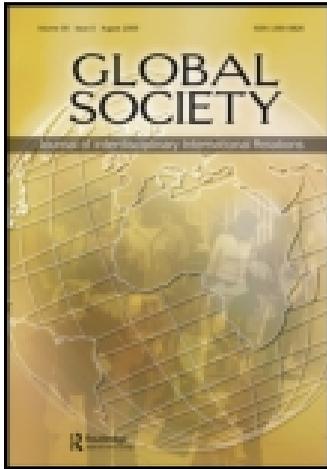


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Global Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgsj20>

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Published online: 19 Mar 2014.



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To cite this article: Kirsten Haack (2014) Gaining Access to the “World's Largest Men's Club” : Women Leading UN Agencies, *Global Society*, 28:2, 217-240, DOI: [10.1080/13600826.2014.887558](https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2014.887558)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2014.887558>

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Gaining Access to the “World’s Largest Men’s Club”: Women Leading UN Agencies

KIRSTEN HAACK

Following the establishment of UN Women in 2010 and the appointment of Christine Lagarde to the position of International Monetary Fund Managing Director in 2011, it appears that today the United Nations (UN) takes gender equality seriously, even within its own leadership ranks. Yet, while research on Women in Politics has paid little attention to women in international organisations, research on leadership in international organisations ignores the question of gender. This is despite an inherent connection between women’s political careers domestically and internationally. Evidence suggests that although women have broken through the glass ceiling in international organisations and thus gained access to what has been termed the “world’s largest men’s club”, women continue to be systematically constrained in a way that enables them to gain access to leadership positions only in specific ways and under specific circumstances. Analysing the role of quotas and the nature of organisations in enabling access through the “glass ceiling”, the limitations of “glass walls” that channel women into gender-specific portfolios, situational dimensions such organisational crisis and instability, and the role of kinship in facilitating access, this paper shows that despite its potential to model and incentivise gender equality, the UN merely replicates domestic patterns of gender inequality.

It has been 20 years since *Ms.*, the American feminist magazine, published Kirshenbaum’s damning exposé of the “world’s largest men’s club”,¹ the United Nations (UN) system. The author painted a bleak picture of an organisation dominated by men who prevented women from changing the status quo, an organisation whose structures kept women in low-paid and low-ranked jobs, with exceptionally few women in the upper levels of employment, let alone in decision-making positions. Kirshenbaum noted that this “men’s club” was defined by both a lack of women UN staff and a lack of women diplomatic staff, with women representing only three delegations (Belize, Jamaica and the Bahamas) at the time. Kirshenbaum alleged that hiring systematically disadvantaged women, while many of the management “reforms” were used to demote women or terminate their contracts. This was despite the fact that the General

1. Gayle Kirshenbaum, “UN Expose: Inside the World’s Largest Men’s Club”, *Ms. Magazine*, September/October 1992.

Assembly had at least paid lip service to the cause of women's representation, commissioning reports and passing a number of resolutions to address the issue. While a woman Under-Secretary-General (head of a Secretariat department) does make an appearance in Kirshenbaum's story, it is noteworthy that in 1992 only three women had occupied the highest offices in the UN system. These include the position of UN Secretary-General or executive head of one of the programmes, funds or specialised agencies. Notably, the highest position, that is, the Secretary-General, remains a man's domain, even if the possibility of a woman Secretary-General had been considered in the past.² Thus, women in the UN system faced a very strong "glass ceiling", that is, "invisible barriers, created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices, to block women from senior executive positions".³

Today, this story appears to have been rewritten. The establishment of UN Women, the UN's Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, in 2010—headed by a woman—and the appointment of Christine Lagarde to the high-profile position of Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) signal even to those not familiar with international organisations that women have entered the higher echelons of UN leadership and that gender equality appears to be taken increasingly seriously by the UN. As of early 2014, and since the first woman broke the glass ceiling in 1987, 21 women have held a leadership position in the UN system, with many more acting as deputies or as Under-Secretaries-General in the Secretariat and thus acting as part of the "cabinet", the Secretary-General's management team. However, with 6 out of 21 women leaders still in office today, this increase in women's appointments to executive office is clearly a recent one. How has this change been facilitated? Moreover, how do women access leadership positions in the context of international organisations?

Research on women in politics highlights the unique condition of women's elections and appointments,⁴ yet this research has paid little attention to women in international organisations. At the same time, international organisations (IO) research has paid little attention to the question of gender in leadership. Indeed, IO research has only recently begun to systematically study leadership, focusing on the UN Secretary-General and other individuals.⁵ Comprehensive data on IO executive heads, men or women, and analyses of their office and leadership do not exist. As a result, we know very little about the women (and men) who occupy executive positions in the UN system, be that individual executive heads or executive heads as either category or cohort. Moreover, the specific historic, political and organisational contexts in which women have been appointed to lead UN agencies are little understood. Applying gender research from national politics to international organisations, focusing on the pattern of representation (where women are represented) and access (how women come to be represented) I find evidence of patterns that are replicated from the domestic to the international.

2. At least one woman, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia, challenged Ban Ki-moon in 2006 (see <<http://www.unsg.org/candidates.html>>, accessed 26 November 2013), while the campaign group Equality Now called for a woman candidate (<http://www.equalitynow.org/take_action/action112>, accessed 26 November 2013).

3. Linda Wirth, *Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling. Women in Management* (Geneva: ILO, 2001), p. 1.

4. Mary Hawkesworth, *Political Worlds of Women* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012); Georgina Waylen et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

5. See Bob Reinalda, *Routledge Handbook of International Organizations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

In an organisation that champions diversity and human rights, the idea of a “gentleman’s club” may be problematic and indeed contradictory. Yet, these patterns are persistent and hold even where key concepts, such as “family relationships” and “shared power”, have to be translated from one domain to the other. Thus, while having broken glass ceilings, women continue to be limited by structural constraints and pressures, enabling them to gain access only in specific ways and under specific circumstances. In other words, access for women to executive leadership is essentially a controlled process in which upward mobility, the breaking of the glass ceiling, now increasingly takes place, but is diminished by limitations to lateral mobility. In other words, women are prevented from accessing all positions of leadership, leaving islands of men’s clubs firmly in place.

To demonstrate this, I will consider five assumptions concerning the conditions and contexts of access and representation from scholarship analysing women in domestic politics and apply these to the UN system. The focus of analysis here is on executive leadership in UN funds and programmes, and the UN specialised agencies, that is, agencies with a degree of autonomy from the UN Secretariat and Secretary-General that have responsibility for both advocacy and programming. Thus, the following agencies are not included: regional commissions, law courts and judges, and heads of departments in the UN Secretariat, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, a role that has been held—very prominently—by several women. The assumptions made by Women-in-Politics scholars regarding women’s access to executive office relate to the presence of quotas, the nature of the political system/organisation into which women are appointed, the nature of the portfolios that women represent, situational dimensions such as crises and organisational instability, and the role of family relations, here: political kinship. Drawing on these assumptions, I will show that despite the UN’s potential to model and incentivise equality, the UN merely replicates domestic patterns of gender inequality.

Women in Politics

As women have increasingly gained access to politics, be that in political parties, legislatures, executives or cabinets, they continue to be subject to a number of constraints and pressures that curtail their advancement both vertically (into the upper echelons of power) and horizontally (into certain areas). From this pressure emerge patterns of political participation and representation that effectively create islands of men’s clubs, leaving women outside or on the fringes of some organisations, while clustering them into others. Executive leadership is one role that continues to be particularly difficult to achieve for women. Analysing patterns of participation and representation, research found that women’s access to executive office is a function of one or more of the following criteria: quotas, the nature of power in the political system/organisation, the nature of the organisation’s portfolio, the existence of crisis and the role of political families.

Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Vertical Mobility and its Constraints

The advancement of women, or lack thereof, is neatly captured in the notion of the *glass ceiling* through which women may look, but which needs to be shattered

before progress can be achieved. Conditions for this progression into the upper echelons of power can be actively created, for example, through quotas. Alternatively, they emerge out of special sets of circumstances, such as political crises, that create windows of opportunity for a few women. Both have positively influenced vertical mobility, that is, the breaking of the glass ceiling, in the past, leading to the following conclusions:

1. *Women are more likely to break the glass ceiling where quotas are institutionalised*
Perhaps the most established mechanism to enhance women's participation, quotas vary from loose commitments and legislative quotas that require all parties to nominate a certain percentage of women, to reserved seats, which leave positions vacant if no suitable candidate can be found.⁶ Initially used by political parties (particularly on the Left) to enhance internal democracy as well as to channel more women into legislatures, in recent years a growing number of states have amended their constitutions or electoral codes to introduce quotas. Quotas favour women in multiple ways. According to Krook, quotas are most likely to emerge in systems where the general view of recognising difference—a central UN goal—is established.⁷ Thus, the wider the quota's application, that is, the more criteria of difference are relevant, the greater the chances for women to access office. For example, in Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel's triple marker of difference as a woman, Eastern German and Protestant in a typically male, Western German, Catholic party greatly enhanced her chances to be appointed to senior positions within the party (and beyond), even without formal quotas.⁸ Elsewhere, UN and World Bank policies, which see gender equality as instrumental to the achievement of social and economic development, have led to an increase in quotas in member states as these organisations spread and model norms for legitimate action, either by pressuring for quotas or explicitly supporting (materially or immaterially) women as representatives.⁹

2. *Women are more likely to access executive office in times of crisis*
Political crises or instability and the resulting uncertainty create windows of opportunity for women to access political office, in some cases providing the only means for women to do so.¹⁰ This theory does not suggest that crises guarantee a woman's election, nor does it imply that crises won't lead to a change in political leadership from one male leader to another. Instead, it suggests that where women have been elected in the past, this has been in the context of political crisis. Crises include political turmoil, often involving the assassination of the previous leader (often a male relative of the woman candidate), combined with a turn

6. Mona Lena Krook, "Quota Laws for Women in Politics: Implications for Feminist Practice", *Social Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2008), pp. 345–368.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Sarah Elise Wiliarty, "Chancellor Angela Merkel—A Sign of Hope or the Exception that Proves the Rule?", *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2008), pp. 485–496.

9. Susan Sunn Bush, "International Politics and the Spread of Quotas for Women in Legislatures", *International Organization*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (2011), pp. 103–137.

10. Piper A. Hodson, "Routes to Power: An Examination of Political Change, Rulership, and Women's Access to Executive Office", in MaryAnne Borrelli and Janet M. Martin (eds.), *The Other Elites. Women, Politics, and Power in the Executive Branch* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997).

to corruption, authoritarianism and war.¹¹ Crises also emerge in party politics, for example, following electoral defeat or internal party scandals.¹² Crises may present women as an alternative to current practices or create "glass cliffs", that is, situations in which leadership positions become so precarious due to the likelihood of failure that they become unattractive to men.¹³

In the context of a crisis, women are seen to offer an attractive alternative to the electorate. They evoke ideas of filial duty, nurture and care by loving wives and daughters, as well as notions of nurturing and caring applied to the nation as a whole. Women, or their "female character", suggest honesty and (political) innocence compared to the corruption and violence of male leaders and the systems of patronage they cultivate.¹⁴ In other words, women are generally associated with good governance and principles such as social justice, equality and development.¹⁵ This can also be observed in the private sector where firms, when faced with public relations crises, are more likely to appoint women to signal to key stakeholders the intention to change.¹⁶ These associations follow gendered perceptions and expectations of what women's characteristics are, yet mirror the difficulty feminist writers have when calling for the "feminisation" of politics based on (real or perceived) innate differences between men and women.¹⁷

Looking through Glass Wall: Lateral Mobility and its Constraints

Even where women are able to break through the glass ceiling and move into the upper echelons of an organisation, they do not move freely into any available position. Access is constrained by factors that reflect a stereotypical understanding of women, their "nature", interests and abilities. Thus, lateral mobility is constrained by preconceptions of what is "suitable" for women, as well as by considerations of which women are suitable for executive office.

3. *Women are more likely to be appointed to lead "soft", female portfolios*

Islands of men's clubs also emerge from the nature of portfolios, that is, the subject matter of the organisations that women are elected or appointed to lead. Women are streamed into specific portfolios, creating "glass walls",¹⁸ which constitute barriers (here: lateral barriers) to women's advancement similar to glass ceilings. The association of women with specific issues stereotypes women and leads to the

11. *Ibid.*; Filomina Chioma Steady, *Women and Leadership in West Africa. Mothering the Nation and Humanizing the State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

12. Wiliarty, *op. cit.*

13. Michelle K. Ryan and S. Alex Haslam, "The Glass Cliff: Exploring the Dynamics Surrounding the Appointment of Women Precarious Leadership Positions", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 32 (2007), pp. 549–572.

14. Michael A. Genovese (ed.), *Women as National Leaders* (London: SAGE, 1993); Steady, *op. cit.*

15. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook and Jennifer M. Piscopo (eds.), *The Impact of Gender Quotas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

16. David Brady *et al.*, "Sector, Size, Stability, and Scandal. Explaining the Presence of Female Executives in Fortune 500 Firms", *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2011), pp. 84–104.

17. See Joni Lovenduski, *Feminizing Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

18. Wirth, *op. cit.*

gendering of portfolios.¹⁹ Generally speaking, women are positively associated with so-called “compassion issues”, such as childcare, health care, education, the environment, civil rights and the control of government spending, while men are associated with military spending, foreign trade, agriculture, crime and tax. Disagreement exists over issues such as crime, suggesting the existence of gender-neutral *issues*, yet gender-specific *positions* on these issues.²⁰ For example, writing about the USA, Huddy and Terkildsen found that the issue of guns becomes one of gun control if taken up by women but one of the right to hold arms if taken up by men. Similarly, while some consider economics to be a male issue, some consider “budget control” a female issue.²¹ This gendered dichotomy of issues is not limited to politics but can also be observed in the private sector where women are more likely to be found in executive positions of companies with a female or child-centred clientele, in non-manufacturing and service sector firms, such as health care, social services and retail. While manufacturing remains a men’s domain, women are increasingly hired into the financial services, consumer products and media sectors.²²

4. *Women are more likely to be appointed in systems where power is shared*

As women break the glass ceiling they tend to become more prevalent in some areas than others, leaving islands of men’s clubs completely intact or making women visibly stand out. Duerst-Lahti argues that the executive branch is the most masculine branch of government as it is organised in a “centralized, functionally distributed and hierarchical arrangement”,²³ from which a “big man” model of leadership follows. This stands in contrast to deliberative fora in which power is shared and communication is central to success. Deliberative processes are seen as more “suitable” to the female character than the quick and decisive one-man decisions required by the executive. Thus, women are not only reduced to their “softer” nature and the roles of communicators and consensus-seekers,²⁴ they are also more likely to hold executive office where their powers

19. Rainbow Murray, “Introduction: Gender Stereotypes and Media Coverage of Women Candidates”, in Rainbow Murray (ed.), *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling. A Global Comparison of Women’s Campaigns for Executive Office* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010).

