

# **Parliamentary Stayers in Western Democracies: Mind the Gender-Gap in Political Endurance**

By

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## **Abstract**

We study how gender shapes political endurance in parliaments, building on the research documenting how newcomers are disadvantaged their first term in office, while senior members enjoy certain privileges. Thus, if there are gender gaps in political endurance women could face more barriers than men in getting their job done as representatives. We put forward three different measures to study gender gaps in political endurance to find out if, how and when men are more likely than women to be a parliamentary stayer. Studying the endurance of all parliamentarians in 10 western democracies from 1965 to 2021 we show that there are gender gaps in political endurance across the different measurements, but that gender gaps are particularly apparent if we concentrate on those that have served as parliamentarians for three or more terms.

## **Introduction**

Women's presence in politics is on a slow increase around the world, but we know little about the career trajectories of women after they are elected. What is established in the broader literature on gender and politics so far is that the expansion of women's numeric representation in elected office in the last decades are significant (Paxton et al, 2010) and that partisan loyalties tend to trump gender stereotypes when voters cast their vote (Dolan and Lynch, 2014). Yet, the literature showing that there are still gender-gaps in political socialization (Bos, Greenlee, Holman, Oxley and Lay; 2022), in political ambitions (Fox and Lawless, 2004; 2005), in cabinet appointments (Franceschet and Thomas, 2015), and in politicians' path to leadership position (O'Brien, 2015), suggests that gender barriers do not disappear immediately after women wins office. There are prominent female politicians like Nancy Pelosi, who has hold on to her seat in the House of the Representatives since a by-election in 1987, but we know very little about how and why political careers like hers are

exceptions in western democracies. How common is it for women politicians to become parliamentary stayers?

Recent studies continue to show that there is a scarcity of women at the apex of political power (Folke and Rickne, 2016). Some studies suggest that this is connected to how parliaments are gendered spaces even after there is an increase in women representatives. Formal and informal seniority-based hierarchies play an important role in the legislative environment (see Puwar, 2004; Murray 2010; Erikson and Josefson, 2022; Jeydel and Taylor, 2002; Kerevel and Atkeson, 2013; Wängnerud, 2015), and newcomers tend to behave differently than experienced representatives (Ollion 2021; Beckwith, 2007; Cowley and Childs, 2003). In some contexts, a small group of legislators with longer careers tend to dominate leadership posts and the political agenda (Jones et al. 2002; Jeydel and Taylor, 2002; Squire 1988). As Kerevel and Atkeson (2013) argue, when there are both newcomers and incumbents in a political chamber, there are likely to be institutional norms that reward seniority. Hence, the continued marginalization of women in politics is at least partly a consequence of seniority-based hierarchies where women's legislative careers may not endure long enough for them to join the ranks of seniors.

We provide the first look on gender gaps in political endurance that includes a specific focus on senior parliamentarians. Our premise is that it takes time for parliamentarians to get the experience required for effective governance (Norris, 1997). If length in office influences parliamentarians' political behavior, and there is a gender gap in the length of political careers, we need to start building theories about the causes and the consequences of this type of gender imbalance. The concept endurance is suggested as a crucial dimension of gender balance, one that can be measured and calculated with individual data on the composition of parliaments. The concept is meant to capture gender gaps in who stays in a political office over years. Endurance can be defined as the ability to continue doing something for a long time, simply referring to the repeated capability to "hang in there". It can be distinguished from the concept of political experience, that arguably is a broader concept that includes people's pre-parliamentary background, like having served as local office holders, leaders in parties or in other positions in and outside politics (Górecki and Kukołowicz, 2014; Buckley et al, 2015).

We expand ongoing research on political careers by shifting our analytical lens from the newcomers to the senior members of parliaments – the parliamentary stayers. Still, our work builds

on recent research of gender dynamics in candidate re-selection, incumbency, and turnover. Research on candidate re-selection interestingly shows that political experience (Luhiste, 2015) and electoral performance (Smrek, 2020; Muyters et al 2021) affect men and women differently. Recent studies of electoral turnovers also show that the introduction of gender quotas has offered a new dynamic into parliaments and is a central driver of elite change (Gouglas et al 2018). Consequently, it is likely that the gender gaps in political endurance are reduced as the number of women increase. While Joshi and Och (2021) have interestingly found that there is important cross-country variation in gender differences in the entry age of parliamentarians and the average length of stay, we encourage a closer look at this relationship by arguing for why a measurement like the average length of legislative stay may not capture the most staggering gender gaps among those who endure in elected office more than one or two terms. Current research has inspired us to take a step forward and explore variation among those who are elsewhere defined as the incumbents. Doing this, we aim to get a more comprehensive understanding and a broader foundation for developing new theories about gender imbalances in policy making and political career opportunities.

With this article we seek to make three contributions. First, we offer an overarching conceptual framework to better understand the concept of political endurance. We explain why we argue that gender-balance is a multilayered concept that contains other crucial dimensions than the numeric one, such as endurance, and we distinguish this concept from similar concepts such as political experience, re-selection/renomination, and legislative turnover. Secondly, we develop three different measurements of political endurance—the continuous-, the relational- and the static measure—and calculates the gender gap by using a dataset of all parliamentarians that have served in 10 different western democracies from 1965 to 2020. Doing this, we demonstrate a persistent gender gap, but the size of the gap varies across measurement, country, and time. Third, we encourage new research on the causes and effects of gender gaps among the most senior members of legislatures – the parliamentary stayers. We show that the gender gap remains high in some countries, like Ireland and the US, while it is nearly closed in Spain. Based on our data, we discuss briefly towards the end of the paper how gender gaps are affected by the emergence of new parties and efficient gender quotas. The implication of our findings is that political scientists must apply multidimensional models when discussing gender balance and that we should start to theorize on

what the consequences of a gender gap in political endurance are for policy making and implementation.

### **What we Know about Gender and Legislative Careers**

Over the last couple of decades there has been an unprecedented interest in the numeric gender imbalance in national parliaments across the world. While existing research on gender imbalance in elected office has tended to emphasise sex ratios in the national legislatures, counting heads of male and female representatives, we put forward a new dimension of political imbalance that stresses variation in elected representative's political endurance. Our theoretical model thus rests on the assumption that gender balance is a multidimensional concept, and while the numeric dimension is important for understanding political behavior, so is variation in political endurance. We can think of a parliament that is composed of 45 percent women and 55 percent men and ask rhetorically; Is this parliament gender-balanced if most women are newcomers while most men have served for three or more terms? Our answer to this question should be informed by the following logic: If women's political careers do not endure over the long haul, and newcomers face barriers when inexperienced, and this again affects their performance and behavior, questions of political endurance are of vital importance for the quality and legitimacy of democratic processes and demand scholarly attention. The answer to the rhetoric question should be "no". However, existing research on political representations lacks accuracy in identifying or mapping the extent of gender-gap in elected representatives' political endurance.

One related strand of literature engages in questions about why women leave politics earlier than men. Studying congressional retirement in the US, Lawless and Theriault (2005) find that women tend to retire voluntarily after a shorter time in office than men because they are more likely to retire when their ability to influence the legislative process stalls. Other studies emphasize that women's exits may not be voluntary. The study of Folke and Rickne (2016) on glass ceilings in politics provides some further knowledge into these dynamics, as they find that women's promotions are slower compared to men's. Furthermore, findings from a study of gender and parliamentary exits in five regional parliaments in Europe conclude that women are more likely to be pushed out of politics at an earlier stage of their parliamentary careers by their parties, compared

to men (Vanlangenakker, Wauters, and Maddens 2013). In their feminist institutionalist study of parties in a post-quota setting, Verge and de la Fuente (2014) find that informal gendered institutions push women out of party politics and “deters them from actively seeking nomination or re-election for either party or elective office” (p. 77).

Case study research also suggest that the window of opportunity for women to engage in politics is smaller than that for men, connecting the likelihood of a shorter stay in office to the age of when women tend to enter politics, either before or after the childbearing years (Carroll 1985; Mariani, 2008). The entry point for women might have consequences. Lazarus, Steigerwalt, and Clark (2022) find in a study of newcomers in the US congress that women newcomers are older than their male counterparts, and that women are more likely to lose a reelection race and to retire because of electoral concerns than men. Mariani (2008) finds that women have less opportunities to run for congress during what is considered prime office-seeking years, something that both affects the support needed to run for office and to be selected to influential positions. With the interest of exploring gender variation in the age of legislative entries, Joshi and Och (2021) amongst other calculates the length of legislative careers across 78 parliaments. They find that in almost half of the cases, there is a significant gender difference in length of legislative careers. At the first glance it may appear as a puzzle. There is a lot of research that document gender inequalities in politics and it goes against conventional wisdom that women do not—on average—leave politics much earlier than men.

