

Position Congruity Bias: Why Voters in Developing Countries May be Particularly Biased Against Women as Village Leaders

Paul Schuler
Associate Professor
School of Government and Public Policy
University of Arizona

Village leaders constitute vital citizen-state links in developing countries. Do voters bias against women holding these positions more than other positions? I theorize that women face additional bias for village leader positions because these positions derive legitimacy from tradition. In patrilineal societies, this means village leaders proxy as lineage group heads, who are traditionally men. Because this bias is specific to the position and not based on “masculine” role expectations, I label this “position congruity bias.” I test this theory over three waves of a massive, nationally representative survey experiment in Vietnam. The findings demonstrate that women face especially high levels of bias when running for village leadership positions. Most, but not all, preregistered results also align with predictions that women face greater bias in areas where the position carries more traditional meaning. Finally, they strongly suggest that the source of the bias differs from the prominent role congruity explanation that explains bias for other positions.

Do voters in developing countries express heightened bias against women holding village leadership positions compared political positions at different levels? Village leadership positions are ubiquitous across the developing world and are important conduits for access to government services, patronage, and protection from the predation of higher-level officials (Baldwin 2018, Kakar 2005, Clayton 2014, de Kadt and Larreguy 2018, Mattingly 2020). Electing women to village leadership roles is important, given that female village leaders can increase girls' educational attainment (Beaman, et al. 2012), women's political opportunities (Clayton and Tang 2018), and local compliance with policies to enhance gender equality (Muriaas, et al. 2019). Given the importance of these leaders and the fact that they are often elected – even in the most authoritarian contexts – it is critical to understand the level and source of potential voter bias against women holding these positions.¹

There are reasons to believe that voter bias against women is especially pernicious in rural villages. As Clayton suggests: "... the historical importance of patrilineal chiefs in structuring community life suggests that male-dominated power structures may be most entrenched at the village level in comparison to more recently formed national legislatures." (2014, 1008) Indeed, several studies show that villagers prefer male village leaders (Clayton 2014, Clayton and Tang 2018, Beaman, et al. 2009, Mattingly 2020). However, these findings sit uneasily within a broader literature suggesting that bias against women holding political office is not the primary source of women's underrepresentation at other levels of government globally (Schwarz and Coppock 2020, Clayton, et al. 2020, Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth 2018). Additionally, some studies in the US suggest that bias declines at lower levels of government (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a), though findings are mixed (Anzia and Bernhard 2022).

¹ Voter bias is not the only factor determining underrepresentation for women in politics. For reviews of this vast literature see Paxton and Hughes (2014) and Lawless (2015).

In explaining voter bias against women, existing theory from developed contexts points to the “role congruity” explanation, whereby voters expect occupants of specific positions to hold stereotypically male traits or policy preferences (Eagly and Karau 2002, Benstead, Jamal and Lust 2015, Bauer 2020a, Bauer 2020c, Anzia and Bernhard 2022). This paper provides some evidence that role congruity – particularly the expectation that officials can provide patronage – may explain bias against women for many positions, even in a less studied developing context. However, while role congruity theory may apply for other positions, this study shows that it does not explain the *additional* bias against women village leaders. Indeed, as this paper’s findings show, voters actually expect village leaders to hold *more* communal traits and stereotypically feminine policy preferences than for occupants of other positions.

To explain the additional bias against women village leaders, I test several preregistered hypotheses based on a theory of “position congruity” bias.² Building on Baldwin (2016), I argue that village leadership positions in developing contexts may be associated with traditional norms of selection, where village leaders proxy for clan or lineage group leaders (Baldwin 2018). In patrilineal contexts, this genders the *position* and generates bias irrespective of the roles citizens expect village leaders to play. I test the theory using a survey experiment from three waves of a nationally representative survey of more than 40,000 respondents in Vietnam over a three-year period. All three waves show that voters bias more against women holding village leadership positions than for legislative positions or other meso-level executive positions. The only position featuring comparable levels of bias is the prime minister position.

To probe the mechanism underlying the additional bias, I theorize that traditional norms associated with village leadership positions should be more prevalent in rural areas than urban

² These hypotheses were preregistered on November 9, 2021 (https://osf.io/z4xrm/?view_only=1c4e3e699c0d4781a526f40755ae80f3) prior to the completion of the third wave of data for the PAPI survey, which was completed in January 2022.

areas. Here, most findings align with the theory, although one preregistered test fails to provide statistically significant support my tradition-based argument. The conclusion section suggests reasons why the traditional-based theory may nonetheless hold despite these findings. It also discusses some potential alternative explanations that could align with the findings. Specifically, it is possible that village leaders' roles in rural areas in distributing land could possibly lead to greater bias, a proposition I consider for future work.

With these caveats in mind, the theory and findings have the several implications. First, the findings demonstrate the deeply ingrained level of bias against women holding village leadership positions that is consistent with findings from other developing contexts (Clayton 2014, Clayton and Tang 2018, Beaman, et al. 2009, Mattingly 2020). Additionally, in contrast to similar studies from the US (Anzia and Bernhard 2022), this paper shows that role congruity theory – at least as commonly construed – does not seem to explain heightened bias against village leaders in Vietnam. In short, the bias is particularly pernicious at the village level and is not based on expectations that village leaders possess stereotypically “masculine” traits. This means that strategies designed to challenge role stereotypes that are effective for campaigns at different levels of government may be less effective for village leader elections.

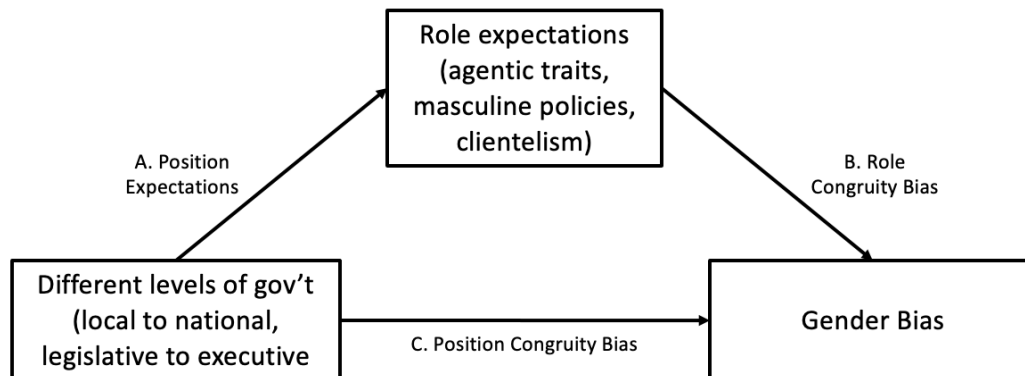
Existing Explanations for Gender Bias Against Women Politicians

