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Blood is Thicker than Water: Family Ties to Political Power Worldwide

Farida Jalalzai & Meg Rincker*

Abstract: »Blut ist dicker als Wasser. Familienbindungen und weltweite politische Machtbeziehungen«. This article analyzes the relevance of family ties for the recruitment of chief executives - presidents or prime ministers - with special emphasis on gender. Based on a cross-national data-set examining political chief executives from 2000-2017 in five world regions (Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and North America), we test several hypotheses and present four main results. First, belonging to a political family (BPF), is an advantage to entering national executive positions around the world, for both democracies and non-democracies. Among those with a sizeable number of executives in this period, regions range from 9 percent (Africa) to 13 percent (Latin America and Europe) of executives BPF. Second, executives' family ties are more powerful (with a previous chief executive) in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and more direct (with an immediate family member) in Asia and Africa. Across the globe, women only made up 6% of chief executives in the time period. Third, females who manage to become chief executives are more often BPF than their male counterparts, particularly in Asia and Latin America. Fourth, regardless of region, family ties nearly always originate from men, not women.

Keywords: Family ties, executive, political recruitment, gender, democracy.

1. Introduction

Political power has been contested between and passed down through powerful families in hereditary monarchies, but also in stable democracies through popular elections. While these transfers of power flowed mainly from fathers to sons, they have at times included formidable female descendants who also drew upon their forbearers' names, experience, and resources to rule others. In the 21st century, Freedom House reports that "of 195 countries assessed,

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eighty-nine (forty-six percent) were rated Free, fifty-five (twenty-eight percent) Partly Free, and fifty-one (twenty-six percent) Not Free” (2016).¹ In stark contrast with the past, 46% of countries’ leaders come to their positions not by inheritance, force or military might, but because their citizenries voted for them. Furthermore, suffrage has been expanded so that men and women of all levels of education, social class, degrees of land ownership, racial, ethnic and religious ties are able to participate in choosing their leaders rather than having their leaders foisted upon them. Individuals whose families have never belonged to the ruling class just need to convince voters that they possess the charisma, organization, and determination to govern. We argue, however, that even in democracies, individuals from political families still regularly attain executive office, illustrating the continuing relevance of political families for the recruitment of presidents and prime ministers in general. Moreover, we examine family ties in relation to gender, including whether female executives are more likely than their male counterparts to hail from a political family, and whether this trend is more pronounced in some regions of the world than others.

This article asks whether families are still an enduring source of political power and recruitment worldwide in executive politics. Do surnames like Bush, Nehru-Gandhi, Marcos, Clinton, Trudeau, Bhutto and Park continue to play important roles in determining who holds national executive office, even in countries with free and fair elections? Secondly, we incorporate the literature on intersectionality, which leads us to examine whether membership in a political family benefits all members of political families equally and in similar ways. Many women who have held executive national office have had family ties to politics, particularly in Asia (Jalalzai 2008; Jalalzai 2013; Jalalzai 2016; Lee and Jalalzai 2017). But this trend could also be influenced by the trajectories of leadership in these countries, and systems of religious values. Systematic study of nearly all national executives, their powers and connections to political families will shed light on how important family ties are today, and whether family ties equally and similarly benefit male and female national executives.

Our analysis focuses on presidents and prime ministers from Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America from 2000-2017. Specifically, we collect data on the backgrounds of all leaders in power during this time period, including family connections and gender. While we systematically examine the prevalence of family ties to executive power, we also contribute to the theoretical development of the family ties concept. We begin, however, with an overview of the importance of family connections to political power.

¹ <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2015#.Vt1rEzbSIPY>>. Freedom in the World 2015.

2. Benefits of Belonging

Why is membership in a family with political power an asset rather than a liability? Belonging to a political family (BPF) confers many possible benefits (see Figure 1). BPF provides political socialization and a free apprenticeship in political strategy, often from a young age. Particularly if his or her relative has held political office for a long time (see Bó et al. 2009) this power may become self-perpetuating, as a relative seeks to find a successor to inherit accrued political resources, or a patsy to carry out his or her will through retirement age. An eligible person belonging to a political family can capitalize on name brand recognition (Feinstein 2010), trust from voters, greater attention and coverage from the media, as well as pre-existing networks and organizations to get out or even buy votes (Derichs, Fleschenberg, and Hüstebeck 2006; Hinojosa 2012, 119-20; Cruz et al. 2015a; Cruz et al. 2015b).² Although in some electoral situations being a candidate with outsider status may help, during a major economic crisis, gridlock, or corruption scandal, candidates still have to overcome the name recognition problem, so generally a famous outsider is better situated to win national political executive office (i.e. Donald Trump) than a “no-name” outsider.

