voters perceive female candidates as less suited to hold political office than their male counterparts. The roots of this perception can be explained by the Gender Socialization Theory, which states that men and women are considered different and, as such, play distinct roles in society (Fox & Lawless, 2004). While men are often associated with prestigious jobs that allow them to build valuable social networks for running for office, women are still confined to more

familial roles and less politically active positions (Verge & Fuente, 2014). In other words, voters associate a political candidate's gender with their abilities and likelihood of success. Kahn (1996) and, more recently, Devroe (2019) showed that voters assume men are more qualified than women. Furthermore, Sapiro (1981b) and Leeper (1991) found that voters often attribute higher chances of success to men, believing they are more likely to win elections. These findings create a challenging environment for female candidates. By lowering their perceived chances of success, potential female candidates may be discouraged from bearing the costs of running for office, which are typically higher for women (Murray et al., 2023).

In Portugal, the introduction of the gender quota regulation, the so-called Parity Law (Organic Law, No. 3/2006, of August 21), has significantly altered the supply-side dynamics by requiring parties to include more women on electoral lists. As a result, party bias has been partially mitigated, ensuring that a larger number of female candidates have access to the electoral process. However, ensuring women's presence on ballots does not necessarily translate into electoral success. If voter bias against women remains, increased female representation in candidate lists may not lead to real gains in elected positions. Given this context, this study focuses on the demand side, investigating the extent to which voter bias persists in Portugal. Specifically, we aim to assess whether voters exhibit preferences for male or female candidates and to what extent these preferences are shaped by political ideology and/or gender attitudes. Understanding these dynamics is important for designing effective policies to promote gender equality in political representation.

5.4. Theory and Hypotheses: The Role of Voters' Ideology and Political Gender Attitudes

The role of voters' ideology in shaping bias toward female candidates

It is widely recognized that voters have underlying gender preferences when casting their votes (Rosenthal, 1995; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). This means that while some prefer to vote for male candidates, others prefer female candidates. In this context, some scholars highlight voters' propensity for "same-gender voting" (e.g., Dolan, 2008; Holli & Wass, 2010; Giger et al., 2014), that is, the predisposition for men to select male candidates and women to choose female candidates from a pool of candidates that includes both sexes. Although less common, the literature also points to the possibility of "cross-gender voting", where men vote for women and women vote for men (e.g., Holli & Wass, 2010). Nevertheless, and given the

unequal distribution of votes between male and female candidates, where female candidates are often disadvantaged, most studies focus on voter bias against women, which favors the chances that a male candidate is preferred to a female, regardless of the gender of the voters (e.g., Le Barbanchon & Sauvagnat, 2022).

Public opinion surveys over the years have shown a high degree of admitted bias by voters against female candidates (e.g., Ferree, 1974; Schreiber, 1978). However, more recent research, primarily based on experimental designs in hypothetical elections[28] has produced mixed results, sometimes more favorable to women. Overall, the disparity in findings is often attributed to the context in which these studies are conducted, as bias against female candidates appears to be influenced by the political culture of a state or community (Fox & Smith, 1998). In some contexts, such as the US, studies report that voters are no less likely to vote for women or that the female gender can positively affect candidate choice (e.g., Teele et al., 2018). In other contexts, such as France (Fréchette et al., 2008), Italy (De Paola et al., 2010), Jordan (Kao & Benstead, 2021), Tunisia (Blackman & Jackson, 2021), and Japan (Ono & Yamada, 2020), the findings tend to be negative.

In this article, we argue that the variation in results may not be due to the political and cultural context of the studies. Instead, we theorize that the variation in results may stem from differences among voters. In fact, most prior research assessing voter bias has treated voters as a homogeneous group, attempting to determine whether they are all biased or unbiased against female candidates. However, voters differ from one another. With this in mind, we argue that voters' bias against women is likely to be present only among a subset of voters, specifically those who align with right-wing parties or ideologies. In contrast, we believe that left-wing voters are more likely to prefer female candidates. This argument aligns with existing literature, which often highlights the role of gender stereotypes in shaping voter preferences. Stereotyping involves assigning characteristics to individuals based on their membership in a group (e.g., Catholic, black, woman...) while disregarding the variation within the group (Aronson, 2004). Gender stereotypes can be categorized into different types, including beliefs about gender roles, traits associated with men and women, and assumptions about issue competencies based on gender (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Hence, these stereotypes may give right-wing voters grounds to form negative perceptions about women candidates (see Sanbonmatsu, 2008). For example, they might lead right-wing voters to evaluate female candidates more negatively since women are

[28] In such studies, respondents see short profiles of candidates, in which the candidate's gender is randomly assigned to man or woman, and they are asked for an evaluation of their vote intention.

generally seen as less capable of addressing key right-wing policy priorities, such as security and order. A similar logic applies to left-wing voters. Assuming that being leftist implies advocating for social welfare or gender equality, left-wing voters, based on gender stereotypes, should perceive female candidates more positively than male candidates (Lefkofridi et al., 2019).

Prior studies have investigated the relationship between voter gender bias and partisanship or ideology in the US (King & Matland, 2003; Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Saltzer & McGrath, 2024), showing that Republicans tend to favor male candidates, while Democrats show a preference for female candidates (e.g., Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009; Schwarz & Coppock, 2022). However, less is known about how this dynamic unfolds in Europe, where proportional representation systems are standard in many countries, and more than two parties typically compete. In Denmark, Dahl and Nyrup (2021) conducted a candidate choice experiment revealing that left-wing voters prefer female candidates, whereas right-wing voters display no gender bias. In the UK, Saha and Weeks (2022) conducted a conjoint survey experiment and found minimal impact of partisanship on gender bias in candidate preferences. Differently, in Croatia, Glaurdić and Lesschaeve (2023) found a notable bias against female candidates among right-wing voters in areas exposed to war violence.

