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# WINGOs as conduits of world culture, their relationships with emancipative values, and women's political empowerment worldwide, 1981–2020

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## Abstract

Women's International Non-Governmental Organizations (WINGOs) are a major force in spreading world culture at the national level. At the same time, women's political empowerment is one of the spaces in which world culture manifests itself. WINGOs, often in conjunction with emancipative values, may potentially have an impact on a country's level of women's political empowerment. However, scholars rarely integrate them into theory and empirical tests. Using the world culture approach as the larger frame, I build this framework and test it. Specifically, Hypothesis 1 tests whether there is a potential positive association between women's political empowerment and the number of WINGO ties. Hypothesis 2 examines the potential interaction between emancipative values and WINGOs. Employing mixed-effects linear regression on the aggregated World Values Survey/European Values Survey (WVS/EVS) dataset and administrative data, I observe that WINGOs and emancipative values have separate effects on women's political empowerment. However, there is no significant evidence that emancipative values interact with WINGOs.

## Keywords

Emancipative values, gender, WINGOs, women's organizations, women's political empowerment, world culture

## Introduction

According to world society theorists, the countries that are most deeply embedded in the world system will adopt principles consistent with scripts of universalism, individualism, rational progress, rational voluntaristic authority, and world citizenship, known as “world culture” (Boli and Thomas, 1997; Boyle et al., 2015; Frank et al., 2010; Mathias, 2013; Pandian, 2019; Schofer, 2003).<sup>1</sup>

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One of the spheres in which world culture manifests itself is women's political empowerment. This is a process suggesting the amplification of women's resources, professional and social capital to gain gender equality in the impact, and execution of political authority (Alexander et al., 2016; Sundström et al., 2017). The spread of emancipative values is key to developing empowerment at the national level (Alexander and Coffé, 2018; Alexander and Welzel, 2011; Brieger et al., 2019; Ertan et al., 2018; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Welzel, 2013).

At the same time, Women's International Non-Governmental Organizations (WINGOs) have a crucial impact on the diffusion of world culture norms and the realization of international development programs at the national level (Avdeyeva and Melin, 2021; Fallon et al., 2012; Givens and Jorgenson, 2013; Pandian, 2019; Wotipka et al., 2018). Ties with WINGOs help countries become more socialized in the international community and more motivated to implement agendas related to world culture.

At the national level, women gain confidence in pressing national governments to advance their demands when they realize that international actors support the world culture scripts (Alvarez, 2000; Hughes et al., 2018; Wilson, 2007). Furthermore, the commitment to global cultural scripts that WINGOs transmit matters, even if they do not explicitly state in their statutes the goal of fighting for gender equality (Boli and Thomas, 1997; Pandian, 2019).

However, some studies found limitations in the explanatory power of WINGO ties. They suggest that national political, economic, and value factors are conditioning WINGOs' effects on implementation of the world culture scripts at the national level (Boyle et al., 2015; Kim, 2020; Noble and Austin, 2014; Swiss, 2016; Swiss and Longhofer, 2016; Yoo, 2022). National contexts slow down or speed up WINGO activities. Furthermore, WINGOs can be effective in the early stages of policy implementation, but their significance fades as national factors take over. While both WINGOs and emancipative values are theoretically linked to women's political empowerment, the cross-national empirical literature rarely accounts for the effects of both. Consequently, it calls for the expansion of the world society theoretical framework, with a particular focus on interactions between WINGOs and values.

More detailed research on the relationship between a country's value environment and WINGO ties shows that a country's embeddedness in world society is linked to the spread of gender equality values in this country (Mathias, 2013; Pandian, 2019; Paxton et al., 2006; Wotipka et al., 2018; Wotipka and Ramirez, 2008), but this process is not the same everywhere. In developing countries, WINGO ties positively influence values only when combined with gender quotas or the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) duration (Kim, 2020). Also, we can infer from research on the rise of women's rights in autocracies that emancipative values and WINGO ties do not necessarily require each other to improve women's political empowerment. With the assistance of WINGOs, the status of women may improve, despite the lack of popular support for these reforms.