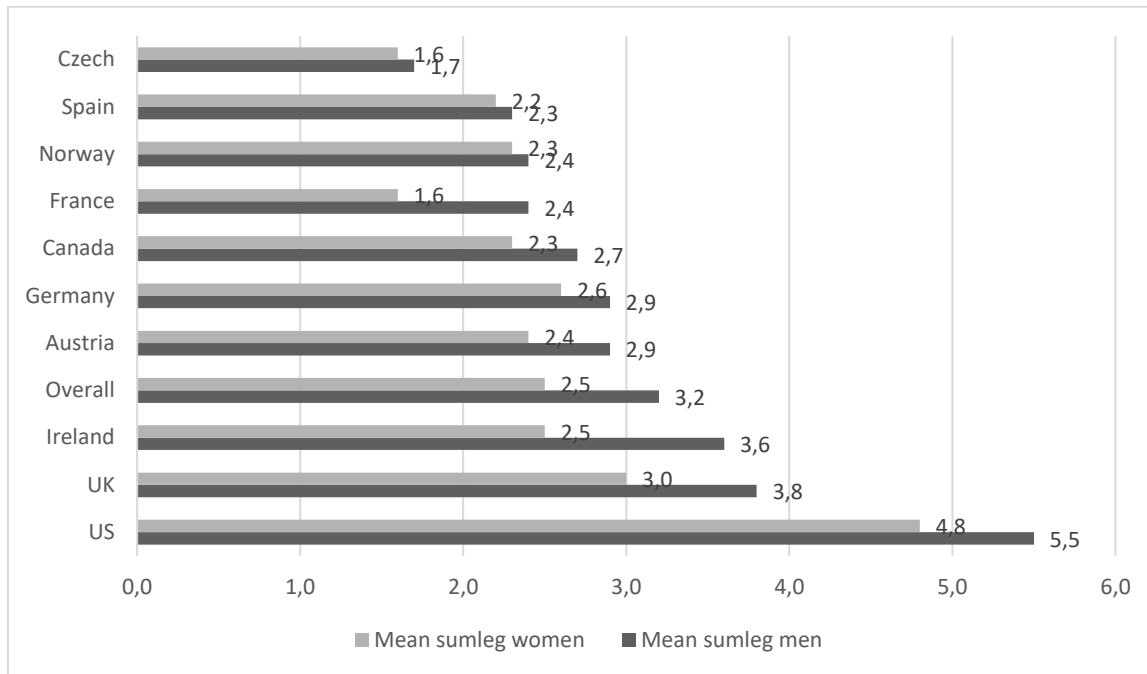
To help solve this puzzle, we can take a closer look at the type of measurement. Calculating the average length of men’s and then women’s stay in parliament in ten selected Western democracies from 1965 to 2019<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1), we show that men overall serve for longer than women. Yet the results are not that alarming. The mean length of a parliamentary career in the selected countries, irrespective of gender, was 3 terms (2.99).<sup>2</sup> All countries combined, the gender gap in endurance amounts to less than one term - only 0.7.

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<sup>1</sup> Please consult the data and methods section for more information about the data used (Comparative Legislator Dataset).

<sup>2</sup> The shortest legislative careers, both among women and men, are served by Czech MPs, while the longest careers are found in the US, where women on average endure for 4,8 periods and men for 5.5 periods. An important reminder is that the US, as the only country in the sample, has predetermined two year legislative periods. The gap in mean endurance between men and women is largest in France, Ireland, the United Kingdom and the US.

Figure 1: Mean length of parliamentary career (nr of legislative sessions served). Men and women. 1965-2019.

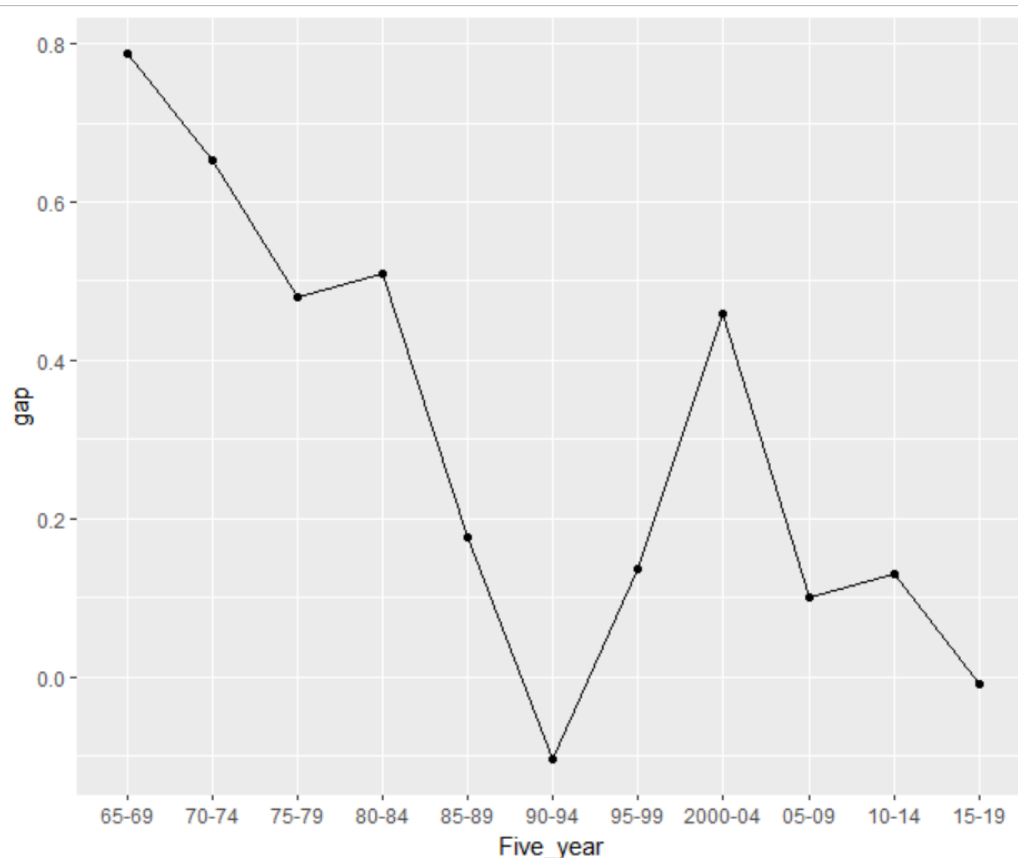


Source: Comparative Legislator Database. N men: 15 833, N women: 3926.

Considering that this average is affected by data going back to the 1960s—long before the explosion of gender quotas in elected office and the subsequent increase of women in politics (Krook, 2009)—this small gap in the average length seems daunting.

If we look at how average length of careers have been changing over the years (figure 2) the results are even more striking, as the gap between men and women’s length of political career is on average closed in the 2015-2019 cycle.

Figure 2: Gap between mean total length (in nr of sessions served) of women and men’s parliamentary careers, all countries, 1965-2019



Source: Comparative Legislator Database.

The problem with this measurement, however, is that it calculates the average length of stay among women (small sized group) and compare it with the average length of men (large sized group). There are many men who serve for less than three terms and they drag the average among all men down. Consequently, we lose valuable information about gender differences among those who have served for three terms or more. In this article we argue that we need another type of concept and measurement if we want to capture the gender gaps among the most senior parliamentarians, one that examines the composition of parliaments.

There is an emergent literature on gender dynamics in legislative turnover, renominations, and parliamentary retirements that is related to our research agenda. Our aim is to build—and expand—on this research by looking more carefully at parliamentarians that have evolved beyond the newcomer stage. If we see political endurance as a continuum, it starts with the newcomers and ends with the most senior members of parliament. However, so far, studies tend to focus mostly on

“the positive pole” — to use the terms of Goertz and Mazur (2008) — the newcomers, while lacking the same analytical interest in the gender dynamics that evolves among those at the opposite (negative) pole—the stayers.

As for instance, turnover in legislatures is commonly measured as the rate of individual membership change from one parliament to the next (François and Grossman, 2015), yet only a few studies look at aspects related to gender differences (Gouglas et al, 2018). Still, research on turnover has found that gender quotas influence turnover indirectly as they create opportunities for women newcomers to oust incumbent men (Gouglas et al, 2018). This indicates that there might be a change in the gender gap in political endurance over time, as the share of women in parliaments is on the rise and then someone must go. Going further into the conditions of what would make women (or members of other minority groups) likely to stay, Wardt et al (2021) show that when women make up 15 per cent or more of a parliamentary party, their odds of exit no longer differ significantly from those of men (Wardt et al, 2021: 486). The important contrast in these studies is the share of women newcomers entering parliaments in contrast to women incumbent candidates, but – contrary to the endurance concept - turnover does not discuss differences among the incumbents. Consequently, this concept does not examine whether an incumbent returns for the first or the twelfth time.

Another related literature investigates gender and renominations in candidate selection. These studies find that in recent years women are quite successful in getting re-selected by their political parties, although these studies do not explore whether women are successful in their electoral bids and how their endurance matters. Studying the Czech Republic, Smrek (2020) find that well-performing female MPs are just as likely as their male colleagues to secure a favourable renomination. Looking into similar dynamics in Belgium, Muyters et al (2021) find that men are particularly punished by bad electoral performance. This seems to indicate that in this case women’s names reappear on electoral lists, no matter whether they were successful in the previous elections, while men - if they fail - are less likely to try again (Muyters et al, 2021). Yet, these studies are on candidate selection, and provide minimal information about the composition of parliaments and the share of women compared to men that get re-elected not just once, but maybe even 5 or 10 times. Since most of the literature on gender and politics is looking at the distinction



between newcomers and incumbents, aspects related to “the negative pole—the stayers” is insufficiently theorized, conceptualized, and explored.