In Portugal, there is a scarcity of studies addressing the role played by ideology in voters' bias, making it essential to bridge this gap in the literature. Therefore, based on what has been presented, we outline the following research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Voters' ideology influences their bias toward female candidates.

Hypothesis 1.1: Left-wing voters exhibit bias in favor of female candidates.

Hypothesis 1.2: Right-wing voters exhibit bias against female candidates.

The role of political gender attitudes in shaping bias toward female candidates

Voters' bias toward female candidates may also be understood through voters' attitudes toward gender (conservative vs. progressive), which Van Der Pas et al. (2022) refer to as "political gender attitudes". In fact, even within a given political ideology (left-wing or right-wing), voters may hold differing views on gender issues that do not fully align with their ideological stance. For example, a left-wing voter may be progressive on various issues but hold conservative views on the role of women. Conversely, a right-wing voter may be conservative on economic policies but more progressive on gender equality issues, with some right-wing voters supporting greater representation of women in the political arena or

advocating for measures to promote women's rights. Therefore, and as discussed by Lefkofridi et al. (2019), voters may occasionally face a dilemma between adhering to their party/ideology or following their personal gender preferences. In the Scandinavian context, Matland's (1994) experimental study of Norway revealed that female candidates were evaluated most harshly by conservative women, especially among those with low interest in politics.

According to Lizotte (2018), understanding these attitudes toward gender and the number of women in politics is crucial because attitudes (among other factors) commonly predict political preferences and behavior. Dolan (2010), for instance, argues that those who believe more women should be in politics are more likely to support female political candidates with their vote, money, or time than those who do not hold such views. In addition, Mo (2015) found that the propensity to pick a female candidate increases as explicit and implicit attitudes against female leadership decrease. Thus, we expect voters' political gender attitudes to influence their bias in candidate evaluations and voting behavior. Specifically, we expect voters with conservative attitudes toward gender to show bias against female candidates. In contrast, we expect voters with more progressive gender attitudes to show bias in favor of female candidates. These expectations are outlined in the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: Voters' political gender attitudes influence their bias toward female candidates.

Hypothesis 2.1: Progressive voters exhibit bias in favor of female candidates.

Hypothesis 2.2: Conservative voters exhibit bias against female candidates.

5.5. Data and Methods

Data and the Vignette-Based Survey Experiment

To explore the possibility of voter bias in Portugal and test the proposed hypotheses, we designed a vignette-based survey experiment[29] that was implemented on a representative sample of the Portuguese population. The survey was administered between September and November 2024, collecting 1,203 complete and validated entries (after the exclusion of some participants[30]). The CEICSH of the University

[29] Domp S.A. conducted the survey through an online platform.

[30] Initially, 1,398 responses were collected through the online survey. Among these, 91 participants were excluded for failing the manipulation check, 79 were identified as speeders (participants whose completion time was up to 50% of the average duration of all responses), and 36 as straightliners (participants who provided the same response to all items across three or more scales). A single participant could belong to more than one of these categories. Therefore, after excluding 195 entries, the final sample comprised 1,203 participants.

of Minho approved this study (approval: CEICSH 125/2024) on September 25, 2024 (see Annex A). In addition, all participants provided written consent before participating in the study. We applied quotas in respondent selection based on gender (50% male, 50% female), age (three categories: 18-34 years, 35-54 years, and 55+ years), region (NUTS II[31]), and education level (two categories: higher education and no higher education). For more information about the general quotas, see Appendix A.

The survey began with the presentation of the vignette. In this section, each respondent was presented with a statement describing a hypothetical political candidate running for mayor in the upcoming local elections. The candidate's gender was randomized, using either *José* (male) or *Maria* (female), two traditional Portuguese names. The candidate's political ideology (left-wing or right-wing) was also randomized. In line with the Van Der Pas et al. (2022) approach, the vignette also included seven traits (listening to people, generosity, empathy, integrity, transparency, decisiveness, and competence), where the fictitious candidate was evaluated positively or negatively. Thus, we developed eight distinct versions of the vignette, to which respondents could be randomly assigned: positively evaluated left-wing man, positively evaluated right-wing man, negatively evaluated left-wing man, negatively evaluated right-wing man, positively evaluated left-wing woman, positively evaluated right-wing woman, negatively evaluated left-wing woman, and negatively evaluated right-wing woman. Appendix B presents the distribution of respondents across the eight vignette conditions (C1–C8), detailing quotas based on gender, age group, region, and education, whereas Appendix C presents all eight vignette versions. In addition, Figure 7 below presents one of the vignettes to which respondents could be randomly assigned:

Figure 7: Positively Evaluated Left-Wing Man

> Imagine that José, who holds a leftist ideology, is a candidate for mayor in the upcoming local elections in your municipality. This candidate has been active in local politics, with eight years of experience in sub-national politics, 4 of which as a councilor. Several newspaper articles from the municipality he is running for describe him as someone who listens to citizens and tries to do what is best for them. They also describe him as an empathetic and honest politician. A politician who is transparent, quick to make decisions, and knowledgeable about the municipality's needs.

After reading the vignette, respondents were invited to rate, on a scale from 0 to 10, how willing they would be to vote for the candidate presented in the vignette for the position of mayor in their municipality, where 0 means "not willing at all" and 10 means "completely willing".

[31] In Portugal, the NUTS II regions are Norte, Centro, Lisboa, Alentejo, Algarve, Autonomous Region of Madeira, and Autonomous Region of Azores.

Following the vignette activity, the survey asked respondents about their ideology and political gender attitudes to assess whether they are more conservative or progressive regarding gender issues. For ideology, respondents were asked to place themselves on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 represents 'left' and 10 represents 'right'. Studies on electoral behavior in elections have shown that individuals' left-right self-placement is a major predictor of their voting choices (Gunther & Montero, 2001).

