

# How Geopolitical Rivalry Undermines Women's Representation\*

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## Abstract

Extensive literature shows that acute security shocks such as terrorism and war reduce women's political representation, yet the consequences of sustained interstate hostility remain underexplored. I argue that rivalries undermine women's representation by cultivating *reservist beliefs*—a political culture comprising deference to authority, civic duty toward national defense, and trust in centralized state institutions—that prepares citizens for militarized escalation while channeling confidence toward male leadership. Using data from 83 democracies (1975-2020) and a range of empirical approaches to identify causal effects in observational data, including generalized synthetic control and time-series cross-sectional analysis, I show that rivalry significantly constrains women's electoral representation. Even when states exit rivalry, divergence from the counterfactual trajectory—what representation would have looked like had rivalry persisted—takes over a decade to materialize, indicating that the adverse effects of rivalry persist well beyond its formal resolution. These results also hold among rivalry states without sustained militarized conflict or terrorism, suggesting that the findings are not driven by rivalry states with recurrent conflicts. To test the mechanism, I draw on the Integrated Values Survey, covering more than 120,000 respondents worldwide. The results show that citizens in rivalry states do not exhibit heightened threat perceptions, but instead display stronger reservist beliefs, with all three pillars predicting bias against women's leadership. Further analyses reveal that unlike rivalry, exposure to terrorism and war is associated with heightened threat perceptions, but not reservist beliefs. Together, these findings provide some of the strongest evidence to date that protracted rivalry undermines women's representation and establish reservist beliefs as a novel mechanism.

**Keywords:** gender and politics, geopolitical rivalry, women's representation, security threats

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Democracies have witnessed remarkable gains in women’s political representation over the past few decades. The average share of women in parliament has more than doubled globally, from 11% in 1995 to 27% in 2026, and a growing number of states have achieved gender parity or beyond in legislatures and cabinets (UN 2026). Women’s political gains have, in turn, improved governance both domestically and internationally, from strengthening the economy (Dahlum, Knutsen, and Mechkova 2022) and reducing affective polarization (Adams et al. 2023) to curbing states’ military actions (Kikuta 2026) and sustaining peace (Shair-Rosenfield and Wood 2017).

Despite these gains, stubborn resisters remain. The United States has women holding just 28% of seats in the 119th Congress, well below the Americas regional average of 36% and ranking 84th globally. Israel similarly lags, with women’s representation in the Knesset stagnating at around a quarter for nearly a decade. South Korea (21%), Japan (16%), Greece (24%), and India (14%) reflect the same broader pattern, continuing to lag behind the global trend toward gender parity in parliament. While these cases differ substantially in the institutional, socioeconomic, and cultural factors that scholars typically invoke to explain women’s underrepresentation (Alexander and Off 2025; Paxton, Hughes, and Barnes 2025; Verge and de la Fuente 2014; Verge and Astudillo 2019), they share one notable feature: protracted interstate rivalry.

This raises two central questions: does geopolitical rivalry—an enduring antagonistic relationship between states that may remain cold or diplomatic rather than militarized—help explain why some democracies continue to lag behind in women’s access to positions of power? If so, why does rivalry undermine women’s representation? Using data from 83 democracies (1975–2020) and a range of empirical approaches to identify causal effects in observational data, including generalized synthetic control, time-series cross-sectional analysis, and within-country tests, I show that rivalry significantly constrains women’s electoral representation, with states engaged in sustained rivalry exhibiting a 6-10 percentage point lower share of women in parliament than non-rivalry states. Importantly, this pattern is not limited to cross-national differences between rivalry and non-rivalry states, which could more readily be attributed to cross-societal differences unrelated to rivalry. Looking at changes over time within the same country, women’s

representation is 3-4 percentage points lower during rivalry years than during non-rivalry years. Even when states exit rivalry and transition to more peaceful interstate relations, meaningful divergence from the counterfactual trajectory—what representation would have looked like had rivalry persisted—takes more than a decade to materialize, indicating that the adverse effects of rivalry persist well beyond its formal resolution. These results also hold even among rivalry states that have not experienced militarized conflict or terrorism for a prolonged period. This suggests that the findings are not driven by rivalry states with recurrent conflicts and that the effect of rivalry is distinct from the legacy of war.

I next turn to the micro-level mechanism underlying this result. The existing literature points to a common mechanism for bias against women leaders in hostile security environments: heightened threat perception. Perceived threat activates preferences for traditional values, conservative policies, right-wing parties and charismatic leadership (Federico and Malka 2018; Eadeh and Chang 2020; Thórisdóttir and Jost 2011; Gillath and Hart 2010), drawing voters toward male leaders during periods of security crisis (Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016; Itzkovitch-Malka 2024). However, rivalries normalize a baseline condition of tension that persists for decades even without direct military confrontation (Thompson, Sakuwa, and Suhas 2022), such that individuals become desensitized to antagonism as it recedes into the background of daily life. How rivalry undermines women’s representation thus remains an open question.

Geopolitical rivalry, I argue, undermines women’s representation by cultivating reservist beliefs, a long-term political culture characterized by deference to authority, civic duty toward national defense, and trust in centralized state institutions that prepares citizens for militarized escalation while channeling confidence toward male leadership. Rivalry permeates public discourse and cultivates worldviews aligned with persistent insecurity (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2013; Halperin and Pliskin 2015), creating a polity that operates on the logic of a reserve force whose members are expected to remain ready for mobilization even in the absence of an immediate threat. I conceptualize the distinctive worldview that emerges from this condition as *reservist beliefs*. The reservist beliefs rest on three relational dimensions: relations with other individuals,

relations with the broader political community, and relations with the state. In relations with other individuals, it entails conformity to hierarchical authority and vertical chains of command in everyday interpersonal interactions. In relations with the broader community, it manifests as an emphasis on shared civic responsibility and mutual obligation around collective defense. In relations with the state, it entails trust in institutions that issue and enforce collective commands, most notably the military and the government. Each predisposition channels confidence toward existing power structures and their predominantly male occupants (Accorsi and Krebs 2025; Cheryan and Markus 2020; Mueller 1985), rendering those who hold these beliefs more skeptical of women's leadership.

To test this mechanism, I draw on the Integrated Values Survey, covering more than 120,000 respondents across democracies worldwide. The results show that citizens in rivalry states do *not* exhibit heightened threat perceptions, but instead demonstrate greater deference to authority, willingness to bear arms for the country, and confidence in government and the military, which together form a political culture grounded in reservist beliefs. Moreover, across countries, adherence to each pillar of reservist beliefs is associated with a 1-3 percentage point decrease in support for women political leaders, even after controlling for conservative ideology, a major predictor of militarism, nationalism, and sexism and one of the strongest potential confounders (Cassese and Holman 2019; Eckhardt 1969). To further distinguish the effects of rivalry, I benchmark its effects against terrorism and militarized interstate disputes as established sources of acute threat. As opposed to rivalry, exposure to terrorism and militarized interstate disputes is associated with heightened threat perceptions, but not reservist beliefs. Together, these results suggest that reservist beliefs constitute a key mechanism linking rivalry to women's political underrepresentation.

This article makes two central contributions. To begin, it provides some of the most rigorous evidence to date on the link between geopolitical rivalry and women's political representation. Estimating this relationship poses substantial inferential challenges, as rivalry is a long-enduring feature and many time-varying controls may themselves be post-treatment to rivalry. In addition

to extensive robustness checks, including sequential g-estimation for post-treatment covariate adjustment and sensitivity analyses for unobserved confounding, the generalized synthetic control design directly addresses these concerns by leveraging identifying variation from countries that exit sustained rivalry. By estimating counterfactual trajectories using countries that remained in rivalry rather than relying on adjustment for covariates that may be affected by rivalry or its termination, it provides rare quasi-experimental evidence on the representational gains that follow transitions away from rivalry.

Beyond this empirical contribution, this article also makes a theoretical contribution by introducing *reservist beliefs* as a novel framework. Existing work has largely relied on threat perception and hawkish attitudes to explain not only gendered leadership preferences but also foreign policy preferences, out-group hostility, and support for war (Aksoy, Enamorado, and Yang 2024; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Huddy et al. 2005; Incerti et al. 2021). Yet these measures do not capture a durable political culture grounded in preparedness rather than willingness to use force, nor do they explain the attitudes and beliefs of citizens who have lived under interstate hostility for so long that acute threat perception no longer dominates political judgment. Reservist beliefs address this gap by shifting attention from short-term reactions to crisis toward enduring political culture produced by protracted interstate hostility.