20. Kathleen Dolan, “Do Women Candidates Play to Gender Stereotypes? Do Men Candidates Play to Women? Candidate Sex and Issues Priorities on Campaign Websites”, *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (2005), pp. 31–44; Deborah Alexander and Kristi Andersen, “Gender as a Factor in the Attribution of Leadership Traits”, *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (1993), pp. 527–545; Farida Jalalzai, “Women Rule: Shattering the Executive Glass Ceiling”, *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2008), pp. 205–231.

21. See Leonie Huddy and Nayda Terkildsen, “The Consequences of Gender Stereotypes for Women Candidates at Different Levels and Types of Office”, *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (1993), pp. 503–525; Huddy and Terkildsen break down economic issues into three dimensions: budget deficits, dealing with business and industry leaders, and handling the saving and loans crisis. Given the remit of the World Bank, the IMF and other development banks, and the current global financial crisis, a separation of these issues is useful to identify whether economic issues can indeed be separated into male and female roles or tasks.

22. Brady *et al.*, *op. cit.*

23. Georgia Duerst-Lahti, “Reconceiving Theories of Power: Consequences of Masculinism in the Executive Branch”, in MaryAnne Borrelli and Janet M. Martin (eds.), *The Other Elites. Women, Politics, and Power in the Executive Branch* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997).

24. Jalalzai, *op. cit.*

are limited in number and shared with others, that is, where executive power is fragmented²⁵ and where leaders can be more easily removed from their positions.²⁶

5. *Women are more likely to access executive office if part of a political family*

The concept of crisis, as shown above, highlights the importance of the political family. Indeed, the concepts of family and kinship explain the paradox of how women gain access to executive office even in countries where women generally do not have access to power socially or politically.²⁷ With very few exceptions, women leaders also have family connections to political leaders.²⁸ These connections serve a number of functions. While political families may form part of a woman's political socialisation,²⁹ a woman's proximity to the political elite at the start of her political career means that voters in an otherwise male-dominated society can rationalise her as an anomaly and discount her gender.³⁰ In addition to fulfilling the political legacy of a deceased family member, political inheritances have instrumental power for the candidate as she may draw on the effects of name recognition and use her inheritance to gain access to financial resources and established campaign organisations.³¹ Thus, belonging or indeed *not* belonging to a political family can influence women's chances of gaining access to executive office. While being part of a politically powerful family has played a role in most cases where women were elected as prime minister or president, the recent elections of Michelle Bachelet and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf show that family connections may no longer be as essential as for the first women who broke the glass ceiling.³²

In summary, women's ability to access executive office is shaped by a range of factors that constrain both vertically and horizontally. In the following section, all five points of constraint are analysed in the context of organisations within the UN system, namely, UN funds, programmes and specialised agencies.

Women in International Organisations

The following sections address in turn each of the five points on women's access to executive office, applying them to the context of the UN system, demonstrating that with the exception of the criterion of "political family", access constraints to executive positions in international organisations mirror access constraints to executive positions in national political contexts.

25. Farida Jalalzai and Mona Lena Krook, "Beyond Hillary and Benazir: Women's Political Leadership Worldwide", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 31, No. 5 (2010), pp. 5–21.

26. Jalalzai, *op. cit.*

27. Jalalzai and Krook, *op. cit.*

28. Genovese, *op. cit.*; Hodson, *op. cit.*; Jalalzai and Krook, *op. cit.*

29. Hodson, *op. cit.*

30. Michael A. Genovese and Seth Thompson, "Women as Chief Executives: Does Gender Matter?", in Michael A. Genovese (ed.), *Women as National Leaders* (London: SAGE, 1993).

31. Hodson, *op. cit.*

32. Gwynn Thomas and Melinda Adams, "Breaking the Final Glass Ceiling: The Influence of Gender in the Elections of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Michelle Bachelet", *Journal of Women Politics & Policy*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2010), pp. 105–131.

Breaking the Glass Ceiling

1. *Women are more likely to break the glass ceiling where quotas are institutionalised*
 As the following discussion shows, since the introduction of informal quotas the number of women in UN leadership positions has indeed increased; however, advances have been modest and recent, despite a strong history of women's rights promotion. Moreover, as the following sections show, this increase followed specifically gendered patterns.

Gender and gender equality have been promoted by a group of very active women diplomats and activists as human rights questions right from the UN's inception. Since the establishment of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 1946, the Women's Year and a global conference in Mexico in 1975, the UN Decade on Women and conferences in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995), and the establishment of UN Women in 2010, women have played a critical role in tabling women's issues at the UN.³³

Over the years, a number of reports have highlighted the underrepresentation of women not only in national assemblies and politics, but also in UN delegations and the UN system. In 1988, following recommendations made by the Copenhagen and Nairobi conferences, the Secretary-General established a Focal Point for Women, which was to monitor and report on the status of women and assist the Secretary-General in achieving gender balance quotas set in 1986. With optimistic deadlines, the General Assembly has since adopted 11 resolutions, raising the bar from 30% of all UN posts to be occupied by women (subject to geographic consideration) to today's 50% goal, which was introduced in 1996.³⁴ References to geographic representation were dropped in 1997, which, according to Timothy had been used as a means to prevent women from accessing executive office based on the assertion that regional considerations had to be addressed first before gender could be considered.³⁵ Thus, the removal of the geographic representation criterion further strengthened gender equality. Thus, while the normative and institutional framework has ensured that gender equality is embedded in the UN system's goals and targets, in practice this has been much harder to achieve.

Employment data collected by WomenWatch, a UN information and resources portal for gender equality and the empowerment of women in the UN system, shows a rise in women employees across the UN system at all levels of employment since the establishment of the first gender quota. **Figure 1** shows that progress toward gender equality has been steady. However, results have been uneven across the UN system and within organisations. Some organisations have achieved full gender equality in some categories, even excelling the 50% target. For example, in some cases gender parity has been achieved at the higher level of P-5 but not the lower level of P-3, highlighting that there is no correlation between level of employment and gender at the professional levels. At the same time, some organisations

33. Devaki Jain, *Women, Development, and the UN. A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

34. UN Women, "Legislative Basis for the UN Mandate on Representation of Women in the United Nations System", 18 October 2010, available: <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fplegbasis.htm>> (accessed 1 August 2013).

35. Kristen Timothy, "Equality for Women in the United Nations Secretariat", in Anne Winslow (ed.), *Women, Politics, and the United Nations* (Westport, CO: Greenwood Press, 1995).

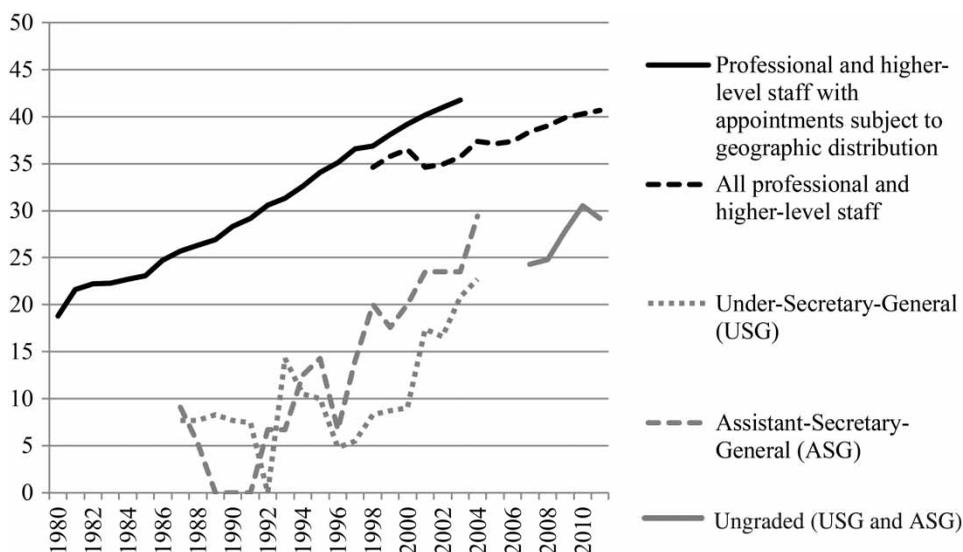


Figure 1. Women in the UN System, 1980–2011.