To measure political gender attitudes, a scale comprising five items related to gender in politics in Portugal was developed. The scale was based on the respondents' assessment of five statements, which they could rate from 1 to 5, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree". To avoid bias in the responses, the scale included two statements favoring women, two favoring men, and one neutral statement. Like Van Der Pas et al. (2022), we departed from the Classical and Modern Sexism Scales (Swim et al., 1995; Ekehammar et al., 2000; Dierckx et al., 2017) but adapted the items to refer specifically to gender in politics rather than society in general. Modern sexism consists of three components: denial of continuing discrimination, antagonism toward the demands of women, and resentment about special favors (Swim et al., 1995). Of the five items in our scale, three addressed the components of modern sexism: denial of continuing discrimination ("Portugal has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities in politics"), antagonism toward demands ("It is not understood why the Government places so much emphasis on the political claims of women"), and resentment about special favors (the reverse of "More measures should be taken to increase the representation of women in politics in Portugal"). In contrast, the other two items addressed classical sexism (the reverse of "I would like to see a woman serving as Prime Minister in Portugal" and "Men are more capable of making political decisions than women"). The exact wording of the items can be found in Appendix D.

Finally, respondents were asked to provide some personal information, as this data could be valuable for identifying patterns of bias against women linked to specific voter characteristics. Accordingly, questions were asked regarding their gender, age, region, and educational level.

Variables and Methods

The study's dependent variable is the rating, given on a scale from 0 to 10, of how willing participants would be to vote for the fictitious candidate introduced in the vignette for the position of mayor in their municipality (*Vote Willingness*). The independent variables, in turn, are divided into two groups to test Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 1 examines whether voters of certain ideologies (right vs. left) exhibit bias in favor or against female candidates. To explore Hypothesis 1, we first consider the respondent's ideology (*Voter Ideology*). This is a numerical variable ranging from 0 to 10, where values closer to 0 indicate a leftist ideology and those closer to 10 indicate a rightist ideology. Additionally, we consider the politician's gender (*Candidate Gender*), a dummy variable that takes the value of 0 when the political candidate presented in the vignette is male and 1 when the candidate is female. We then use an interaction between these two variables (*Voter Ideology*Candidate Gender*) to assess the potential voter bias in favor or against women based on the respondent's ideological position.

Hypothesis 2, in turn, examines the extent to which voters' bias is driven by voters' attitudes toward gender (progressive vs. conservative). To examine this, we incorporate the political gender attitudes variable (*Political Gender Attitudes*). This variable measures respondents' attitudes toward gender in politics, derived from various items assessing classical and modern sexism, as explained before. It ranges from 1 to 5, where values closer to 1 represent more conservative attitudes and values closer to 5 represent more progressive attitudes. We also include an interaction variable (*Political Gender Attitudes*Candidate Gender*) between political gender attitudes and the candidate gender, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play.

In our analyses, we controlled for some variables. First, we included respondents' gender (*Voter Gender*), a categorical variable coded as 1 for male, 2 for female, and 3 for "other" or "prefer not to answer". Second, we controlled for respondents' age (*Voter Age*), a continuous variable. Third, we accounted for respondents' region (*Voter Region*), a categorical variable based on NUTS II classification. Fourth, we considered respondents' level of education (*Voter Education*), a dummy variable coded as 1 if the respondent has higher education and 0 otherwise. Finally, we controlled for the traits presented in the vignette experiment with a dummy variable coded as 1 if the candidate in the vignette is leftist and 0 if rightist (*Candidate Ideology*) and with another dummy variable coded as 1 if the candidate is portrayed positively in the vignette and 0 otherwise (*Candidate Attributes*).

As a method of analysis, we ran a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions.

5.6. Results and Discussion

The results presented in Table 4 refer to the estimation of the models using OLS. Model 1 presents all variables except the interactions. Model 2, in turn, includes all variables from Model 1 plus the interaction

used to test the first research hypothesis (*Voter Ideology*Candidate Gender*). Finally, Model 3 includes all the variables from Model 1 plus the interaction used to test the second research hypothesis (*Political Gender Attitudes*Candidate Gender*).

Table 4: OLS Estimations

VARIABLES	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Voter Ideology	-0.0518	-0.0117	-0.0533
	(0.0377)	(0.0495)	(0.0376)
Candidate Gender	0.338**	0.747*	-1.884**
	(0.154)	(0.401)	(0.900)
Political Gender Attitudes	-0.223*	-0.215*	-0.498***
	(0.127)	(0.127)	(0.164)
*Voter Ideology * Candidate Gender*		-0.0789	
		(0.0727)	
*Political Gender Attitudes * Candidate Gender*			0.586**
			(0.232)
Candidate Ideology	-0.0668	-0.0671	-0.0632
	(0.155)	(0.155)	(0.154)
Candidate Attributes	4.106***	4.110***	4.117***
	(0.154)	(0.154)	(0.153)
Voter Age	-0.00472	-0.00482	-0.00412
	(0.00565)	(0.00564)	(0.00564)
Voter Education	-0.106	-0.109	-0.108
	(0.179)	(0.179)	(0.178)
Voter_Gender_Female = 2 (Ref=Male)	-0.0213	-0.0364	-0.0262
	(0.163)	(0.163)	(0.162)
Voter_Gender_Other = 3 (Ref=Male)	-1.025	-0.983	-1.098
	(0.736)	(0.738)	(0.800)
Voter_Region_Center = 2 (Ref=North)	-0.00952	-0.00898	-0.0401
	(0.200)	(0.201)	(0.201)
Voter_Region_Lisbon = 3 (Ref=North)	-0.215	-0.211	-0.219
	(0.195)	(0.195)	(0.195)
*Voter_Region*_Alentejo= 4 (Ref=North)	-0.523	-0.521	-0.517
	(0.353)	(0.352)	(0.347)
*Voter_Region*_Algarve = 5 (Ref=North)	0.359	0.349	0.355
	(0.338)	(0.337)	(0.336)
Constant	4.216***	3.984***	5.238***
	(0.655)	(0.684)	(0.770)
Observations	1,203	1,203	1,203
R-squared	0.380	0.381	0.384
F-statistic	60.58	56.26	58.91
Prob > F	0.000	0.000	0.000

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: 1%, ***; 5%, **; 10%, *.