The high activity of WINGOs and the tools they use to put pressure on governments to implement gender equality reforms (such as "shaming") outweigh the disadvantage of low emancipative values for women's political empowerment (Donno et al., 2022). Furthermore, governments conduct gender equality reforms on a voluntary basis by "weaponizing" women's rights and "capitalizing" cooperation with women to gain international prestige and secure the regime's stability (Bjarnegård and Donno, 2023; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2022; Donno and Kreft, 2019).

Thus, I pose two questions: (1) What are the potential impacts of WINGOs and emancipative values on women's political empowerment? (2) Is there a potential interaction between WINGOs and emancipative values that may be associated with an increase in women's political empowerment?

To address these questions, I created a multisource database of World Values Survey/European Values Survey, WINGOs, and administrative data that contains 87 countries around the world from

1981 to 2021. Then I put them to the test using generalized linear regression modeling, where the contextual variables are nested in the countries. In addition, I conduct generalized structural equation modeling (GSEM) path analysis to specifically explore the directions of the relationships between WINGO ties, emancipative values, and women's political empowerment. I found that WINGOs and emancipative values are both positively linked to women's political empowerment. However, it is not necessary for these two variables to be present simultaneously in order to increase women's political power. There is no requirement for emancipative values and WINGOs to complement or bolster one another for them to coexist.

The lack of a significant interaction effect between WINGOs and emancipatory values reflects the dynamics seen in autocracies, but this is also applicable to democratic nations. Despite the low levels of emancipative values in some countries, WINGOs play a pivotal role in promoting women's political empowerment. This is because the strength and significance of WINGO activities go beyond the limitations imposed by a lack of popular support for such reforms. In other words, WINGOs can make a significant impact despite the challenges imposed by low levels of emancipative values.

## Theory and hypotheses

### *WINGOs as conduits of world culture and women's political empowerment*

Overall, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) serve as conduits for "world culture" (Berkovitch, 1999; Hughes et al., 2015; Pandian, 2019; Paxton et al., 2006; Swiss, 2011; Wotipka et al., 2018). Therefore, countries that are more penetrated by INGOs are more integrated into world society. Although WINGOs include not only advocacy organizations fighting for women's political empowerment but also various professional and leisure associations, studies confirm that regardless of the WINGOs profile, a country's ties with them have a crucial impact on the diffusion of world culture norms and the realization of international development programs at the national level (Kim, 2020; Pandian, 2019).

Countries with more WINGO ties, in particular, are more likely to implement a gender-egalitarian agenda (Avdeyeva and Melin, 2021; Fallon et al., 2012; Givens and Jorgenson, 2013; Pandian, 2019; Wotipka et al., 2018). WINGO ties assist countries to become more socialized in the international community and more motivated to promote gender equality and women's political empowerment. This socialization urges countries to implement gender-friendly policies and encourages women to participate in politics in their respective countries.

The visibility of WINGOs also has a symbolic impact on women. Owing to the diversity of their profiles, WINGOs promote women's culture in general. This sense of belonging to the global women's community has been instrumental in giving women the confidence to stand up and fight for their rights. Women gain confidence in pressing national governments to advance their demands when they realize that international actors support the women's agenda broadly defined (Alvarez, 2000; Hughes et al., 2018; Wilson, 2007).

During the twentieth century, the international women's movement discourse evolved. As a result, changes in the demands made by women on national governments reflect the evolution of the women's movement (Galey, 1995). At the start of the international women's movement, organizations concentrated on providing women with suffrage. The demands were then expanded to include women's representation in parliaments rather than formal voting rights. The most recent demands established a threshold of 30 percent women in parliament as necessary for a "modern state" and also for developing countries to qualify for international financing. Furthermore, they declare the goal of addressing inequities between the Global North and the Global South, since the

WINGOs from the Global North have historically dominated the women's movement (Hughes et al., 2015, 2018; Towns, 2010). In addition, WINGOs strive not only for "technical" changes in the legislation but also cultivate solidarity and identity among women as a disadvantaged group (Grossman, 2012; Woliver, 2018).

Nonetheless, there are findings that call the omnipresent role of WINGOs into question (Boyle et al., 2015; Noble and Austin, 2014; Swiss, 2016; Swiss and Longhofer, 2016; Yoo, 2022). They emphasize that a country's ties with WINGOs can be more defining and essential for the implementation of pro-gender egalitarian policies and the receipt of international women's health aid than its institutions and level of economic development.