### **Why Study Parliamentary Stayers**

To understand why it is important to pay attention to political stayers it is important to revisit the “politics of presence” agenda. In the mid-1990s Anne Phillips (1995) kick-started a debate in political science on women’s exclusion from politics that engaged scholars to study questions related to gender quotas (Krook, 2009; Clayton et al, 2017; Weeks 2022), political representation (Mansbridge, 1999; Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008), political recruitment (Lovenduski and Norris, 2003), women’s policy agencies (McBride et al 2010) and male dominance (Bjarnegård, 2012; Murray 2014). The core argument of why numbers mattered for gender balance was nicely summed up by Barnes; if women “do not comprise an equitable proportion of legislative chambers, their preferences are likely not being given adequate weight and their perspectives do not have a sufficient influence in the legislative process” (Barnes, 2012). Yet still, scholars are debating if presence is sufficient for making sure that women can make a difference, e.g., the critical mass (Dahlerup, 1988).

Lately, research have found that even if numbers are not sufficient for political influence (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2014), the mere presence of women in decision making helps legitimizing political decisions, particularly on women’s rights issues. Survey research confirms that citizens are more likely to think that decisions made by a gender balanced body are more legitimate than bodies where one gender dominates (Clayton et al, 2019; Arnesen and Peters, 2018). Women’s equal presence legitimizes decision-making processes on women’s rights issues by sending a signal to citizens that women’s opinions are heard (Clayton et al, 2019). Hence, there is an assumption that women have an impact on policy making if present. The challenge is that even if all parliamentarians should be considered equals, factors relating to experience in office might affect their ability to influence and lead a policy process. Earlier research has shown that there are differences between members of a parliament, and that seniority tends to be one factor that affects political behavior and opportunities (Strøm, 1998).

As such, Merton's (1957) concept of an accumulative advantage, is useful. He argues that when someone starts to gain knowledge and learn skills in an organization, they will be rewarded, and this again will lead to more advantages that can be used to be getting even further ahead. This theoretical rationale has found empirical bearing in previous studies on legislatures, which show that political endurance does matter for legislators' opportunities in office. Some studies have demonstrated how formal rules provide senior members of parliaments with certain rewards and privileges (Heinsohn and Schiefer, 2019). Although modified over the years, seniority is still rewarded in the US Congress, as senior members can choose committee assignments and seniority is used to decide committee chairmanships. Jones et al (2002) for instance found that it takes slightly more experience to belong to the more prominent committees. Studying institutional norms in the context of seniority hierarchy, Squire (1988) showed that the most important pieces of legislation in the New York Assembly were introduced by senior legislators, particularly committee chairpersons, although party interests "can override this tendency".

Other studies points to the informal aspects of seniority hierarchies by taking an interest into studying the challenging situation that newcomers face when they are elected to political office (Beckwith, 2007; Barnes, 2012; Puwar, 2004; Ollion, 2021). A study of the intersection of youth and gender in the Swedish Parliament found that young women experience higher demands and anxiety and are more subject to negative treatment compared to other groups (Erikson and Josefsson, 2021). Nirmal Puwar (2004) problematizes, and nuances, the assumption that women will make a difference once they are entering the elected political space. She gives the example of the 1997 British general election, where the number of women in parliament almost doubled. The sudden co-existence of women, black and Asian MPs in Westminster demonstrated how these 'groups' were both historically and conceptually 'space invaders' who disrupted and highlighted how such institutions were "built by men and shaped by men, in men's image" (Puwar, 2004: 67). Cowley and Childs (2002) did find that gender hierarchies indeed influenced parliamentary behavior after the 1997 elections, as newly elected women were "significantly less likely to have rebelled" than other Labour MPs. Newly elected women were significantly more loyal to the party leadership than any other group in the parliament, including more experienced women parliamentarians. Reiterating the argument of Franceschet and Piscopo (2014), even if gender quotas have a positive effect on the number of women elected to office, political change might not happen unless women get access to elite political networks traditionally dominated by men. More

equal presence of women among senior members of parliaments could be one way of reducing the impact of male dominated networks.

### **Operationalizing Political Endurance**

We propose three different measures of gender gaps in political endurance. Note that even if our particular interest is to provide measurements that calculates gender gaps, the term can be useful without this “gendering” aspect and used to study differences—or inequalities—among parliamentarians on other aspects as well (e.g., class, age, education, minority background, political experience etc.). Political endurance can serve as a dependent variable in for instance studies that aim to explain why variation in gender gaps occur within or across countries. Knowing gender gaps in political endurance is also important when we wish to generalize on findings from small-N country studies on gender dynamics in parliamentary culture and impact on policy making. We suggest three ways of measuring variation in political endurance (with gender used as the example):

*The continuous measure:* What is the difference between men and women’s political endurance in parliaments? To answer this question, we need a *continuous measure* that captures the share of women that have served in each term, starting from the share of women among those who have served only one term and going all the way up to the share of women amongst those who have served for the highest observed number of terms. The continuous measure must first capture how many MPs served for one, two, three, four, five terms (and so forth), and then be able to measure how many of those who served X periods were men and women respectively. Such a continuous measure captures whether gender gaps increase as the number of terms served increases and can also be used to identify when gender differences occur. We could for instance find that there is almost no gender gap between those who serve one or two terms, or we could find that even if the share of women is low among those who serve few terms, the gender gap among those that have served for more terms is smaller. As argued by Goertz and Mazur (2008), continuous concepts incorporate a gray zone and often suggest that important phenomena occur in that area. Many parliamentarians have served two or three times and neither qualifies as newcomers nor senior members of parliaments. Furthermore, a continuous measure is less affected by the researchers a-priori expectations about when seniority starts to affect political behavior. By using

a continuous measure, it is possible to empirically explore when endurance influence policy impact or political behavior occurs.

*The relational measure:* What is the share of women among those who have served longer than other parliamentarians? A relational measure considers that seniority must be seen in relation to others, and that someone is senior if they have stayed longer than others. Getting to the position of being seen as a senior depends on the characteristics of others in the group. The cut-off points that distinguish a MP exhibiting endurance versus one that does not, should then be relational so that what is considered a “stayer” could change across parliaments, reflecting that the overall number of stayers in different contexts varies widely. To identify the gender gap among the stayers, one must first decide on an upper percentile (25%, for instance) and identify the share of women among those belonging to this cohort. A relational definition of ‘stayer’ allows the researcher to take country differences into account more directly, as parliamentarians in some countries tend to serve longer than they do in countries with more electoral volatility. Using a relational measure would allow there to be a difference in the definition of being a “senior” across countries. As for instance, it may take fewer terms to be among the longest serving members in the Czech Republic compared to Ireland.

*The static measure* is useful for a question asking what the share of women is among parliamentarians who have a solid experience of what it means to be a representative? Specifically, if we want to calculate the gender gap among those that have served for a fixed period in parliaments, we can use *the static measure*. This dichotomic measure can be connected to a knowledge model where we construct a cut-off point, after which we assume that a parliamentarian has been in office long enough to have developed skills and knowledge. Experience is time-sensitive and relies on an internal process where you achieve knowledge of procedures and problem solving over time. Therefore, there might be scientific reasons to develop a static cut off point for those that of endured long enough to develop important skills and knows the inner dynamics of policy making. We suggest that one could define “stayers” as a member of parliament having served three or more legislative sessions. With this static measure a parliamentary stayer is defined based on an accumulated experience of doing the same thing more than a couple of time and can as such be relevant in cross case comparisons as it sets a fixed standard. As for instance, we could

find that the power of this experience remains the same regardless of how many you share this experience with.

## Research design

### *Case selection*

We empirically assess the three endurance measures with data from eight European (Czech Republic, Norway, Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, the UK, and Spain) and two North American countries (the USA and Canada). This case selection firstly ensures rich variation on relevant system-level variables, such as numeric representation of women in parliaments over time (see appendix E), electoral system (see e.g. Adams, 2018; Lee 2019; Norris, 2006), electoral volatility and the presence of gender quotas (for an overview, see Paxton et.al, 2021:178-182). Secondly, it makes sure we cover countries situated in both North, South, East and Central Europe, plus North America, and with different number of MPs in their lower or unicameral chambers.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1 Overview of core characteristics of selected countries

<b>Country</b>	<b>% of female MPs (2021)</b>	<b>Type of quota</b>	<b>Electoral system</b>	<b>Electoral volatility<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Canada</b>	30,5	Voluntary party quota	Plurality/majority	NA
<b>The US</b>	28,4	No quota	Plurality/majority	NA
<b>Czech Republic</b>	25,5	No quota <sup>3</sup>	Proportional	12,9 (2021)
<b>Norway</b>	44,9	Voluntary party quota	Proportional	9,8 (2021)
<b>Austria</b>	40,9	Voluntary party quota	Proportional	19,6 (2019)
<b>France</b>	37,3	Legislated quota (1999)	Plurality/majority	43,7 (2017)
<b>Germany</b>	34,9	Voluntary party quota	Mixed	15,6 (2021)
<b>Ireland</b>	23,1	Legislated quota (2012)	Proportional	17,8 (2020)

<sup>3</sup> While Norway, Ireland and having a lower or unicameral house counting between 150 and 200 representatives (Norway, Ireland, Austria), and more than 400 representatives (France, the UK, Germany).