In Model 1, the variable *Voter Ideology* is not statistically significant. By contrast, the candidate's gender has a positive and significant effect. Specifically, the coefficient of the *Candidate Gender* variable is positive and significant at 5%, suggesting that, on average, survey participants are willing to give female candidates an additional score of 0.338 on the 0 to 10 scale compared to male candidates while holding all other variables constant.

The coefficient of *Political Gender Attitudes* in Model 1 is also statistically significant but with a negative sign, suggesting that as voters' gender attitudes become more progressive (with values closer to 5), this has a negative effect on the willingness to vote for the political candidate (without yet considering the gender of the candidate presented in the vignette).

Similar findings have been observed in other studies. For example, Griffin and Newman (2005) show that voters are more conservative than nonvoters. One possible explanation is that conservative voters are more motivated to vote due to a strong engagement with ideological values they perceive as fundamental. In other words, conservative voters can be more polarizing, leading to greater fervor and urgency to ensure their beliefs prevail. However, as the focus of this paper is not political participation, we leave it open to explore in future research the question of why conservative voters may be more motivated to vote than progressive voters.

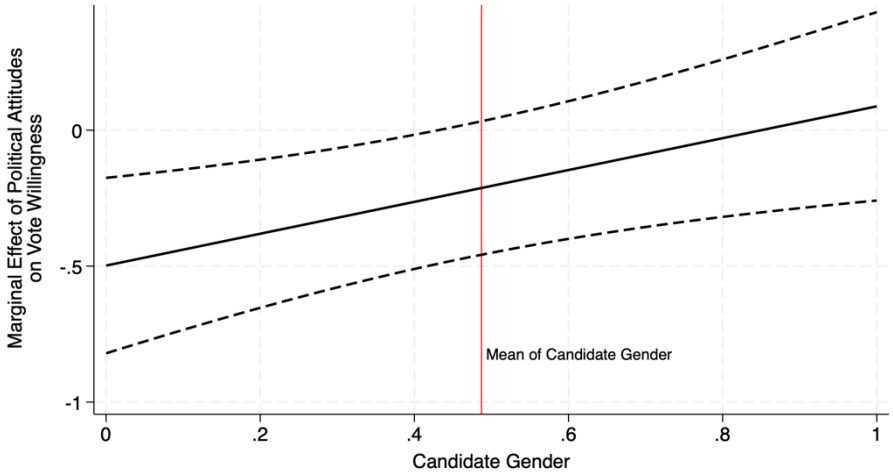
Finally, regarding control variables, only the *Candidate Attributes* variable shows significance in Model 1. Its positive coefficient and statistical significance at 1% indicate that voters are much more likely to vote for positively evaluated candidates.

In Model 2, the variables *Candidate Gender, Political Gender Attitudes,* and *Candidate Attributes* behave similarly as in Model 1, while the other variables remain statistically insignificant. The same goes for the interaction variable Voter *Ideology * Candidate Gender.* This result suggests that the ideological position of voters does not significantly influence their preference for a candidate's gender. Therefore, we cannot confirm the first research hypothesis that voters' ideology influences their bias in favor of or against female candidates. This result aligns with the study by Dahl and Nyrup (2021), which shows that, contrary to expectations, right-wing voters are indifferent to the gender of the candidate.

The results provided by Model 3, in turn, are interesting and demand careful consideration. Although higher values of the variable *Political Gender Attitudes* alone (more progressive attitudes) have a negative effect on the willingness to vote (as in Models 1 and 2), the positive coefficient and statistical

significance at 5% of the interaction *Political Gender Attitudes * Candidate Gender* suggests that the reduction in willingness to vote associated with more progressive attitudes diminishes or even reverses when the fictional candidate is a woman. In other words, the interaction result suggests that progressive voters (with attitudes more favorable to gender equality), when confronted with a female candidate, are more willing to vote for her, as illustrated in Figure 8 below. The contrary is also true: more conservative voters regarding gender issues, when confronted with a female candidate, are less willing to vote for her.

Figure 8: Interaction between Political Gender Attitudes and Candidate Gender



Note: Dashed lines give 95% confidence interval.

Therefore, Model 3 shows that the effect of voters' political gender attitudes (conservative vs. progressive) on the willingness to vote depends on the candidate's gender presented in the vignette, confirming our second research hypothesis. Specifically, progressive voters are biased in favor of female candidates, while conservative voters are biased against female candidates.

Regarding Model 3, it should also be noted that the variable *Candidate Gender* alone shows statistical significance. However, it now appears to have an opposite sign to that observed in Models 1 and 2. According to the coefficient obtained in Model 3, on average, survey participants are willing to give a score 1.884 points lower on the 0 to 10 scale to female candidates compared to male candidates while holding all other variables constant. Furthermore, the variable *Candidate Attributes* is the only control variable that shows statistical significance, demonstrating once again that a positive description of the hypothetical candidate presented in the vignette strongly influences the willingness to vote for that candidate. This makes sense since voters will prefer candidates with more appealing personal characteristics.

In summary, the results indicate that voters' willingness to vote based on candidates' gender is strongly influenced by their political gender attitudes rather than their political ideology. Voters with progressive gender attitudes tend to support female candidates, while conservative voters show resistance, preferring male candidates. This finding suggests that gender equality policies promoting women in politics could be more effective if they focus on changing more conservative attitudes towards gender rather than solely addressing traditional ideological divides (such as left-wing vs. right-wing views). In addition, political campaigns should be more attuned to these attitudes, fostering a more open dialogue on gender equality, which can help create a more inclusive environment sensitive to voters' concerns. Lastly, and regarding control variables, the candidate's attributes remain an important factor in voting decisions, suggesting that campaigns emphasizing candidates' attractive personal traits could positively impact voters' willingness to vote.