This section reviews existing research literature to generate a framework for how bias against women candidates might vary by position. As such, I do not address the large literature examining how various cultural or individual traits such as gender, ethnicity, age, or traditional values could lead to general hostility against women (Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth 2018). Studies showing how certain voters have a “taste for discrimination” either through attitudes about gender roles in society or homophily for representatives of one's own group are important, but do

not explain why we might find different levels of bias against women running for certain positions (Becker 1953, Zipp and Plutzer 1985, Dolan 2008). This also applies to an important literature focusing on double standards, which finds that voters punish women more heavily than men for engaging in scandals or failing to demonstrate competence (Eggers, Vivyan and Wagner 2018; Barnes, Beaulieu and Saxton 2020; Mo 2015; Lawless and Pearson 2008). Again, double standards can lead to bias, but does not explain differential bias across positions.

A related mechanism that does pertain to differential bias across government positions is the role congruity mechanism (Eagly and Karau 2002, Benstead, Jamal and Lust 2015, Bauer 2020a, Bauer 2020c). Under the role congruity mechanism, women face bias in holding certain positions because voters prefer candidates for those positions to have issue preferences or traits that are stereotypically associated with men. The roles associated with men (and women) are traits (agentic versus communal) and policy preferences (masculine versus feminine) (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b, Bauer 2020a, Bauer 2020c). Importantly, for the developing world, an additional role voters may expect officials to hold that could generate role congruity bias is the ability of the official to provide patronage (Malesky and Schuler 2020, Lust-Okar 2006, Blaydes 2010). Although to the best of my knowledge, this has not been tested in the context of a survey experiment of voter bias, it is theoretically plausible that if voters perceive women as less connected to patronage networks, as some research suggests (Daby 2021, Shalaby and Barnett 2021, Mufti and Jalalzai 2021), and certain positions are more important for patronage that women could face differential levels of bias across positions. Because voters' role expectations may vary depending on the position, with executive positions requiring more agentic traits and national positions more "masculine" policy priorities, role congruity theory could explain why women face greater bias in holding some positions compared to others.

Figure 1: Pathways Linking Different Government Positions to Gender Bias



With this in mind, Figure 1 summarizes the causal logic of role congruity theory. This framework will be useful for comparing my theory to the role congruity theory in the analysis that follows. The first link in the causal chain is that different positions lead respondents to expect more “masculine” qualities for occupants of those positions (causal arrow “A” in Figure 1). The second link in the causal chain is that voters reward candidates that they think possess those qualities (causal arrow “B” in Figure 1). An alternative pathway between positions and bias, which I propose in the next section, is that the bias inheres in the position itself. That is, the position itself could be gendered in such a way that even absent expectations about the qualities that the officeholder should possess, the position itself may be so steeped in gendered norms that voters simply cannot disentangle the position from “maleness.” This is similar to the “taste” or “hostility” argument. However, in contrast to those arguments, the hostility against women or taste for men could vary by the position itself. I call this the position congruity mechanism (causal arrow “C” in Figure 1).

Empirical support showing that the role congruity mechanism drives differential bias across different positions is mixed. With regards to legislative positions, there is little consistent

survey evidence of bias against women running for legislative positions.³ Of course, there are a wide range of other reasons why women are underrepresented in legislatures,⁴ but role congruity does not appear the most prominent explanation. Much of other literature on role congruity uses survey priming experiments to assess whether women can overcome role congruity bias by adopting campaign strategies that emphasize more masculine traits or policy preferences (e.g. Blackman and Jackson 2021; Jones 2016; Bauer 2020a, Bauer 2020b). While important, this does not directly address whether role congruity drives differential bias across positions.

Where the experimental and observational evidence is strongest is in showing that voters hold greater bias against women occupying executive positions at the national and local levels than for legislative positions (Kage, Rosenbluth and Tanaka 2019, Ono and Burden 2019, Anzia and Bernhard 2022). Additionally, Håkansson (2021, 512) finds that women mayors can face disproportionate levels of violence in part because those positions are linked with “power” and “assertiveness,” which are stereotypically seen as male traits. Nonetheless, these studies do not find evidence for each link the causal chain in Figure 1. There is evidence for the first link in the chain, which is that executive positions seem to carry greater expectations that the occupants hold stereotypically masculine traits and policy preferences (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b). There is also evidence that women are perceived as less likely to have such traits and preferences (e.g. Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, Sanbonmatsu 2002). Nonetheless, evidence that role perception mediates the impact of different positions on gender bias remains elusive. Indeed, Huddy and Terkildsen’s (1993b) still-seminal analysis fails to find that manipulating the traits of candidates leads to differential effects on bias levels across positions. In short, there is

³ For a metaanalysis of the large body of literature examining this question, see Schwarz and Coppock (2020).

⁴ For a review of this vast literature, see Lawless (2015).

compelling evidence for the first link in the role congruity causal chain in Figure 1, but less for the second.

Turning to village positions, even with possibility of role congruity applying to executive positions, there is compelling evidence that bias against village leaders may operate differently. Studies have found persistently high levels of bias against women at this level of government, with the most prominent explanation focusing on “taste” (Clayton 2014, Clayton and Tang 2018, Beaman, et al. 2009, Mattingly 2020). In the case of India, even gender quotas that provide women village leader role models fail to undermine this bias (Beaman, et al. 2009). In suggesting that voters have a particular antipathy against women holding village leadership positions specifically, these studies raise the possibility that bias against women holding village leadership positions may operate through the position congruity mechanism. The next section offers a theory to explain why this might be the case.

Traditional Leader and Position Congruity Bias

Building on Baldwin’s (2016) differentiation between “traditional leadership” and rational-legal positions, I argue that village leadership positions in some rural contexts in developing countries fall within the broader category of traditional leadership positions. Baldwin defines traditional leaders as “rulers who have power by virtue of their association with the customary mode of governing a place-based community” (2016, 21). This definition emphasizes that village leader selection should be based on customary, or traditional, norms rather than legal statute. In the context of Africa, the customary selection procedure is primarily hereditary succession (Baldwin 2016). I relax the strict requirement of *de jure* customary selection procedures to reflect the possibility that the distinction between “traditional” and “rational-legal” is not always clearly defined. As such, I argue that traditional positions are those in which

citizens may implicitly use customary modes of selection to appoint officials. With this definition, I argue that village leaders in many developing contexts fit this criteria because they are supposed to be leaders of lineage groups.