<b>The UK</b>	34,6	Voluntary party quota	Plurality/majority	8,5 (2019)
<b>Spain</b>	42,9	Legislated quota (2007)	Proportional	22,2 (Apr, 2019), 10,7 (Nov, 2019)

Sources: Hughes et.al (2017), Hughes et.al (2019), IDEA, the Loop (ECPR), and Casal Bértoa, F. (2022): Database on Who governs in Europe and beyond, PSGo. Available at: [www.whogoverns.eu](http://www.whogoverns.eu)

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Captures whether the country has implemented a gender quota as part of its constitution or secondary law. <sup>2</sup> Defined as “the net change within the electoral party system resulting from individual vote transfers”. See appendix F for volatility figures over time, <sup>3</sup> The Greens have one, but research on the Czech Republic argues that “all relevant parties are reluctant to use party quotas” (Hrbkova and Fellegi, 2022).

The endurance measures will be investigated with the Comparative Legislator Dataset (CLD) (Göbel and Munzert (2021), which has user-generated information (Wikipedia) on the political careers of over 45.000 contemporary and historic politicians in all the selected countries apart from Norway. The dataset is available through an open access package in R. To CLD, we add Norwegian data which is available through the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT).

Considering this paper’s focus on female representation over time and career length, we include MPs represented in parliaments from 1965 until today. Prior to 1965 not many women were represented in the selected parliaments, making it hard to ensure variation in endurance (see appendix G). Also, 1965 as a cut off year signifies that we capture the crucial years concerning female emancipation taking place globally, such as the first UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 and the 1995 UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Krook and True, 2010; Paxton, Hughes and Green, 2006). To ensure comparability across the selected countries, we only include data on elected representatives in the lower houses.

The variables of interest in the datasets are: name, legislative sessions served, and gender. We count those representatives that were elected to parliament, and do not consider whether they went on leave (e.g to become ministers), as our interest is which MPs manage to get re-elected multiple times. Also, we do not distinguish between whether a representative is elected for *consecutive* terms or not. While this is an interesting distinction for future papers looking at the full political careers of parliamentarians and how they evolve (also in a gender perspective), our focus is mainly on whether there is a gender gap in the ability to remain in parliament – whether consistently or on and off.

*Analysis: Exploring three measures of political endurance*

The analysis is structured according to the three measures of endurance presented above, and starts with the continuous measure before we proceed to the relational measure and the dichotomous static measure. While the following analysis will demonstrate that the gender gap in endurance differs depending on the measure analysed, there is a persistent gender gap documented across all measures in the selected countries across time.

**The continuous measure**

What is the difference between men and women’s political endurance? The table below outlines the number of MPs in the selected countries who served between one and 13 terms, and shows the gender distribution within each group of legislative terms. The table firstly demonstrates the massive gender difference in numeric representation, as 79 percent of all MPs in these countries since 1965 were men, while 21 percent were women. Secondly, the table shows how the share of women decreases as the number of legislative sessions increases. Specifically, among those MPs who have served five terms, only 15 percent were women, while 85 percent were men. Among those having endured for ten terms in parliament, 92 percent were men, and eight percent were women. Thirdly, the table shows an unsurprising trend, namely that it is quite rare to endure in parliament for more than two decades (more than six terms). Specifically, 697 men endured for six terms, only 97 women managed the same. Ten terms were only served by 100 men and 5 women in the sample, and only 4 men endured for 13 terms.

Table 2: Parliamentary endurance, all countries except the US

	<b>Number of legislative sessions served (percent/N)</b>						
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>Men</b>	76 (4857)	77 (2832)	78 (2054)	81 (1534)	85 (1017)	88 (697)	91 (422)
<b>Women</b>	24 (1534)	23 (852)	22 (569)	19 (353)	15 (182)	12 (97)	9 (43)
<b>Total</b>	100 (6391)	100 (3684)	100 (2623)	100 (1887)	100 (1199)	100 (794)	100 (465)

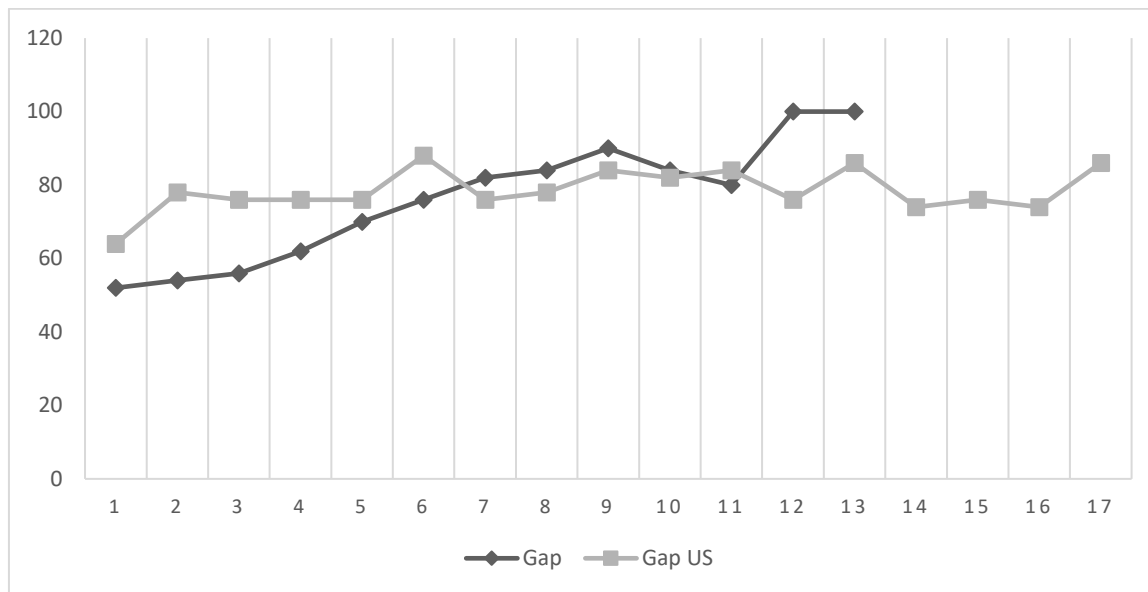
	<b>Number of legislative sessions served (Percent/N)</b>						
	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Men</b>	92 (205)	95 (100)	92 (48)	90 (19)	100 (5)	100 (4)	79 (13794)
<b>Women</b>	8 (17)	5 (5)	8 (4)	10 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	21 (3658)

<b>Total</b>	100 (222)	100 (105)	100 (52)	100 (21)	100 (5)	100 (4)	100 (17452)
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Source: Comparative Legislator Database.

The figure below shows the gender gap between men and women according to endurance, i.e. number of legislative terms endured. To measure the gender gap, we simply subtract the share of female MPs from the share of male MPs. In this figure, the US is represented with a separate line given its two year congressional sessions. Strikingly, the gender gap is substantial for all levels of endurance, both in the European countries plus Canada, and in the US. In the first category of countries, we observe an increase in the gender gap from 52 percentage points among those having served only one legislative term, to a gender gap of 100 percentage points among those having endured 12 and 13 terms. Note that there are very few observations in these two highest categories, only five men endured for 12 legislative terms, and four for 13 terms. In the US, the gender gap is consistently large, amounting to around 80 percentage points for those having endured for between two and 17 terms in Congress. We will present how gender gaps in political endurance evolve over time and countries below by use of the relational and static measure.

Figure 3: Gender gap in percentage points in endurance, by legislative terms served. All countries.



Source: Comparative Legislator Database. Note: We have excluded those (very few) congressional representatives who have served more than 18 terms, as they are very few. In total, 25 representatives served between 18 and 25 periods in Congress. One of these was a woman.



## The relational measure

The relational measure is sensitive to country contexts, and can answer the question: What is the share of women among those who have served longer than other parliamentarians?

To present the relational measure, we have first calculated the political endurance (number of legislative terms served) within each country in our sample, then calculated how many terms a MP had to serve in order to be among those MPs with the 25 percent longest endurance, i.e. a stayer. As the table below shows, this figure differs across countries, in the UK and Ireland the top 25 percent of MPs served six or more terms, while the same number was four in France, Norway and Spain. In the Czech Republic, a stayer is produced after having served only three or more periods.