5.7. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into how voters' ideology and political gender attitudes shape their preferences for male and female candidates in Portugal and how this consequently affects the underrepresentation of women. Based on the analysis of the data collected from the vignette-based survey experiment, we draw several key conclusions about voter bias in Portugal.

First, and contrary to our expectations, voters' political ideology (left-wing vs. right-wing) does not significantly affect their gender bias in candidate preference. The results suggest that voters' ideological position alone does not clearly influence whether they favor male or female candidates. This aligns with the findings from Dahl and Nyrup (2021), who similarly observe no significant ideological effect on gender preferences in Denmark. Therefore, we cannot confirm Hypothesis 1, which posits that ideological orientation influences voter bias toward female candidates. In contrast, we find evidence supporting Hypothesis 2. According to the results, voters with more progressive gender attitudes are more likely to favor female candidates, whereas conservative voters tend to be biased against women in politics. Specifically, the interaction between political gender attitudes and candidate gender (*Political Gender Attitudes * Candidate Gender*) reveals that progressive voters are more willing to vote for female candidates, while conservative voters are less willing to do so, favoring male candidates. These findings suggest that voters' views on gender equality, rather than their broader political ideology, are more influential in determining their support (or lack thereof) for women in politics. Thus, future studies should

differentiate between ideological orientation (left vs. right) and gender attitudes (progressive vs. conservative) to better understand electoral bias.

Second, a consistent pattern emerges across all three models: a negative relationship between more progressive political gender attitudes and voters' willingness to vote for a candidate. This indicates that as voters' gender attitudes become more progressive, their overall likelihood of voting decreases, regardless of the candidate's gender. Based on this, we conclude that progressive voters tend to participate less in elections, whereas conservative voters, who exhibit gender bias against women, are more likely to turn out to vote. This dynamic may contribute to the underrepresentation of women in elected positions. Therefore, this study underscores the importance of considering voters' gender attitudes when developing strategies for increasing gender representation in politics. Political campaigns and public policies that address and challenge conservative views on gender could help create a more inclusive political environment where female candidates are given equal opportunities to succeed.

Finally, our results emphasize that the positive evaluation of a candidate's traits remains a significant factor in influencing voter behavior. Political campaigns, therefore, may benefit from emphasizing candidates' appealing personal characteristics, which could be especially advantageous for female candidates, as they are underrepresented in politics and could thus have greater chances of electoral success.

In conclusion, the results suggest that voters' attitudes toward gender play a decisive role in shaping their voting choices. Political campaigns should address these attitudes, fostering more inclusive discussions about gender equality and its benefits. This approach can potentially drive meaningful change in gender representation in political offices. Although this study provides valuable insights into gender bias among Portuguese voters, some questions remain open and warrant further investigation. First, it would be interesting to explore the evolution of gender attitudes over time, assessing whether socio-political changes and advancements in gender equality policies can help reduce or transform voters' bias against women. Additionally, future research could examine how this bias manifests in real electoral contexts, such as local or national elections, and whether factors like party affiliation or candidate visibility influence voters' willingness to vote for female candidates.

6. Overall Conclusion

This thesis examines Gender Representation in Portuguese Local Governments, focusing on both the factors that facilitate women's political representation and the barriers that hinder their access to local office. In this regard, the literature identifies two leading causes of women's political underrepresentation: party bias and voter bias. In Portugal, by requiring parties to include more women on their candidate lists, the Parity Law has mitigated party bias in candidate selection. However, voter bias may remain a significant challenge for women. To explore these dynamics, this doctoral thesis presents three articles: the first investigates the facilitators of women's political representation, while the second and third articles analyze the influence of voter preferences and biases in shaping electoral outcomes.

Previous research has shown that while gender quotas have, in the short term, effectively increased female representation, they have also contributed, in the long term, to the formation of a glass ceiling around the legal threshold, limiting women's further progress. Against this backdrop, the first article sought to answer the research question: What factors contribute to women breaking out of the glass ceiling trap in municipal councils? By analyzing panel data from Portuguese local elections, the study found that overcoming this barrier depends on a combination of historical factors and contagion effects. Specifically, the presence of left-wing parties that have adopted voluntary gender quotas, previous municipal experience with women mayors, and competitive political environments were identified as key facilitators of women's representation in local government.

The second article shifted the focus of the thesis to voter behavior, investigating whether candidate gender influences electoral preferences even when other candidate attributes are considered. To address this, the study posed two key research questions: (1) Does candidate gender influence voter decision-making, even when other candidate attributes are revealed? (2) Do voters exhibit a preference for male over female candidates? Using a conjoint experiment, the study found that the candidate's gender indeed influences voter decision-making. However, this occurs in an unexpected way. Contrary to expectations of gender bias against women, Portuguese voters exhibit a statistically significant preference for female candidates. This finding aligns with recent research showing that voters are not necessarily less likely to support women and, in some cases, may even favor them (Clayton et al., 2020; Teele et al., 2018). However, our findings also reveal that this preference is not uniform across the electorate. A deeper empirical analysis identified two key drivers of this effect: female and left-leaning voters who are more likely to support female candidates. These outcomes suggest a potential shift in gender biases

among certain voter groups, which could, over time, contribute to greater female representation in local governments. The study also revealed that while gender influences voter preferences, other candidate attributes, such as education, political experience, and local ties, remain more decisive in shaping voter choice in Portugal.

The third article further investigated voter bias toward female candidates, specifically addressing two key research questions: (1) Are Portuguese voters biased toward female candidates? (2) Is this bias primarily driven by voters' political ideology (left vs. right) and/or their attitudes toward gender (progressive vs. conservative)? The study found that while political ideology did not significantly influence gender bias, political gender attitudes played a role. Specifically, voters with progressive gender attitudes were more likely to support female candidates, whereas those with conservative gender attitudes exhibited a preference for male candidates. Moreover, the study identified a worrying trend: Progressive voters, who are more inclined to support female candidates, tend to participate less in elections, whereas conservative voters, who favor male candidates, show higher electoral turnout. This pattern may help explain the persistent underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions.

