

POLITICS AT THE INTERSECTION: A CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS OF MINORITY WOMEN'S LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATION

ABSTRACT

Researchers, organizations, and activists advocate increased political representation for both women and minority groups. But looking around the world, we know little about how politics at the intersection of these identities impacts the legislative representation of minority women. Indeed, aside from a few case studies of Western Industrialized countries, empirical research on women in politics has failed to acknowledge differences among female legislative representatives. In this dissertation I collect data on the representation of more than 250 racial, ethnic, and religious groups across more than 75 democratic and semi-democratic countries. Then, using this new data, I conduct the first large-scale, cross-national investigation of the factors that explain minority women's political representation across different cultural, structural, and political contexts.

Employing a mixed-method strategy, I investigate whether traditional explanations for women's differential presence in national politics also account for differences in minority women's political representation. But I also analyze new factors such as ethnic conflict that may have particularly important effects for minority women in some countries. I find that in many countries, the separate struggles for the political advancement of women and minority groups may translate into few legislative gains for minority women. Minority women are underrepresented compared to both their male and majority group female counterparts. But under certain circumstances, politics at the intersection may create strategic advantages for minority women. For instance, the simultaneous use of both gender and minority group quotas—policies that guarantee a certain percentage of the seats in a legislature must be occupied by women and/or minorities—can produce higher numbers of minority women in politics. This research suggests that scholars and activists should consider not only how to empower women and minorities, but also how to advance the political representation of individuals at the intersection of these social categories.