This research advances a broad range of literature, including women's representation, the politics of interstate rivalry, and the domestic consequences of international relations. First, this study identifies rivalry as a distinct political environment that shapes women's representation. Existing studies on gender and conflict document that acute threats hinder women's access to power and activate stereotypes that women lack masculine-coded leadership traits (Hadzic and Tavits 2021a; Lawless 2004; Itzkovitch-Malka 2024), even when their actual performance in office demonstrates otherwise (Humayun 2024; Imamverdiyeva and Shea 2022). Yet far less attention has been paid to sustained interstate hostility. Building on a small set of studies that examine prolonged threat environments (Kim and Kang 2022; Schroeder 2017) and gendered political culture (Alexander and Off 2025), this study shows that protracted rivalry exerts enduring effects on gen-

der equality by cultivating reservist beliefs. At the same time, this study advances understanding of the politics of geopolitical rivalry and its domestic consequences. Prior research has explored the impact of rivalry on anti-immigrant sentiment (Wimmer et al. 2024), genocide and politicide (Uzonyi 2018), leadership turnover (Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson 2008), state capacity building (Gibler and Miller 2014; Han and Thies 2019; Lu and Thies 2013; Thies 2005), and domestic cohesion and centralization (Bak, Chávez, and Rider 2020; Mari et al. 2022). This study extends the literature by identifying women's political representation as a consequential domestic outcome, laying the groundwork for future research on the broader gendered implications of geopolitical rivalry.

## **Geopolitical Rivalry as a Protracted Security Environment**

Interstate rivalries have spanned centuries and continents. Unlike single disputes or wars, rivalries are enduring relationships of antagonism in which states come to regard one another as persistent threats. Myrick (2021, p.927) characterizes rivalry as a “competitive relationship that could become militarized.” Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos (2021, p.610) similarly define rivalry as a protracted state of enmity in which “states see one another as enemies and competitors.” Across these accounts, the core feature of rivalry is a continuing state of antagonism between countries that develops and endures over time (Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos 2021; Thompson, Sakuwa, and Suhas 2022).

The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of new rivalries forged in the aftermath of decolonization and ideological division. Alongside older rivalries that arose between the mid-eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries, such as those between Colombia and Venezuela and between Thailand and Vietnam (Thompson, Sakuwa, and Suhas 2022; Wawro 2003), new contests emerged as global power structures shifted. The rivalry between India and Pakistan (Ganguly 2002) and the protracted confrontation between North and South Korea (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2013) began in the mid-twentieth century, while the rivalry between Russia and Ukraine deepened

following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

As of 2020, rivalries persist across much of the world, including the Middle East and North Africa (e.g., Syria and Jordan, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Israel), Eastern Africa (Ethiopia and Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, Kenya and Somalia), South-eastern Europe (Greece and Turkey, Russia and Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan), East and Southeast Asia (China and India, North and South Korea, China and Taiwan), Latin America (Colombia and Venezuela, Bolivia and Chile, Guyana and Venezuela), and South Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan, India and Pakistan) (Thompson, Sakuwa, and Suhas 2022). Rivalry, in short, has been a consistent feature of international politics.

The defining feature of rivalry is persistence, as it reflects a relationship between states that endures over time. As Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos (2021) explain, the study of rivalry differs from the study of isolated conflict events in two key respects. First, rivalry research examines long-term patterns of hostility between states, addressing the limitations of conventional approaches that treat conflict as a series of isolated incidents. By focusing on the broader historical and strategic context, rivalry research allows scholars to understand how recurring interactions shape ongoing adversarial relationships. Second, whereas event-based studies often view security as a condition of war versus peace, the rivalry framework emphasizes that interstate competition unfolds across varying levels of tension and hostility over time. As such, it provides a more realistic understanding of how states manage enduring competition and the recurring risk of conflict.

This distinction raises the question of whether insights from studies of short-term crises, such as terrorist attacks or militarized disputes, can be extended to understand the political consequences of prolonged geopolitical rivalry. Acute security crises are known to influence national cohesion and societal cooperation (Godefroidt 2023; Bauer et al. 2016), policy preference (Huddy et al. 2005), and institutional trust (Nägel, Nivette, and Czymara 2024; Davenport et al. 2019), primarily through heightened perceptions of external threat (Getmansky and Zeitsoff 2014; Myrick 2021; Webster, Chen, and Beardsley 2019). Yet effects of acute crises often fade once the immedi-

ate threat subsides. For instance, Bove, Efthymoulou, and Pickard (2024) show that the effect of terrorism on public sentiment is limited and rather short-lived, returning to “homeostasis” even with the first-order measures regarding terrorism. Similarly, Efthymoulou, Pickard, and Bove (2024) find that terrorist threat strengthens British identification but the effect disappears in 45 days as the threat dissipates.<sup>1</sup>

Rivalry, by contrast, reflects prolonged interstate hostility with lasting political and social consequences (Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos 2021; Thompson, Sakuwa, and Suhas 2022). As Halperin and Pliskin (2015) argue, persistent security tensions can permeate everyday life, structure public discourse, and shape the collective agenda. For instance, statements such as the assertion that a “Chinese naval blockade or military attack on Taiwan could constitute a survival-threatening situation for Japan,” surface against a backdrop of decades of accumulated bitterness and shape the domestic political agenda (Hetherington 2026; Ninivaggi 2025; BBC 2014). Even ostensibly conciliatory exchanges are filtered through this adversarial lens. A meeting between the leaders of Greece and Turkey aimed at easing tensions, for example, was nonetheless framed in the news media as “A war threat and a chance: Turkey and Greece face hard decisions—Any compromise would carry significant political costs at home, prompting caution on both sides” (Euractiv 2026). Such narratives routinely remind citizens of the hostile nature of the relationship, reinforcing the very rivalry they describe.

Beyond shaping public discourse, rivalry restructures political institutions and social norms. While rivalries do not necessarily produce conscription (i.e., the United States, Japan, India), states engaged in rivalries are generally more likely to adopt conscription (Asal, Conrad, and Toronto 2017), which diffuses norms of military preparedness not only among conscripts but also throughout the broader citizenry (Kim and Kang 2022). The prominence of national security on the political agenda under these conditions thus leads individuals to adopt worldviews aligned

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<sup>1</sup>Importantly, Peffley, Hutchison, and Shamir (2015) show that while the effects of terrorist attacks are relatively short-lived, *persistent* terrorism has a long-term negative effect on political tolerance among right-wing Israelis. The authors leave the underlying mechanism as an avenue for future research. An important question therefore would be whether the central micro-level mechanism identified later in this article, reservist beliefs, may also apply to persistent terrorism.

with persistent insecurity (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2013). Indeed, existing studies show that rivalry affects citizens' views on a wide range of issues, from attitudes toward the populations of adversary states to leadership turnover and domestic cohesion (Bak, Chávez, and Rider 2020; Gibler and Miller 2014; Han and Thies 2019; Kim, Kim, and Kwak 2024; Mari et al. 2022; Wimmer et al. 2024).

## **How Rivalry Undermines Women's Representation**

A substantial body of research demonstrates that hostile security environments constrain women's access to positions of power (Hadzic and Tavits 2021a; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016; Itzkovitch-Malka 2024; O'Brien and Piscopo 2023). In times of heightened insecurity, voters prioritize leadership traits conventionally associated with masculinity (Hasty and Maner 2025; Falk and Kenski 2006; O'Brien and Piscopo 2023), evaluating women as less fit to govern than their male counterparts (Bauer 2015; Hadzic and Tavits 2021a; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Lawless (2004) finds that, in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attack, citizens in the United States expressed a stronger preference for traditionally masculine leadership traits, perceiving men as better equipped to handle emerging security threats. Experimental evidence by Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister (2016) and Itzkovitch-Malka (2024) similarly demonstrates that security threats tend to erode support for women leaders.

While existing research offers important insights into women's political disadvantage during security crises, it remains unclear whether the acute threat perceptions that link security crises to pro-male leadership preferences extend to conditions of rivalry. Scholarship directly addressing this question remains sparse. Previous work shows that prolonged territorial threats are associated with bias against women's leadership and lower levels of women's representation (Kang and Kim 2020; Kim and Kang 2022), but it tends to focus on how prolonged threat increases state-level militarization, such as military size, defense spending, and conscription, rather than the broader political culture built around the general public's readiness for mobilization. Schroeder

(2017) focuses explicitly on rivalry, but draws on a small set of consolidated democracies and does not identify the mechanism linking rivalry to women's underrepresentation. In summary, the assumption that sustained interstate hostility provokes heightened threat perception remains untested, and the micro-level mechanism through which rivalry undermines support for women's leadership remains largely underexamined.