Table 3: Overview of country differences in terms served by 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of MPs, and those in the top 25<sup>th</sup> percentile

<b>Country</b>	<b>75<sup>th</sup> percentile</b>	<b>Top 25 percentile</b>
<b>Norway</b>	3 terms	4 to 9 terms
<b>UK</b>	5 terms	6 to 13 terms
<b>Austria</b>	4 terms	5 to 10 terms
<b>Canada</b>	4 terms	5 to 11 terms
<b>Spain</b>	3 terms	4 to 10 terms
<b>France</b>	3 terms	4 to 11 terms
<b>Ireland</b>	5 terms	6 to 13 terms
<b>US</b>	7 terms	8 to 27 terms
<b>Germany</b>	4 terms	5 to 13 terms
<b>Czech Republic</b>	2 terms	3 to 8 terms
<b>Overall (mean)</b>	4 terms	More than 5 terms

The main question in the relational measure is the distribution of men and women among the stayers in each context, i.e. among those who endure for longest in parliament. In the figures below, we have calculated the share of men and women stayers. Specifically, we look at the share of men and women within each group of legislative terms endured in the top 25 percentile. So, in Canada, for instance, the figure shows how many women and men endured for five, six, seven and up to eleven terms in the legislature (see table above).<sup>4</sup>

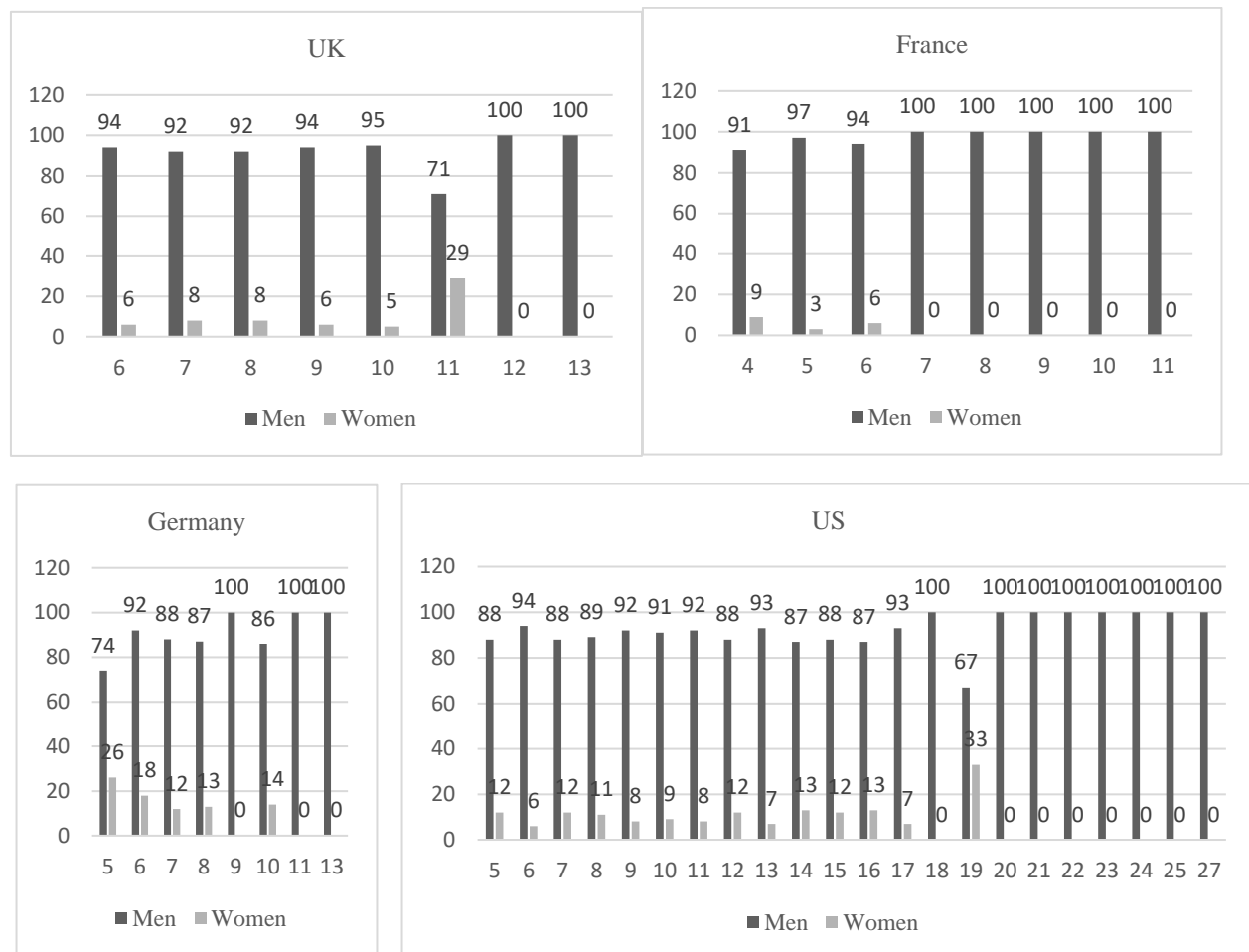
The most striking result from the two figures below is that there is a substantial gender gap among the MPs that have the longest endurance – as it was in the continuous measure as well. In the UK,

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<sup>4</sup> In the figures below, the N is not included, so please consult Appendix E for this information.

94 percent of those enduring for five terms were men, and only 6 percent were women. Nearly identical figures are found in the US, where only 12 percent of those who endured for more than six terms were women. In France, no woman endured for more than six terms. Among these four countries, Germany is the only country where women make up a sizeable number of the stayers enduring for five and six terms, 26 and 18 percent were women in the two periods respectively.

Figure 4: Number of men/women MPs among the 25 percent who sit longest (stayers) in France, Germany, the US, and the UK

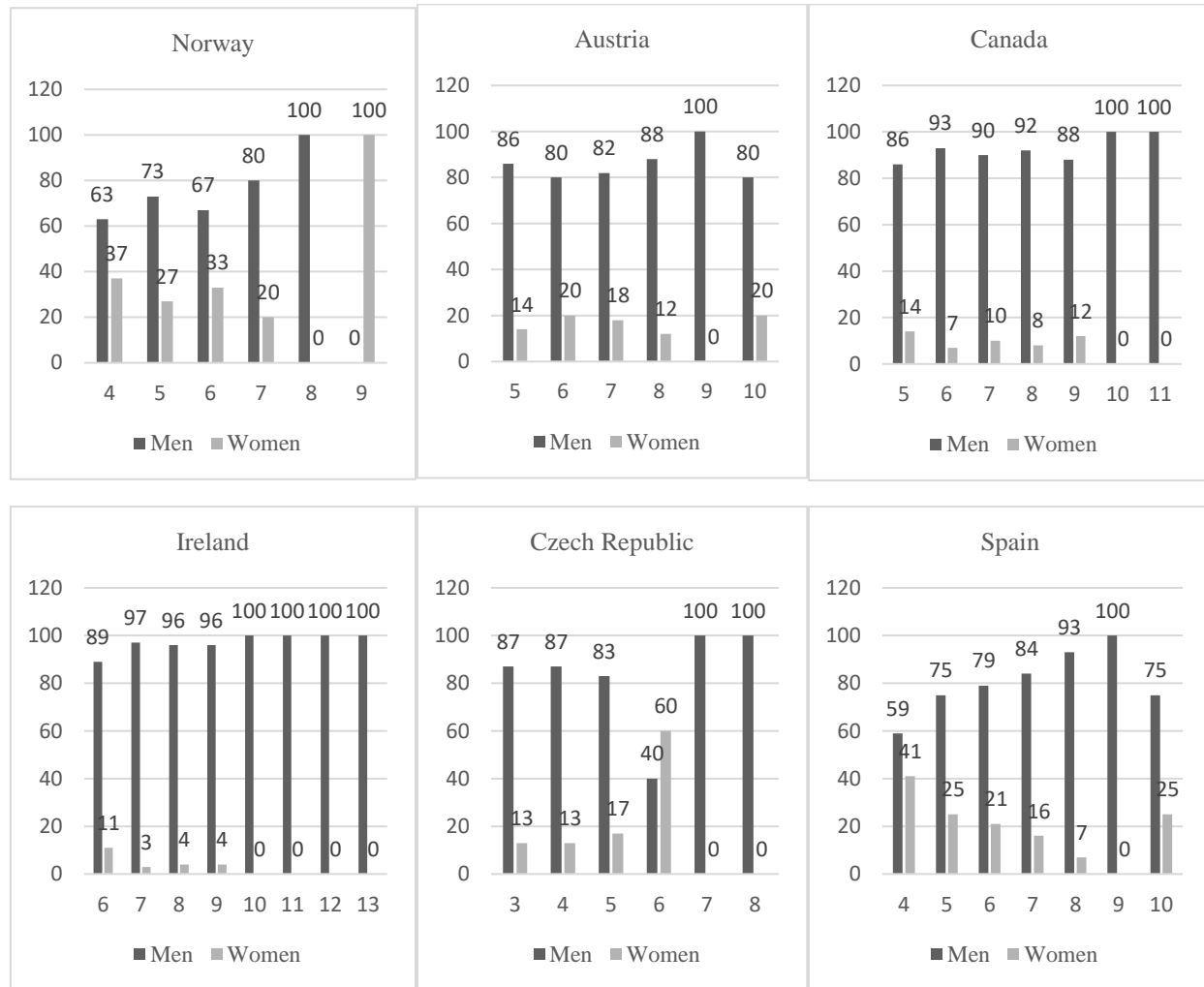


Source: Comparative Legislator Dataset. Appendix E outlines the N for the different plots.