As understood, taking together these articles provides a comprehensive response to the central research questions of this thesis. While gender quotas increase female representation in elected office, other factors remain important determinants of electoral outcomes and cannot be overlooked. The research demonstrates that, contrary to concerns about widespread voter bias against women, Portuguese voters do not systematically penalize female candidates. In fact, they may even favor them. However, this favoritism is not uniform across all the electorate and is shaped more by voters' gender attitudes than by ideological alignment. While progress has been made, significant challenges remain. Conservative gender attitudes continue to hinder women's political advancement, as voters with such views tend to favor male candidates and exhibit higher electoral participation, potentially reinforcing the persistent underrepresentation of women in local government.

Based on the findings of the thesis, several policy recommendations can be proposed to enhance women's representation in local government. First, targeted voter mobilization should focus on increasing electoral participation among women, left-wing, and progressive voters, as they are more likely to support female candidates. This could include initiatives such as community engagement programs and measures to incentivize voter turnout among communities with a higher proportion of women in their population, as well as among more left-leaning and progressive demographics. Second, public awareness

campaigns must actively challenge conservative gender attitudes that continue to shape voter preferences. Such campaigns could, for example, highlight the benefits of gender-balanced leadership, showcase the successes of prominent female politicians, and address any persistent unconscious biases that may still exist among certain voter groups. Third, investing in training and mentorship programs for female political aspirants is also important. Expanding these initiatives would not only equip women with the necessary skills and networks to compete effectively in elections but also enhance their visibility and credibility among voters.

Future research should further explore the evolution of gender attitudes over time, assessing whether ongoing socio-political changes and gender equality policies contribute to diminishing voter bias. Additionally, investigating how these biases manifest in real electoral contexts, rather than experimental settings, would provide deeper insights into the factors influencing voter decisions. Finally, understanding the role of intersectionality, including how factors such as ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic background interact with gender in shaping electoral outcomes, would further enrich the discourse on gender representation in politics. Understanding these intersecting factors can reveal if marginalized groups, including women of color, working-class women, and older women, experience unique forms of bias and underrepresentation in political institutions.

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Annex A: Positive Ethics Approval (CEICSH)

Universidade do Minho

Conselho de Ética

Comissão de Ética para a Investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas (CEICSH)

Identificação do documento: CEICSH 125/2024

Título do projeto: *O comportamento dos eleitores portugueses na seleção de candidatos políticos*

Equipa de Investigação: Bruna Filipa Gonçalves Ribeiro (IR), Doutoramento em Ciências da Administração, Escola de Economia e Gestão, Universidade do Minho; Miguel Ângelo Vilela Rodrigues (Orientador), Centro de Investigação em Ciência Política, Escola de Economia e Gestão, Universidade do Minho; Francisca Tejedo-Romero (Coorientadora), Universidad de Castilla-la Mancha, España.

PARECER

A Comissão de Ética para a Investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas (CEICSH) analisou o processo relativo ao projeto de investigação acima identificado, intitulado *O comportamento dos eleitores portugueses na seleção de candidatos políticos.*

Os documentos apresentados revelam que o projeto obedece aos requisitos exigidos para as boas práticas na investigação com humanos, em conformidade com as normas nacionais e internacionais que regulam a investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas.

Face ao exposto, a Comissão de Ética para a Investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas (CEICSH) nada tem a opor à realização do projeto nos termos apresentados no Formulário de Identificação e Caracterização do Projeto, que se anexa, emitindo o seu parecer favorável, que foi aprovado por unanimidade pelos seus membros.

Braga, 25 de setembro de 2024.

O Presidente da CEICSH

Assinado por: **EMANUEL PEDRO VIANA BARBAS DE ALBUQUERQUE**
Num. de Identificação: 07089799
Data: 2024.09.25 10:54:44 +0100

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Appendices

Appendix A: General Quotas

Table A1: Quotas by Gender and Age Group

Gender	18-34				35-54				55+				TT			
	C	S	D	C%	C	S	D	C%	C	S	D	C%	C	S	D	C%
Male	140	112	-28	100%	223	168	-55	100%	243	224	-19	100%	606	504	-102	100%
Female	148	112	-36	100%	201	168	-33	100%	240	224	-16	100%	589	504	-85	100%
Other			0		1	0	-1		1	0	-1		2	0	-2	
NS/NR	2	0	-2		3	0	-3		1	0	-1		6	0	-6	
N	290	224	-66	100%	428	336	-92	100%	485	448	-37	100%	1203	1008	-195	100%

Note: C – complete responses; S - sample; D - Difference between sample and complete responses; C% - Completion percentage.

Table A2: Quotas by Region

Region	C	S	D	C%
North	414	368	-46	100%
Center	290	240	-50	100%
Lisboa metropolitan area	349	288	-61	100%
Alentejo	73	64	-9	100%
Algarve	77	48	-29	100%
N	1203	1008	-195	100%

Note: C – complete responses; S - sample; D - Difference between sample and complete responses; C% - Completion percentage.

Table A3: Quotas by Education

Education	C	S	D	C%
No higher education	912	784	-128	100%
With higher education	291	224	-67	100%
N	1203	1008	-195	100%

Note: C – complete responses; S - sample; D - Difference between sample and complete responses; C% - Completion percentage.