The possibility that village leaders occupy traditional positions is supported by the fact that in many countries village leadership roles persist even during periods when they are not formally recognized by the state. In South India, for example, village institutions persisted despite the fact that the colonial government and the immediate post-colonial government “never inducted this ‘traditional’ local institution into... the formal state apparatus (Pur and Moore 2010, 607). In China too, village institutions, have “no formal connection to the rest of the government,” yet continue exert strong influence in policy implementation (Mattingly 2016, 387). In Zimbabwe, where the official role of village chiefs has waxed and waned, the increasing formalization of their power is largely a function of the fact that efforts to strip them of their *de facto* authority were undermined by the strength of their traditional authority (Baldwin, Muyengwa, and Mvukiyehe 2017, 10-11).

If village positions derive at least part of their authority from tradition, two important factors that should increase the degree of *position-specific* bias citizens hold against women holding those positions. The first include the norms of selection. If a position is traditional, the selection for traditional leaders is heavily rooted in the *family or clan associated with a place*. As such, the village leader in many cases is the leader of family that is associated with that particular village. In Zimbabwe, for example, “[t]he vast majority of [village] leaders inherit their positions from within their village’s founding family” (Baldwin, Muyengwa, and Mvukiyehe 2017, 9). In China’s patrilineal context, in villages with strong lineage groups, the village leader is often the *de facto* head of the lineage group (Mattingly 2016, 389-390; Schoon 2013). If the village leader

is the head of the clan or extended family, in a patrilineal society this would mean that the occupant of that position should be a man. Because rational-legal positions are not as inextricably tied with clan or family, the association between the position and the gender of the occupant should be weaker and more indirect.

The second feature of traditional leadership important for gender bias includes the customary duties of the leader. In exchange for recognizing the authority of the traditional leader, citizens hold expectations for the duties those officials are meant to perform (Scott 1972, 93). This is important for village leaders, because in addition to the distributional roles village leaders play, which in theory a bureaucrat could also play, traditional leaders also hold additional customary duties. These include presiding over weddings, funerals, or other local religious customs. For example, in South India, customary village councils, led by predominately male *yajamanas*, “play an important role in organizing religious ceremonies and festivals, in constructing and maintaining local temples, and raising resources for religious functions.” (Pur and Moore 2010, 610) In China, village leaders are involved in presiding over “life events” such as funerals and weddings (Mattingly 2016, 389). Where men are seen as important to fulfilling these customary and traditional roles, citizens may directly associate the positions with men.

The argument that village leadership positions occupy traditional forms of authority, which in patrilineal societies will lead to a direct association between the position and maleness, leads to predictions about the level of bias citizens should hold against women occupying village leadership roles. Because of the direct association of the village leadership position with men, consistent with Figure 1, I argue that this leads to *position congruity bias*, whereby the position itself is incongruous with a woman officeholder. This means that for any position deriving authority from traditional sources in a patrilineal society, we should see a higher *direct* level of

bias against women holding those positions compared to other positions in the government. This leads to the following preregistered hypothesis⁵:

H1: Voters will exhibit greater levels of direct bias against women holding village leadership positions compared to other formal positions in the government.

Because the theory suggests that it is the association of the village leader with tradition that differentiates it from other positions, the theory also predicts that women should face greater bias in competing for village leadership positions as compared to other rational-legal positions at the village level. As the next section discusses, in the context of Vietnam, villages also feature village Communist Party cell secretaries, who act as the party leaders at the village level. If it is *tradition* and not *level of government* that drives the bias, we should expect greater bias against women holding village leadership positions than party leadership positions at the village level. This leads to the second preregistered hypothesis:

H2: Voters will exhibit greater levels of direct bias against women holding village leadership positions compared to other rational-legal village-level positions.

The theory carries an additional empirical implication concerning where bias against women village leaders should be most prevalent. I expect the role of tradition and the expectation of lineage group leadership to be greater in rural areas. Urbanization, by disrupting the dominance of a single lineage group and undermining the historical lineage of the geographic area, undermines the traditional authority of the leader. In the context of Zimbabwe, “urbanization is... reducing the traditional areas of influence of traditional leaders” (Chigwata 2016, 79). In China, Schoon (2013, 224) argues that rural villages differ from urban neighborhoods in that the “social fabric of villages is strongly impregnated by age-old

⁵ These hypotheses were preregistered on November 9, 2021 (https://osf.io/z4xrm/?view_only=1c4e3e699c0d4781a526f40755ae80f3) prior to the completion of the third wave of data for the PAPI survey, which was completed in January 2022.

patriarchal, clan, and/or lineage structures. Family ties make village societies a relatively stable unit.” These ties, she argues, are less present in the “anonymous society” of the urbanized areas.

As such, the third preregistered hypothesis predicts:

H3: Voters will exhibit greater levels of direct bias against women holding village leadership positions relative to other positions in rural areas than in urban areas.

Village Leaders in Vietnam – Co-opted Traditional Institutions

I test this theory in Vietnam. For the theory to fit the scope conditions outlined in the previous section, two conditions should apply. First, the theory applies in a patrilineal society. Second, position congruity applies where village leadership positions derive at least part of their legitimacy from tradition. As Appendix A discusses, village leaders in Vietnam meet these conditions. While space limits a full discussion of gender norms in Vietnam, scholars describe the Kinh majority as “patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal” (Hirschman and Vu 1996, 230).

Turning to village leadership positions, to what extent do these positions derive legitimacy from traditional sources of authority? To what extent are the selection mechanisms rooted in tradition? To what extent are the roles these leaders play cultural as opposed to purely distributional and bureaucratic? Historically, villages are central to Vietnamese public life. It is by now a hoary aphorism in Vietnam that the “rule of the emperor stops at the village gate” [*“Phép vua thua lệ làng”*]. In terms of the precolonial village structure, in most villages, the village head was the liaison between a village council of notables, which was primarily made up of the *male* heads of the various lineage groups and higher-level magistrates:

The village authority was structured vertically with a council of (male) elders sitting at the top of this structure. Below the council of elders, the village headman and village council oversaw all matters of relevance to the community at large and served as the representative body to the local magistrate... Participation in the village power structure was... strictly limited to male representatives of their lineages. (Tran 2006, 127-128).