For example, although WINGO ties are positively associated with adoption of the first abortion allowance, these effects disappear as women's parliamentary representation is controlled (Boyle et al., 2015). Also, according to Hughes et al. (2015), there is no evidence to support the presumption that country-level WINGO ties significantly impact the likelihood of gender quota adoption. A recent study on gender-based health aid confirms that WINGOs are ineffective in attracting AIDS prevention funding in recipient countries after controlling for country democracy and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita level (Yoo, 2022). These studies suggest that the size and significance of the WINGO effects should be considered cautiously. Yet, political, economic, and value factors could have conditioning effects on the WINGOs.

Based on previous findings regarding the significance of WINGO ties in relation to gender egalitarian policies, I expect that a higher number of WINGO ties in a country may have a positive influence on women's political empowerment.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive association between a country's ties with WINGOs and women's political empowerment; as the number of WINGO ties increases, there is a tendency for women's political empowerment to increase as well.

However, the first hypothesis requires additional investigation, with a particular emphasis on exploring how values may influence the relationship between the variables. It is vital to supplement the frame with emancipative values and explain the relationships between WINGOs, values, and empowerment. Thus, the following section expands on the linkages between WINGOs and emancipative ideals in a more nuanced way.

### *Connecting WINGOs and emancipative values*

What is the relationship between WINGOs and emancipative values? In general, there is evidence to suggest a positive association between a state's integration into global society and the presence of pro-equality values. This association can be observed in various aspects. The first is when INGOs translate cultural scripts on equality (including gender equality) and engage in public discourse on the subject (Beckfield, 2003; Dodson, 2015; Pandian, 2019). The second way is when INGOs influence domestic policies via supranational actors such as the UN or the European Union (Clark, 2011; Meyer et al., 1997; Pandian, 2019; Paxton et al., 2015; Sikkink, 2011; Tripp and Kang, 2008). Finally, the impact of general state embeddedness in world society is significant. It suggests that residents of a country with greater engagement in world society tend to exhibit more egalitarian gender attitudes (Mathias, 2013; Pandian, 2019; Paxton et al., 2006; Wotipka and Ramirez, 2008; Wotipka et al., 2018).

Furthermore, even WINGOs with profiles that are not directly related to gender equality (because WINGOs include various professional and leisure associations) are crucial for promoting

gender equality values (Boli and Thomas, 1997; Pandian, 2019). The commitment to global cultural scripts matters more, even if they do not explicitly state in their statutes the goal of fighting for gender equality. It is likely that a higher number of WINGO ties in a country may correlate with a larger number of WINGO members. Consequently, this could potentially contribute to a greater acceptance of emancipative values among a portion of the population in that society. The working environment of WINGOs tends to align with the aggregate emancipative values index. In countries with a more emancipated environment, there is a tendency for an increase in WINGO ties, which may potentially contribute to women's political empowerment.

A more recent study, however, suggests a contradictory perspective, demonstrating that WINGOs alone do not affect gender equality values in developing countries. WINGOs have a positive impact on values only when combined with gender quotas or the duration of CEDAW (Kim, 2020). This illustrates the limited ability of WINGOs to influence values. WINGOs can act as an effective tool for improving gender equality values in developing countries, but only when combined with national policies. Thus, the diffusion of world culture is slow and uneven.

This is especially true in the developing world, where customs and traditions are often slow to change, implying that the effects of global trends may take longer to manifest. One might expect that WINGOs come to these countries with the purpose of inducing changes in the population's mindset. Presumably, a more gender traditionalist environment will reduce the impact of WINGOs on women's political empowerment.

Interactions between the country's value environment and WINGOs affect the practical steps to women's political empowerment. For instance, the spread of gender quotas as a legal demand for women's political empowerment began in peripheral countries with low levels of emancipative values and progressed to the core of international society (Dahlerup, 2011; Towns, 2012). Thus, emancipative values alone are insufficient to generate or improve women's political empowerment. WINGOs, on the contrary, have limited ability to improve women's political empowerment in the absence of supranational actors such as the UN or the European Union (Tripp and Kang, 2008). When supranational actors support pro-women's discourse, an emancipative shift in values occurs in the nation-states (Alexander and Welzel, 2015; Moghadam and Bagheritari, 2007; Paxton and Hughes, 2017).

