

BOOK REVIEW

***Women's Paths to Power: Female Presidents and Prime Ministers, 1960–2020.* By Evren Çelik Wiltse and Lisa Hager. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2021. 303 pp. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9781626379282; \$28.50 (paper). ISBN: 9781626379305.**

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In *Women's Paths to Power*, Evren Çelik Wiltse and Lisa Hager offer an ambitious and comprehensive multimethod study of women who have risen to the highest ranks of executive political leadership. Building on the extant literature, most notably Farida Jalalzai's (2013) seminal work, they present a clear and expansive view of how each woman prime minister or president rose to power and the conditions making women's leadership more likely. They focus on explaining how various conditions correlate with different path types, including family, activist, and political career types. Wiltse and Hager expand on previous work by offering a more parsimonious single-path coding schema and theoretical approach, including interim and short-term executives, and by adding an additional 10 years of data to offer the most up-to-date study in a period when more women than ever are being elected.

The nine chapters are smartly organized by methodology in a way that spells out the authors' argument and contributions very well. After an introductory chapter, which outlines the three paths to executive office and their place in the literature, Wiltse and Hager move on to three chapters dedicated to each of the paths. While the three paths represent a common approach to this field of study, the focused presentation with such integration of literature, theoretical argument, and qualitative descriptive analysis is useful. In discussing the family path, which was particularly prevalent in the earlier periods and in Asia, the authors warn against overemphasizing regional culture as an explanatory variable given that it does not sufficiently explain intra-regional variation or underlying factors, such as level of development. They note that in addition to an inverse relationship between development and prevalence of the family path, in more established and highly developed democracies, the family legacy may even hinder a woman's path to executive office—an assertion they examine more closely in a later case study (Chapter 8) on Hillary Clinton and Marine Le Pen. This

in-depth case study of failed presidential campaigns by two highly skilled political leaders in developed democracies illustrates the inverse relationship between development and the family path very well.

The chapter on the activist path shows that those women are somewhat more challenging to study systematically, though it appears that they either exist in well-developed sociopolitical and gender-equal spaces where they can mobilize substantial resources, or they are able to capitalize on transitional political periods. When discussing the political career path, the most common path, Wiltse and Hager note that the conditions that predict women rising to legislative positions may not be the same for executive positions, and there may be less of a link than expected between the two where women may be more likely to lead to the top executive position from other executive (e.g., cabinet) positions.

Chapters 5–7 offer quantitative lenses through which to examine the impact of the political and institutional contexts, the impact of previous women leaders, and the longevity puzzle. These chapters bridge the two key lines of research on paths to leadership and the contributing factors by examining how the conditions correlate with specific paths. While Wiltse and Hager's approach is similar to that of Jalalzai (2013), they differ in their coding of women as only taking one path, rather than multiple paths, and their inclusion of interim executives. Their hypotheses find mixed results, with some variation depending on the path examined. As previous literature has suggested, there is substantial support for the notion that less democratic states are more likely to foster the family path and that female predecessors predict a family path. Similarly, Wiltse and Hager continue to find support for career paths being more prevalent in parliamentary and semipresidential systems.

Arguably, though, it is their rejected hypotheses that are more interesting. In each case, the hypotheses are rejected for the activist path, which suggests that we know much less about the conditions that foster women as political activists and their path to executive leadership. The chapter on longevity is particularly interesting as it compares women leaders across conditions rather than comparing men to women. While none of Wiltse and Hager's well-theorized hypotheses are supported in the quantitative analysis, their qualitative analysis sheds some light on the matter. While there are some interactive effects that are difficult to parse in the quantitative analysis, they also point to important external party factors.

Overall, this is a well-written and organized book that clearly outlines both women's paths to leadership and the conditions that favor those paths. Wiltse and Hager's mixed-methods approach with qualitative case studies and straightforward quantitative studies make their work ideal for both undergraduate and graduate reading material, as well as a great starting point for further in-depth research. It is also worth noting that the authors offer a comprehensive appendix of brief biographical notes with their coding, which could be particularly valuable for scholars looking to do further research or for students for either substantive or methodological learning.

There is plenty of opportunity here for future qualitative and quantitative research. A deeper dive into the activist path and the conditions, perhaps cultural and structural factors, that support such women would be welcome.

Additionally, while this work does well in examining each path individually, future research may consider examining the paths jointly to see how conditions affect a multivariate dependent variable. As Chapter 8 diligently notes, there are many cases in which women still have not cracked the glass ceiling; quantitatively examining those conditions alongside the various types in a two-step approach could yield valuable information. Finally, Wiltse and Hager's results suggest that as women become increasingly likely to win office and do so through the political career path, there is reason to examine the role of political parties, particularly organizational behavior in selecting their leadership to examine when and why (or why not) political parties choose a woman to lead them in their efforts to win office.

References

Jalalzai, Farida. 2013. *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact? Women and the Executive Glass Ceiling Worldwide*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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