The village leader, therefore, came from the ranks of the council of village elders, who were almost exclusively male.

Of course, the *de jure* methods of selection have changed since precolonial times. Village leaders are no longer nominated or selected by a council of village elders. Instead, after the Grassroots Democracy Decree of 1997, they are directly elected, contingent on approval of the village and commune party cells (Nguyen 2017). However, consistent with the precolonial era, scholars suggest that traditional village norms exert at least some influence over the *de facto* selection of these chiefs. As Nguyen (2017) suggests, villagers continue to vie to have the head of their clan serve as village chief, a dynamic with parallels to China (Mattingly 2020). As such, consistent with the notion of traditional authority laid out in the previous section, village chiefs in Vietnam derive at least *part* of their legitimacy from patrilineal traditions, which should lead them to enjoy greater traditional legitimacy, and therefore, greater position-based male gender bias than other positions of government in Vietnam.

The traditional authority enjoyed by these village leaders differs in important ways from other levels of government. Other levels of government, starting with the lowest official level of administration in Vietnam, the commune government, to the national level have a People's Council, which in Vietnam is a directly elected legislative body at each level (called the National Assembly at the national level). These bodies, which include only delegates vetted by the party, are largely controlled by party-dominated People's Committees, which are the executive branches of the government (see Table 1). Importantly for this study, these other levels of government derive legitimacy from the legal authority granted to them by the state and party. Therefore, role congruity theories of gender bias may apply to those levels. This includes party secretary positions at the village level, which is a rational-legal position at the village level.

Table 1: Positions Assessed for Gender Bias

	Executive*	Legislative
National	Prime Minister	National Assembly Delegate
Province	People's Committee Chair	People's Council Delegate
District	People's Committee Chair	People's Council Delegate
Commune	People's Committee Chair	People's Council Delegate
Village	Village Head	

* Note: Each executive level also includes a party position called the party secretary (at the national level it is the Party General Secretary). Meso-level party secretaries were included in the survey in 2019, but dropped in subsequent years as they didn't differ substantially from the People's Committee Chairs. The General Secretary position was included in 2019 and 2020 but not 2021. See Appendix D for a disaggregation of all the positions tested.

A final contextual factor of importance concerns the numbers of women currently in these positions (see Table 2). It is possible that higher numbers of women in these positions could drive position congruity through a role model effect (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006, Schuler 2019). As Table 2 shows, while women village leaders are predicted to face the highest level of bias, there are actually more women in village leadership positions than for national or meso-level executive positions. To account for the possibility of the role model effect in driving bias against women village leaders, in robustness checks I assess whether experience with a women village leader impacts bias against women village leaders.

Table 2: Women's Representation in Politics in Vietnam

Position	Percentage
Village Leader	12
General Secretary/Prime Minister	0
Province People's Committee Chair	3.12
District People's Committee Chair	3.02

Commune People's Committee Chair	3.42
National Assembly Delegates	27
Province People's Council Delegates	25.7
District People's Council Delegates	24.62
Commune People's Council Delegates	27.71

Notes: Village leader representation is estimated from sample of 812 villages in 2020 PAPI survey; General Secretary and prime minister positions have never been held by women. The data from remaining positions are from 2004-2011 (Munro 2012).

Data and Results

I test main hypotheses using a survey experiment embedded in the three waves of the nationally representative, face-to-face Vietnam Provincial Governance and Performance Index (PAPI) conducted in 2019, 2020, and 2021. Although the survey has been conducted annually by the UNDP on adults over the age of 18 since 2011, I use these three waves because they include questions on voter gender bias.⁶ The survey uses a probability proportional to size (PPS) clustered sample to assess the quality of provincial governance in Vietnam⁷ and has been used in other published research (e.g. Bauhr and Carlitz 2020, Schuler 2019). Because the purpose of the PAPI survey is to generate provincial level statistics on Vietnam's 63 provinces, the sample size is large, with 44,366 respondents over the three waves.

The dependent variable comes from a question asking whether respondents think a man or woman would make a better occupant of a randomly selected government position. Respondents could also say the gender did not matter. To avoid survey fatigue and priming issues, the respondents were randomly divided into groups corresponding to a different government position, so each was asked this question for only one position (see Appendix B for the specific wording and flow of the question). Different positions were included in different waves, but each year included the village leader, the prime minister, two meso-level executives,

⁶ For additional information on the survey, see papi.org.vn.

⁷ Clustering occurs at the district, commune, and village levels. All 63 provinces are surveyed.

and at least three legislative positions (see Appendix D for the list of positions assessed each year). The dependent variable is binary, coded “1” if the respondent preferred a man for the position and “0” if otherwise.⁸

To test the hypotheses, I create a categorical variable that breaks the positions down into national executive (prime minister), meso-executive (province, district, and/or commune People’s Committee chairs), village leader, and legislative (all legislative positions).⁹ For each year, I test the first hypothesis using the following model:

$$eq1: Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 MesoExecutive + \beta_2 PrimeMinister + \beta_3 VillageLeader + \epsilon_i$$

where Y_i is 1 if respondent i prefers a man for the position and 0 if the respondent has no preference or prefers a woman. β_0 represents the coefficient for the omitted legislative positions. The additional parameters estimate the coefficients for meso, national, and village executive positions. Because of the clustered survey design, the standard errors are adjusted using multilevel clustering.

