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The Effect of Women in Government on Government Effectiveness

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The Effect of Women in Government on Government Effectiveness

Abstract

A critical factor of gender and development is the political empowerment of women. Beyond this equality, however, what are the effects of women in government? This paper investigates these effects by examining the relationship between the percentage of women in parliament and overall government effectiveness. The research strongly supports the theory that women are more effective political leaders than their male counterparts.

Keywords

gender, development, government

Disciplines

American Politics | Gender and Sexuality | Models and Methods | Policy Design, Analysis, and Evaluation | Policy History, Theory, and Methods | Political Science | Politics and Social Change | Sociology | Women's Studies

Comments

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The Effect of Women in Government on Government Effectiveness

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Introduction

Despite historical underrepresentation in government, women have, over the past two centuries, made significant gains in their participation levels. In 2008, Rwanda became the first country to have a female majority in the lower house of its parliament, with 56% of representatives being female. Today, women hold 63.8% of the lower house of parliament, the highest proportion in the world. Scandinavian countries also have above-average female representation in parliament, with the average of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark cited at 41.2%. The rest of Europe and America have a strong patriarchal tradition, however, with female representation rates in the teens and twenties. In Asia, women represent 11.4% of the Indian parliament and 23.4% of the Chinese parliament, while several countries have gender quotas. Only four countries do not have any female representatives (Comstock 2015).

The ongoing trend of an increasing proportion of women in government raises questions about the effect this has on countries; do women alter the way in which the government functions? Is this a positive or negative effect? In this paper, I will seek to address these questions. Specifically, I will investigate whether or not the level of women's representation in parliament has an effect on government effectiveness.

This research question is important to understanding the role of women in politics, especially in developing countries. In patriarchal societies, men hold most positions of power and women are often viewed as incapable of serving in public office. However, gender equality is an essential characteristic of development. Therefore, research proving not only that women are capable of serving in public office but that they have a positive effect on government may be the first step in creating cultural change towards women's rights. Additionally, if women do, in fact, increase the effectiveness of a government, political scientists may be able to use this

outcome to improve government. For example, if a government is struggling to maintain the competency to effectively run the country and is losing the support of its people, people may lobby for a gender quota with the idea that increasing the number of women in parliament may enhance effectiveness. While such a bill may be difficult to pass in a developed country with long-established government traditions, developing countries may be more likely to adopt newer ideas in order to improve the country and the lives of its people.

The nature of this argument is deductive based on key differences between women and men in leadership. Previous literature concludes women exhibit different leadership characteristics than men, prioritize different policy areas than men, and alter both the policies and nature of government. Given these differences, I will test the effects of women in government on government effectiveness. I conclude that women are only one of several factors that explain a great amount of the variation in effective governments.

Previous Research on Women as Leaders

There has been extensive research on the role of women in leadership positions, both in the public and private sectors. The literature centers on three research points; the difference in leadership styles between men and women, the priorities of women in public office, and the effects of these priorities on the respective countries. Additionally, there is research investigating the proportion of women that must hold office in order for such effects to occur.

It is a popular belief among feminists that women and men have distinct leadership styles, providing each gender with distinct strengths. One of the most prominent differences between the genders is that women are more willing to work with others in order to reach a goal collectively, while men are more likely to work alone so they can prove themselves capable

among others. In support of this statement a recent social study of men and women described women as more collaborative than men, who tend to be more commanding (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Walker 2014). This finding is supported by further research on women in positions of power that described women as “collaborative and consensual” (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013) and men as “individualistic and competitive” (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). Additionally, studies have shown women are more likely to empower others in these collective efforts, while men commonly assert their power over others (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Walker 2014).

In terms of politics, women are more likely to cooperate and work alongside members of the opposite political party in order to reach a decision (Paxton and Hughes 2007). Female politicians are also more likely to adopt different approaches to problem-solving and explore new and creative solutions. In contrast, men approach problem-solving with a more authoritative and manipulative method, making them less likely to cooperate with the opposing party (Iwanaga 2008). With these approaches, women resolve conflicts more democratically (Jacobson, Palus, and Bowling 2010), and men are far more likely to rely on conflict to solve a problem (Iwanaga 2008).