What is the relationship between BPF and political engagement? In general, family attitudes have a strong effect on an individual’s political engagement, either encouraging or discouraging it. This is because families, a key site of discussion about politics, combine with friend and local networks to form the social basis of an individual’s attitudes about the political system and foster political engagement (McClurg 2003). Ljunge (2015) finds that, across 83 countries, strong family ties are associated with civic virtues like not cheating on taxes or claiming extra benefits.³

In Figure 1 we assume that the potential effects of BPF could be mediated by an individual’s gender identity. Studies of political socialization and gender show that the extent to which parents talk or do not talk to their daughters about politics affects a girl’s likelihood of saying that she would consider running for political office in the future (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006). Actors in the political system can also be impacted by the gender of the eligible candidate. Voters may be more likely to discount female candidates from political families, particularly if their values are that women cannot be effective leaders.

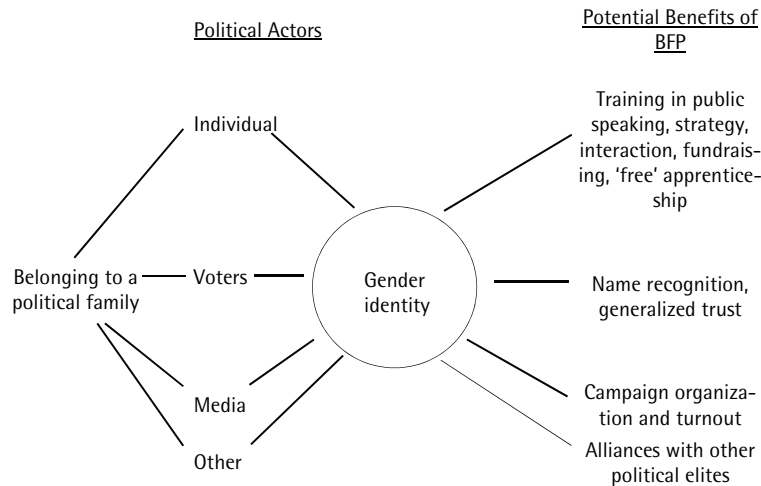
² We do not imply that family connections will always benefit candidates; this depends on myriad contextual factors including whether voters are critical of mainstream politics since political dynasties could be viewed as unearned advantages that keep the same types of elites in power.

³ Of course, this data is from only one empirical study and might require further study.

The media and other political elites may also react differently to a male eligible BPF than a female eligible. This leads us to Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1: BPF is an advantage to entering national executive positions around the world, in both democracies and non-democracies.

Figure 1: Benefits of Belonging



We view family very broadly to entail both immediate and extended relationships whether by blood or marriage. However, we view closer relationships to power to be held between immediate family (parents/children; siblings; spouses; grandparents/grandchildren) rather than the extended family (cousins; uncles/nephews). We also consider cases where a leader has multiple relatives in politics, especially from their immediate family, as being particularly relevant to their political careers; this family is especially entrenched in the political system, affording individuals leverage in gaining power.

We consider power offered by the position the relative held as well, with higher levels of office (presidencies and prime ministers) providing more benefits than medium level (parliamentarian and cabinet ministers) and lower level posts (state or local official, political activist). We argue that the clearest benefits of family linkages occur between closer relations (immediate family) that have held the highest offices.

Since families tend to play a larger role within cultural settings in which traditional family structures still dominate as opposed to the more individualistic framework of modern (post)industrial societies, we do expect that BPF will be even more prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa (Brossier and Gilles 2016), Asia

(Derichs, Fleschenberg, and Hüstebeck 2006) and Latin America (Alcántara, Barrigan, and Sanchez 2018). This leads us to Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2: Family ties in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America, will be of a more direct and powerful type, when assessing the type of family relationship and the office their relatives held.

3. Gender and Family Ties

The 1990s were a watershed decade in terms of women's advancement into national executive office. The number of new women leaders nearly quadrupled in the 1990s and did so again in the 2000s (Jalalzai 2013). Well over 100 women now have served in these positions, with the majority in prime ministerships as opposed to presidencies (Alexander and Jalalzai 2018).