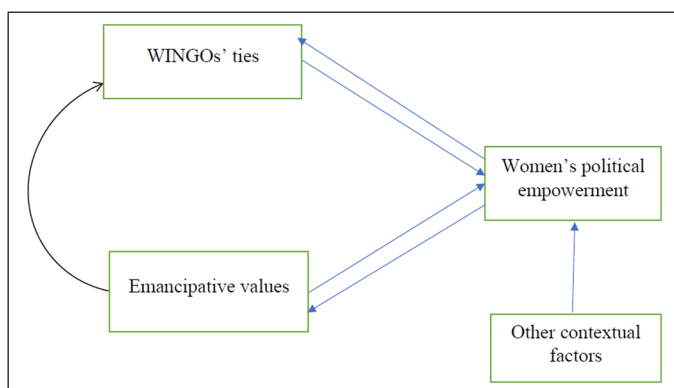
In addition, sometimes women's political empowerment itself generates emancipative value shifts and WINGO activities. Improvements in political rights, which advance women's political empowerment, facilitate support for emancipative values (Alexander and Welzel, 2011, 2015). The top-down spread of women's political empowerment discourse has a symbolic effect at the grass-roots level. The growing presence of women in political offices as a result of gender quotas accelerates women's participation in politics (O'Brien and Rickne, 2016).

These findings are encouraging for women's empowerment advocates because they demonstrate that organizational activity can be productive even when emancipative values are not widespread in a country. WINGOs, in particular, could even act as conduits for values and women's political empowerment. They disseminate women's empowerment discourse from international organizations to the grassroots level, resulting in a shift in emancipative values that empower women. Thus, I test this expectation.

**Hypothesis 2:** The relationships between WINGO ties and women's political empowerment may vary depending on the level of emancipative values.

Nonetheless, based on what we know about autocratic countries, we can make a guess about the null interaction effect between WINGOs and emancipative values. WINGOs and





**Figure 1.** Expected relationships between WINGO ties, emancipative values, and women's political empowerment.

emancipative values can coexist without needing to complement or, more importantly, without strengthening one another. When emancipative values are weakly manifested, the impact of stronger WINGO ties may be more significant for women's political empowerment. There are several mechanisms for improving women's status without relying on popular support for gender equality.

WINGOs "shame" autocratic governments for repressions and for not following international rules (Donno et al., 2022). The "shaming" gives countries around the world a reason to make at least legal changes to improve women's rights. However, shaming has limited effectiveness as an incentive for autocratic nation-states to implement actual de facto women's rights reforms. These states may prioritize maintaining their power and control over implementing gender equality measures. Despite the limitations of WINGOs "shaming," it can lead to improvements in the status of women, bypassing even the lack of popular support for these reforms. Furthermore, autocracies sometimes agree to improve women's rights voluntarily by "weaponizing" them (Bjarnegård and Donno, 2023; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2022) or "capitalizing" cooperation with women (Donno and Kreft, 2019). By taking these steps, autocracies seek international prestige and secure regime stability at the same time. For autocracies, it will be more secure to nominate women to high-ranking positions, although these are often symbolic positions, than to conduct free and fair elections, which can lead to the collapse of an autocracy. As a result, autocracies may combine de jure improvements in women's positions with a lack of democratic procedures (Bjarnegård and Donno, 2023; Donno and Kreft, 2019).

Figure 1 depicts the expected relationships between the WINGO ties, emancipatory values, and women's political empowerment. I emphasize here that I do not test multidirectional causality, because testing causality with the data I have is impossible. Nonetheless, I presume and illustrate graphically ways in which potential multicausality could operate. WINGO ties and emancipative values are positively associated with women's political empowerment. The emancipative values are linked to the WINGO ties. Also, Figure 1 includes the reversed paths of the relationships, acknowledging that women's political empowerment acts as a catalyst for the development of WINGOs and the promotion of emancipative values.<sup>2</sup>

## Data

I draw on data from several sources. First, I merge the World Values Survey (WVS) (1981–2021) with the European Values Study (EVS) (1981–2017) (Haerpfer et al., 2021) and aggregate these

data. The sample size varies across countries. To limit estimation biases during individual data aggregation, I use the WVS and EVS-advised weights on the national samples. In addition to WVS/EVS, I utilize data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), WINGOs, Polity5, and the Maddison Project Database.