In the figure below, Norway and Spain stands out with a more equal distribution of men and women belonging to the stayers category. Actually, only one MP – a woman - in Norway has managed (in this time period) to endure for nine terms, and that is current Conservative party leader Erna Solberg. On the opposite scale is Ireland, where 89 percent of those who have endured for six terms are men, while 11 percent of them are women. In the same country, no woman has endured for ten

or more terms. In Austria and Canada, the share of women is below 20 percent among those who have endured the longest in parliament.

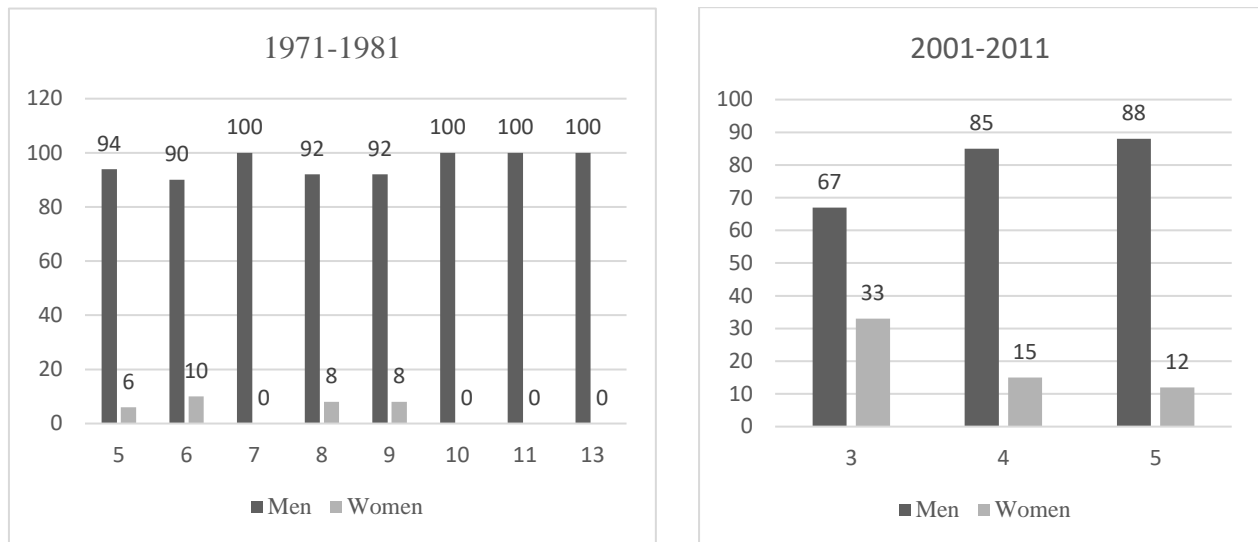
Figure 5: Number of men/women MPs among the 25 percent who sit longest (stayers) in Ireland (IR), Norway (NO), Czech Republic (CZ), Spain (SP), Canada (CA), and Austria (AU)



Source: Comparative Legislator Dataset. Appendix E outlines the N for the different plots.

We know that there is a gender gap in the relational measure when we look at the whole period from 1965 until today both in all countries combined, and in individual countries. But how has the gender gap observed in the relational measure evolved over time? The figures below compares the production of stayers within two separate time periods, 1971-1981 and 2001-2011 respectively. The figures show that the gender gap has decreased among the stayers, with a much more substantial share of female stayers being produced in the latter period. That said, the gender gap in the production of stayers is still substantial.

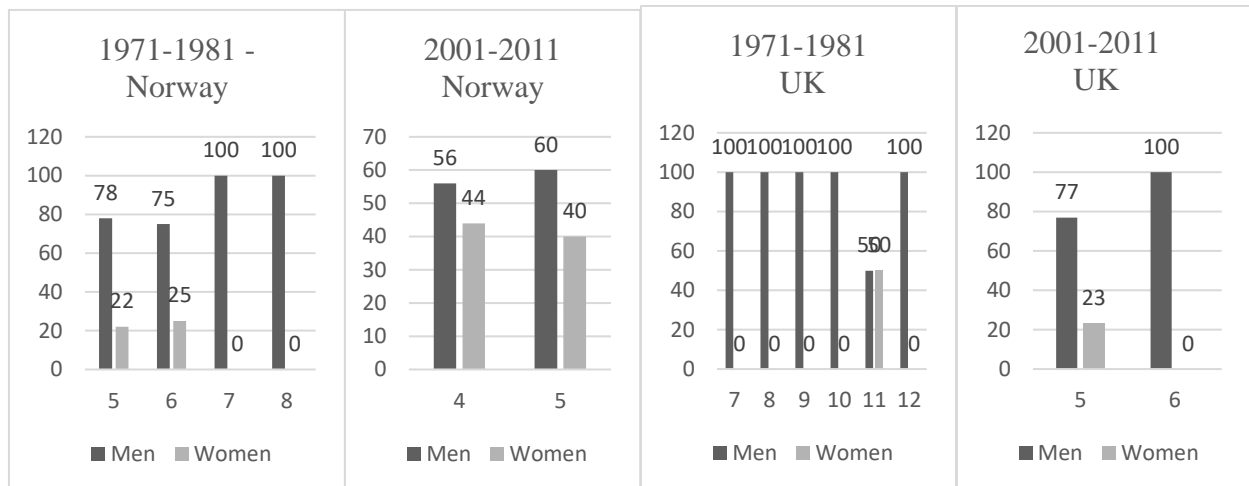
Figure 6: Overview of gender differences in stayers produced in the periods 1971-1981 and 2001-2011. Percentages.



Source: Comparative Legislator Database. N in the left plot is 2264 MPs, of which 2442 were men and 291 were women, in the right it is 3651 MPs, of which 2843 were men and 1188 were women. The Czech Republic is only included in the right hand side plot.

Similar figures for each country can be consulted in Appendix X. Here we restrict ourselves to presenting plots on the UK and Norway respectively, two countries which differed widely in the gender balance on the relational measure. We observe that there is an increased share of female stayers produced in the last period in both countries compared to the first. In Norway especially, the gap has closed significantly, and amounts to 12 percentage points for those having endured four periods and who were elected for the first time in 2001-2011. Also the UK has seen a positive development, but interestingly, among those having endured for six terms, there are still no women (but 22 men).

Figure 7: Overview of gender differences in stayers produced in the periods 1971-1981 and 2001-2011 in Norway and the UK. Percentages.



Source: Comparative Legislator Database.

Notes: Norway: 1971-1981, N=173 (52 women and 121 men). 2001-2011, N= 187 (79 women and 108 men).

UK: 197—1981, N=303 (16 women and 287 men). 2001-2011, N=475 (131 women and 344 men).

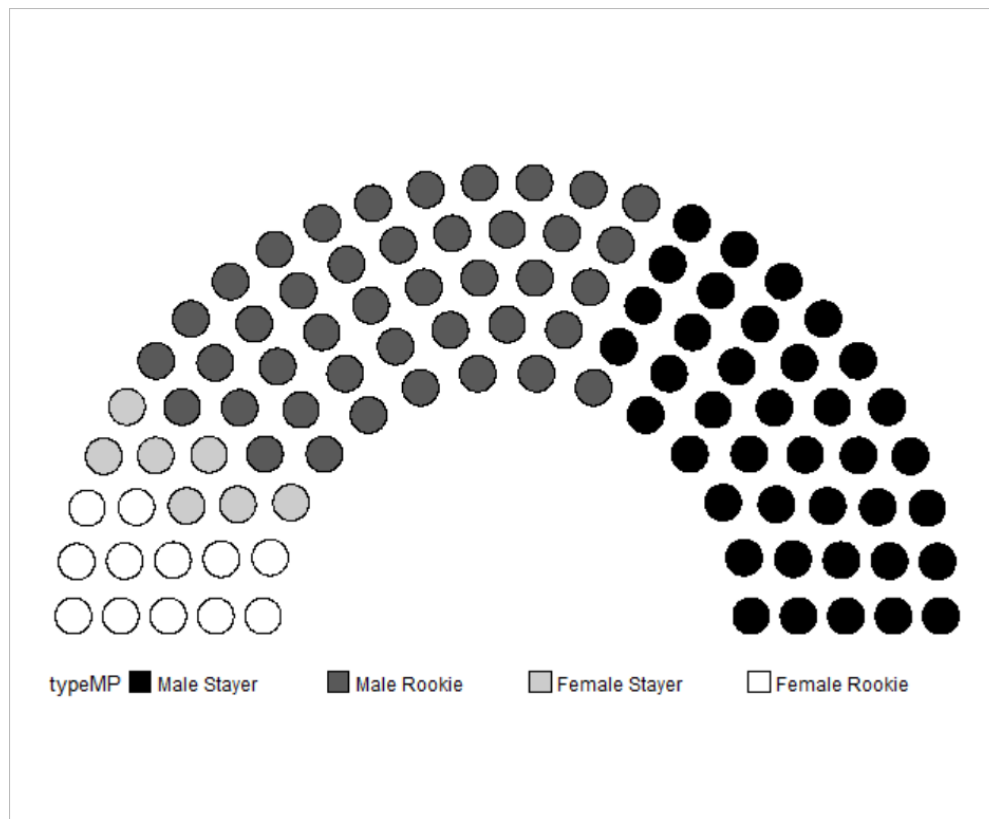
Many of the MPs in the total N are (naturally) missing and not included in the table above, as the tables only show the stayers (i.e. those belonging to the top 25<sup>th</sup> percentile).