I argue that rivalry constitutes a distinctive security environment that undermines women's representation, not by producing discrete moments of alarm, but by normalizing insecurity over time. The political culture that emerges from this process reflects the *diffusion of military values into civilian society* through education, media coverage, and mandatory military service (Asal, Conrad, and Toronto 2017; Lin et al. 2009; Yang and Liu 2012; Zheng, Du, and Xu 2025), shaping citizens' attitudes in ways that closely parallel the logic of reserve forces—whose members are expected to remain prepared for mobilization even in the absence of immediate threat. While this persistent state of preparedness facilitates readiness for militarized escalation, it also places greater emphasis on hierarchy and reinforces men's dominance in positions of authority (Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018; Schein 2007), defines citizenship with values that have historically been framed as masculine, such as sacrifice, service, and protection (Best, Hunter, and Thomas 2021; Enloe 2013; Huntington 1981), and strengthens confidence in institutional arrangements that reproduce existing distributions of power, including their gendered composition (Cheryan and Markus 2020). Together, these processes channel confidence toward existing power structures and their predominantly male occupants (Accorsi and Krebs 2025; Cheryan and Markus 2020; Mueller 1985), making citizens more skeptical of women's leadership.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. I first examine whether rivalry constrains women's electoral representation. I then develop the underlying mechanism by introducing and conceptualizing rivalry's distinctive political culture rooted in *reservist beliefs*. Finally, I test this mechanism using the Integrated Values Survey, assessing whether citizens in rivalry states exhibit stronger reservist beliefs, and whether reservist beliefs are associated with greater bias against women's leadership.

# The Effect of Rivalry on Women’s Political Representation

To evaluate whether sustained geopolitical rivalry is associated with lower levels of women’s political representation, I analyze data from 83 democracies between 1975 and 2020.<sup>2</sup> The analysis draws on the Peace Data by Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos (2021), which provides historical and contemporary information on dyadic rivalries. Based on a holistic evaluation of war plans, conflicts, interstate communication, diplomatic exchanges, and mutual negotiations and agreements, the dataset constructs a peace scale ranging from 0 (severe rivalry) to 1 (security community). I code a country-year as experiencing rivalry when its peace score equals 0, indicating the presence of severe and persistent rivalry with at least one other state.<sup>3</sup> This binary indicator serves as the main explanatory variable. Importantly, severe rivalry does not necessarily involve ongoing or repeated armed conflict violence; rather, it captures an enduring antagonistic relationship in which states view one another as enemies and structure their foreign policy accordingly (e.g., the United States–Soviet Union during the Cold War or the contemporary China–Taiwan relationship). Appendix A provides a detailed discussion of how severe rivalry is conceptualized, the components that inform its measurement, and the conditions under which countries transition to lesser levels of rivalry. The dependent variable is the percentage (%) of seats held by women in national parliaments, which captures the level of women’s electoral representation in a given country-year.

Rivalry is associated with a wide range of country-level characteristics. Countries engaged in rivalry are more likely to experience interstate conflict and terrorism, participate in regional security alliances, and exhibit greater military preparedness (Conrad 2011; Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson 2008; Findley, Piazza, and Young 2012), features that have also been shown to hin-

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<sup>2</sup>Not all countries in the sample are democratic throughout the entire study period. Several cases experienced episodes of authoritarian rule or democratic backsliding, and levels of democratic consolidation vary across countries. To address this variation, democracy is operationalized using the average V-Dem democracy score over the post-Cold War period, and countries are classified as democratic if this average exceeds 0.5. The main results remain robust when applying a stricter democracy threshold of 0.7, as shown in Table B.2.

<sup>3</sup>This study restricts attention to high intensity rivalries by coding the rivalry indicator as 1 only when the peace scale equals 0. Accordingly, the results should be interpreted as assessing whether prolonged exposure to high intensity rivalry is associated with different patterns of women’s representation.

der women's advancement to positions of political power (Barnes and O'Brien 2018). Prolonged rivalry further shapes long run institutional features, including regime type, the ideological orientation of government, and the degree of democratic consolidation (Bak, Chávez, and Rider 2020; Myrick 2021; Kim 2019).

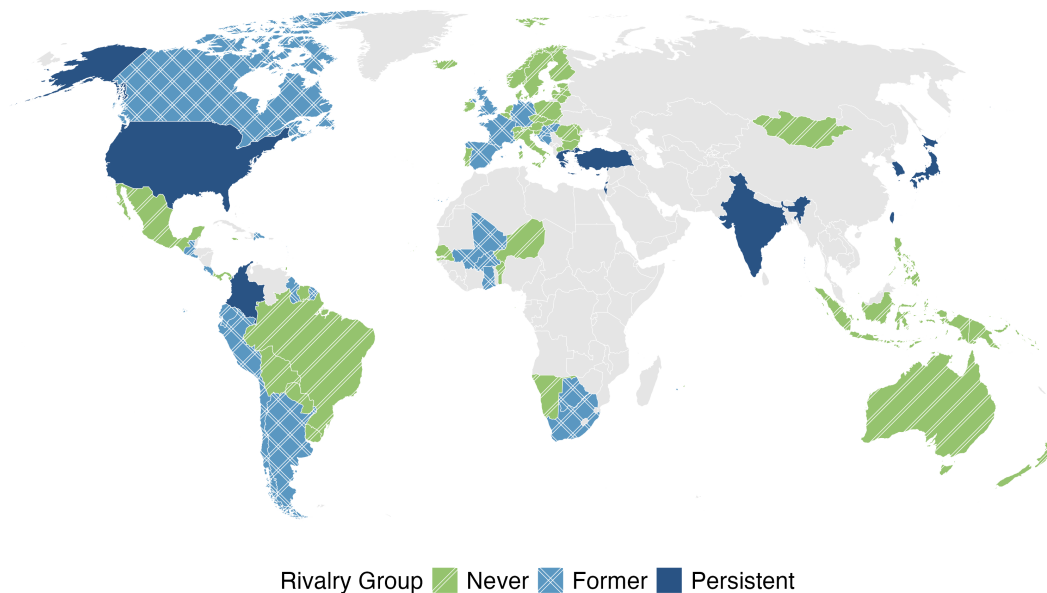
While these factors may constitute important channels through which rivalry influences women's representation, they also raise the possibility that observed patterns in women's representation reflect broader political and institutional environments rather than rivalry itself. To assess whether the association between rivalry and women's representation persists net of these broader conditions, all models control for the occurrence of terrorism events and militarized interstate disputes within the previous three years, logged military spending as a share of GDP, level of democracy, NATO membership, EU membership, the presence of mixed electoral system, and the ideological orientation of the executive. The models also control for economic conditions and institutional policies that directly shape women's electoral pathways to power, such as logged GDP per capita and the presence of gender quotas.

## **Effect of rivalry between states**

To first present the descriptive trajectories of women's representation, I divide the 83 democracies into three groups based on their rivalry status. As shown in Figure 1, the *Persistent Rivalry* group consists of states engaged in interstate rivalries until the end of the study period, including Colombia, Cyprus, Greece, India, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Taiwan, and the United States. The *Former Rivalry* group comprises 22 states that transitioned from a period of severe rivalry to more peaceful relations during the study period. These include Argentina, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and South Africa, among others. Transitions out of severe rivalry occurred between 1978 and 2004, with a median year of 1993. Finally, the *Never Rivalry* group includes 50 states, including Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Mexico, Netherlands, and Portugal, that did not experience rivalry between 1975 and 2020. The full list of countries included in each group is provided in Appendix B.1. For descriptive purposes, I distinguish between countries that ex-

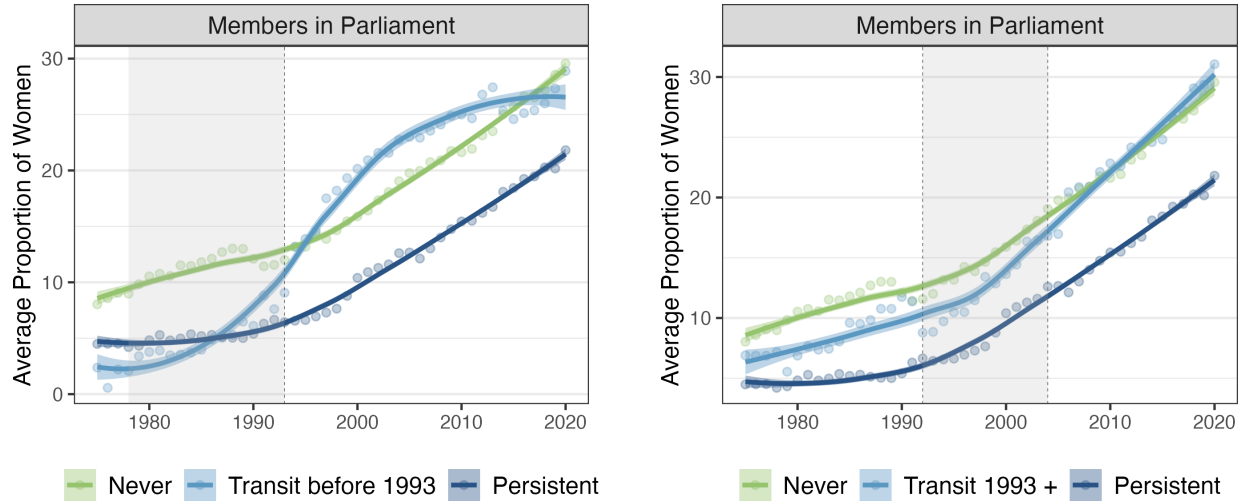
ited rivalry before 1993, the median transition year, and those that exited thereafter, in order to account for cross-national variation in the timing of rivalry termination. As shown in Figure 2, countries with persistent rivalries consistently exhibit lower levels of women’s representation than countries that have never experienced rivalry. Both early and late exiters begin from lower levels of women’s representation but gradually converge toward the never-rivalry group after rivalry ends, suggesting that rivalry served as a barrier to women’s political inclusion.