In a 2013 study, Susan Eisner thoroughly tested these differences in leadership styles of women and men by analyzing a series of interviews with business leaders published in *The New York Times*. In the articles, the interviewer asked the businesswomen and businessmen to discuss her or his leadership style and reasoning behind the style. Eisner selected eighty of these interviews, forty with men and with women, to determine which leadership qualities men and women exhibit and value. She found a great number of traits more common in women as well as several that appeared more consistently among the male sample. The women were more likely to

focus on individual people and relationships over tasks and results as well as to enhance coworkers' self-worth. Compared to men, women were more encouraging of abstract thinking, showing support for new, creative ideas, and placed a greater value on listening to feedback. Additionally, the interviewed women were more team-oriented, goal-oriented, passionate, committed, and open-minded. In terms of leadership values, they were more likely to value communication change, the ability to learn from previous failures, and introversion. In contrast, men were more likely than women to share their power with coworkers and be inspiring leaders. They also placed greater value on risk taking than women. From this data, Eisner concluded that there are statistically significant differences in the leadership styles of women and men (Eisner 2013).

These studies demonstrate that women and men offer different strengths in leadership positions. However, additional studies have concluded that these differences may, in fact, make women better leaders. Both the *New York Times* and the *Daily Mail* have published articles explaining this theory, noting that, in business, women are perceived as better managers (Bryant 2009, Daily Mail 2010), while an article in *Psychology Today* claims these stylistic differences make women "...more suited to the style of leadership needed today in organizations" (Williams 2012). This finding is backed by a variety of research statistics, including the greater profit of companies with female board representation and higher scores of women on tests of leadership qualities (Williams 2012).

In public office, women are more likely to introduce and support legislation concerning women's issues than men. This grouping of issues includes the role of women in society in terms of their rights, economic status, and health. However, it is not limited to factors directly involving women. Bills pertaining to "...social welfare and the environment are also included"

(Iwanaga 2008). In addition, women are more likely to sponsor legislation concerning children, especially education, family health, and child care (Volden, Wiseman, Wittmer 2013).

Oftentimes, these bills support greater government spending on health care and other social policies (Swiss, Fallon, Burgos 2012).

These differences in bill legislation could be attributed to women's leadership styles; women are more concerned with securing social rights for the collective population than concentrating political power in the government. In this way, women use political power as "a way to get things done" as opposed to a means of controlling or influencing others (Paxton and Hughes 2014). However, another study offers an alternative explanation for these different policy priorities – life experiences. Women may be more likely to propose bills relating to women's issues because previous experiences have led them to view those issues as most important and needing improvement. Because women are often responsible for family health and childcare, for example, they value governmental support in these areas and understand best the ways in which they can be improved. Therefore, it is a societal unknown whether or not the different leadership styles and policy values of men and women are related. Regardless, it is important to note that there is diversity among women, including those in leadership positions. Not all women have the same leadership skills or previous life experiences, meaning that, no matter the reason for this difference in public policy priorities, some women are more likely than others to support women's issues (Iwanaga 2008).

When women hold public office, there are changes to the government. Most tangibly, because women introduce and support legislation on different topics, different public policy issues are addressed. When women serve in government, countries spend more money on social services, most notably health care, leading to a reduction in poverty (Swiss, Fallon, Burgos

2012). This is especially effective in improving living conditions for women and children (Comstock 2015). A study in India found that, when one third of seats on the village council are reserved for women, the council is more likely to invest money in infrastructure projects (Swiss, Fallon, Burgos 2012). Furthermore, with the beginning of female representation in Sweden, the government passed a greater number of pieces of legislation. This led to faster, greater change in less time than during all-male parliaments (Iwanaga 2008). Despite these successes, however, women face structural obstacles in passing legislation.

The legislative system rewards male characteristics over the female value of collective solutions, making it difficult for women to gain enough support to pass legislation. For example, in Colorado during the 1990s, both men and women proposed laws to control high crime rates. The women's bills focused on more creative means of crime reduction, including prioritizing long-term solutions, while the men's bills were more likely to blame and punish the individual for his or her crimes. Most of the bills that were passed had been proposed by men and supported the male perspective. It is also noteworthy, however, that, when comparing the effectiveness of the female bills to the male bills, the female bills were more effective in addressing crime (Paxton and Hughes 2012). Returning to the study that concluded that more women in Indian government led to an increase in infrastructure investments, the study also had some negative conclusions. In many countries, including Colombia, Argentina, and Costa Rica, women were unable to gain sufficient support to pass their bills proposing increased spending. The study theorizes this is because there was not a large enough proportion of women in government to have an effect on policy in the countries (Swiss, Fallon, Bergos 2012). Additionally, members' committee assignments are an important factor in determining which bills are even considered by the full house of parliament. In a study of Latin American countries, it was concluded that

women representatives are often limited to committees involving women's issues, limiting their influence in vast policy areas. With such disadvantages, women in government may have a limited influence under certain conditions (Schwindt-Bayer 2006).