Women are more likely to emerge in dual executive systems which feature both a president and prime minister (Jalalzai 2008, 2013). Women also tend to become executives in countries with a higher proportion of women in parliament. To overcome potential gender bias, females may use their credibility by association, running if they have not just the interest but also belong to a political family. Together, extant research suggests that women from political families are best positioned to leverage family connections to politics and name recognition to gain high-status executive office (Jalalzai 2013; Thompson 2002). Crisis situations such as corruption scandals (Campus 2013, 44) or assassination of a male executive in particular appear to change the frames through which women's candidacies are viewed. Party elites and the electorate focus less on the qualifications of the candidate which are often gendered (see Murray 2010; Rincker 2017; Rincker, Aslam, and Isani 2017), and instead focus on a female national executive's increased status as a mourner and or family representative with transferred credibility, and on a women's ability to persevere through hard times. This leads us to Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 3: Globally, reflecting higher hurdles for women to enter executive office, a higher percentage of women executives than their male counterparts are BPF.

We are interested in examining the types of gendered differences in relationships that are helpful to forging a political career. This expectation derives from men's sheer dominance in holding executive office overall, but this is particularly acute where politics is almost exclusively a male domain because of various cultural obstacles women still encounter in trying to gain office. As such, it might be difficult for them to be the first one in their families choosing a political career. Instead, we expect men to be the initial office holder who use their influence to occasionally benefit their relatives, some of whom are female. Women may, however, be able to extend such family connections to other relatives in the future. This leads us to Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 4: Family ties will disproportionately originate from men, not women. This is in spite of the increasing number of women in executive positions over time.

4. Research Design

Before moving forward, we need to consider the definition of familial ties which must distinguish between political positions and relationships, as well as between various levels of these. Someone is counted as BPF when they are an executive possessing a blood or marital connection to someone who holds (or held) a formal political office defined very broadly. This would encompass any number of national and subnational positions within various institutions including political parties and councils. For example, we included not only members of the national or subnational cabinets and legislature but also judges, party officials, and government bureaucrats. The quality of positions varies to be most inclusive of activity ranging from presidents or prime ministers to municipal officials and local council members (regardless of the size of the council). We also count political activists, whether engaged in larger political movements or individual activities. While it might make sense to limit analysis to formal political office holders, or even just other prime ministers or presidents, power is exercised in many different ways. It has been a struggle to achieve democracy in some countries. People engage in political activism to unsettle authoritarian regimes and this sometimes results in these actors' imprisonments or even assassinations. As a result, we include family members who served in oppositional/dissident political roles. While we must recognize that this outsider position may offer less political capital to a relative than if they held a formal office such as the presidency, the type of support a family member generates may be particularly strong when the general public is pushing for the dismantlement of an authoritarian government.⁴

We include all autonomous countries in five major regions – Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, Latin America, Asia, and North America⁵ and our unit of analysis are the national chief executives, either presidents or prime ministers or holders of equivalent positions such as the German chancellor, who is essen-

⁴ In much of the developing world, the military exerts a high degree of authority. Therefore, we would want to identify situations where executives have relatives that occupy high levels of military power when the military plays a consequential role in politics as it does in some African countries. At the same time, we may not consider this a political role in other areas. We start at the rank of colonel and count these as political positions if they are in Latin America, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

⁵ We include Mexico in Latin America. We note that we do not include the Middle East and North Africa region and discuss the implications of this later in the article.

tially a prime minister.⁶ Our sample includes elected and appointed presidents and prime ministers, regardless of whether they came to power through democratic or undemocratic means. Our time frame is 2000 through the end of October 2017, which allows us to leverage the number of cases of women in office. In fact, over half of all women executives to date were in office during this period.

Zarate’s Political Collections lists all of the world leaders throughout this period and also includes biographies in Spanish, though not for all cases. We supplement this source with additional biographies from news media websites including the *BBC News* and online biographical resources.⁷ We separated individual cases of leaders so that each would only be counted once, even if he or she held the same office multiple times but non-consecutively or occupied the office of prime minister or president at different times. This yielded a total of 1,029 individual cases of executives. We do not only analyze democracies, mainly because we expect family connections to exert even more of an influence in non-democracies and these systems are more common within less developed regions.

Table 1: Executive Office Holders by Region

Region	Number (%)	Office holders with family ties	Percent office holders with family ties
Europe	417 (41)	54	13
Sub-Saharan Africa	312 (30)	29	9
Asia	204 (20)	23	11
Latin America	88 (9)	11	13
North America	8 (0)	2	25
Total	1029 (100)	119	12

Table 1 lists the number of cases by region. We see that Europe makes up the greatest number of cases of executives overall, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and North America. More central to our analysis, we find that 119 of 1029 leaders are BPF, approximately 12% of the overall total as can be seen in Table 1.⁸ While perhaps lower than in ancient times, family

⁶ In presidential systems we included the president, in parliamentary systems we examined the often indirectly elected presidents (if applicable) and the prime minister, in semi-presidential systems with directly elected presidents the incumbents of both offices.