Figure 1: Interstate Rivalries



*Note:* The figure illustrates the three rivalry categories. Dark blue represents countries with persistent rivalries, light blue indicates former rivalries, and green denotes never-rivalry states. Countries not among the 83 democracies included in this study are shown in gray.

Figure 2: Trends in Women’s Representation across Rivalry Groups



*Note:* The green line represents countries that never experienced rivalry, the light blue line represents countries that exited severe rivalry (before 1993—the median transition year—in the left panel and in or after 1993 in the right panel), and the dark blue line represents countries with persistent rivalries. The gray band denotes the period of rivalry exit or termination.

Yet these descriptive patterns may be driven by other underlying observable differences between rivalry and non-rivalry states. To test whether rivalry states exhibit lower levels of women’s representation even after accounting for differences in militarization and political context, I estimate cross-sectional OLS models that pool each country’s observations across the study period. Specifically, I fit the following model:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta D_i + \mathbf{X}_i \boldsymbol{\gamma} + \varepsilon_i$$

where  $Y_i$  denotes the average percentage (%) of parliamentary seats held by women in country  $i$  over the study period and  $D_i$  measures the proportion of years during the study period in which country  $i$  was engaged in rivalry. The vector  $\mathbf{X}_i$  includes country-level covariates averaged over the study period, and  $\varepsilon_i$  is an error term. The coefficient of interest,  $\beta$ , captures the association between rivalry exposure and women’s representation after conditioning on observed covariates. Standard errors are computed using the HC2 estimator to ensure heteroskedasticity-robust inference. The unit of analysis is the country.

Table 1: Cross-Sectional OLS Estimates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Rivalry	-6.131** (1.977)	-9.673*** (2.319)	-10.110*** (2.523)	-10.044*** (2.753)	-8.738** (2.732)
Terrorism		4.235 (7.117)	1.589 (6.824)	2.089 (7.001)	0.563 (6.745)
MID		-9.121 (6.094)	-2.592 (6.490)	-2.926 (6.651)	2.247 (6.195)
Log military spending		4.682*** (1.281)	3.583* (1.392)	3.650* (1.473)	2.289+ (1.260)
Log GDP per capita			1.619 (1.212)	1.641 (1.228)	3.594*** (0.984)
Democracy			4.156 (8.605)	3.753 (9.513)	-6.850 (8.492)
NATO membership				-0.847 (3.698)	-1.436 (3.777)
EU membership				0.999 (4.220)	2.862 (4.448)
Gender quota					2.733 (3.130)
Mixed regime					0.255 (1.534)
Left executive					6.847** (2.325)
Num.Obs.	83	76	76	76	72
R2	0.070	0.236	0.339	0.340	0.431

*Signif. Codes:* \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ,

Note: Each column reports estimates from an OLS regression. Column 1 presents results from a bivariate specification, whereas Columns 2 through 5 report estimates from models that include control covariates. Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors are reported in parentheses.

The results in Table 1 are consistent with the descriptive patterns. Column (1) reports a bivariate estimate showing that countries engaged in interstate rivalry throughout the study period have, on average, a 6.1 percentage point lower share of women in parliament ( $p = 0.003$ ). This association remains negative and statistically significant as controls are added sequentially. Column (2) adds exposure to militarized interstate disputes, terrorism, and military expendi-

ture ( $\beta = -9.67, p < 0.001$ ); Column (3) further includes GDP per capita and democracy ( $\beta = -10.11, p < 0.001$ ); Column (4) adds NATO and EU membership ( $\beta = -10.04, p < 0.001$ ); and Column (5) incorporates gender quotas, electoral system, and executive ideology ( $\beta = -8.74, p = 0.002$ ). Across all specifications, interstate rivalry is associated with significantly lower levels of women’s parliamentary representation.

Appendix B.2 shows that the results are robust across a wide range of alternative specifications. Applying a stricter democracy threshold (average V Dem score of 0.7; Table B.2), excluding Israel (the case with the most regional rivalries; Table B.3), and excluding the United States (the only great power rivalry case and the only case without geographically proximate rivals; Table B.4) do not alter the direction or significance of the key coefficients. Extending controls for militarized interstate disputes and terrorism from three to ten years (Table B.5) or restricting the sample to countries without conflict episodes in the past ten years (Table B.6) likewise leaves the results unchanged, suggesting that the effect of rivalry is distinct from the legacy of war, and the findings are not driven by rivalry states with recurrent conflicts. Given that some covariates in these models may themselves be downstream of rivalry, I also estimate sequential g-estimators following Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen (2016). The estimator isolates the direct effect of rivalry by first removing from the outcome any variation explained by potential post-treatment covariates, then estimating the association between rivalry and the residualized outcome. The estimated controlled direct effect of rivalry remains negative and statistically significant (Table B.7).

The results also hold when controlling for the number of years women have been legally eligible to hold office (Table B.8), capturing pre-existing differences in women’s political empowerment prior to the study period, and when replacing the severe rivalry indicator from Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos (2021) with the principal rivalry measure from Thompson, Sakuwa, and Suhas (2022) (Table B.9).<sup>4</sup> Across all specifications, the rivalry coefficient remains substantively

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<sup>4</sup>Strategic rivalry dataset from Thompson, Sakuwa, and Suhas (2022) classifies rivalries by type or issue, whereas peace data from Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos (2021) captures variation in the intensity of hostility. As such, a binary indicator derived from the strategic rivalry dataset identifies whether a rivalry of a given type exists, whereas a binary drawn from the lower end of the peace data scale identifies states experiencing the highest level of interstate hostility. Because the argument in this paper concerns how sustained and severe interstate hostility shapes public perceptions of women as leaders, the key issue is the degree of hostility embedded in the relationship rather than

and statistically consistent with the main results. Finally, sensitivity analysis shows that the estimate is robust to substantial omitted confounding. Even an omitted confounder as strong as log military spending, the strongest observed benchmark, would reduce the rivalry coefficient only from -8.74 to -6.34, leaving the relationship negative and statistically significant (Figure B.1).

## Effect of rivalry within states

It is nevertheless possible that unobserved differences between countries that experience rivalry and those that never do, and even between persistent rivalries and those that later terminate, can confound cross-country comparisons. To address this concern, I estimate a two-way fixed effects (TWFE) model that relies exclusively on within-country variation in rivalry status over time. The key independent variable is the one-year lagged rivalry status, and the dependent variable is the proportion of women in parliament. The model includes the same set of covariates as the cross-sectional specification and standard errors are clustered at the country level to account for serial correlation. The unit of analysis is country-year.

The dataset includes 23 countries that experienced a change in rivalry status between 1975 and 2020, with individual rivalry episodes lasting from 4 to 38 years (mean = 15.7, median = 14).<sup>5</sup> Because short-lived rivalries are unlikely to produce the institutional and societal transformations through which sustained rivalry influences women's political representation, including these brief episodes could attenuate the estimated effect of long-term rivalry. As such, I first estimate models using the full set of countries that underwent a change in rivalry status, and then re-estimate them after sequentially excluding cases with fewer than five rivalry years (Spain) and those with fewer than ten rivalry years (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Chile, Germany, the Dominican Republic, Spain, Croatia, and Hungary).<sup>6</sup>

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the substantive type of rivalry. The analysis therefore uses the peace data operationalization as it captures exposure to severe hostility, which is precisely the condition central to the theory.

<sup>5</sup>Appendix A provides a detailed discussion of the conceptualization of rivalry and the processes through which states transition into and out of severe rivalry.

<sup>6</sup>Because military expenditure data are unavailable for Costa Rica across the study period, the fully specified TWFE models exclude Costa Rica through complete-case deletion. As a robustness check, Appendix Table C.3 re-estimates the TWFE models without the military spending control, thereby retaining Costa Rica in the estimating

Table 2: Within-Country TWFE Estimates

	All rivalry episodes	Rivalries lasting 5+ years	Rivalries lasting 10+ years
Rivalry	-1.537 (1.124)	-2.538* (0.953)	-3.736** (1.179)
Num.Obs.	746	703	483
R2	0.831	0.835	0.848

*Signif. Codes:* \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Note: The table reports estimates from two-way fixed effects models in which the dependent variable is the proportion of women in parliament and the key explanatory variable is rivalry status lagged by one year. Full covariate estimates are reported in Appendix Table C.1. Country-clustered standard errors are reported in parentheses.