Source: Compiled from United Nations General Assembly, *Improvement in the Status of Women in the United Nations System*, Report of the Secretary-General, various years.

Note: Reporting changes between 1998 and 2003 have led to some discontinuities in the representation of data, reducing the overall trend. Changes included the creation of joint categories for (1) professional and higher level staff on contracts of one or more years subject to geographic distribution, staff with special language requirements and staff appointments limited to service with a particular office, and (2) for the most senior levels (USG and ASG) (see A/53/367, 14 September 1998). USG/ASG data was not available for 2005 and 2006, and prior to 1998.

continue to be dominated by male staff, while in others women are predominant. Thus, the General Assembly recognised in its 1997 resolution 51/67 that its goal of gender parity at all levels may not be met, especially at policymaking and decision-making levels (i.e. D1 and above), and called for member states to “identify and regularly submit [...] more women candidates and [...] encourage women to apply for posts within the Secretariat, the specialized agencies and the regional commissions”.³⁶ This has certainly shown results as women have been increasingly nominated for leadership positions.

As Table 1 shows, the first wave of women executive heads came into office during the terms of Javier Perez de Cuellar and Boutros Boutros-Ghali. These first appointments followed the highly successful Beijing conference and a decade of very active women’s rights work at the UN. In 1987, Margaret Anstee (UK) became Director-General of the UN Office in Vienna, shortly after (also in 1987) followed by Nafis Sadik (Pakistan), who was made Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Following this initial push and success in reaching its goal of 35% women in posts subject to geographic distribution in 1996, the UN realised that the current annual increase of less than 1% was not

36. United Nations, *Resolution by the General Assembly on the Improvement of the Status of Women*, A/RES/51/67 (31 January 1997).

Table 1. Women Leaders in Chronological Order of Access to Office.

Secretary-General	UN funds and programmes		UN specialised agencies	
Ban Ki-moon (2007–2016)	2013–	UN Women: Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (South Africa)	2011–	IMF: Christine Lagarde (France)
	2012–	WFP: Ertharin Cousin (USA)	2009–	UNESCO: Irina Bokova (Bulgaria)
	2010–	UN Women: Michelle Bachelet (Chile)	2007–	WHO: Margaret Chan (Hong Kong, China)
	2009–	UNDP: Helen Clark (New Zealand)		
	2007–2011	UN Deputy-Secretary-General: Asha-Rose Migiro (Tanzania)		
	2007–2012	WFP: Josette Sheeran (USA)		
Kofi Annan (1997–2006)	2005–2010	UNICEF: Ann M. Veneman (USA)		
	2005–2010	UNRWA: Karen Koning AbuZayd (USA)		
	2001–2010	UNFPA: Thoraya A. Obaid (Saudi Arabia)		
	2000–2010	UN-HABITAT: Anna Tibaijuka (Tanzania)		
	1998–2006	UN Deputy-Secretary-General: Louise Fréchette (Canada)		
Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992–1996)	1995–2005	UNICEF: Carol Bellamy (USA)	1998–2003	WHO: Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norway)
	1993–1998	UNEP: Elizabeth Dowdeswell (Canada)		
Javier Perez de Cuellar (1982–1991)	1992–2002	WFP: Catherine Bertini (USA)		
	1990–2000	UNHCR: Sadako Ogata (Japan)		
	1987–2001	UNFPA: Nafis Sadik (Pakistan)		
	1987–1992	UNOV: Margaret Anstee (UK)		

enough to achieve gender parity until well into the twenty-first century.³⁷ Thus, the beginning of Kofi Annan's Secretary-Generalship in 1997 marked a renewed push towards gender parity. Kofi Annan appointed the same number of women leaders as both of his predecessors combined. Ban Ki-moon appointed a similar number of women, however, personnel changes in the first year of his second term saw this number reduced as women were replaced by men, highlighting the difficulty in achieving as well as *maintaining* gender equality at executive level.

37. United Nations, *Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat. Report of the Secretary-General*, A/52/408, 30 September (New York: United Nations, 1997). For current projections, see <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fggenderbalancestats.htm>>.

Table 2. UN Agencies with Woman Leader.

Agency	Established	Date of first woman executive head	Number of executive heads	
			Overall	Women
UN Deputy-Secretary-General	1997	1998	4	2 (50%)
UN funds and programmes				
UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)	1946	1995	5	2 (40%)
UN Development Programme (UNDP)	1966	2009	8	1 (13%)
UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)	2010	2010	2	2 (100%)
UN Environment Programme (UNEP)	1972	1993	6	1 (17%)
UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)	2002	2000	2	1 (50%)
UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	1950	1990	10	1 (10%)
UN Office in Vienna (UNOV)	1982	1987	6	1 (17%)
UN Population Fund (UNFPA)	1969	1987	4	2 (50%)
UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)	1949	2005	13	1 (0.8%)
World Food Programme (WFP)	1962	1992	12	3 (25%)
Specialised agencies				
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	1946	2011	11	1 (0.9%)
UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	1946	2009	10	1 (10%)
World Health Organization (WHO)	1948	1998	8	2 (25%)

With such high-profile leaders as Christine Lagarde at the IMF, it *appears* that women leaders of international organisations are as commonplace today as in any other organisation. Yet the group of women leaders remains a select one: since 1987, when Margaret Anstee and Nafis Sadik were made head of a UN agency, only 20 women have held executive positions in the UN system. This number includes women leading UN agencies and the position of Deputy-Secretary-General (DSG). Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate that 13 UN agencies have had at least one woman leader, while the leadership positions of only four organisations (WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP) as well as the role of the DSG, were held by two women, respectively. Fourteen agencies remain gentlemen's clubs, never having had a woman leader. While older organisations, especially those founded in the nineteenth century and incorporated into the UN system after the Second World War, are less likely to have had a woman leader, these islands of gentleman's clubs share other characteristics, which will be further explained below.

In summary, quotas have had a positive impact on women's representation in the UN system. The nature of these quotas, that is, the fact that they are circumscribed as "goals", relying on voluntary observance by member states and the

Table 3. Gentleman's Clubs—UN Agencies without a Woman Leader.

Agency	Established	Number of leaders
UN funds and programmes		
UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	1964	6
Specialised agencies		
International Labour Organisation (ILO)	(1919 ^a) 1946	(3) 7 ^b
Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO)	1945	9
World Bank	1944	12
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)	1947	11
International Maritime Organization (IMO)	1958	8
International Telecommunications Union (ITU)	(1865 ^a) 1947	(8) 10 ^b
Universal Postal Union (UPU)	(1874 ^a) 1948	(7) 8 ^b
UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)	1967	7
UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)	1997	3
World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)	(1893 ^c) 1967	(6) 4
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)	(1873 ^c) 1950	(7) 5
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	(1932 ^c) 1975	5

^aDenotes date of foundation; the organisation became a UN specialised agency after the Second World War, maintaining its name.

^bExecutive heads who remained in office as the organisation became a UN specialised agency are included here in the UN phase.

^cDenotes date of organisation's predecessor (name, form and/or function changed).

Secretary-General to nominate and elect/appoint women, and that they interact with other important criteria, such as merit and (less so) with geographic representation, may slow down progress toward their achievement. Despite this, progress has been solid, providing women in the UN system with firmer foundations to stand on.