⁷ If media biographies did not exist, we utilized websites such as Wikipedia that were based on biographical sources including news media reports.

⁸ We believe that our count of family relationships is probably underestimating its occurrence mainly because we have to rely on existing biographies that may not mention these connections. This is due to the fact that there is little detailed biographical information available even on national chief executives in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa. Further, while connections to other executives such as former presidents and prime ministers might be noted,

ties are hardly insignificant in 21st century politics, and thus we show the continued relevance of family ties for ascent into positions of executive power. Our analysis does not include the Middle East and North Africa, so our estimate of the prevalence of family ties is conservative. Conservatively speaking, one in ten executives around the world is BPF. We therefore offer confirmation of Hypothesis 1: BPF is an advantage to entering national executive positions around the world.

But are family ties only relevant in non-democracies? To assess the implications of family ties on politics worldwide, it is important to investigate whether or not they are associated with a non-democratic, top-down process of choosing an executive through elite nepotism and grooming. We therefore examined whether family ties are more or less prevalent in electoral democracies by integrating data from Freedom House. Freedom House notes that “electoral democracy” differs from “liberal democracy” in that the latter also implies the presence of a substantial array of civil liberties. Because we are focusing on patterns of elite recruitment for elections rather than individual civil liberties across a society, the appropriate litmus test is whether countries meet Freedom House’s basic standards for an electoral democracy that we describe below.

We used Freedom House Electoral Democracies dataset, 1988-2017, in which “Yes indicates that the country was considered to be an electoral democracy for the year; No indicates that a country was not.” Freedom House “[a]ssign[s] the designation ‘electoral democracy’ to countries that have met four minimum standards:” a competitive multiparty system, universal adult suffrage for non-criminal offenders, regular elections free of fraud and representative of the public will, and access of all major parties to the media and campaigning. All electoral democracies must have scored twenty out of forty on political rights overall, and seven of twelve on the political rights subcategory A. Further, “[a] country cannot be an electoral democracy if significant authority for national decisions resides in the hands of an unelected power, whether a monarch or a foreign international authority;” if either presidential or parliamentary elections failed to meet the four criteria above, or if legal changes have reduced the possibility of a fair election the country. Because some executives served across many years, and countries vary over time in their status as an electoral democracy, we note these data in a separate table. In our analysis, if there was a year within an individual’s executive time of service that Freedom House coded the country as “No,” we erred on the side of categorizing that individual’s term as non-democratic.

Since our findings are relevant to discussing regional differences, we outline the democratic patterns we detected regarding democracy and family ties in the next section. Furthermore, we assess interesting regional patterns that position

it is probably less likely that we would know if they had a distant relative in other political offices including national legislative roles or local politics.

some areas as more reliant on the family path than others. We also track the number of executives from political families from individual countries. Keeping in mind that this is only a 17 year snapshot, countries with multiple instances of political family members in office seem particularly striking. This pattern signals the possible entrenchment of political families in the process of transferring executive power. Beyond quantity, we also examine within regions whether powerful family ties (with a previous chief executive) and direct family ties (between immediate family members) are more associated with the presence of executives BPF.

5. Findings

As reported in Table 1 we find among countries with a sizeable number of executives in this period, Europe has the highest proportion of cases in which executives are BPF. Family connections are equally prevalent in Latin America where 11 of 88 executives (13%) are BPF. The latter result is not particularly surprising, considering the important role we see that family plays within Latin American society but also politics in particular (see Hinojosa 2012). Only Nicaragua had more than one executive from a political family come to power during this time period, though. Given that Latin American countries utilize presidential systems, all of these leaders exercised dominant influence. Democracy appears quite strong in the region and none of the leaders from political families ascended in non-democratic countries during this period of time.

More surprising is that Europe has the second highest proportion of cases in which executives are BPF. Specifically, we identified 54 family connections surfacing among the 417 European cases, representing 13% of European chief executives overall. Twenty-five countries in this region have had members of political families serve as executive, with the majority (13 of 25) associated with at least two different instances of this. In fact, Greece, Ireland, and Spain have had four executives with family connections and Bulgaria and Italy five. This confirms that the family path is not just relevant in non-democratic countries. The vast majority of European countries are democratic. Only Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have been governed by an executive BPF during this time frame in periods of non-democracy. When thinking about the type of position held by the executives, the majority (32 or 59%) hold substantial power in the system as dominant prime ministers. In fact, only 11 serve in mainly symbolic roles as either weak prime ministers (four) or presidents (seven), and the rest are powerful but not dominant.