Table 2 presents the estimates from TWFE models. In the full sample, rivalry is associated with a 1.54 percentage point lower share of women in parliament. Although this estimate does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance ( $p = 0.186$ ), the association increases in magnitude and is estimated with greater precision when countries with only brief rivalry histories are excluded. Excluding cases with fewer than five years of rivalry yields a 2.54 percentage point decrease ( $p = 0.015$ ), and excluding those with fewer than ten years produces a 3.74 percentage point decrease ( $p = 0.007$ ).<sup>7</sup> Once again, these results indicate that sustained rivalries are detrimental to women’s parliamentary representation.<sup>8</sup> Taken together, the cross-sectional and longitudinal panel analyses provide consistent evidence that protracted rivalries undermine women’s representation.

## How long do effects persist?

The theory posits that rivalry constrains women’s representation by cultivating an enduring political culture that aligns citizens’ attitudes with the logic of reserve forces. If so, countries that have experienced prolonged rivalry should require time to diverge from the trajectories established under sustained security competition. To assess this, I examine how long it takes for coun-

sample. The main results remain robust in this alternative specification.

<sup>7</sup>Table C.4 reports results from models that include only country and year fixed effects, without additional time-varying covariates. The results remain robust to this alternative specification.

<sup>8</sup>Restricting the sample further to countries with rivalries lasting 15 or more years yields a coefficient of similar magnitude but attenuated statistical significance ( $\beta = -2.833, p = 0.117$ ), likely reflecting the substantial reduction in sample size ( $N = 377$ ). See Appendix C.2.

tries that exit rivalry to diverge from those that remain in persistent rivalry in terms of women's representation.

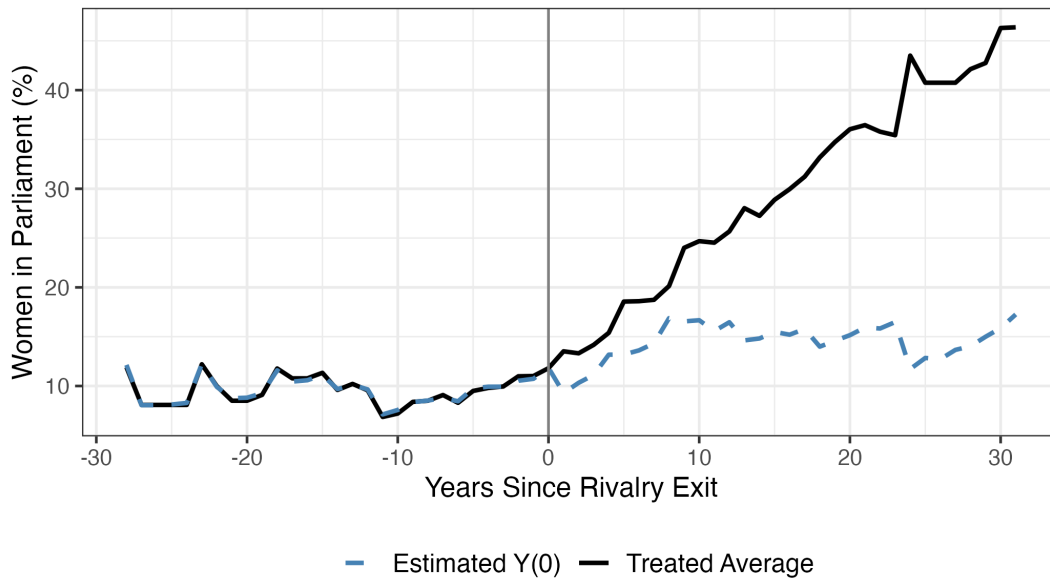
Estimating this effect poses important identification challenges. Exits from rivalry are not random, as countries transitioning to more peaceful relations may differ systematically from those that remain in rivalry. In addition, rivalry exits occur at different points in time, making common latent trends across treated and control units unlikely. To address these concerns, I implement a generalized synthetic control (GSC) design using rivalry termination as the treatment (Xu 2017). The GSC extends the difference-in-differences framework by relaxing the parallel trends assumption and constructing unit specific counterfactuals through a weighted combination of control units within an interactive fixed effects (Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller 2015). This accommodates multiple treated units, staggered treatment timing, and time varying confounders, making it well-suited to the panel structure at hand.

In this analysis, countries that exited rivalries are considered treated units and those with ongoing, persistent rivalries serve as control units. I impose several sample restrictions to ensure reliable counterfactual construction under the GSC design. Appendix D.1 provides a detailed discussion of the sample restrictions, including their theoretical justification and implications for counterfactual construction. After applying these criteria, the final treated units are Ecuador, France, the United Kingdom, Guyana, Peru, El Salvador, and South Africa. The control units consist of Cyprus, Greece, India, Israel, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Turkey, and the United States. The GSC model includes both interactive fixed effects and two-way fixed effects, with standard errors computed through a nonparametric bootstrap of 1,000 replications clustered at the country level (see Appendix D.2). To avoid conditioning on covariates that may themselves be affected by rivalry or its termination, the specification excludes time-varying controls.

Figure 3 shows that the pre-treatment trajectories of women's parliamentary representation are closely aligned between treated countries and their synthetic counterfactuals, indicating a strong pre-treatment fit. Around ten years after rivalry termination, the estimated counterfactual levels stabilize at roughly 15% and remain relatively flat over the following two decades. The

treated countries, in contrast, continue to exhibit steady gains in women’s representation. The Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) becomes positive and statistically significant eleven years after termination ( $ATT = 14.70, p = 0.035$ ). Twenty years after rivalry exit, former-rivalry countries have 25 percentage points higher women’s parliamentary representation than their synthetic counterfactuals in which rivalries persisted ( $ATT = 25.30, p < 0.001$ ).

Figure 3: Treated and Counterfactual Averages



*Note:* This figure presents the treated and counterfactual averages of women’s representation in parliament over time. The solid black line shows the average observed proportion of women in parliaments among countries that exited their rivalries, while the dashed blue line shows the estimated counterfactual trajectories those countries would have followed had their rivalries persisted. Time is measured relative to the year of rivalry termination (0 = treatment year).

Taken together, the results indicate that the adverse effects of rivalry on women’s parliamentary representation are long-lasting. Among countries that exit rivalry, meaningful divergence from the counterfactual trajectory takes more than a decade to materialize, indicating that the effect of sustained geopolitical hostility persists well beyond the formal exit. I now turn to mechanisms through which rivalry shapes women’s political representation.

## How Reservist Beliefs Undermine Women's Leadership

The preceding results show that rivalry is associated with lower women's electoral representation, and that states exiting rivalry begin to diverge meaningfully from their counterfactual trajectories only after a considerable period of time. I argue that one reason for this prolonged adverse effect lies in the distinctive political culture rivalry cultivates among citizens. As rivalries normalize insecurity over time, they produce a political culture in which not only the armed forces, but citizens more broadly, are expected to remain prepared for mobilization even in the absence of immediate threat. I conceptualize the worldview that emerges from this condition as *reservist beliefs*.

To understand reservist beliefs, it is first necessary to examine the defining characteristics of reserve forces. Reserve forces differ from active-duty personnel in their relationship to civilian life. While active-duty members serve continuously under military command, reservists maintain civilian jobs or studies while participating in periodic training and remaining available for mobilization during national emergencies. Their defining feature is this constant readiness for full-time service, which places them at the intersection of military and civilian spheres and creates a broader societal link to national defense (Lomsky-Feder, Gazit, and Ben-Ari 2008). Because reservists must be prepared to fight when called upon, they internalize a militarized socialization characterized by deference to hierarchical authority, willingness to defend the nation in emergencies, and trust in institutions that issue orders, such as the military and the government more broadly (Huntington 1981; Soeters 2018). This belief system aligns closely with the social dynamics of geopolitical rivalry, which institutionalizes a sustained condition of vigilance.

Rivalries inherently carry the potential for militarized escalation that prompts states to entrench military preparedness (Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos 2021; Thompson, Sakuwa, and Suhas 2022). Individuals living in rivalry environments likewise internalize the possibility of armed confrontation through repeated exposure to narratives of national security and persistent external threats. Rivalry states communicate these messages through education systems, media, political rhetoric, and military institutions, creating a "common sense" understanding of national threat

that becomes embedded in everyday conceptions of politics and society (Lin et al. 2009; Yang and Liu 2012; Zheng, Du, and Xu 2025). States involved in geopolitical rivalries are also more likely to adopt conscription (Asal, Conrad, and Toronto 2017), and although enforcement varies across contexts, some rivalry states maintain strictly enforced systems, such as Israel, South Korea, and Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> The effects of this institutionalized militarization extend beyond those who serve directly by exposing the broader citizenry to norms and expectations surrounding military preparedness (Kim and Kang 2022). Sustained geopolitical tension thus normalizes expectations of mobilization and devotion to the state, encouraging citizens to view participation in national defense as a civic obligation, “even to the extent of willingness to sacrifice their lives for the state” (Bar-Tal et al. 2012, p. 41).