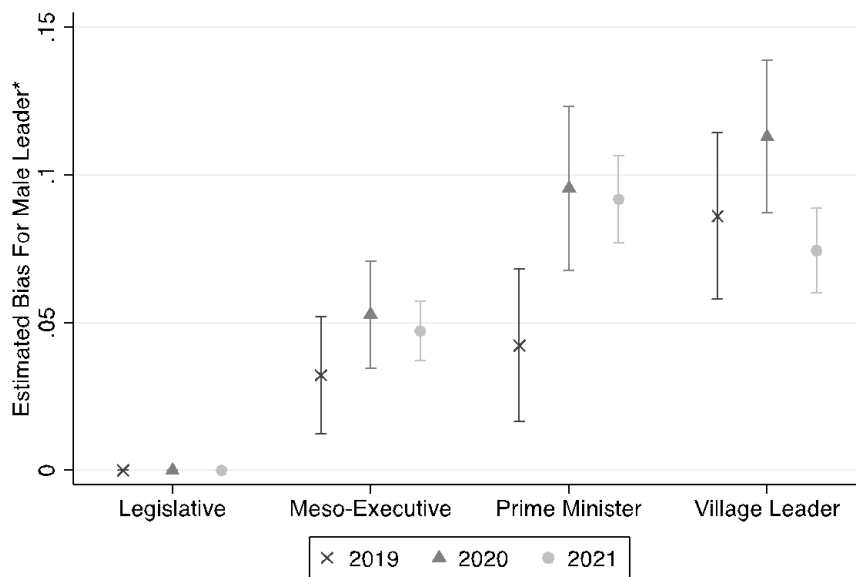
Keeping in mind that the hypotheses were only preregistered before the 2021 survey, Figure 2 shows the results for each year (see Appendix C for the full results). Consistent with the predictions, the bias is greatest for village leaders compared to all other positions in 2019. In 2020 and 2021, the bias against women village leaders is significantly higher than for legislative and meso-level executive positions. F-tests in Table 3 confirm that bias for the village leadership positions is not only higher than legislative positions, but also higher than meso-level executive

⁸ A small number of respondents preferred women over men for the positions (ranging from less than 1 percent to about 2.5 percent per position). Therefore, for ease of interpretation, I create a binary variable with only those who prefer men as a “1” and all others as a “0.” Robustness checks show the main results hold creating a tripartite variable from -1, when respondents prefer women, to “0” with no preference, to “1” for a preference for men.

⁹ I aggregate legislative positions given that legislative positions do not carry different bias depending on the level of government.

positions at statistically significant levels each year. Compared to the prime minister's position, the bias against women village leaders is higher 2019, but not in 2020 or 2021. In fact, in 2021 the bias is lower than for the prime minister, though not at conventional levels of significance.

Figure 2: Estimated Proportion Preferring Male Officials by Position



*Note: Results are from the OLS regression results in Appendix C. Bars include 95% confidence intervals. Estimated effects are relative to the omitted category of the legislative positions.

Table 3: F-Test of the Difference Between Estimated Bias Against Village Leaders

		2019	2020	2021
Village Leader = Meso Executive	F-Statistic	12.31	15.84	12.58
	Probability>F	0.0007	0.0001	0.0005
Village Leader = Prime Minister	F-Statistic	6.92	0.89	3.29
	Probability>F	0.0102	0.3487	0.0712

Note: F-Tests in Table 3 are a comparison of equal means between village leaders and meso-executives and prime ministers from Appendix C. Bolded numbers are statistically significant differences at 95% levels.

To ensure that the results are not driven by particular way I aggregated the positions into the different categories (e.g. the inclusion of province, district, and/or commune People's Committee chairs into the meso-level executive category), Appendix D compares village leader bias to all 13 other positions assessed over the three waves of the survey. As Appendix D shows, the estimated bias against women village leaders is higher than 12 of the 13 positions in each

wave of the survey at statistically significant levels. The only position where women face similar levels of bias is the prime minister position in the 2020 and 2021 waves.

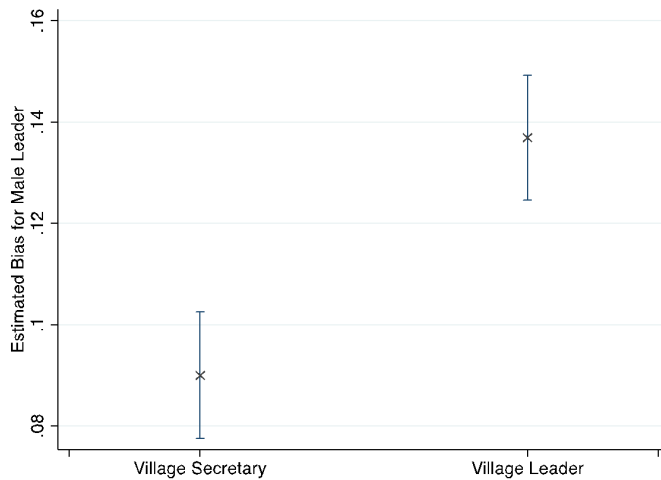
These results strongly suggest that women face more bias as village leaders than as meso-level executives or any legislative position. At the same time, it only partially comports with the preregistered hypothesis given that the prime minister position shows comparable levels of bias. Nonetheless, the high levels of bias against women prime ministers is in line with existing literature showing that voters are more biased against women holding national executive positions than legislative positions (Kage, Rosenbluth and Tanaka 2019; Ono and Burden 2019). Additionally, consistent with the overall theory presented in this paper, as I show below the *source* of the bias for prime ministers differs the source of bias for village leaders.

Turning to Hypothesis 2, which compares the village leadership position to other rational-legal positions at the village level. This analysis assesses whether heightened bias against village leaders is driven by the level of government or, as this paper argues, its traditional source of legitimacy. If the level of government rather than traditional associations with the position drives the bias, we should see no difference between the bias against women holding village party secretary positions and village leadership positions. However, if bias is inherent to traditional positions, we should expect greater bias against women holding village leadership positions compared to village party secretary positions. Figure 3 shows the estimated level of bias against women holding village leadership positions compared to village party secretaries based on an OLS regression of the 2021 results in Appendix E.¹⁰ As it shows, compared to the approximately 13.5 percent bias for men for village leaders, only an estimated nine percent of

¹⁰ This analysis only uses 2021 results because village party secretaries were not assessed in previous years.

respondents expressed bias for male party secretaries. In line with Hypothesis 2, amongst local executive positions, village leadership positions seem uniquely gendered.