Twenty-three of 204 Asian leaders (11%) are from political families. Six countries have had one executive BPF, while seven countries have had two and one has had three. In nearly all of these cases, (20/23 or 87%), the leader held dominant authority in their systems. Again, this is not surprising given the

relevance of family within Asian societies. Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand had family members in power during non-democratic periods. In fact, only four of the 14 Asian countries with leaders BPF were democratic.

In Africa, only 29 of its 312 leaders have family ties (9%), which is the lowest percentage found for any of the regions. Twenty-one different countries have seen executives with family connections coming to power during this time period, with the vast majority (14 out of 20 or 70%) with one individual and five countries with two people (Benin, Gabon, Libya, Mauritius, and Somalia) while Mali and Madagascar have had three though all held weak powers as prime ministers in presidential systems. Overall, just slightly more hold dominant executive authority in their systems (15 of 29 or 52%). Like Asia, African countries have greatly struggled in achieving democracy. Angola, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Somalia and Togo, representing almost half of the countries in this region, had leaders BPF in power during undemocratic periods.

Finally, both of the North American countries in our sample, the United States and Canada, have been led by executives BPF, with one case each (2 of 8 or 25%). Given the executive structures in place in these countries, leaders held the dominant executive power and arose in democratic contexts.

Overall, we do not see a clear pattern between democracy and BPF. BPF is an advantage to entering national executive positions around the world, even in democracies, providing further confirmation of Hypothesis 1. While we might have expected family ties to be more salient in the developing world, perhaps where politics is dominated by clientelism (Hinojosa 2012), BPF appears very relevant also in the developed world. It is also surprising that Africa has the lowest percentage of leaders BPF. Perhaps this is due to the fact that this region has only recently undergone democratization, which greatly increased the numbers of new parties and candidates competing.

We next examine the types of relationships that exist between executives and their relatives. Of particular interest is whether their relatives held influential positions such as prime ministerships and presidencies. If this is the case, the family tie is more powerful. In contrast, where the relative held a less powerful role such as a local legislator, this indicates a weaker family tie.

In Africa, we see that most relationships exist between executives and relatives that also held executive power themselves – either presidents or prime ministers. In Africa, 16 of 29 executives were related to one president and another two had connections to prime ministers. In another instance, a leader had two different relatives who held the presidency prior. Taken together, 18 of 29 of executive BPF in Africa were related to either presidents or prime ministers (59%). Another eight executives had relatives that held other formal positions such as members of parliament, cabinet ministers and a Supreme Court

justice. As such, while Africa has the lowest proportion of executives BPF in our sample, those that do have powerful family ties.

Table 2: Family Ties and Positions by Region

Position of family member(s)*	Sub-Saharan Africa	Asia	Latin America	Europe	North America
President	16 (55)	7 (30)	4 (36)	2 (4)	1 (50)
Prime Minister	2 (7)	7 (30)	0 (0)	4 (7)	1 (50)
Other office holder	8 (28)	3 (13)	4 (36)	33 (61)	0 (0)
Other	1 (3)	0 (0)	1 (9)	13 (24)	0 (0)
Multiple	2 (7)	6 (26)	2 (18)	2 (4)	0 (0)
Total with family ties	29 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	54 (100)	2 (100)

* Positions mentioned in the first column are the positions family members held before the President/Prime Minister in our sample came to power.

In Asia, we find a higher proportion of executives BPF with powerful family ties as well. Seven of 23 executives were related to presidents and seven were related to prime ministers. Of the six with multiple relationships, two had relatives that held chief executive office. Therefore, 16 of 23 executives BPF in Asia benefited from powerful family ties, having relatives who were prime ministers and/or president (70%). Finally, only three were related to lower level officeholders, and, as such, would be of only marginal political influence. BPF has a more direct influence on executive office holding in Asia.

In contrast to Asia and Africa, in Latin America executive family ties were less powerful. Only four of the 11 executives (36%) BPF were related to other presidents⁹. The remaining cases had relations that held lower status posts. Although Europe has the largest number of executives BPF, the proportion of powerful family ties was rather low; only two of 54 were related to presidents and another four were related to prime ministers (11% combined). Most often, relatives held other positions such as legislators or cabinet ministers. Finally, in both of the North American cases family ties were powerful – one related to a president and the other a prime minister.