2. *Women are more likely to access executive office in times of crisis*

The criterion of crisis applies specifically in the context of the specialised agencies where women are elected by member states. By contrast, in the UN funds and programmes the Secretary-General appoints executive heads, making access to leadership less dependent on situational factors, such as the whims of member states. Crises have determined the context of women's elections to leadership in the case of the specialised agencies, enabling women to break the glass ceiling in this specific institutional context. In international organisations, crises take a specific form. Newman defines crisis as a situation that is not only related to institutional effectiveness with regard to the achievement of policy objectives, but one that is fundamentally defined through the *expectations* of member states to operate according to the principles and goals upon which the organisation was founded.³⁸ Hence, next to corruption and mismanagement, the issue of "politicisation" has contributed in the past to the destabilisation of organisations by creating conflict or reducing confidence in the organisation. This led to the withdrawal of resources or participation, especially by major powers. While politicisation has been linked

38. Edward Newman, *A Crisis of Global Institutions? Multilateralism and International Security* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 27.

predominantly to agenda setting and decision-making (e.g. Cold War polemics, anti-Israel resolutions, the New International Economic Order),³⁹ executive appointment processes are not immune to politicisation as elections in the specialised agencies show. In addition to open confrontation or conflict, the unwritten rule of regional rotation and regional coalition building ("horse trading") determines the outcome of elections and the chances of women accessing executive leadership.

Gro Harlem Brundtland's election to the position of WHO Director-General in 1998 is a classic example of the crisis theory. Director-General Hiroshi Nakajima's (Japan) leadership had led to low morale across the organisation and its staff, a bloated bureaucracy, (financial) mismanagement and disillusioned member states. Nakajima was accused of cronyism, racism against African states and "misplaced budget priorities".⁴⁰ Competing against two candidates from Asia, Latin America and Africa, respectively, Brundtland was the only candidate from a developed country and one of two women. Brundtland's training in public health, her experience as Norwegian prime minister and her "great leadership qualities and exceptional determination"⁴¹ were clearly favoured by member states, who regarded her as most suitable to deal with the crisis. At the same time, US opposition to Nakajima and endorsement of Brundtland saw Brundtland win 18 of the necessary 17 votes in the fourth round.

Crisis—organisational and external—equally favoured the election of Christine Lagarde to the position of IMF Managing Director in 2011. Following the resignation of her compatriot Dominic Strauss-Kahn from the position of IMF Managing Director in light of rape allegations, Lagarde was able to emerge as a favourite candidate. With her professional credentials unquestioned, her "female qualities" stood in contrast to both her predecessor Strauss-Kahn and her main competitor, Mexico's Agustín Carstens. Described as "ascetic" and being a vegetarian teetotaler and fitness fanatic, Lagarde, who had been a director of a renowned global law firm and France's longest serving Finance Minister, offered not only a (visible) alternative to Carstens' "portliness" but also to Strauss-Kahn's lack of professionalism.⁴² In addition to this, the financial crisis in the Eurozone provided further opportunity for Lagarde's election. Despite recognition that leadership should move away from Europe and towards developing countries, European states had a strong interest in maintaining European leadership in order to deal with issues in their own backyard. With the additional backing of China and the USA, the majority of votes were thus secured for Lagarde.⁴³

Instability and politicisation also played a role in the 2009 election of Irina Bokova to the position of UNESCO Executive Director. Here, crisis arose as part of the election process and therefore suggested the (undesirable) scenario of potential future instability. More than any other agency, UNESCO has suffered

39. Sagarika Dutt, *The Politicization of the United Nations Specialized Agencies. A Case Study of UNESCO* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen University Press, 1995).

40. Tani Freedman, "Brundtland Wins the Top Job at the WHO, Becoming its First Woman Chief", *Agence France Press*, 27 January 1998.

41. AFP, "Kofi Annan Says Ex-Norwegian PM Brundtland would be 'Superb' WHO Head", *Agence France Press—English*, 2 September 1997.

42. See Molly Guinness, "Call Me Madam Chairman", *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 10 September 2010; David Luhnnow, "'San Agustín' Tries to Settle IMF's 65–0 Score", *Wall Street Journal (Online)*, Saturday, 11 June 2011.

43. Omkar Shrestha, "It's Time for Major Reforms at IMF", *The Business Times Singapore*, 23 June 2011.

from organisational instability following politicisation during the Cold War, eventually leading to the withdrawal of the USA in 1984 and the UK in 1985 (both re-joined in 2003 and 1997, respectively).⁴⁴ Conflict along ideological or cultural lines was common at UNESCO and also influenced the 2009 executive head election. In a field of nine candidates, four candidates were women (Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Austria; Irina Bokova, Bulgaria; Ina Marčiulionyte, Lithuania; and Ivonne Baki, Ecuador). Farouk Hosny of Egypt was regarded as the front runner and, following the unwritten rule of regional rotation, the expected successor to Koïchiro Matsuura of Japan. Yet previous remarks by Hosny, expressing a desire to burn Jewish books in Egyptian libraries, led to heated debate about Hosny's suitability for UNESCO leadership. Tactical voting along regional lines eventually led to Bokova's victory over Hosny. African candidates withdrew due to lack of support. Following the recognition that the various European-backed candidates would split Hosny's opposition, all European candidates withdrew to strengthen the opposition to Hosny and support Bokova. While Bokova's communist past was not without criticism, organisational crisis during elections and thus the emerging potential for future crisis led her candidacy to be successful.

By contrast, the election of Margaret Chan to the WHO Director-General in 2007 suggests that the crisis factor applies only when women candidates break the glass ceiling, that is, become the *first* woman candidate to enter executive office in an organisation. Duerst-Lahti notes that once an office has been led by a woman it can be regendered as "female" or, more generally, women become more accepted as potential future candidates by their constituencies.⁴⁵ Nominated as one of two women and as an attempt by China to engage more with WHO, Chan was considered a favourite early on and was elected in the absence of a crisis. In 2012, Chan was re-elected to her position, having been the only candidate for nomination.

In sum, contextual factors play an important role in facilitating women's access to leadership roles in international organisations. This applies in particular to the specialised agencies where access is subject to elections by member states and the process of selection. Here election and appointment becomes an arena for member states to play out global politics, pursuing their specific interests.

Glass Walls

3. *Women are more likely to be appointed in systems where power is shared*

Women are indeed more likely to access UN leadership positions where their selection and appointment is not subject to the forces of elections by member states, such as in the UN funds and programmes. Importantly, however, this raises the issue of institutional comparability and the power and autonomy of executive heads in international organisations. Thus, the concept of "shared power", as discussed by researchers investigating women in national politics, requires translation into the institutional and political context of international politics in the UN system. It finds expression in the debate on *autonomy* and *leadership* in international organisations, which has been discussed at length in recent

44. Victor-Yves Ghebali, "The Politicisation of UN Specialised Agencies: A Preliminary Analysis", *Millennium*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1985), pp. 317–334.

45. Duerst-Lahti, *op. cit.*

years.⁴⁶ By contrast, the institutional position of executive heads compared to their peers within the UN system has rarely been addressed, allowing only for general conclusions at this point.