Figure 3: Estimated Proportion Preferring Male Village Leaders Compared to Male Village Party Secretaries (2021)

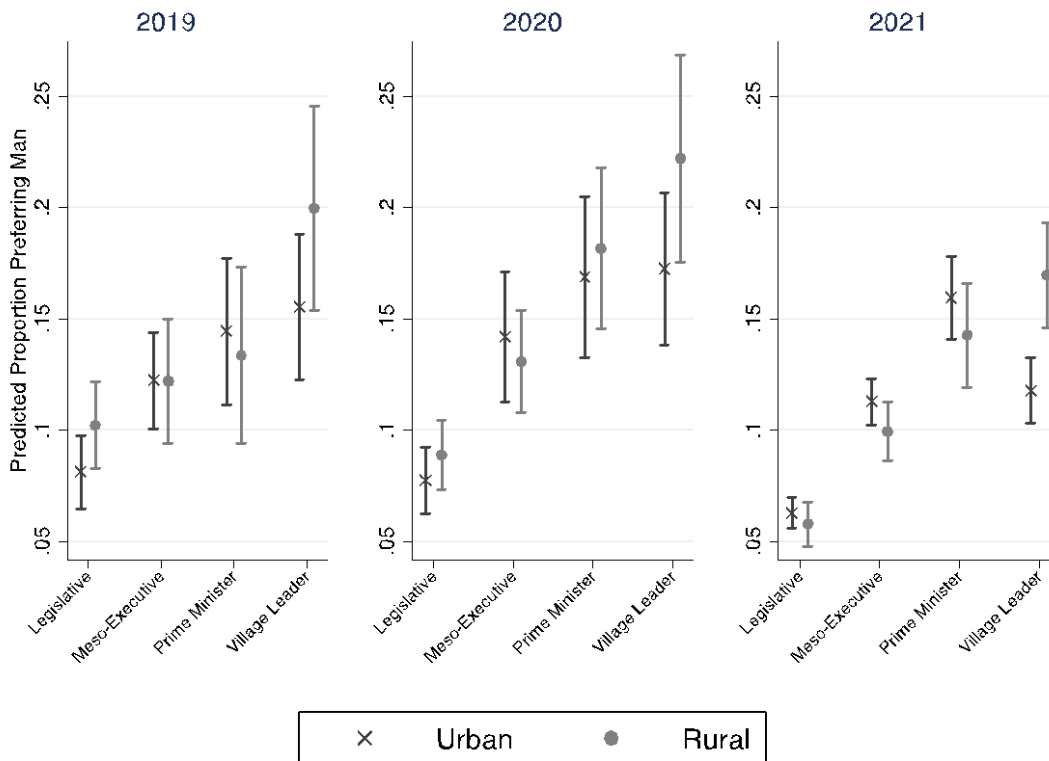


Testing the Mechanisms – Rural vs. Urban Patterns

My third set of preregistered hypotheses addresses the mechanism underlying the bias by predicting that the bias for village leadership compared to other positions should be higher in rural areas than urban areas.¹¹ To assess this, I estimate the same OLS model as equation, except that the positions are interacted with the respondent's location. Hypothesis 3 predicts that the interaction of rural and village leadership to be significantly more positive than the interaction effects on the other positions. Figure 4 presents the predicted proportion preferring men to women leaders for the different positions based on whether the respondent is an urban or rural resident (see Appendix F for the full results).

Figure 4: Heterogeneous Effects of Male Preference by Urban/Rural

¹¹ In urban areas, the position would be a neighborhood leader.



Note: Results are from Models 1, 3, and 5 in Appendix F. Bars include 95% confidence intervals. See Table 4 for the F-Test of significance difference between village leaders and other positions.

Table 4: F-Test of the Difference Between Estimated Bias Against Village Leaders

		2019	2020	2021
Village Leader*Rural = Legislative*Rural	F-Statistic	0.62	1.49	16.83
	Probability>F	0.4345	0.2262	0.0001
Village Leader*Rural = Meso Executive*Rural	F-Statistic	2.86	2.83	16.02
	Probability>F	0.0946	0.0966	0.0001
Village Leader*Rural = Prime Minister*Rural	F-Statistic	2.01	0.76	11.9
	Probability>F	0.1602	0.3862	0.0001

Note: F-Tests in Table 4 are a comparison of equal means between village leaders and meso-executives and prime ministers from Appendix F. Bolded numbers are statistically significant differences at 95% levels.

The results in each of the years are consistent with the predictions. In each wave, the interaction term of village leader and rural areas is positive and greater than the interaction terms for meso-executives and the prime minister. With that said, the difference between village leader and the other positions is statistically significant only in 2021. Nonetheless, the consistency of

the pattern over three years (and the strong evidence in 2021) suggests that the bias against village leaders relative to other positions is stronger in rural areas than urban areas. Additionally, the results could be weaker in 2019 and 2020 because of the smaller sample size in each category in those years. The 2021 wave consolidated many of the positions included in previous years, thus increasing the number of respondents assessing village leaders and other positions common to the three waves. Appendix G shows that consistent with this explanation, the results become stronger when village leaders are compared to all other positions pooled in the previous years, thus increasing the sample size.

One final comparison assesses the degree to which women face more bias as village leaders compared to village party secretaries in rural areas compared to urban areas. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, I expect that in rural areas where the traditional associations are stronger, the bias against women village leaders should increase, while the bias against women village party secretaries should be less affected by region. Appendix H shows the results. Village leaders do feature about 1.58 percentage point greater bias in rural areas relative to village secretaries after accounting for differential bias against village secretaries in rural and urban areas. With that said, this difference is not statistically significant, and rural areas do exhibit about 4 percent greater bias against women secretaries than they do in urban areas

This provides mixed evidence in support of the proposed mechanism. On the one hand, perhaps there are other explanations consistent with the findings, which is that there is something specific about village governance in rural areas that differs from urban areas. One possibility discussed in the conclusion is the greater involvement of village officials in land administration. Another explanation consistent with the tradition-based, position congruity theory offered here is that in recent years, there has been a push to merge the positions of party secretary with the

village leadership position, particularly in the rural areas.¹² Therefore, it is possible that respondents decreasingly see these positions as distinct in rural areas. I return to these possible interpretations in the conclusion.

Alternative Explanations

While these findings mostly support the tradition-based, position congruity argument, other mechanisms could also explain the findings. The most prominent is role congruity, which I address in more detail in the next section. Here, due to space constraints I briefly review additional analyses taken to address other explanations conducted in Appendix I.

One explanation for the greater bias against women village leaders is that greater contact with village leader than for other positions drives the bias. Appendix I.A addresses this possibility by testing whether those who have greater contact with village leaders exhibit greater bias, finding no evidence. Alternatively, building on the role model effect, it could be that lower experience with women leaders at the village level could correlate with reduced support for women village leaders. To test this possibility, for the 2020 sample, which for that year includes a measure for whether the village had a woman village leader, I create a *woman leader* variable for each respondent and interact it with the position, finding that this does not correlate with less bias against women village leaders.

It could also be that the salience of the position correlates with the bias. If village leaders are more salient in the eyes of voters than other positions, it is possible that voters are more biased against leaders holding office for positions they care more about. To test this possibility, I create a *name leader* variable, which is “1” if the respondent can name the leader and 0 if not.