Based on these results, we provide partial confirmation of Hypothesis 2: BPF is less prevalent among executives in Africa, but, when relevant, family ties are more direct and powerful, such as being an immediate family member of a former president. In Asia, BPF is prevalent, and family ties are more powerful. Finally, BPF is prevalent in Latin America but family ties are less powerful. Since democratic patterns vary quite a bit in these regions and within spe-

⁹ Jorge Luis Batlle Ibáñez of Uruguay had three different relatives that held the presidency before he did.

cific countries, it is quite challenging to make any direct connections between democracy and the prevalence of BPF.

Table 3: Family Relationships within Regions

Region	Sub-Saharan Africa	Asia	Latin America	Europe	North America
Father/Son	14 (48)	5 (22)	4 (36)	30 (56)	2 (100)
Mother/Son	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (4)	0 (0)
Father/Daughter	2 (7)	4 (17)	2 (18)	3 (6)	0 (0)
Husband/Wife	0 (0)	4 (17)	2 (18)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Grandfather/Grandson	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (6)	0 (0)
Uncle/Nephew	4(14)	0 (0)	1 (9)	6 (11)	0 (0)
Brothers	2 (7)	3 (13)	0 (0)	4 (7)	0 (0)
Brother/Sister	0 (0)	1 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Cousins	2 (7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Brother-in-Laws	0 (0)	2 (9)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Father/Son-in-Law	1 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Multiple	2 (7)	4 (17)	2 (18)	5 (9)	0 (0)
Other	2 (7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (2)	0 (0)
Total	29 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	54 (100)	2 (100)

While to this point we have examined linkages between executives BPF and how powerful a position the relative held, we now explore specific types of family relationships. We argue that some family ties, whether by blood or marriage, are more direct than others. These relationships include spouses, siblings, parents/children, grandparents/grandchildren while more distant examples are cousins and uncle/nephews etc. We would expect more direct family ties to offer greater benefits.

As far as types of family ties in Africa are concerned, BPF consists mostly of fathers/son pairings (see Table 3). The only other more common pattern includes uncles and nephews while the remaining cases vary but include such relationships as cousins and brothers. Only two women in Africa appear to have family connections to power and their relationships are less direct, a point we dissect more in the next section. BPF in Asia encompasses a large variety of relationships, but almost always direct. Seventeen of 23 had one close relation and all four with multiple relatives had at least one that was close (91%). In Latin America, most relationships were between close family members, most often fathers and sons but also fathers and daughters, as well as husbands and wives. One of the cases with multiple relatives also was the son of a former

president.¹⁰ All connections originated through male relatives, not female, a point discussed in the next section.

Among European executives, a majority (56%) were the sons of male politicians and this relationship is even more prominent when you include executives with multiple relatives in office. Other close relatives include fathers and daughters and mothers and sons, though these only account for three and two cases, respectively. We also see several male executives whose uncles were in politics.

In the last area we analyzed, North America, both the United States and Canada have seen sons of former presidents and prime ministers respectively who hold the same positions as their fathers did. With the absolute number of cases being so small, however, it is impossible to draw definite conclusions for this region. Across different regions, BPF is most frequent and beneficial to executives when familial ties are direct.

We now turn our attention more fully to gender. Though experiencing record highs in office during the time frame examined, women account for only 66 of 1029 executives. They, therefore, represent only six percent of all leaders in power during this nearly eighteen year period. We find the largest number of female leaders in Europe, followed by Africa, Asia and Latin America and North America that has no cases of women executives (see Table 4).

Table 4: Executive Office Holder by Region and Gender Worldwide

Region	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total
Europe	385 (92)	32 (8)	417
Sub-Saharan Africa	296 (95)	16 (5)	312
Asia	191 (94)	13 (6)	204
Latin America	83 (94)	5 (6)	88
North America	8 (100)	0 (0)	8
Total	963 (94)	66 (6)	1029

In Africa, we see that most relationships exist between executives and relatives that also held executive power themselves – either presidents or prime ministers. In Africa, 16 of 29 executives were related to one president and another two had connections to prime ministers. In another instance, a leader had two different relatives who held the presidency prior. Taken together, 18 of 29 of executive BPF in Africa were related to either presidents or prime ministers (59%). Another eight executives had relatives that held other formal positions such as members of parliament, cabinet ministers and a Supreme Court justice.