First, the position of executive heads of international organisations is quite dissimilar to that of elected politicians as, comparatively, they lack in autonomy over the appointment process. Equally, the way in which they draw on and use their power in office varies in that formal authority is differently circumscribed. Indeed, the autonomy of international organisations in general and the potential for effective leadership⁴⁷ has been a question widely debated in recent IO research, in particular with reference to the UN Secretary-General.⁴⁸ While the question of whether a leader can exercise leadership within the constraints set by the UN Charter and the interests of 193 "masters" is indeed important, the question of whether they *should* has serious implications on how the role is understood. Normative goals, such as representing global values and voices that are not heard otherwise, are as important here as more practical questions, such as the need not to complicate relations with member states.⁴⁹ Proponents of the principal-agent approach suggest that leaders of international organisations could exercise leadership, however, only within the constraints set by their principals, that is, member states.⁵⁰ By contrast, researchers adopting a constructivist framework have noted the role of communication and interaction, the handling of information and the shaping of discourses and practices as opportunities for IO leaders to move beyond functions that are often very narrowly defined in organisational charters.⁵¹ Considerations such as these influence the extent to which both member states and office holders view the potential for autonomy of the executive head, that is, the ability to "share power" with member states in shaping global policy.

Secondly, the extent to which executive heads are able to exercise leadership depends not only on the expectations of member states to share global policymaking with bureaucratic actors but also on the extent to which they are able to make use of their prescribed and assumed powers, in other words on how well they

46. Richard Collins and Nigel D. White (eds.), *International Organizations and the Idea of Autonomy: Institutional Independence in the International Legal Order* (London: Routledge, 2011); Joel E. Oestreich (ed.), *International Organizations as Self-Directed Actors* (London: Routledge, 2012); Bob Reinalda and Bertjan Verbeek (eds.), *Autonomous Policy Making by International Organisations* (London: Routledge, 1998); Jutta Joachim, Bob Reinalda and Bertjan Verbeek (eds.), *International Organizations and Implementation: Enforcers, Managers, Authorities?* (London: Routledge, 2010).

47. Darren G. Hawkins, David A. Lake, Daniel L. Nielson and Michael J. Tierney (eds.), *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Andrew Moravcsik, "A New Statecraft? Supranational Entrepreneurs and International Cooperation", *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (1999), pp. 267–306; Oran Young, "Political Leadership and Regime Formation: On the Development of Institutions in International Society", *International Organization*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (1991), pp. 281–308.

48. Simon Chesterman (ed.), *Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Kirsten Haack and Kent J. Kille, "The UN Secretary-General and Self-Directed Leadership: Development of the Democracy Agenda", in Joel E. Oestreich (ed.), *International Organizations as Self-Directed Actors* (London: Routledge, 2012).

49. Haack and Kille, *op. cit.*

50. Hawkins *et al.*, *op. cit.*

51. Haack and Kille, *op. cit.*; Ian Johnstone, "The Secretary-General as Norm Entrepreneur", in Simon Chesterman (ed.), *Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

navigate the different needs of both member states, the organisation and the global population. This raises the particular issue of women's leadership style and the stereotyping of women. Kille's analysis of leadership styles, based on a study of UN Secretaries-General, highlights the different ways in which leaders respond to the constraints of their positions. While managers are constraint respecters, visionaries challenge constraints almost to breaking point as they pursue their own agendas. Strategists, a style thus far only identified with Kofi Annan, by contrast are able to carefully manoeuvre the constraints of their position. They are constraint accommodators.⁵² With Kille's analysis based exclusively on men, the question arises to what extent this style maps onto women in executive office. A detailed analysis of women's leadership styles, both individually and compared to men, is beyond the scope of this study; however, for many researchers the question of style highlights the essentialisation of male and female nature as strong and solitary versus communicative and collaborative,⁵³ suggesting a propensity of women to lean toward a particular style, here perhaps one that is most in line with Kille's strategic style. Following on from this is the question of whether women are pushed into or allow themselves to be placed into specific managerial roles and leadership styles, accepting the constraints set by member states rather than carving out distinct profiles for their own leadership.

Thirdly, an analysis of the institutional framework within which the individual leader is situated shows that the organisations analysed here offer women varying degrees of autonomy, power and the ability to contribute to global policymaking. UN funds and programmes are subsidiary organs of the UN General Assembly, set up to carry out the functional work of the General Assembly. Their autonomy is limited due to their position within the UN system; however, a degree of operational independence exists. Leaders of UN funds and programmes are nominated by the Secretary-General and appointed by the General Assembly, thereby significantly depoliticising a selection process that can be highly fraught with tensions and vote jockeying in the specialised agencies. By contrast, specialised agencies are autonomous agencies, which broadly support the functional work of the UN. They are, therefore, more "political" in all aspects.⁵⁴ In the specialised agencies, executive heads are elected directly by member states (i.e. by limited membership executive boards). Candidates take part in small, limited election campaigns in which they seek to secure the support of member states. Indeed, given this, candidates are considered to be "highly political animals",⁵⁵ more concerned with their majority support, which does not necessarily correspond to the largest financial supporters of the organisation,⁵⁶ or as Williams notes: "their powers have often been compared to feudal barons,

52. Kent J. Kille, *From Manager to Visionary. The Secretary-General of the United Nations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

53. Duerst-Lahti, *op. cit.*

54. The degree of autonomy and the nature of an organisation's legal personality may vary, depending on the specific agreements that established the organisation; see UNEP, *United Nations Specialised Agencies versus United Nations Programmes*, Note by the Executive Director, 7 June 2010, available: <<http://www.rona.unep.org/documents/partnerships/>> (accessed 27 February 2014).

55. Douglas Williams, *The Specialized Agencies and the United Nations. The System in Crisis* (London: Hurst, 1987), p. 22.

56. The largest financial contributor is the USA. However, many candidates and leaders are supported by large regional groups, mainly developing countries.

owing only such allegiance to their United Nations king as they choose to give, with domains".⁵⁷

In addition to leading their respective organisations, several of the women analysed here gain influence within the UN system by being part of the Secretary-General's cabinet, the Senior Management Group (SMG), which includes 39 members at the level of Under-Secretary-General. This group includes the heads of various departments in the UN Secretariat, a number of Special Representatives, heads of regional commissions and UN offices in Geneva and Vienna, as well as a few heads of UN programmes and funds. Overall, approximately 44% of all UN departments and UN offices were led by women in early 2013, 38% of the SMG were women while representative leadership positions (Special Representatives and envoys) were held by seven women, or 30%.

In summary, as more women are found in the UN funds and programmes than the specialised agencies, women lead agencies with a lesser degree of autonomy compared to men. Their appointment means that they can be more easily removed from office. Their power is "shared" to the extent that they work as part of the SMG, the inner circle of the UN system. While on the one hand this may be more constraining than leading one of the more independent specialised agencies, it also means that a considerable number of women leaders have a seat at the table of system-wide discussions and decision-making, working closely with the UN Secretary-General to shape and influence UN ideas and practices.

4. *Women are more likely to be appointed to lead "soft", female portfolios*

The gendered dichotomy of portfolios, that is, the distinction between soft, female and hard, male issues, is also replicated at the international level. At first glance it appears to map easily onto the distinction between "high politics" (security) and "low politics" (welfare, human rights and the environment). However, as security issues do not easily find a clearly identifiable expression in UN agencies, and with executive power limited, issues that UN agencies are concerned with require a more detailed breakdown. For example, welfare, poverty and human rights can be identified as "soft", female issues, while trade, industry (or industrial development), economic/financial and agricultural issues can be defined as "hard", masculine issues. Moreover, issues traditionally pertaining to sovereignty and public goods, which in the past (more than today) required cooperation between states as service providers (for example, postal services and civil aviation) or the shared use of the global commons (e.g. the seas), fall into the category of so-called masculine issues.⁵⁸

Following this distinction, the prevalence of women in various UN agencies follows a clearly gendered pattern. Women have led the following agencies on "soft", female issues such as:

1. **the environment:** UN Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT);

57. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

58. Maria Escobar-Lemmon and Michelle M. Taylor-Robinson, "Women Ministers in Latin American Government: When, Where, and Why?", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2005), pp. 829–844.