### The static measure

The static measure captures the gender difference between those having served three or more terms in parliament versus those who have served only one or two terms. In contrast to studies on turnover, we are therefore able to say something about gender balance among those who are successful in enduring/becoming parliamentary stayers, not just among the newcomers. This is an important distinction as one might argue that there is more skills and knowledge learned after someone have served two terms, rather than only one term. Establishing a general cutoff point that can be used across countries is also easier to calculate and present across countries, although the size of this relative to those that have stayed one or two terms, varies.

Among all parliamentarians in the selected countries since 1965, only 7.4 percent were female stayers, compared to 38.9 percent male stayers, represented by light grey and black dots respectively in Figure 1 below. The gender gap between male and female stayers thus amounts to 31.5 percentage points.

Figure 8 Stayers and rookies by gender, all countries since 1965. Percentages.

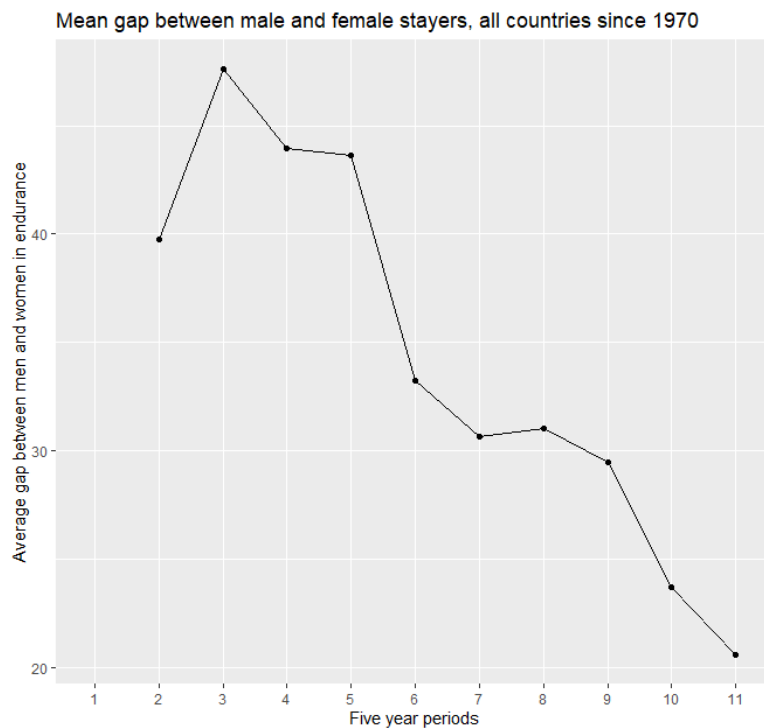


Source: Comparative Legislators Database

Note: Stayers and rookies are calculated on the basis of all MPs.

The below plot shows the mean gap between male and female stayers across all countries within five-year periods (1965-1969, 1970-1974, 1975-1979 etc). The figure clearly shows that the gender gap decreases over time, from nearly 50 percentage points in the period between 1975-1979, to its lowest point in the last period included (2015-2019) of just above 20 percentage points. Interestingly, between period seven and nine, i.e. 1995-2009, the gap remained constant at around 30 percentage points across the countries, before the gap dropped again from 2010 and onwards. Still, note that the gap across countries has never been under 20 percentage points, documenting that the gender gap remains substantial to this day.

Figure 9 Mean gender gap, male and female stayers present in parliament, all countries since 1970



Source: Comparative Legislator Database.

This measure is also interesting compared to the results we got by calculating the gender gap in parliamentarians' average length of stay in office. Using that measure, the gap was closed, but by centering the attention on the most senior members of parliament we see that the gender gap is significant. The static measure demonstrates that there is a decreasing, yet persistent and large gender gap in political endurance between women and men across all the selected countries.

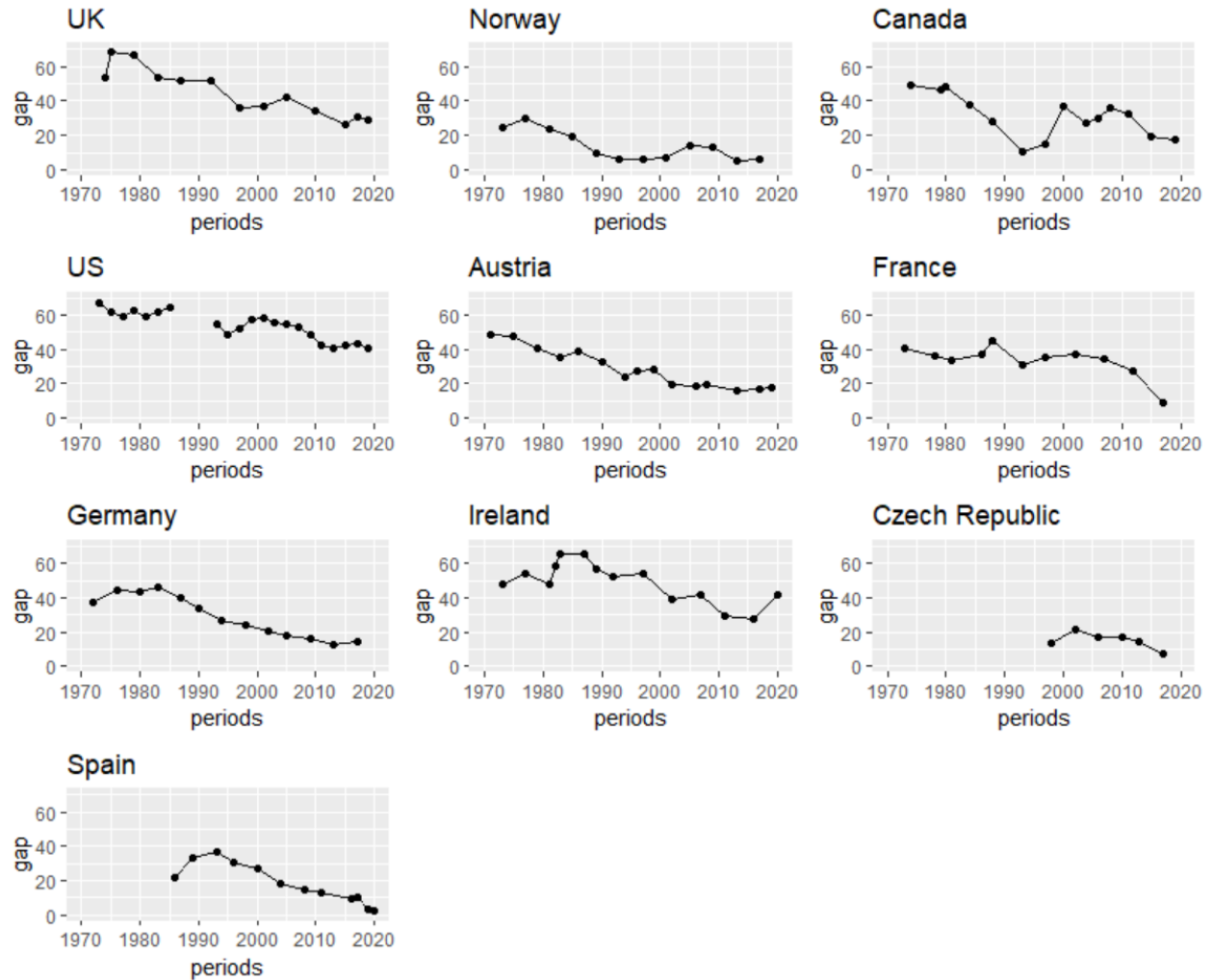
The figure below explores the static measure in the individual countries, and outlines rich country variation in the size of the gender gap in the period 1965 until today. The UK, the US, and Ireland have had the highest gender gaps in the whole period, reaching about 70 percentage points at its top. In contrast, Norway and the Czech Republic peaked at 30 percentage points (Norway), and 22.5 percentage points (Czech Republic). Take note, however, that our data from the Czech Republic only goes back to the late 1990s.