As well as these policy changes, the presence of women in government has a strong impact on the nature of the government. A study of the Tanzanian legislature consisting of interviews with thirty members of parliament, including representatives of both minority and majority parties, determined that a greater percentage of women in parliament led to more positive attitudes towards female members (Yoon 2011). In Sweden, this phenomenon even extended to the population at large, improving public support of gender equality (Iwanaga 2008). The Tanzanian study also found that having female representation in parliament created a better government atmosphere and sparked more productive debate (Yoon 2011). In parliament, women have been found to make more responsible choices in voting than men, carefully considering the positive and negative effects a bill will have on society, as opposed to voting based on the way in which the vote will affect her career (Iwanaga 2008). Given that women are more likely to work with the opposing party to reach collaborative solutions to problems, women have been recognized as effective conflict mediators and "moderators between extreme positions" (Goetz 2007). The presence of women in government is also associated with greater government transparency and higher levels of democracy (Goetz 2007). There is also evidence supporting differences in levels of female and male involvement in corruption between public officials.

The idea that a greater number of women in government is associated with a lower level of government corruption has been circulating in the academic literature in recent years. It has been found that women have fewer opportunities for corruption while in public office, that is,

fewer people approach them to ask for help with plans of embezzlement, fraud, and bribes. The reasoning behind this is unclear, however. In the case of bribes, it may be that women are viewed as having less money than men, so they would not be able to pay as much if approached for a bribe. Another possibility is that women are involved in more informal corruption that is not measured by corruption statistics. For example, instead of paying bribes, women may be sexually abused. In countries that have low levels of women in business, women may also lack the connections that could offer opportunities for corruption. Even though women are approached with plans to commit formal corruption less frequently than men, they are also less likely to accept these offers (Goetz 2007).

The explanation behind women's greater honesty in public office is also unclear. Some scholars believe it is because women have a more honest and caring nature and they are not willing to compromise their moral values. The irony in this is that, previously, women's innocence was viewed as a reason to exclude them from public office and limit their responsibility to those of the household; however, it is possible that these qualities make women better public officials (Goetz 2007). An alternative explanation is that women's motivation for entering public office opposes the negative effects of corruption. In a set of interviews of female political leaders in Thailand, all respondents "expressed a motivation for entering politics that could be more or less characterized as civic-oriented, a motivation which was coupled with a sense of public service" (Iwanaga 2008). If women's primary goal in entering politics is to benefit their communities, it is logical that they would not engage in acts of corruption because corruption has negative effects on the very community they are trying to protect. Instead, women have been found to make more responsible choices while in public office (Iwanaga 2008).

With the belief that women are less corrupt than men, several countries have conducted experiments to attempt to “feminize notoriously corrupt public agencies” (Goetz 2007). In Lima, Peru, President Fujimori transformed the traffic police, consisting of 2500 officers, to an all-female force. Because they are less likely to embezzle money and, culturally, often hold influence in making household financial decisions, women are also viewed as “effective managers of the public purse” (Goetz 2007). Under the belief that women will control the use of public money, most financial positions in the Ugandan government are now assigned to women. Between public service improvements and positive changes in the nature of the government, countries with women in governmental positions see measurable effects on their government and country (Goetz 2007).

It is difficult to determine, however, how many women must be present in government for these changes to occur. Early research on this phenomenon theorized that women must constitute a critical mass of fifteen percent of parliament to have a significant impact on policies and institutions, especially those regarding women’s issues. A 2012 study attempted to test this theory by analyzing the relationship between the proportion of women in parliament and health care. Specifically, the study looked at data regarding access to immunizations and infant and child mortality rates for 102 countries between the years 1980 and 2005 and concluded the critical mass for women to have significant impacts on health care was 20% of parliamentary seats. Although this research focuses on only one policy field, it is important to note that, because of the aforementioned challenges women face in passing legislation, having only a small proportion of women in government may not be influential in making policy changes of any nature (Swiss, Fallon, Bergos 2012). However, there are structural changes that can be made to government to increase the number of women. First, gender quotas can set a minimum number

of positions in government or seats in parliament that must be filled by female politicians. This assures that a government meets the critical mass that gives women an influence in policy. Additionally, proportional representation electoral systems often give more seats in parliament to minorities because more than one candidate wins in each district. In other words, a female candidate who receives a smaller proportion of votes than a male candidate can still earn a seat and represent women. With these institutions, governments can allow for a greater proportion of women and, therefore, see greater effects of these changes (Joshi 2015).