2. **children and women:** UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women);
3. **education:** UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO);
4. **health:** UN Population Fund (UNFPA);
5. **welfare:** UN Development Programme (UNDP), World Food Programme (WFP), UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA);
6. **human rights:** Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Women have also led agencies concerned with gender-neutral issues, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), which despite its strong scientific focus (hard issue) is primarily concerned with public health (soft issue). Finally, the arguably "hard", masculine issue of finance and lending at the IMF is also currently led by a woman. The case of the IMF may raise the question as to what extent it is a "hard" issue, given that it deals not only with "hard" financial issues such as lending and macro-economic concerns but also with "soft" issues such as poverty. Yet, its importance in global finance, especially where sovereign debts are concerned, suggests that indeed it is.⁵⁹

The remaining men-only agencies focus exclusively on "hard" issues such as:

1. **agriculture:** Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD);
2. **industry:** UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO);
3. **trade and economic issues:** UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Bank;
4. **science and technology:** World Meteorological Organization (WMO);
5. **issues traditionally pertaining to sovereignty:** International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Universal Postal Union (UPU);

and gender-neutral issues such as law (World Intellectual Property Organization, WIPO), crime (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC), labour (International Labour Organisation, ILO) and tourism (World Tourism Organization, UNWTO).

Thus, the distinction between soft/female issues and hard/male issues highlighted by researchers analysing women's access to executive leadership in domestic politics helps to explain the differences between UN funds and programmes on the one hand, and the specialised agencies on the other. For example, while UN funds and programmes in general have had at least one woman leader since their establishment, only 3 out of 14 specialised agencies have had a woman leader. This difference mirrors the stronger emphasis on masculine and gender-neutral issues in the specialised agencies over the predominantly "soft", female issues in the UN funds and programmes. Secondly, the only agency among the UN funds and programmes without a woman leader is UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, which is concerned with a masculine issue. Finally, the distinction between soft and hard issues also explains why organisations that have had two or

59. *Ibid.*; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson highlight that the prestige of a ministry or department mirrors the soft-hard/female-male divide, with women more likely to be found in low or medium prestige ministries.

more woman leaders are concerned with reproductive and sexual health, gender equality and family planning (UNFPA), children’s issues and gender equality (UNICEF), global health (WHO) and food aid (WFP).

5. *Women are more likely to access executive office if part of a political family*

Membership of a politically powerful family, be that through parents or husbands, was identified as an essential precondition for the early generation of women leaders, creating another barrier for women. Those without these political connections found themselves looking in but rarely able to participate. In international organisations this has not proven to be the case. The hybrid political–bureaucratic nature of international organisations is highlighted in particular in the case of the role of family relationships, as noted by Hodson⁶⁰ and Genovese.⁶¹ The concept of “family” in this context requires translation, given that principles of neutrality and bureaucratic rationality render patronage of this kind a taboo in any bureaucracy that seeks to avoid accusations of corruption. Instead, organisations follow impartial criteria, such as experience and merit, while in international organisations an additional criterion—geography—changes the dynamics of hiring and appointing at all levels beyond the general services.⁶² In the context of regional rotation and regional coalition building, this specific criterion has had, as Timothy argues, a negative effect on gender representation as member states’ demands for geographic representation have been used to justify the low percentage of women staff.⁶³ Following these specific demands and pressures within international organisations, the criterion of family is not to be taken literally but metaphorically. In international organisations, family translates instead to the selection of candidates that mirror the selectors’ own context and that form part of their wider professional network, or “family” of international elites.

Within these networks, IO leadership candidates are to be chosen on impersonal criteria. These criteria include expertise or accomplishment in areas functionally similar or close to the organisation in question, geographic representation (national or regional), previous achievement in political and administrative leadership positions, or senior level work within the UN system. However, despite apparently open and meritocratic criteria such as these, gender research has highlighted that the way in which these criteria are interpreted and operationalised is fundamentally gendered, favouring those with specific experiences—mostly men—over others.⁶⁴ The relative absence of women diplomats does suggest this form of gendering also affects UN executive positions.

Indeed, analysis of professional backgrounds of executive heads in the UN system shows that while many candidates have business experience, no candidate emerges directly from the private sector. Thus, candidates, both men and women, tend to have followed one of three pathways and established themselves in networks that are either political in nature or highlight their particular expertise in an area related to that of the UN agencies they are appointed to lead. First,

60. Hodson, *op. cit.*

61. Genovese, *op. cit.*

62. This includes the professional levels P1–5, senior management levels D1–2, Assistant-Secretary-General (ASG) and Under-Secretary-General (USG).

63. Timothy, *op. cit.*

64. I thank the anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.

candidates have been international civil servants for some time, following a career within the UN system, in particular that which they are about to lead. In this case, appointment to executive office is another step up the career ladder. Second, candidates have been involved in UN affairs as diplomats or as part of governmental delegations at world conferences. Their involvement in specific issue areas marks them as experts, and while an appointment may, for some, be a step up the career ladder, for many it is recognition of their UN work. Finally, candidates have established their merits and expertise in national politics, either as elected politicians or as senior civil servants. Reasons for selection may be expertise but also naturally occurring end points in political careers or indeed the exhaustion of potential moves up the career ladder, while gender in itself may be a selection criterion.

Table 4 shows the various professional background of women executive heads on accessing UN office. In the specialised agencies, where candidates are elected

Table 4. Women Leaders' Professions on Entering UN Office.

Office/profession	Women leaders
Political office	
Head of state/government	Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway Helen Clark, Prime Minister of New Zealand Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Deputy President of South Africa
Elected and appointed heads of executive departments	Christine Lagarde, Finance Minister Asha-Rose Migiro, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Ann M. Veneman, US Secretary of Agriculture
Parliament	Irina Bokova, member of Bulgarian parliament
Administrative office	
National civil service	Catherine Bertini, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Services at the US Department of Agriculture Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Assistant Deputy Minister of Environment, Canada Louise Fréchette, Deputy Minister of Defence, Canada Josette Sheeran, US Under-Secretary for Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs in the State Department
UN civil service	Margaret Chan, WHO Assistant Director-General for Communicable Diseases Karen Koning AbuZayd, UNRWA Deputy Commissioner General Nafis Sadik, UNFPA Assistant Executive Director Anna Tibaijuka, UNCTAD Director and Special Coordinator for the Least Developed, Land-Locked and Island Developing Countries Thoraya Obaid, UNFPA Director of the Division for Arab States and Europe
Diplomatic service	
Academia	–
Other	Sadako Ogata, Professor of International Relations Carol Bellamy, Director of the US Peace Corps

and appointed by member states, three women leaders have previously held political positions (Gro Harlem Brundtland, Norwegian prime minister, Irina Bokova, Bulgarian member of parliament, and Christine Lagarde, French finance minister), while Margaret Chan was WHO Assistant Director-General for Communicable Diseases before becoming its executive head. This stands in contrast to the UN funds and programmes, where women leaders hail from a range of backgrounds, including presidential office (Michelle Bachelet), prime ministerial positions (Helen Clark) and deputy president/member of parliament (Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka). Among the three women who held ministerial positions, only Asha-Rose Migiro had been an elected member of parliament, while both Christine Lagarde and Ann M. Veneman were appointed leaders of executive departments. Again, both were part of very different professional networks: while Veneman was a career civil servant, Lagarde had held two ministerial positions in six years, after leaving a successful legal career.