¹² See *Gia Lai Online*. “Nhất thể hoá bí thư chi bộ và trưởng thôn: Hiệu quả tiết kiệm.” [Unifying the Party Cell Secretary and Village Leader Positions: Efficient and Economical.” <https://baogialai.com.vn/channel/12377/202111/nhat-the-hoa-bi-thu-chi-bo-va-truong-thon-hieu-qua-tiet-kiem-5755854/>

Because this variable is measured post-treatment, I conduct a mediation analysis where the ability to name the leader is the mediator. While Appendix I.B shows that respondents are more likely to be able to name village leaders than other leaders, it shows no evidence that this mediates bias against women village leaders.

Another concern with these findings is that the level of bias for legislative positions may be abnormally high, thus suggesting that results could be an artifact of something particular to the direct question used. Indeed, in other developing contexts, scholars have found little bias against female candidates for legislative office (Clayton, et al. 2020). Perhaps the higher level of bias in this survey results from the possibility that the direct question primes gender in a way that an actual election with real candidates would not. To address this possibility, I examine conjoint experiments from three waves of the survey where gender is one of the items randomized (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014). I do not use these results as the main analysis because of difficulties correlating the outcomes with individual, respondent-level variables and because I could only compare village leaders to legislative positions because only those levels are elected. Nonetheless, analysis of a conjoint analysis in Appendix J from all three years shows that village leaders face between 2.7 and 4.1 percentage points more bias than candidates for the National Assembly, which is only slightly lower than the overall level of difference in Figure 2.

Role Congruity

Turning to role congruity theory, to address the possibility that role congruity theory explains the different levels of bias for village leaders, I rely on several questions following the direct question asking about the *traits*, *policy priorities*, and *level of clientelism* respondents

prefer occupants of those positions to endorse, possess, or be able to provide. Starting with traits, building on previous research, traits can be differentiated into “agentic” or “communal” (Eagly and Karau 2002). Agentic traits, which are stereotypically associated with maleness, are primarily concerned with independence and assertiveness, while “communal” traits include being concerned with the wellbeing of others. Due to space and time constraints on the survey, the survey only contains measures of a few traits. Furthermore, space limitations prevented a separate measure of preference for agentic and communal traits, as is done in other work (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b, Bauer 2020a). Instead, the survey measures the *relative* preference for a randomly selected agentic trait versus a randomly selected communal trait (see Appendix K for the specific wording of the question and a list of the traits assessed). I take a similar approach for issue preferences to construct a variable *masculine issue*, which is a “1” if the voter prefers the official to prioritize one of the randomly selected masculine issues over the randomly selected feminine issue and a “0” if otherwise.¹³

An additional potential source of role congruity bias is the possibility that voters assume that men have better connections to higher ranking officials, and thus, will be better placed to provide patronage for those positions where patronage resources are more important (Daby, Mufti and Jalalzai 2021, Shalaby and Barnett 2021). As such, the survey includes a question asking whether the respondent wants the official to hold one of a set of normatively positive “clientelistic” traits such as “connections to government officials”, “knowing how the political system works”, or being “respected by other government officials.” A *clientelism* variable is coded “1” if a respondent prefers the official to have one of these qualities over non-clientelistic traits such as being “honest”, “transparent”, or “close to citizens.”

¹³ The label is not intended to imply that these preferences are inherently masculine, but instead, following existing work (Bauer 2020b), label how they are stereotypically seen.

In terms of testing for role congruity, as Figure 1 in the literature review section shows, role congruity implies two causal linkages. First, voters should prefer candidates to hold certain, stereotypically male traits. Second, those preferences should translate into bias against women holding those positions. This causal chain suggests a causal mediation analysis (Imai, Keele and Tingley 2010). Mediation analysis relies on two regressions, where the first regression regresses the mediating variable (in this case, agentic traits, male policy, or expectations of clientelism) on the treatment (in this case, the government position). The second equation regresses bias against women on the mediating variable and the treatment. The mediation analysis estimates the proportion of the effect of the treatment on the outcome that is direct and the proportion that operates through the mediating variable.

Identification through mediation analysis relies on two assumptions. First, no confounder impacts both the treatment and the outcome (Imai, Keele and Tingley 2010). In this case, because the treatments – government positions – are randomized, that assumption is met. The second assumption is that no confounder impacts both the mediator and the outcome. Because the mediators – preference for agentic traits, preference for candidates with male policy preferences, and ability to deliver patronage – are post-treatment variable that could be correlated with unobserved variables we cannot be sure this is the case. Nonetheless, even with the second assumption likely unmet, the full results from the mediation analysis fail to show evidence that the impact of the *any* position on bias is mediated through the different roles respondents associate with those positions. As Appendix L shows, only a small fraction of the effect of the position (if any at all) on bias operates through the channel of changed expectations of the role the occupant of the position should have for any position, not just the village leadership

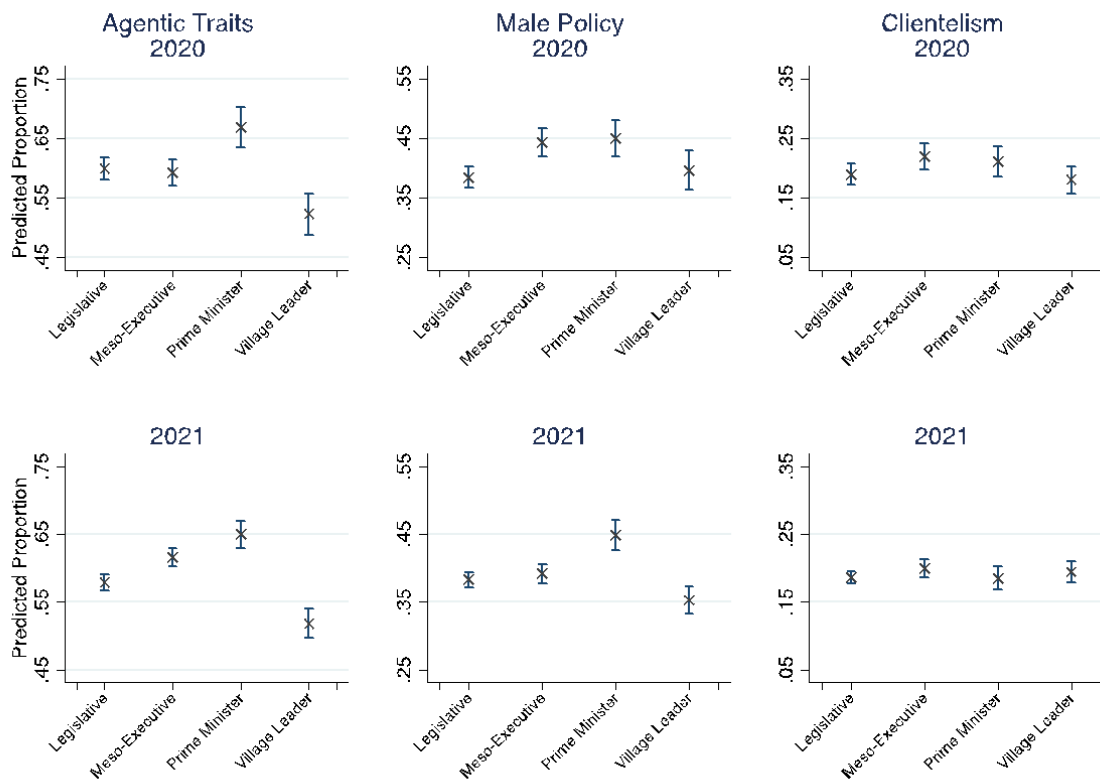
positions. This raises some concerns about the applicability of role congruity theory to the Vietnamese case.