The current literature on the role of women in politics is summarized in four conclusions. First, women have distinct leadership characteristics from men, which may qualify them as better leaders. When women are in positions of political power, they are more likely to introduce bills that address women's issues, although there is no clear explanation for this phenomenon and women must overcome structural challenges before their bills are passed. Additionally, the effects of women in politics are plentiful, both in improving public life and creating positive changes in the nature of the government. Despite these facts, however, it is unclear how many women must be involved in political decision-making before the benefits can take effect.

This research suggests that the presence of women in government has a measurable impact on a country, including several positive effects detailed above. Given that women carefully consider legislation based on the needs of the country and, quantitatively, pass more bills, especially including those relating to social welfare, governments should, theoretically, be able to provide better services to meet the needs of their people. Additionally, as women are more likely to work collaboratively with the opposing party to reach a cooperative decision, they should be able to satisfy most people in their work. With higher levels of government transparency and democracy in countries with women in government, the presence of women

should force the government to remain focused on its goals and do so in a fair manner. As women are associated with less corruption, governments and, in turn, countries, should have more public money to spend on social services and be more honest to the people. With these factors combined, governments with women should be able to more successfully and effectively run their countries. In this way, countries with higher proportions of women in government will have higher levels of government effectiveness.

Research Design

Data for this study was collected by the Quality of Government Institute (QOG) and reported in the World Dataset. It is a time-series dataset, and there are 1,018 cases between the dependent variable, level of government effectiveness, and central explanatory variable, proportion of women in the lower house of parliament, for the span of 1997 to 2011. When the control variables, real GDP per capita, level of democracy, and index of globalization, are considered as well, there are 764 observations of countries across the time span with data for all five variables.

The QOG World Dataset includes the variable “government effectiveness (estimate),” which is the dependent variable in this study. According to the dataset codebook, “This variable combines into a single grouping responses on the quality of public service provision, the quality of the bureaucracy, the competence of civil servants, the independence of civil servants from the political pressures, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to policies” (Teorell, Charron, et al 2013). Government Effectiveness is an interval-level variable, measured on a continuous scale of negative three to three, with all countries falling between the range of -2.510756 and 2.6358976.

Also included in the dataset is the variable “women in national parliament (lower house).” The central explanatory variable in this study, it measures the percentage of women in the lower house of a country’s parliament. If a country has a unicameral legislative branch, the measurements are taken of the single house of parliament. The observations of this ratio-level variable are out of one hundred percent and range from zero to nearly fifty percent.

The first control variable is level of economic development as measured by real GDP per capita. Because data was collected over a period of sixty years, it is a chain series with the GDP measurement adjusted to 1996. As it is a measure of money, this is an interval-level measure of economic development. The real gross domestic products of the countries studied range from about 153 to about 111,730 international dollars.

The level of democracy a country experiences may also exercise an effect on women in parliament and government effectiveness. In the QOG dataset, the combined polity measures the difference in the states’ levels of democracy and level of autocracy, as measured by the institutionalized democracy and institutionalized autocracy variables. Institutionalized democracy considers the presence of “...institutions and procedures through which citizens can express effective preferences about alternative polities and leaders...intstitutionalized constrains on the exercise of power by the executive...and guarantee of civil liberties to all citizens...”(Teorell, Charron, Dahlberg, Holmberg, Rothstein, Sundin, and Svensson 2013). Institutionalized autocracy considers the rights of the people to express their views on political candidates and policies. Both of these measurements are scales of one to ten; therefore, the states’ polity scores range from negative ten to ten, with negative ten representing strongly autocratic countries and ten representing strongly democratic countries. In the dataset, countries’ scores span this entire range.

Another factor that may control for the relationship is the country's level of globalization. The World Dataset contains the variable "index of globalization," which is the average of the variables economic globalization, social globalization, and political globalization. The economic variable is a measurement of trade and investments, while the political aspect is a measure of the countries' involvement in the international community, including the number of international organizations the countries are a member of and the number of international treaties the countries have signed. The social globalization variable is given the most weight in the globalization index, and it takes into account personal contacts with, information flow with, and cultural proximity to other countries. The index of globalization is on a scale of zero to one hundred, and the countries' scores range from eight to ninety-three.