Almost half of all women leaders have had successful careers in administrative roles, be that at the UN or in national civil services. Those who held senior positions within the UN remained in the organisations they knew well; thus, their appointment to executive head constituted a career progression on the basis of their expertise. With the exception of Louise Fréchette, who moved from a diplomatic role and defence to the newly created, administrative–managerial position of DSG, those joining the UN from their national civil services stayed close to their area of expertise. Interestingly, no woman leader has emerged directly from the diplomatic service (see Table 4), whether as a Permanent Representative at the UN or elsewhere, which raises questions as to the gendered nature of the diplomatic service but also the different ways in which women profile themselves and bring themselves to the attention of decision-makers: does the comparatively larger number of women emerging from administrative roles suggest that they are chosen as “token” candidates⁶⁵ for member states to fulfil UN quotas rather than career awards for established leaders in (internationally relevant) issue areas?

Despite the absence of women diplomats, several of the women analysed here have some experience in representing their state internationally. Before leading a department of the Canadian government, Louise Fréchette developed a career in the Canadian Foreign Service, including postings to the UN. Elizabeth Dowdeswell was part of the Canadian delegation at the 1992 Rio summit and Canada’s representative to the WMO. Sadako Ogata joined the UN as a former (occasional) diplomat and academic. Ogata was an independent expert for the UN Commission on Human Rights on the Human Rights Situation in Myanmar in 1990 and a representative of Japan at the UN in the 1970s and 1980s.

Anna Tibaijuka’s example shows how expertise can lead to a very varied career that is not easy to categorise. Tibaijuka was a professor of economics and a member of the Tanzanian delegation to a number of UN world conferences before she joined the UN in a senior role as Director and Special Coordinator for the Least Developed, Land-Locked and Island Developing Countries. It is from this position that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Tibaijuka to lead UN-HABITAT. Her appointment also showed how family translates to political networks from which candidates are nominated: Ban not only sought to fulfil

65. Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, “Women Who Win: Social Backgrounds, Paths to Power and Political Ambition in Latin American Legislatures”, *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2011), pp. 1–33.

his pledge to appoint a woman from a developing country,⁶⁶ her position at UNCTAD and previous collaborations when Ban was Foreign Minister of South Korea⁶⁷ had led Tibaijuka to the right place to be noticed for selection. Finally, Carol Bellamy, previously Director of the US Peace Corps, appears somewhat unusual in this group. Her work at the Peace Corps, an appointment made by President Clinton, was preceded by a career in local politics, which included the role of president of the New York City Council.

Conclusion

The UN system is no longer the “world’s largest men’s club” as Kirshenbaum stated 20 years ago. Much has changed since, with women having broken the glass ceiling in all but one of the UN funds and programmes, having assumed leadership of important organisations such as the IMF and even being represented by two women in some organisations. However, despite such positive news, women continue to encounter barriers and constraints that mirror those experienced in domestic politics, reinforcing stereotypes of women’s role in society, politics and indeed employment.

Quotas, despite their informal, non-enforceable nature, have led to an increase in women in leadership roles in the UN system. Member states appear to be more willing to nominate women for UN leadership positions, as, for example, the number of women candidates in UNESCO’s 2009 election showed. At the same time, UN Secretaries-General are also keen to demonstrate their commitment to gender equality by continuing to appoint women to executive positions. Clearly, this commitment is a work in progress, as gender equality has not yet been achieved at executive level, or indeed at the lower professional level. Moreover, critics highlight that the lack of funding for UN Women⁶⁸ shows indeed quite the opposite—an unwillingness to support verbal commitments to gender equality with action. On the other hand, greater willingness to nominate women candidates, yet a lack of willingness to provide funding for gender issues may suggest that member states may regard representation by one of their own citizens (whether man or woman) as less important (or risky) than the potential changes to gender policies promoted or implemented by UN Women.

Secondly, in addition to an increase in women candidates, women have found themselves in situations that are conducive to their election, which the discussion of elected positions in the UN specialised agencies showed. As in domestic contexts, crises offered unique windows of opportunity for women to be elected to executive positions. However, the claim that crises offer unique opportunities for women showed some unexpected limitations. In contrast to domestic politics where the field of candidates tends to be limited to two or three top candidates overall, any number of candidates may emerge in the context of elections in the UN specialised agencies. Bokova’s election at UNESCO shows that while crisis

66. Julia Preston, “Tanzanian Woman is Chosen for U.N.’s 2nd Highest Post”, *New York Times*, 1 June 2007.

67. UN News Centre, “Tanzanian Foreign Minister Named New UN Deputy Secretary-General”, 5 January 2007.

68. Johanna Morden, “Lakshmi Puri on UN Women Funding Woes, Post-2015 Agenda” (Devex, 23 July 2013), available: <<https://www.devex.com/en/news/lakshmi-puri-on-un-women-funding-woes-post-2015-agenda/81489>> (accessed 26 November 2013).

was indeed a contextual factor, enabling her to access office, her election over three other women is not explained by the crisis hypothesis. Indeed, following the crisis hypothesis in the context of UN elections leads to the question of why a woman is chosen not only over men but also over other women. These situations rarely occur at the national level, the recent campaign for the Chilean presidency between Michelle Bachelet and Evelyn Matthei being a rare exception. At the UN, regional power politics and alliances in voting may play a role, for example, the recognition that no candidate, man or woman, had ever represented the Eastern European group of member states may have played a role in the final outcome. Further analysis would be needed to gain access to the very secretive process of voting.

An increase in candidates and leaders does not necessarily translate into a fully open and competitive field. Women are channelled into gender-"appropriate" areas, that is, portfolios that (apparently) represent women's concerns, such as health, education and children. Exceptions to this rule are rare, with Christine Lagarde the only woman to hold a "hard/male" portfolio at this level, while Angela Kane is the only woman at departmental level to be responsible for security issues in the role of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. While the current UN discourse on the role of women in peacekeeping might suggest that women may assume a leadership role in this "male domain" of security in the not too distant future, Lagarde's success in advancing into a "male" domain appears to be tempered by the fact that her election followed a "typical" access route for women, that is, in the context of crisis.

Thirdly, while the criterion of shared or limited powers is replicated from the domestic to the international, it is mitigated by the fact that power and institutional autonomy in international organisations differ markedly from national politics in general. The need to belong to a political family, on the other hand, is replicated from the national to the international only in so far as international elites share similar backgrounds. "Connections" here refers instead to the ability, or potential, to come to be known by a decision-maker, be that the Secretary-General for appointments in the UN funds and programmes, or member states for elections in the specialised agencies. Finally, what appears to be an interesting trend in this context of organisational crises is the fact member states choose to elect former politicians. Whether greater trust is placed in (former) politicians to solve organisations in crises requires further analysis of all elections and appointments, both men and women, across the UN system.

In sum, as vertical mobility (breaking the glass ceiling) is tempered by the constraints of lateral mobility (glass walls) the question arises whether women can only break glass ceilings if and only when circumstances conspire to create specific openings "suitable" for women leaders. As more women access national politics, decision-making positions of national civil services or diplomatic corps, they become part of an international group of leaders from which candidates for UN leadership positions are drawn. Therefore, these women provide a pool of potential candidates for international leadership, creating a clear connection between the national and the international. Considering this, the UN has the potential to model and incentivise gender equality as an international norm. On the one hand, women in UN leadership roles may serve a symbolic function, highlighting the potential for women globally to contribute to leadership in a variety of roles in society, politics and business. On the other hand, women in UN leadership roles

may serve a substantive function in promoting women's concerns in all aspects of UN politics, from children and health to peacekeeping and agriculture. Given these linkages, the study of women in politics cannot limit itself to state-level or comparative analysis; neither can the study of international organisations ignore the contribution made by women in areas outside the context of development, human rights and health. As international organisations affect women globally in different ways, be that through lending conditions, peacekeeping missions or development projects, the *representation* of women in international organisations plays an important role for women domestically and globally.

About the Author

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