¹⁰ This includes a leader with multiple relations in politics who were all presidents. Technically, he is counted as multiple rather than under president.

As such, while Africa has the lowest proportion of executives BPF in our sample, those that do have powerful family ties.

Table 5: Family Ties and Gender by Region

Region	Total	Family ties	%	Total Men	Men with family ties	%	Total Women	Women with family ties	%
Europe	417	54	8	385	50	13	32	4	13
Sub-Saharan Africa	312	29	9	296	27	9	16	2	13
Asia	204	23	9	191	14	7	13	9	69
Latin America	88	11	13	83	7	8	5	4	80
North America	8	2	25	8	2	25	0	0	-
Total	1029	119		963	100	10	66	19	29

How does gender inform patterns related to BPF? Nineteen of the 66 (29%) women executives in our sample possess familial connections to politics while 100 of 963 (10%) men do. A larger number of men, therefore, benefit from kinship connections. Since women form such a small number of executives, however, this translates into a disproportionately high percentage with family ties, thus confirming hypothesis 3.

Women and men do not equally benefit from familial connections to politics in all locations worldwide, however. Whereas Europe leads the globe in both numbers and percentages of executives from political families, men's and women's rates of BPF are identical. Women from political families disproportionately arise only in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Specifically, four of five women executives in Latin America possess family ties (80%) compared to only seven of 83 male executives (8%). Family ties exist for nine of 13 (69%) women leaders in Asia while only 14 of 191 men have ties (7%). In Africa, a higher percentage of female than male BPF presents to us just how the hurdles are for women to exercise executive power. Of 312 executives in Sub-Saharan Africa from 2000-2017, only 16 (5%) were women and 296 (95%) were male. Of those 16 female African executives, 2 (13%) were BPF. Contrast this with 296 males who were executives in Africa, and 27 (9%) were BPF. A lower percentage of male executives were BPF, but even with family connections there were only 16 women executives in this period. Men for the most part do not need to be BPF but can still exercise 94% of executive power, while women only governed in 6% of cases, and then in 29% of these cases BPF was a factor. In essence 94-10= 84% of time a male who isn't BPF governs. Six percent of cases a woman governs, and moreover, 29% of this time family connections play a role. It's miniscule when women govern as chief executives,

and when they do it without a family tie where male authorization often plays a role.

We are also interested in whether women ever were responsible for the family's initial foray into politics. The two cases in Europe where we saw male executives having female political relatives, neither of these were prime ministers and presidents. Given that no executives in Latin America, North America, and Africa had family ties to women in politics, we confirm hypothesis 4 that family ties usually originate from men, not women.

In Europe, in two cases female relatives (mothers) held office first. Neither was a prime minister or president. In Africa, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia's father served in parliament and Acting President of Mauritius Monique Ohsan-Bellepeau's father founded a political party. Neither, therefore, enjoyed the same close family relationships that men do to presidents in this region. Another point worth noting is that wives do not follow their husbands into executive office in Africa; this tendency to follow male relatives into executive office is relegated to male heirs in Africa (at least through 2017). As such, even though a slightly higher percent of women were coded as possessing family ties than men in Africa, we notice that BPF does not afford the highest advantages for women. These links did not directly propel them to power while their male counterparts regularly benefitted from being their fathers' heirs apparent. In Africa, very few women executives come to power and, when they are BPF, they are not the relatives of former chief executives. Here, the maleness of executive office may be so entrenched that even family linkages do not allow women to surmount barriers to ascend to power. The obstacles women face in achieving the presidency in Africa are multiple. These include presidential systems providing chief executives with a multitude of powers and path to office through popular vote, conditions under which women seldom come out victorious (Jalalzai 2013). We also note that in many African countries including Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, the presidents have held onto to power for so long (40 and 36 years respectively) that it has been virtually impossible for anyone to gain access to the presidency. As we have not yet incorporated the regions of Northern Africa and the Middle East, we are perhaps even underestimating the maleness of the executive overall, and men from political families particularly.