Appendix B: Quotas by Condition

Table B1: Quotas by Gender and Age Group

	Gender	18-34				35-54				55+				TT			
		C	S	D	C%	C	S	D	C%	C	S	D	C%	C	S	D	C%
C1	Male	16	14	-2	100%	30	21	-9	100%	35	28	-7	100%	81	63	-18	100%
	Female	18	14	-4	100%	26	21	-5	100%	33	28	-5	100%	77	63	-14	100%
	Other					1	0	-1						1	0	-1	
	NS/NR																
	N	34	28	-6	100%	57	42	-15	100%	68	56	-12	100%	159	126	-33	100%
C2	Male	17	14	-3	100%	36	21	-15	100%	33	28	-5	100%	86	63	-23	100%
	Female	17	14	-3	100%	23	21	-2	100%	28	28	0	100%	68	63	-5	100%
	Other																
	NS/NR					1	0	-1						1	0	-1	
	N	34	28	-6	100%	60	42	-18	100%	61	56	-5	100%	155	126	-29	100%
C3	Male	17	14	-3	100%	26	21	-5	100%	30	28	-2	100%	73	63	-10	100%
	Female	21	14	-7	100%	25	21	-4	100%	29	28	-1	100%	75	63	-12	100%
	Other																
	NS/NR																
	N	38	28	-10	100%	51	42	-9	100%	59	56	-3	100%	148	126	-22	100%
C4	Male	18	14	-4	100%	26	21	-5	100%	29	28	-1	100%	73	63	-10	100%
	Female	24	14	-10	100%	26	21	-5	100%	29	28	-1	100%	79	63	-16	100%
	Other																
	NS/NR	1	0	-1		2	0	-2						3	0	-3	
	N	43	28	-15	100%	54	42	-12	100%	58	56	-2	100%	155	126	-29	100%
C5	Male	17	14	-3	100%	25	21	-4	100%	28	28	0	100%	70	63	-7	100%
	Female	18	14	-4	100%	23	21	-2	100%	31	28	-3	100%	72	63	-9	100%
	Other																
	NS/NR																
	N	35	28	-7	100%	48	42	-6	100%	59	56	-3	100%	142	126	-16	100%
C6	Male	15	14	-1	100%	21	21	0	100%	28	28	0	100%	64	63	-1	100%
	Female	16	14	-2	100%	29	21	-8	100%	34	28	-6	100%	79	63	-16	100%
	Other									1	0	-1		1	0	-1	
	NS/NR	1	0	-1										1	0	-1	
	N	32	28	-4	100%	50	42	-8	100%	63	56	-7	100%	145	126	-19	100%
C7	Male	20	14	-6	100%	29	21	-8	100%	31	28	-3	100%	80	63	-17	100%
	Female	17	14	-3	100%	24	21	-3	100%	28	28	0	100%	69	63	-6	100%
	Other																
	NS/NR									1	0	-1		1	0	-1	
	N	37	28	-9	100%	53	42	-11	100%	60	56	-4	100%	150	126	-24	100%
C8	Male	20	14	-6	100%	30	21	-9	100%	29	28	-1	100%	79	63	-16	100%
	Female	17	14	-3	100%	25	21	-4	100%	28	28	0	100%	70	63	-7	100%
	Other																
	NS/NR																
	N	37	28	-9	100%	55	42	-13	100%	57	56	-1	100%	149	126	-23	100%

Note: C – complete responses; S - sample; D - Difference between sample and complete responses; C% - Completion percentage.

Table B2: Quotas by Region

	Region	C	S	D	C%
C1	North	57	46	-11	100%
	Center	40	30	-10	100%
	Lisboa metropolitan area	44	36	-8	100%
	Alentejo	8	8	0	100%
	Algarve	10	6	-4	100%
	N	159	126	-33	100%
C2	North	52	46	-6	100%
	Center	35	30	-5	100%
	Lisboa metropolitan area	51	36	-15	100%
	Alentejo	8	8	0	100%
	Algarve	9	6	-3	100%
	N	155	126	-29	100%
C3	North	53	46	-7	100%
	Center	36	30	-6	100%
	Lisboa metropolitan area	39	36	-3	100%
	Alentejo	9	8	-1	100%
	Algarve	11	6	-5	100%
	N	148	126	-22	100%
C4	North	52	46	-6	100%
	Center	39	30	-9	100%
	Lisboa metropolitan area	47	36	-11	100%
	Alentejo	9	8	-1	100%
	Algarve	8	6	-2	100%
	N	155	126	-29	100%
C5	North	48	46	-2	100%
	Center	33	30	-3	100%
	Lisboa metropolitan area	42	36	-6	100%
	Alentejo	10	8	-2	100%
	Algarve	9	6	-3	100%
	N	142	126	-16	100%
C6	Norte	49	46	-3	100%
	Center	36	30	-6	100%
	Lisboa metropolitan area	41	36	-5	100%
	Alentejo	10	8	-2	100%
	Algarve	9	6	-3	100%
	N	145	126	-19	100%
C7	North	48	46	-2	100%
	Center	36	30	-6	100%
	Lisboa metropolitan area	44	36	-8	100%
	Alentejo	10	8	-2	100%
	Algarve	12	6	-6	100%
	N	150	126	-24	100%
C8	North	55	46	-9	100%
	Center	35	30	-5	100%
	Lisboa metropolitan area	41	36	-5	100%
	Alentejo	9	8	-1	100%
	Algarve	9	6	-3	100%
	N	149	126	-23	100%

Note: C – complete responses; S - sample; D - Difference between sample and complete responses; C% - Completion percentage.

Table B3: Quotas by Education

	Education	C	S	D	C%
C1	No higher education	122	98	-24	100%
	With higher education	37	28	-9	100%
	N	159	126	-33	100%
C2	No higher education	117	98	-19	100%
	With higher education	38	28	-10	100%
	N	155	126	-29	100%
C3	No higher education	110	98	-12	100%
	With higher education	38	28	-10	100%
	N	148	126	-22	100%
C4	No higher education	120	98	-22	100%
	With higher education	35	28	-7	100%
	N	155	126	-29	100%
C5	No higher education	107	98	-9	100%
	With higher education	35	28	-7	100%
	N	142	126	-16	100%
C6	No higher education	111	98	-13	100%
	With higher education	34	28	-6	100%
	N	145	126	-19	100%
C7	No higher education	111	98	-13	100%
	With higher education	39	28	-11	100%
	N	150	126	-24	100%
C8	No higher education	114	98	-16	100%
	With higher education	35	28	-7	100%
	N	149	126	-23	100%

Note: C – complete responses; S - sample; D - Difference between sample and complete responses; C% - Completion percentage.