This pressure for state preparedness and the need for public compliance generate a distinctive political culture—a set of durable background orientations toward society and the political system that shape citizens’ political attitudes (Almond and Verba 1963). When reservist beliefs become the dominant political culture in rivalry states, leadership evaluation is filtered through its three constituent pillars, conformity to hierarchical authority, emphasis on national defense duty, and trust in centralized state institutions, and women are systematically disadvantaged under each. The following section explains why these manifestations are especially salient under conditions of interstate rivalry and how they undermine confidence in women’s leadership.

### **Conformity to hierarchical authority**

Rivalry states value adherence to hierarchical authority. Acceptance of hierarchical authority facilitates collective action by setting clear responsibilities along chains of command, which reduces uncertainty about who should act, when, and how (Anicich, Swaab, and Galinsky 2015). Such hierarchy is particularly helpful in environments that demand rapid interpretation of signals and swift execution of decisions, such as conflict settings. Conformity to authority fur-

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<sup>9</sup>Not all rivalry states adopt conscription (e.g., the United States, India, and Japan), and a notable number of states that have never engaged in rivalry adopt conscription (e.g., Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Switzerland, and Norway). This makes it unlikely that the results are driven by conscription per se.

ther strengthens intragroup coordination by limiting internal contestation. Compliance becomes more predictable when lower status members are less inclined to challenge superiors, and this allows leaders to mobilize resources and implement directives with fewer delays (Anicich, Swaab, and Galinsky 2015). Because rivalry requires continuous vigilance for potential crises, hierarchical authority becomes routinized in everyday interactions in order to sustain coordination and reduce the risk of fragmentation.

When hierarchical authority is highly valued, women are disadvantaged with respect to both formal institutional recognition and also their capacity to shape others' attitudes and behavior. With respect to formal authority, men's prevalence across politics, business, and other public domains normalizes their exercise of power and shapes expectations about who legitimately holds authority (Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018; Schein 2007; Wängnerud 2009). This visibility reinforces a masculine default in which traits associated with men define competent leadership, rendering women's presence in comparable roles as incongruent with prevailing norms (Cheryan and Markus 2020; Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman, Caleo, and Manzi 2024). As men become the status quo of legitimate authority, women's presence in comparable leadership roles appears incongruent with prevailing norms (Heilman, Caleo, and Manzi 2024). Yet even when women occupy formal leadership positions, they do not necessarily possess the capacity to shape others' judgments or guide collective decision-making (Caverley and Krupnikov 2024). Their contributions in deliberative settings are more frequently interrupted even in highly institutionalized bodies, which reduces their influence relative to male counterparts with equivalent formal standing (Miller and Sutherland 2023). As a result, the authority that formal positions nominally confer is unevenly realized in practice, as men's formal roles translate more readily into perceived influence, while women must continually overcome credibility deficits that their positions alone do not resolve. When authority is especially prized, as it is under rivalry, these patterns of exclusion and bias become more pronounced.

## **Civic duty**

Rivalry states have strong incentives to cultivate civic duty oriented toward national defense. Internally-driven compliance reduces the administrative burden of enforcement, which allows the state to implement security policies through routine governance rather than coercion (Deth 2017). More importantly, voluntary willingness to defend the country is essential when manpower is most needed, as formal obligations alone do not guarantee participation under wartime pressure. Reports of desertion and Absent Without Leave (AWOL) in both Ukraine and Russia illustrate how noncompliance can produce severe infantry shortages even under legal penalty (Asami 2026; Ponomareva 2025). Rivalry states therefore have incentives to foster not merely rule-following, but an internalized commitment to collective defense that normalizes sacrifice and service as expressions of national belonging rather than state imposition.

Such emphasis on civic duty of national defense represents one of the most powerful channels through which rivalries can reinforce gendered hierarchies of political leadership. The meaning of citizenship in militarized social environments becomes closely intertwined with sacrifice, service, and protection, all of which are values that have historically been framed as masculine (Best, Hunter, and Thomas 2021; Enloe 2013; Huntington 1981). The act of defending the nation, among others, is often seen as the highest expression of civic virtue (Gross 2008; Lashof 1996; Nesbit and Reingold 2011). This association creates an implicit hierarchy of citizenship, where men, who are expected to serve and sacrifice, are viewed as more legitimate political actors than women (Cohen, Huff, and Schub 2021; Enloe 2014). Women, in contrast, are often positioned as dependents to the state rather than as its protectors, which diminishes perceptions of their suitability for leadership roles (Kwon 2000).<sup>10</sup>

Empirical evidence from highly militarized societies illustrates this pattern. In contexts such as South Korea, where conscription institutionalizes male military service as a civic obligation,

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<sup>10</sup>Even when women are drawn into national defense, their participation is often justified through exceptionalist narratives of patriotic necessity and does not necessarily transform gendered citizenship. For instance, Santana (2016) shows that while the Rosie the Riveter narrative contributed to women's wartime empowerment, postwar expectations pushed many women back toward domestic roles.

men often view their service as conferring a form of moral entitlement (Kwon 2000). Studies show that this perception contributes to resentment toward gender-based policies, including quotas and skepticism about women's political competence (Bae and Lee 2024). The broader implication is that rivalry environments, by elevating sacrifice and protection as the markers of full citizenship, intensify the gender gap in political legitimacy (Huntington 1981; Persson and Sundevall 2019). In these settings, civic virtue becomes masculinized and leadership becomes synonymous with the capacity to defend rather than to deliberate, undermining the normative space for women's authority (Enloe 2014).

### **Trust in centralized state institutions**

The last pillar of reservist beliefs is trust in centralized state institutions, most notably the government and the military whose directives citizens must be willing to follow in times of emergency. Trust in these institutions serves two functions that are particularly important under rivalry. First, institutional trust facilitates compliance. Citizens with higher trust are more likely to comply with taxation, conscription, and other state demands necessary for security preparedness (Orviska and Hudson 2003; Caplanova, Sivak, and Szakadatova 2021). Second, trust enables swift compliance with restrictions on individual freedom during crises, from wartime curfews to pandemic lockdowns (Caplanova, Sivak, and Szakadatova 2021). Trust in the military specifically underpins citizens' willingness to volunteer for service, accept conscription, and support military spending (Accorsi and Krebs 2025). In crisis situations where the military assumes broad authority over civilian life, trust becomes the foundation upon which compliance rests. Rivalry states cultivate trust in centralized state institutions as a background condition of social order, ensuring that citizens remain willing to defer to state authority when it matters most.

Trust in state and military institutions also provides a pathway through which rivalry reinforces gender bias in political leadership. Rivalries often sustain a militarized political culture in which the armed forces are central to national identity and social order (Kim 2019). When the military is among the most trusted institutions in society, its values of discipline, hierarchy, obe-

dience, and strength become the normative template for leadership itself (Enloe 2013; Goldstein 2003; Kwon 2000). These values privilege traditionally masculine traits and marginalize qualities more commonly associated with collaborative or inclusive leadership styles, reinforcing both male authority and military values more broadly. Consequently, women's leadership becomes less conceivable within the moral framework of governance (Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2011; Lawless 2004).

High levels of trust in government and the military also signal confidence in existing political arrangements and the structures through which authority is exercised (Accorsi and Krebs 2025; Mueller 1985). Individuals who trust these institutions are more likely to view the current organization of power as legitimate and to prefer its continuation. Yet preserving existing arrangements entails preserving patterns of male leadership. Research shows that women are more likely to ascend to positions of power when institutional trust erodes and existing leadership is perceived to have failed (Armstrong et al. 2023; Funk, Hinojosa, and Piscopo 2021), suggesting that high institutional trust stabilizes male incumbency and reduces openness to leadership change. Trust in institutions reinforces support for the existing institutional order and distribution of power, including its gendered composition (Cheryan and Markus 2020), producing a status quo bias that, combined with heightened male authority and the valorization of military values, further reduces citizens' incentives to favor women's entry into positions of authority.

In summary, deference to hierarchical authority, civic duty oriented toward national defense, and trust in state institutions constitute a political culture grounded in reservist beliefs that rivalry both requires and sustains. Enduring geopolitical hostility demands hierarchical compliance to enable coordinated mobilization, civic duty to sustain willingness to sacrifice, and institutional trust to secure the legitimacy of collective action. These same conditions, however, undermine the recognition of women's leadership by normalizing vertical authority structures that exclude women, elevating masculine-coded notions of civic virtue, and reinforcing confidence in male dominated institutions. The result is a political culture that supports preparedness for mobiliza-

tion while constraining women’s political representation.<sup>11</sup> In the following section, I test this mechanism.