Notably, some women initially appear to pass on political connections to both male and female relatives in Asia. Once we dig deeper, however, the original connection actually started with a male relative. In Pakistan, Asif Zardari served as president after his wife, Benazir Bhutto, had been killed while campaigning for a third term as prime minister. Yet, Bhutto herself was the daughter of the slain former president and prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (thereby Zardari's deceased father in law). "Noynoy" Aquino, former President of the Philippines, was the son of President Corazon Aquino. Again, however, we see that it was his father, Benigno Aquino, who set this line of leadership in

motion.¹¹ In Sri Lanka, Chandrika Kumaratunga was the daughter of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Again, however, her mother's source of power was that her husband, Solomon Bandaranaike, who had served as prime minister before his assassination.¹²

6. Discussion

In this article, we have examined the frequency and importance of belonging to a political family (BPF) to holding national chief executive office in the 21st century. We presented four main findings. First, belonging to a political family (BPF) is an advantage to entering national executive positions around the world, for both democracies and non-democracies. Regions range from 9% (Africa) to 13% (Latin America and Europe) of executives BPF. Second, family ties are more powerful (with a previous chief executive) in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and more direct (with an immediate family member) in Asia and Africa. Third, females who manage to become chief executives are more often BPF than their male counterparts, particularly in Latin America and Asia. Across the globe, women only made up 6% of chief executives in the time period. For some women, BPF is a key reason they are able to surmount traditional obstacles women face in gaining access to power. While men also benefit from such connections, they are more likely to ascend to executive office, and so less frequently need to be BPF. Fourth, regardless of region, family ties nearly always originate from men, not women. Women tend not to be the first member of their families to hold a national chief executive office, though they may extend the family path to power to future generations. In the few cases in Asia where males followed their female relatives to executive posts, the original tie to power emanated from a male relative. In Europe, when two women initiated the political family path, they held less prominent political positions rather than presidencies or prime ministerships.

Patterns around family ties in executive politics are shaped by the sheer dearth of women executives. Though their numbers indeed are growing, women continue to be vastly underrepresented in executive office. To remedy this, more women need to be able to rise to power – without the requirement that

¹¹ Benigno Aquino was a political activist and de facto opposition leader jailed on subversion charges. After returning from exile, he was set to defeat the Marcos regime but was assassinated ahead of the 1983 elections. Without this connection, his wife would never have gained the presidency (Brooke 2002; Jalalzai 2013; Thompson 2002) in the first place.

¹² These three Asian cases are counted as having multiple relatives in our analysis. We also point out that Kumaratunga used her presidential powers to appoint her mother to her last term prime ministerial term demonstrating the complexity in advantages among political relatives.

they belong to an important political family. This leads to an important point regarding the interpretation of these results. Given the very small numbers of women leaders in this analysis overall, any slight changes in results affect interpretations drastically. We also note that not all political relatives are allies. Instead, some are political rivals, using their powers to oust their own relatives from executive power.¹³ The complexities of family connections, therefore, need to further be problematized particularly in viewing kinship as an advantage versus a liability. We also assert that women's stronger dependency on family ties to power, though still critical, seems to be waning at least in Latin America. This trend seems to be less pronounced in Asia though, though Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen provides a counter-example. Finally, it is obvious that the overall rather modest importance of family ties for ascent into highest executive office in democracies as well as non-democracies.

As far as moving the research agenda on this topic forward, we are currently collecting data on prior political experience (including political activism), educational training (degree but also if they obtained their educations outside of their home regions), marital status, whether they have children, age they first entered executive office, path to power and political party. We hope to see not only how family ties affect these variables but how gender interacts with these conditions. Family ties seem to be an additional asset for a career (as assumed in Figure 1), but neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for achieving high political office. To confirm this, however, more data on personal backgrounds and on executive candidacies would be needed. It would also be beneficial to analyze how BPF shapes access to other political offices besides national chief executives.

We do not only plan to include regions missing in the present analysis, but also to expand the time frame backwards to the starting year 1990. That would provide us a bigger window to assess changes in the relevance of family ties over time but also leverage the cases of women in power, which was still much lower until the 1980s. We might expect that family ties proved even more salient in the past, but can only analyze this in a limited way at this point. Despite a global shift to expanded suffrage, family ties remain a significant path to executive office, across both democratic and non-democratic countries. Regional variance notwithstanding, belonging to a political family is resource

¹³ At times, presidents were handpicked successors of their relatives such as Ismail Omar Guelleh whose uncle, Hassan Gouled Aptidon, selected him as his replacement after over 20 years of holding power Djibouti. While we see the coordination of executive power transfer between relatives, in some instances we see competition between relations. For example Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo ousted his uncle Francisco Macias Nguema, from the Equatorial Guinea presidency in a military coup. In Thailand, Somchai Wongsawat deposed his brother in law, Thaksin Shinawatra, in a coup.

more often drawn upon by women and perhaps someday will be a resource female executives can originate and hand down to relatives.

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