I will conduct this research in two steps. First, I will directly test the relationship between the percentage of women in the lower house of parliament and the level of government effectiveness using bivariate regression. This will determine whether knowing a country's proportion of women in parliament improves the estimate of the government's effectiveness. Because these are both interval-level variables, I will use regression test to determine whether or not there is a statistically significant relationship between them. Then, if I find this relationship exists, I will rerun the regression test, controlling for levels of economic development, democracy, and globalization. I will then determine which of the four variables are statistically significant and use the data to develop a formula for government effectiveness.

Results

Looking at Figure 1, the scatter plot supports the findings of the regression test, with the line of best fit running a positive slope. The points on the graph are heavily concentrated towards

the lower-left corner, or countries with low levels of women in government and low levels of government effectiveness. There is spread and random scatter among the data, however, with countries falling into all levels of effectiveness and female participation. According to Table 1, the test of regression between government effectiveness and the percentage of women in the lower house of parliament proved to be positive and statistically significant with a P-value of less than 0.001. The adjusted R-squared value is equal to 0.1683. The test provides the following formula:

$$\text{Government Effectiveness} = -.5569216 + .0418995 * (\% \text{ of Women in Lower House of Parliament}).$$

Table 2 shows that all four dependent variables, percentage of women in lower house of parliament, real GDP per capita, level of democracy, and index of globalization, have a P-value below 0.001, meaning they are statistically significant. They also all have a positive coefficient, meaning there is a positive relationship with the dependent variable. The adjusted R-squared value is .8589. From this test, the following formula is derived:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Level of Government Effectiveness} = & -1.987 + .0095627 * (\% \text{ of Women in Lower House of} \\ & \text{Parliament}) + .0000444 * (\text{Real GDP per capita}) + .0258282 * (\text{Level of Democracy}) + .0219961 \\ & * (\text{Index of Globalization}). \end{aligned}$$

Discussion

With a p-value less than 0.001, there is a statistically significant association between government effectiveness and the percentage of women in parliament. Specifically, the adjusted R-squared value of .1634 says that 16.34% of the variation in government effectiveness can be accounted for by the variation in levels of women in parliament. Additionally, an increase of one

percent more women in parliament would be associated with about a 0.042-point increase in the level of government efficiency. With a constant of about -0.557, a country with no women in parliament would be expected to have a government with an effectiveness rating of -0.557.

This aligns with the literature regarding women in government. The studies of Swiss, Fallon and Burgos, Comstock, Iwanaga, Yoon, and Goetz all conclude women are associated with changes in government. They found governments with female representation pass bills that increase funding for social services and alter the nature of the government, including decreasing corruption. The theoretical framework of my hypothesis is that these changes make government more effective because they can better meet the needs of their people. These findings prove that governments with more females are, in fact, more effective, better serving their people. In this way, my research confirms previous studies.

In considering the three control variables as explanatory variables to create a model for government effectiveness, all four variables are statistically significant. In this model, an increase of one percent more women in parliament would be associated with an increase of about 0.01 points in level of government effectiveness, keeping all other variables constant. Additionally, a one-international dollar increase in real gross domestic product is associated with a 0.0000444-point increase in the effectiveness variable with no changes in the other variables. On the twenty-point democracy scale, an increase of one point with all other variables remaining the same has an association with an increase of about 0.026 points on the government effectiveness scale. A one-point increase in the fourth variable, index of globalization, is associated with about a 0.022-point increase in the dependent variable, given no changes in the other explanatory variables. Together, the variation in these variables account for 85.81% of the variation in government effectiveness. That is, by knowing the percentage of women in a

country's legislature, a country's real gross domestic product per capita, its level of democracy, and its index of globalization, one can improve the prediction of the country's government effectiveness by 86%.

Conclusion

This study supports the research hypothesis that countries with higher proportions of women in government have higher levels of government effectiveness. The association is relatively strong for this relationship, meaning women are a useful predictor variable of effectiveness. However, it remains unclear whether the women in government cause the government effectiveness or if there exists one or more omitted variables that could explain this relationship. From the results of the control variables, it is conclusive that real gross domestic product per capita, level of democracy, and globalization index do not explain this relationship but rather add to it. The model becomes even stronger when the three control variables are included, with the four variables collectively explaining nearly all variation in government effectiveness. Therefore, the hypothesis cannot be rejected; there is an association between women in parliament and government effectiveness.