## **Testing the Mechanism: Reservist Beliefs, Threat Perception, and Bias Against Women’s Leadership**

This section proceeds in four steps. First, I assess the individual-level association between rivalry and attitudes toward women’s leadership. This tests whether the negative relationship between rivalry and the proportion of women in parliament observed at the country level is also reflected in individual attitudes. If such a correspondence holds, it suggests that voter-level biases contribute to the disadvantage women face in politics. Second, I replicate the well-established finding that exposure to MID or terrorism is associated with heightened threat perception, and demonstrate that citizens in rivalry states do *not* exhibit this same response. This, importantly, suggests that the effect of rivalry on women’s representation operates through a distinct mechanism. Third, I argue that citizens in rivalry states instead show greater respect for authority, civic duty toward national defense, and trust in centralized state institutions, which together constitute reservist beliefs. Finally, I show that all three pillars of reservist beliefs are strong predictors of skepticism toward women’s political leadership, suggesting that reservist beliefs serve as an important mechanism linking rivalry to women’s underrepresentation.

To this end, I draw on individual-level data from the Integrated Values Survey (IVS), a cross-national longitudinal survey that integrates the European Values Study and the World Values Survey. The data consist of seven waves spanning from 1981 to 2021 with nationally representative samples. Following the analytical strategy employed by Kim and Kang (2022) to examine the effects of external threat on support for women’s leadership, I estimate hierarchical linear models with individuals nested within countries and survey years to account for the non-independence

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<sup>11</sup>Reservist beliefs bear a family resemblance to what scholars have called militarism (Kim and Kang 2022; Kwon 2000; Stavrianakis and Selby 2012). Appendix E provides a detailed discussion of how reservist beliefs relate to the broader literature on militarism and extends existing conceptualizations.

of observations arising from the clustered data structure. Random intercepts are included for country and year to account for unobserved heterogeneity across national and temporal contexts. Appendix F.1 lists the countries included in the analyses.

I include the same set of country-level controls as in the TSCS analysis (i.e., the presence of a gender quota, logged GDP per capita, indicators for terrorism and MIDs in the past three years, the level of democracy, logged military spending as a share of GDP, NATO and EU membership, regime type, and left executive) and also include the proportion of women in parliament as a control. The individual-level controls include age, gender, political ideology, income, religion, and religiosity. The key independent variable is rivalry status, coded as 1 if a country-year is engaged in a rivalry and 0 otherwise. Standard errors are estimated from mixed-effects models with crossed country and year random intercepts. Degrees of freedom for fixed-effect tests are approximated using Satterthwaite’s method, which provides small-sample-corrected inference.

The first step is to examine whether individuals in rivalry contexts express lower levels of support for women’s political leadership. I use a standard survey item frequently used in the literature, which asks respondents whether they agree with the statement “Men make better political leaders than women do.” Responses range from (1) agree strongly to (4) disagree strongly. In line with Kim and Kang (2022), I reverse-code this item so that higher values indicate greater support for women’s leadership and then recode it into a binary variable, where 1 denotes support for women’s leadership and 0 denotes lack of support.

Table 3: Bias Against Women’s Leadership

Support for Women as Political Leaders	
Rivalry	−0.045** (0.014)
Num.Obs.	125 417
Num.Ctry	47
Controls	✓

*Signif. Codes:* \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ,

Note: This table reports coefficients from hierarchical linear models with random intercepts for country and year. Degrees of freedom for fixed-effect tests are approximated using Satterthwaite’s method. Full covariate estimates are reported in Appendix Table F.1.

Consistent with the country-level results, the individual-level survey results show that individuals in states engaged in rivalries express significantly lower support for women's political leadership than those in non-rivalry states. As shown in Table 3, respondents in rivalry states report 4.5 percentage points lower support for women's leadership compared to those in non-rivalry states ( $p = 0.001$ ). This pattern supports the interpretation that voter bias helps explain the lower representation of women in parliament observed in the aggregate analysis.

What accounts for this bias? A central argument of this paper is that rivalries not only undermine women's representation but do so through a distinct mechanism. Recall that existing research commonly explains the relationship between hostile security environments and reduced support for women's leadership through acute fear of external danger. If this logic also applies to rivalry, citizens in rivalry states should report stronger feelings of personal insecurity and greater concern about war or terrorism. Yet if such heightened threat perceptions are absent among citizens in rivalry states, it would suggest that rivalry operates through an alternative mechanism that contributes to women's underrepresentation. I examine this possibility by testing whether individuals in rivalry states report greater concern about security threats.

To this end, I analyze three survey items from the IVS. The first, drawn from the Schwartz Human Values battery, measures the importance respondents place on "living in secure surroundings" (1 = not like me at all to 6 = very much like me). The second asks how much respondents worry about a war involving their country (1 = very much to 4 = not at all), and the third asks how much they worry about a terrorist attack, using the same response scale (1 = very much to 4 = not at all). The latter two items are reverse coded from their original scales so that higher values indicate greater concern. I estimate hierarchical linear models for each item and compare the effect of rivalry to those of terrorism and militarized interstate dispute indicators to benchmark its relative strength among well-established sources of insecurity. To address concerns about multiple hypothesis testing, the analysis adjusts p-values using the Benjamini–Hochberg procedure.

Table 4: Threat Perception in Security Environments

	Secure Envirn	War Concern	Terror Concern
Rivalry	-0.798*	0.278	-0.116
	(0.296)	(0.218)	(0.243)
Terrorism	-0.066*	0.140***	0.196***
	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.031)
MID	0.156***	0.012	0.087**
	(0.031)	(0.027)	(0.029)
Num.Obs.	57 055	52 457	52 510
Num.Ctry	31	28	28
Controls	✓	✓	✓

*Signif. Codes:* \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ,

Note: This table reports coefficients from hierarchical linear models with random intercepts for country and year. Degrees of freedom for fixed-effect tests are approximated using Satterthwaite's method and p-values are adjusted using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure. Full covariate estimates are reported in Appendix Table F.2.

Table 4 presents the results. The first row reports the coefficient for rivalry status, the second for exposure to terrorism resulting in more than ten deaths within the past three years, and the third for exposure to a MID resulting in more than twenty-five battle-related deaths in the past three years. Consistent with previous research, recent experiences of terrorism are associated with significantly higher public concern about both the likelihood of war involving one's country and the threat of terrorist attacks. Respondents residing in countries that experienced an MID within the past three years also assign significantly greater importance to living in secure surroundings and express greater concern about the threat of terrorist attacks. In contrast, individuals in rivalry states assign significantly less importance to personal security than their counterparts in non-rivalry contexts, suggesting that rivalries may in fact foster greater confidence in internal security. Furthermore, rivalry status is not associated with greater concern about either war involving one's country or the threat of terrorism.

Taken together, these results confirm that interstate rivalry does not operate through the elevation of threat perceptions. If rivalry suppressed women's political representation by making citizens feel less safe or more fearful of armed conflict, we would expect to observe consistently

heightened security concerns among the public in rivalry states. The evidence, however, points in the opposite direction. Not only does rivalry fail to increase concern about war or terrorism, but individuals in rivalry states report lower attachment to personal security than those in non-rival contexts. These results effectively rule out threat perception as the mechanism linking rivalry to women's underrepresentation and redirect attention toward an alternative pathway.

## **Reservist beliefs and skepticism toward women's leadership**

I next test whether rivalry instead fosters a society that functions as a large-scale reservist system characterized by deference to authority, heightened civic obligation, and trust in centralized state institutions.

**Deference to authority.** I measure compliance with hierarchical norms using respondents' attitudes toward respect for authority. Respondents were asked whether greater respect for authority would be desirable as a future social change, with response options ranging from (1) good thing to (3) bad thing. The item is reverse-coded so that higher values on *Respect Authority* indicate a more favorable view of greater respect for authority.

**Civic obligation.** I interpret willingness to fight for one's country as an indicator of civic obligation, reflecting individuals' readiness to fulfill one of the most demanding duties to the nation. Respondents were asked whether they would be willing to fight for their country, with responses recorded in binary form, yes (1) or no (0). I use this measure as the variable *Willingness to Fight*.

**Trust in state and military institutions.** To capture trust in state and military institutions, I use survey items asking how much confidence respondents have in the national government and the armed forces. Responses range from (1) a great deal to (4) not at all and are reverse-coded so that higher values on *Trust Government* and *Trust Army* indicate greater confidence in these institutions. To assess whether this confidence extends beyond state authority to the broader political sphere, I include parallel items measuring trust in parliament and political parties. Similarly, higher values on *Trust Parliament* and *Trust Party* reflect greater confidence in these institutions.

I fit the same multilevel model with a set of country- and individual-level control variables and adjust the p-values using the Benjamini–Hochberg procedure.