France is one of the countries that has been most effective in closing the gap between male and female stayers over time, peaking at 45 percentage points in 1988, but decreasing to 8.9 percentage

points following the 2017 elections. Similarly, the UK went from a gap of 69 percentage points in 1975 to 29 in 2019, while Canada managed to go from 49 in 1974 to 17 percentage points in 2019. Strikingly, Spain is the only country which has nearly completely closed its gender gap in endurance, having a gap today of 3 percent, compared to 37 in 1993. Apart from Spain, the gender gap is still very much present in all countries, most notably in the US and Ireland, where the gender gap is still around 40 percentage points. The UK is at 30 percentage points, while Austria, Germany, and Canada have a gap between 10 and 20 percentage points. In Norway, the Czech Republic, and France the gender gap is at 10 percentage points or lower. What is interesting is that the gender gap in political endurance has been lower in Norway over the years than in the other countries, but the gap has never been fully closed. This indicates that even if there is a positive trend in several countries, it is not evident that the gap will wither away over the years.

Figure 10: Development in gender gap in political stayers in selected countries





Source: Comparative Legislator Database.

## Discussion

We have over the last couple of decades seen some single case studies that have suggested that women's careers as elected representatives in parliaments tend to end quicker than men's (Doland and Ford, 1997; Fox and Theriault, 2004). This study documents that this holds true across our continuous, static and relational measures of political endurance in ten western democracies. Apart from showing the theoretical relevance of political endurance, a major contribution of the paper has been to empirically assess the concept, and in that way, document that a gender gap in political endurance between women and men is substantial both in the past and now – despite a trend towards greater gender balance.

We encourage future studies to embark on analyses where the three different measures constitute either the dependent or independent variables. In order to inspire such future studies, the following discussion will make a first attempt to explore how the introduction of gender quotas (see e.g. Paxton et.al, 2021:178-182) and type of electoral system (see e.g. Adams, 2018; Lee 2019; Norris, 2006), two systematic features that have been linked to the increased representation of women in parliaments over time in the literature, seem to be associated with the gender gap in political endurance. We also look at the (increased) electoral volatility in relation to our empirical findings, as higher volatility is one of the central features of contemporary Western democracies (see Appendix F, see also Gallagher et.al 2011).

The gender gap in political endurance is present across all the countries in our study and thus across three different types of electoral systems. Also, there is no systematic trends with regards to political endurance according to electoral system. Specifically, in our sample of ten Western democracies, there are four countries (UK, US, France, and Canada) with a majoritarian electoral system, commonly associated with more male-dominated legislatures, and five proportional electoral systems (Norway, Czech Republic, Austria, Ireland, and Spain), found to result in legislatures boasting a higher share of women (Salmond, 2006). Germany has a mixed electoral system. Should electoral system be of importance for the gender gap in political endurance, there would have to be indications that the gender gap is systematically higher – or more resistant to drop over time – in majoritarian contexts. Our country level analysis on the relational measure, suggests mixed results for this proposition. On this measure, there is a tendency that majoritarian systems overall have a bigger gender gap in political stayers than proportional systems. For example do Figure 4 and 5 outline that very few women stayers are present in the legislatures having a majoritarian electoral system, namely the UK, the US, France, and Canada. Norway and Spain, on the other hand, as proportional systems, exhibit higher levels of gender balance in political stayers. Still, as long as the three proportional systems Ireland, the Czech Republic, and Austria fare relatively bad when it comes to securing gender balance on the relational measure, electoral system seems to be of less importance to understand gender gaps in political endurance. This argument is supported by investigating the results of the static measure, showing that three out of the four countries that are most effective in closing the gender gap in political endurance over time are majoritarian systems (France, UK, Canada). Spain, having a proportional system, is the fourth country on this list.

One of the main reasons why electoral system is a weak predictor of issues related to gender balance is that some countries with majoritarian elections, like France, has adopted gender quotas with a penalty (Achin et al, 2019; Muriaas et al, 2022). Our data shows that the gender gap in France has declined clearly after 2010 when a quota was adopted (Murray, 2012). Similarly, we can also see that in Spain, where they have a PR electoral system, the gender gap is nearly closed over the years, but it is likely that the reduction of the gap is connected to the adoption of a mandatory gender quota (Verge, 2010). The narrowing down of the gender gap in Spain indicates that women elected as an effect of gender quotas do not confront more obstacles nor are they less motivated (Zetterberg, 2008). In Norway, political parties started to adopt voluntary party quotas back in the 1990s, and our data show that the gap has remained significant—yet comparatively small—for a few decades. Our results thus support the argument by Gouglaas et al (2018) that gender quotas is a means of elite change. Still, the example of Norway indicates that gender quotas might not be sufficient to close the gender gap in political endurance fully. Issues related to age and child penalty, and maybe also the power the most senior members in institutions have over socialization, might make it difficult to reduce the gender gap completely in contexts of relatively stable party competition.

This takes us to another current political trend that might have an impact on the closing of the gender gap. In recent years it has become less common for parliamentarians in many countries to stay for several terms in office due to new parties emerging. Some parties, like En Marche! in France, even mobilized support on “the need for new faces” political agenda (Ollion, forthcoming). Studies have shown that there has been an ongoing increase in the levels of electoral volatility in established democracies since the 1970s (Gallagher et al. 2011: 304; Mair 2008). Lately, there is also a large literature that explains the rise of populist parties and the electoral success of political movements (Spruyt et al, 2016). Research into political representation have found that new parties and political outsiders have attracted considerable electoral support in national elections in various parts of the world and that it is common to observe large vote swings from one party to another (Carreras and Acácio, 2019). Specifically, with increased instability, we assume that it has become more difficult for stayers – female or male - to establish themselves, producing parliaments that to a larger extent are dominated by political rookies. The overall share of stayers is likely to affect a gender gap. One critical question that remains to be answered is how political policy processes are affected by changes in the composition of parliaments. At the one hand, one could assume that the increased commonality of short careers would provide more power to those few who have long

careers. Still, the opposite is also plausible, the reduction of stayers could make parliaments more open and inclusive of different perspectives and new ways of doing politics.

## **Conclusion**

We have introduced the new concept political endurance and showed three different ways for how it can be measured to facilitate an increased scholarly attention on the causes and consequences of gender gaps among the most senior members of parliaments worldwide. Our concept and measurements are innovative in several ways. First, the concept of political endurance is critical to understand how gender affects power dynamics in elected office as the most senior members of parliaments tend to play a significant role in processes of socialization and appropriation. By coining this new dimension of gender imbalance, we can expand our gaze from the newcomers in elected office to paying more attention on the more advanced members. Research so far has been effective in demonstrating that it takes time for parliamentarians to learn what it means to be an elected representative. The concept of political endurance allows us to develop theories and test hypothesis about impact and privileges among parliamentarians both within single parliaments and across time and countries.

Another innovation is our development of three different measurements that in similar, yet distinct ways, calculate gender gaps in political endurance. These three measures can also be used to calculate gaps along other dimensions of gender, e.g. class, education, minority background, religion, age. Furthermore, we also show how it is possible to calculate gender gaps by both continuous and dichotomized measures, depending on our theoretical framework and considerations about the generalizability of our results. We also discuss how our choice of measurement depend on our understandings of why endurance matter. As for instance, the choice of measurement should not just be taken based on how common it is for parliamentarians to stay in office, but also based on some reflections about whether perks of being senior is accessed when certain terms have passed or when one has endured longer than others.

The third innovation is that we have been able to empirically demonstrate - for the first time - a consistent gender gap in political endurance over time and across 10 different western democracies. One important finding is that variation in gender gaps is increasing over time across

countries. In Spain, the gender gap is nearly closed, while the gender gap in political endurance in the US, the UK and Ireland is still high. In Ireland we are also witnessing a negative trend where the gaps are increasing again. Norway is another interesting case, as the gender gaps have historically been narrower, but never closed. Indicating that there might not be a steady downward spiral to closing the gap. In our discussion, we discuss two global trends that we assume have an impact on the size of a gender gap in political endurance. The size of a gender gap is likely to be affected by electoral volatility as old parties suffer electoral loss and new parties emerge, and gender quotas with penalty mechanisms have contributed to higher proportions of women representatives. More research is however needed to explore these relationships.

Future research could make use of our operationalization to both explore the causes and effects of gender gaps in political endurance. While we are starting to get some interesting insights into gender dynamics among parliamentary newcomers, we need to increase our knowledge about how such aspects are relevant at later stages of parliamentary careers and quite critically, how this might affect policy impact and implementation. Future research could also extend the data collection to more countries, especially non-western democracies. It would for example be important to study how aspects related to seniority plays out in new democracies with high volatility, such as Lithuania and Malawi, but also in more stable political surroundings, such as Estland and South Africa. Or in Latin America, where many countries have adopted gender quotas and have PR electoral systems. Future studies could also explore the impact of institutional factors further. While our preliminary discussion indicates that electoral system is not a decisive factor determining gender gaps in political endurance, future studies should systematically assess this with our measures on endurance as dependent variables, as such potentially providing relevant policy input to legislators striving to achieve substantive gender balance in contemporary parliaments.

Our research hopefully engages discussions of how to overcome gender gaps in political endurance, as just assuming that electoral volatility and the increase of women parliamentarians might do the trick, may not take us further than where we are today. Political endurance in elected office is critical as representatives' capability to deliver on their promises to the voters is likely to increase as they gain more first-hand knowledge about how the parliament works.

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