With that said, the mediation analysis still reveals some important correlations that are consistent with other work and could provide partial support for role congruity for certain positions. We could relax the requirement that the entire chain in Figure 1 holds for role congruity to apply. Huddy and Terkildsen's (1993b) analysis, which is still the most direct analysis of how role congruity varies across positions, only finds strong evidence of the first link in the causal chain in Figure 1. That is, while they find that voters are more likely to value agentic traits and masculine policy expertise for national executive positions compared to others, they do not find evidence that those with these role expectations are more likely to want a man to hold the position. Perhaps given the hypothetical nature of the design, which is similar to this study, respondents desiring agentic traits do not assume men or women candidates in the abstract differ in these qualities. Perhaps they only infer these traits when confronted with an actual woman candidate. If so, if role congruity applies, we might only expect to see results in the first link in the causal chain.

Appendix L suggests that for meso-executive and prime minister positions, there is support for the first link in the chain. Consistent with Huddy and Terkildsen (1993b), Vietnamese voters associate national leadership positions and meso-level leadership positions with agentic traits and male policy competencies. However, role expectations for village leaders are actually *less agentic* and *less associated with male policy competencies*. Figure 5, which shows results from a simple OLS regression of positions on role or trait expectations clearly shows that expectations are even more stereotypically feminine for village leaders than even legislative candidates. In short, even if we only accept the first link as evidence of the role congruity

mechanism, the results clearly show that those role expectations are not higher for village leaders. In fact, they seem quite the opposite. Respondents expect village leaders to have *more* communal traits and more feminine policy competencies.

Figure 5: Trait Preferences by Positions



Note: Graphs show results from OLS regressions with the predicted proportions preferring candidates for different positions to hold agentic traits (vs. communal traits), stereotypically male policy preferences (vs. stereotypically female policy preferences), and ability to deliver clientelism (vs. transparency and honesty). Regression results and F-Tests show that village leaders are significantly lower than all positions for male traits and male policy, except for male policy between village leaders and legislative positions in 2020.

The findings also reveal another interesting result, which concerns clientelism. Although space constraints do not allow a fuller exploration of these results, which will be saved for another paper, the results suggest that clientelism is not associated with a particular position. However, as Appendix L reveals, expectations for clientelism do lead to additional bias against

women for all positions. This is certainly an important finding for research on differential levels of bias across different contexts that I will pursue elsewhere.

Conclusion

In reviewing these results, what can we conclude about the level of bias against women holding village leadership positions and the roots of this bias? The results from three waves of a large, nationally representative survey clearly indicate that bias against women holding village leadership positions in Vietnam is only comparable the bias against women holding the prime minister position. The bias was even greater than other meso-level executive positions, such as commune, district, and provincial leaders. Although not in line with each of the preregistered hypotheses (because bias was not greater than for the prime minister's position), consistent with the spirit of the theory, the evidence shows consistent, perniciously high bias against women holding village leadership positions.

Additionally, in line with the theory, the evidence strongly suggests that the *additional* bias against women holding village leadership positions is higher in rural areas than urban areas. For rational-legal positions, the bias does not vary between urban and rural areas. However, for village leadership positions, the bias differs, suggesting that increased anti-woman bias at the village leadership level is particular to rural areas in developing contexts. Because these areas are more likely to associate village leaders with patrilineal clan or lineage group leaders, this is consistent with the tradition-based, position congruity argument offered in this paper.

With that said, one implication that did not hold was the expectation that village party secretaries would also face higher bias in rural areas than urban areas. For this finding, at least two additional explanations are plausible. One is consistent with the theory, one is not. Consistent with the theory, it is possible that in rural areas, Vietnam's push to unify party

secretary and village leadership positions (largely by encouraging the village leader to become a party member) has increasingly led rural respondents to also associate village party cell chair with the traditional role of village leader. This would lead to the patterns found in the data while also aligning with the theory. However, it is also possible that village governments are particularly salient in rural areas due to their role in mediating land disputes. If so, it could be the prominent role village government, which would include village party cells, take in mediating land disputes that impact bias. Future research should further attempt to disentangle the importance of tradition in driving the increased bias versus other village-specific roles that could increase bias.

With that said, an additional contribution of this paper is that it clearly shows that bias against women village leaders operates differently than the bias against women holding other rational-legal executive positions. While occupants of rational-legal executive positions are expected to possess agentic traits and stereotypically male policy competencies, the same is not true for village leaders. Village leaders are actually more associated with communal qualities and stereotypically male policy interests. This suggests that the expectations and the structure of the bias operates in different and possibly more pernicious at the village level.

In terms of reducing this bias, what does this suggest for policy? On one hand, it speaks to the importance of gender quotas specifically for village positions, which have been implemented in countries like India and Lesotho (Beaman, et al. 2009; Beaman, et al. 2012; Clayton and Tang 2018). Yet, also consistent with those studies, it suggests that while the quotas may help impact policy outcomes, they may not undermine persistent, taste-based sources of bias against women holding those positions. To reduce bias against women holding the positions, the traditional associations citizens have with the positions themselves must change, possibly through urbanization. This of course is more difficult change to initiate through policy.

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