Table 5: Reservist Attitudes in Rivalries

	Respect Authority	Willing Fight	Trust Gov	Trust Army	Trust Parl	Trust Party
Rivalry	0.047* (0.020)	0.061*** (0.014)	0.125*** (0.028)	0.064* (0.025)	−0.084** (0.025)	−0.159*** (0.024)
Terrorism	−0.020*** (0.004)	0.002 (0.003)	0.043*** (0.006)	−0.024*** (0.005)	0.017** (0.005)	0.033*** (0.005)
MID	−0.014* (0.005)	−0.009* (0.004)	−0.019* (0.007)	−0.031*** (0.007)	−0.017* (0.007)	0.018** (0.006)
Num.Obs.	137 520	123 549	130 433	137 919	137 349	134 191
Num.Ctry	47	46	46	47	47	47
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Signif. Codes:* \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ,

Note: This table reports coefficients from hierarchical linear models with random intercepts for country and year. Degrees of freedom for fixed-effect tests are approximated using Satterthwaite’s method and p-values are adjusted using the Benjamini–Hochberg procedure. Full covariate estimates are reported in Appendix Table F.3.

The results in Table 5 show clear differences between rivalry, terrorism, and MID as sources of security pressure. The results for terrorist attacks align with the rally ’round the flag effect where external shocks heighten institutional legitimacy and raise willingness to defend the state. Yet they are simultaneously associated with lower respect for authority and reduced confidence in the military, suggesting that political rallying does not necessarily translate into internalized hierarchical norms. MIDs, by contrast, erode institutional confidence and dampen the willingness to bear the costs of defense, while paradoxically increasing confidence in political parties. Rivalry exhibits yet another pattern. Rivalry is associated with stronger respect for authority ( $p = 0.016$ ), heightened willingness to fight ( $p < 0.001$ ), and greater trust in government ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the armed forces ( $p = 0.011$ ). At the same time, individuals in rivalry states express lower trust in parliament ( $p = 0.002$ ) and political parties ( $p < 0.001$ ). In short, rivalry fosters an orientation toward centralized authority and military preparedness while eroding confidence in politicized state institutions that introduce friction and deliberation into the political decision-making pro-

cess.

Importantly, the models control for one of the strongest confounders, conservative ideology, which is also a major predictor of militarism, nationalism, and sexism (Cassese and Holman 2019; Eckhardt 1969). This indicates that the association between rivalry and reservist beliefs remains significant even after adjusting for a strong alternative explanation. Taken together, these results support the argument that individuals in rivalry contexts exhibit stronger attitudes aligned with conformity to hierarchical norms, a heightened sense of civic duty toward the state, and greater trust in state and military institutions. Rather than producing short-term spikes in perceived insecurity, rivalry cultivates a political culture grounded in reservist beliefs.

Finally, I examine whether the attitudinal features characteristic of rivalry contexts predict lower support for women's political representation. The dependent variable is *Women Leader*, a binary measure capturing support for women's leadership. Models (1) through (4) each include one of the proposed mechanism variables as the main predictor: respect for authority, willingness to fight for one's country, trust in government, and trust in the military. This final step tests whether the reservist belief system characteristic of rivalry states is associated with individual-level bias against women.

Table 6 shows that all three attitudinal dimensions are significantly associated with lower support for women's political leadership. Respect for authority ( $p < 0.001$ ), willingness to fight ( $p = 0.025$ ), trust in government ( $p < 0.001$ ), and trust in the military ( $p < 0.001$ ) are all negatively correlated with support for women's leadership. These results provide strong evidence that reservist beliefs channel confidence toward existing power structures and their predominantly male occupants, making those who hold such beliefs more skeptical of women's leadership. Taken together, the results from this section yield three conclusions. First, citizens in rivalry contexts report bias against women. Second, rivalry is not associated with heightened threat perception but instead corresponds to a heightened sense of reservist beliefs. Third, this reservist belief system predicts lower support for women's political leadership. Reservist beliefs, in other words, serve as an important mechanism through which rivalry undermines women's representation.

Table 6: Reservist Attitudes and Bias Against Women’s Leadership

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Respect Authority	−0.024*** (0.002)			
Willing Fight		−0.007* (0.003)		
Trust Gov			−0.027*** (0.001)	
Trust Army				−0.019*** (0.002)
Num.Obs.	123 073	110 975	121 053	123 343
Num.Ctry	47	46	46	47
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Signif. Codes:* \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ,

Note: This table reports coefficients from hierarchical linear models with random intercepts for country and year. Each column corresponds to a separate model using support for women’s leadership as the dependent variable, and each row reports the estimated coefficients for the key independent variables. Degrees of freedom for fixed-effect tests are approximated using Satterthwaite’s method and p-values are adjusted using the Benjamini–Hochberg procedure. Full covariate estimates are reported in Appendix Table F.4.

## Discussion and Conclusion

A rich body of research has established that the security environment plays a critical role in shaping women’s political representation (Barnes and O’Brien 2018; Hadzic and Tavits 2021b; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2022; Lawless 2004; Kang and Kim 2020). This study contributes to the existing literature by introducing an underexplored dimension of security: long-term geopolitical rivalry. I show that rivalry systematically reduces women’s political representation, and that the adverse effects of sustained interstate hostility persist long after formal antagonism subsides.

Another central contribution of this article lies in the introduction of reservist beliefs as a conceptual framework. Drawing on the Integrated Values Survey, I show that rivalry operates through a mechanism distinct from those identified in studies of acute security crises. Rather than heightening perceived threat, it cultivates deference to hierarchical authority, a sense of civic duty

centered on national defense, and trust in state institutions. Each of these predispositions is associated with greater skepticism toward women's leadership. The study thus advances scholarly understanding of how geopolitical rivalry entrenches gender bias by cultivating reservist beliefs.

Importantly, these findings should not be read as suggesting that women are passive victims of geopolitical rivalry. Women have achieved substantial progress in political empowerment often despite significant structural and cultural constraints (Kreft and Schulz 2022; Lindsey and Koos 2024; Tripp 2023). The trajectories of former rivalry states themselves reflect this agency. As the GSC analysis shows, countries that exit rivalry eventually surpass their counterfactual paths in women's representation, reflecting the sustained efforts of women candidates, feminist movements, and institutional reforms to dismantle entrenched barriers. The contribution of this study is thus not to diminish these achievements, but to identify an underexamined structural condition that shapes the baseline difficulty of that process. Understanding this terrain is precisely what allows scholars, practitioners, and advocates to target the conditions that most effectively constrain women's political advancement.

This research points to several avenues for future inquiry. One important direction is to examine the transmission mechanisms through which rivalry cultivates reservist beliefs, particularly the roles of education systems, media environments, and political rhetoric. Moreover, while this study explores heterogeneity by classifying rivalries according to their duration, future work could examine additional sources of variation, such as the historical origins of rivalries or the political and strategic characteristics of opposing states (Thompson, Sakuwa, and Suhas 2022). Although the main results indicate that rivalry's effects operate across varying levels of democratic consolidation, further research could assess whether similar dynamics emerge in non-democratic contexts.

Beyond the micro-level mechanism, institutional and elite-level pathways also offer an important direction for future research. While this study focuses on how rivalry shapes political culture and voter attitudes, it may also constrain women's representation through supply-side dynamics within parties and legislatures. Party gatekeepers may be less likely to recruit or nominate

women in rivalry contexts, viewing them as electorally risky under sustained security competition (Kim and Kang 2022). Rivalry may also shape militarized legislative agendas that marginalize women’s policy concerns or reinforce masculine norms of political competence within elite networks (Kwon 2000). Institutional arrangements such as conscription policy, gender quotas, and education curricula may also condition the effects of rivalry by shaping gendered understandings of citizenship and leadership.<sup>12</sup> Disentangling these demand and supply-side mechanisms, and their interaction across cultural, institutional, and elite levels, remains a promising avenue for future research.

Finally, future studies should address how societies can mitigate the adverse consequences of security environments for women’s political representation. Although preventing terrorism, conflict, or geopolitical rivalry may be beyond the capacity of domestic actors, it is possible to strengthen the political and institutional conditions that sustain women’s participation even under insecurity. Given the ample evidence that hostile security environments undermine women’s representation (Itzkovitch-Malka 2024; Kim and Kang 2022; O’Brien and Piscopo 2023; Schroeder 2017), understanding what enables states to *maintain* or even *expand* women’s representation during periods of external tension is essential for improving gender equality in an era of enduring global insecurity.

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<sup>12</sup>Indeed, as shown in Appendix G, rivalry is associated with a significantly lower predicted probability that a country has a gender quota in place. Because the main models control for gender quotas, the estimated rivalry effect is not driven solely by quota differences; nevertheless, gender quotas may constitute one institutional pathway through which rivalry shapes women’s representation.

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