Appendix C: Vignette versions

1) Positively evaluated left-wing man

Imagine that José, who holds a leftist ideology, is a candidate for mayor in the upcoming local elections in your municipality. This candidate has been active in local politics, with eight years of experience in sub-national politics, 4 of which as a councilor. Several newspaper articles from the municipality he is running for describe him as someone who listens to citizens and tries to do what is best for them. They also describe him as an empathetic and honest politician. A politician who is transparent, quick to make decisions, and knowledgeable about the municipality's needs.

2) Positively evaluated right-wing man

Imagine that José, who holds a rightist ideology, is a candidate for mayor in the upcoming local elections in your municipality. This candidate has been active in local politics, with eight years of experience in sub-national politics, 4 of which as a councilor. Several newspaper articles from the municipality he is running for describe him as someone who listens to citizens and tries to do what is best for them. They also describe him as an empathetic and honest politician. A politician who is transparent, quick to make decisions, and knowledgeable about the municipality's needs.

3) Negatively evaluated left-wing man

Imagine that José, who holds a leftist ideology, is a candidate for mayor in the upcoming local elections in your municipality. This candidate has been active in local politics, with eight years of experience in sub-national politics, 4 of which as a councilor. However, several newspaper articles from the municipality he is running for describe him as someone who struggles to listen to citizens and do what is best for them. They also describe him as an unempathetic and even dishonest politician. A politician who lacks transparency has difficulty making decisions and is unaware of the actual needs of the municipality.

4) Negatively evaluated right-wing man

Imagine that José, who holds a rightist ideology, is a candidate for mayor in the upcoming local elections in your municipality. This candidate has been active in local politics, with eight years of experience in sub-national politics, 4 of which as a councilor. However, several newspaper articles from the municipality he is running for describe him as someone who struggles to listen to citizens and do what is best for them. They also describe him as an unempathetic and even dishonest politician. A politician who lacks transparency has difficulty making decisions and is unaware of the actual needs of the municipality.

5) Positively evaluated left-wing woman

Imagine that Maria, who holds a leftist ideology, is a candidate for mayor in the upcoming local elections in your municipality. This candidate has been active in local politics, with eight years of experience in sub-national politics, 4 of which as a councilor. Several newspaper articles from the municipality she is running for describe her as someone who listens to citizens and tries to do what is best for them. They also describe her as an empathetic and honest politician. A politician who is transparent, quick to make decisions, and knowledgeable about the municipality's needs.

6) Positively evaluated right-wing woman

Imagine that Maria, who holds a rightist ideology, is a candidate for mayor in the upcoming local elections in your municipality. This candidate has been active in local politics, with eight years of experience in sub-national politics, 4 of which as a councilor. Several newspaper articles from the municipality she is running for describe her as someone who listens to citizens and tries to do what is best for them. They also describe her as an empathetic and honest politician. A politician who is transparent, quick to make decisions, and knowledgeable about the municipality's needs.

7) Negatively evaluated left-wing woman

Imagine that Maria, who holds a leftist ideology, is a candidate for mayor in the upcoming local elections in your municipality. This candidate has been active in local politics, with eight years of experience in sub-national politics, 4 of which as a councilor. However, several newspaper articles from the municipality she is running for describe her as someone who struggles to listen to citizens and do what is best for them. They also describe her as an unempathetic and even dishonest politician. A politician who lacks transparency has difficulty making decisions and is unaware of the actual needs of the municipality.

8) Negatively evaluated right-wing woman

Imagine that Maria, who holds a rightist ideology, is a candidate for mayor in the upcoming local elections in your municipality. This candidate has been active in local politics, with eight years of experience in sub-national politics, 4 of which as a councilor. However, several newspaper articles from the municipality she is running for describe her as someone who struggles to listen to citizens and do what is best for them. They also describe her as an unempathetic and even dishonest politician. A politician who lacks transparency has difficulty making decisions and is unaware of the actual needs of the municipality.

Appendix D: Political Gender Attitudes Scale

Table D1: Items Included in the Scale of Political Gender Attitudes

	Item (Statement)	Type
1.	Gostaria de ver uma mulher a desempenhar o cargo de primeira-ministra em Portugal.	C
	Translation: I would like to see a woman serving as Prime Minister in Portugal.	
	Adapted from: I would like to see a woman prime minister in Sweden.[32]	
2.	Os homens são mais capazes de tomar decisões políticas do que as mulheres.	C
	Translation: Men are more capable of making political decisions than women.	
	Adapted from: Men are more capable than women of taking the lead.[33]	
3.	Portugal atingiu o ponto em que mulheres e homens têm iguais oportunidades na política.	M
	Translation: Portugal has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities in politics.	
	Taps: Denial of continuing discrimination.	
4.	Não se compreende porque é que o Governo dá tanta ênfase às reivindicações políticas das mulheres.	M
	Translation: It is not understood why the Government places so much emphasis on the political claims of women.	
	Taps: Antagonism toward demands.	
5.	Mais medidas devem ser tomadas para aumentar a representação das mulheres na política em Portugal (um exemplo de medida já em vigor é a existência de quotas de género nas listas eleitorais para cargos políticos).	M
	Translation: More measures should be taken to increase the representation of women in politics in Portugal.	
	Taps: Resentment about special favors.	

Note: C = Classical sexism; M = Modern sexism.

[32] Adapted from Ekehammar et al. (2000).

[33] Adapted from Dierckx et al. (2017).