The implications of this research could have broad effects on the role of women in politics. In countries where women are culturally seen as unfit to participate in the field of government, these results could be used to prove that women do not have negative impacts on government. This means that, as a group, women are naturally no less qualified for public service than men. This idea could spark cultural change in patriarchal societies. Additionally, women's rights activists in both development and developed countries could use this conclusion to support the introduction of gender quotas in government. They can argue that women do not inhibit the

ability of government to effectively meet the needs of the country, and may, in fact, cause an increase in effectiveness.

Tables and References

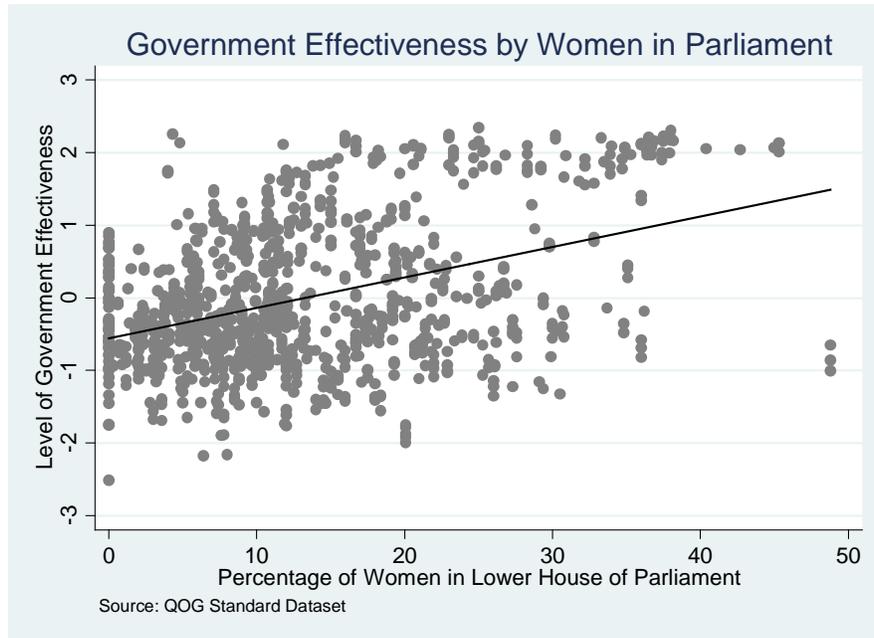


Figure 1: Scatter Plot with Line of Best Fit of Government Effectiveness by Percentage of Women in the Lower House of Parliament

Government Effectiveness	Coefficient	Standard Error	T	P>t	95% Confidence Interval	
% of Women in Lower House of Parliament	.0418995	.0029749	14.08	0.000	.0360619	.0477372
Constant	-.5569216	.049032	-11.36	0.000	-.6531371	-.460706

$$\text{Government Effectiveness} = -0.5569216 + .0418995 * (\% \text{ of Women in Lower House of Parliament})$$

Number of Observations: 1018
 F(1,1016) = 198.37
 Probability > F = 0.0000
 R-Squared = 0.1634
 Adjusted R-Squared = 0.1625
 Root MSE = .91043

Source	SS	Degrees of Freedom	MS
Model	164.42203	1	164.42203
Residual	842.137711	1016	.828875699
Total	1006.55974	1017	.989734258

Table 1: Results from Regression Test of Women in Parliament on Government Effectiveness

Government Effectiveness	Coefficient	Standard Error	t	P>t	95% Confidence Interval	
% of Women in Lower House of Parliament	.0095627	.0015601	6.13	0.000	.0065002	.0126252
Real GDP per capita	.0000444	2.00e-06	22.25	0.000	.0000405	.0000483
Level of Democracy	.0258282	.0026433	9.77	0.000	.0206391	.0310173
Index of Globalization	.0219961	.0015581	14.12	0.000	.0189374	.0250547
Constant	-1.987653	.0737302	-26.96	0.000	-2.132392	-.460706

Level of Government Effectiveness = $-1.987 + .0095627 * (\% \text{ of Women in Lower House of Parliament}) + .0000444 * (\text{Real GDP per capita}) + .0258282 * (\text{Level of Democracy}) + .0219961 * (\text{Index of Globalization})$

Number of Observations: 764

$F(4,759)=1154.58$

Probability > F = 0.0000

R-Squared = 0.8589

Adjusted R-Squared = 0.8581

Root MSE = .37088

Source	SS	Degrees of Freedom	MS
Model	635.242613	4	158.810653
Residual	104.399507	759	.137548757
Total	739.64212	763	.969386789

Table 2: Results from regression test of government effectiveness by women in lower house of parliament, real GDP per capita, level of democracy, and index of globalization

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