During the data harmonization process, I used list-wise deletion to get rid of the records that were in some datasets but not in others. Varieties of Democracy, Maddison Project database, Polity5, and the United Nations Human Development dataset have very extensive region and time coverage. In comparison with them, the WVS/EVS and WINGO datasets have fewer countries and time points. Since I took the country and time coverage of WVS/EVS as a basis, I deleted the records of other datasets that exceeded the region and time coverage of this dataset. In addition, I excluded regions that are not independent countries, such as Hong Kong, Macau, Puerto Rico, and Taiwan. To fill in the missing values in WINGOs, I used linear interpolation and extrapolation to predict the values for intervening years outside the original WINGOs dataset year range. The missing dates for emancipative values, the lower chamber gender quota placement mandate, and the gender quota threshold were linearly interpolated. After these steps were taken to fill in the missing data, the dataset had 87 countries and 2830 observations.<sup>3</sup>

Because current structures and values are influenced by the past and policies need time to take effect, the independent variables were lagged by 5 years. Including variables with lags is a common approach in the construction of longitudinal datasets (Avdeyeva and Melin, 2021; Pandian, 2019; Wotipka et al., 2018).

Below, I discuss the data sources and operationalization of variables.

### *Dependent variable: women's political empowerment*

I operationalize “women’s political empowerment” with V-Dem’s “women’s political empowerment index” (Coppedge et al., 2021; Sundström et al., 2017). This item answers the question, “How politically empowered are women?” The index is calculated by the aggregation of three other indices representing choice, participation, and agency dimensions of women’s political empowerment: the women’s civil liberties index, the women’s civil society participation index, and the women’s political participation index (Coppedge et al., 2021: 298).

This is an interval scale ranging from 0 to 1, where a higher value indicates greater women’s political empowerment. Some authors used other indexes of multidimensional empowerment, such as the United Nations’ Gender Empowerment Index (Alexander and Welzel, 2015) and the Gender-Related Development Index (Brieger et al., 2019). Although these indexes are relevant to women’s overall empowerment, the women’s political empowerment index is more theoretically consistent and has wider temporal and spatial coverage (Sundström et al., 2017).

### *Independent variables*

*WINGO ties.* The data on WINGO are from the dataset of Hughes et al. (2017, 2018). The WINGOs dataset is widely used by scholars in studies devoted to various aspects of women’s political empowerment, such as gender quota adoption and global diffusion (Hughes et al., 2015); women’s protest mobilization (Murdie and Peksen, 2015); and parliamentary representation (Fallon et al., 2012; Paxton et al., 2006) (see Fallon and Rademacher, 2018 for discussion). This dataset is also used in studies on the impact of world culture on women’s education (Wotipka et al., 2018), health (Yoo, 2022), abortion liberalization (Boyle et al., 2015), and gender attitudes formation (Kim, 2020; Pandian, 2019).



The original dataset codes the international organizations with women as the primary or named membership and/or that focus on serving women and/or girls from the Union of International Associations (UIA) Yearbook and counts the number of countries' ties to these organizations. Only countries with a population of over 1 million were included in the sample. Hughes et al. (2017) refer to "international" organizations, meaning that they are present in at least three countries. They provided estimations on a quinquennial basis from 1950 to 2013 (Hughes et al., 2017). I transform this variable by natural logarithm to reduce skewness (Geist and Cole, 2020). To fill the missing values and harmonize WINGO ties with other macrolevel variables, I apply linear interpolation and extrapolation, which do not alter the results (Geist and Cole, 2020).

*Emancipative values index.* The WVS/EVS integrated dataset provides data for the index of the emancipative values, which is calculated in the following way. All items in the sub-indices—"equity," "autonomy," "choice," and "voice"—are normalized into a continuous scale, where "0" indicates a less emancipative stance and "1" is the most emancipative. Then groups of items are averaged into sub-indices. Finally, the sub-indices are averaged into the index of emancipative values (Welzel, 2013: 67–68). It is a 5-item ordinal scale, with higher values indicating a more emancipative orientation. The missing values are linearly interpolated.

*Economic and social control variables.* In this study, I consider economic development, women's education, and women's labor force participation as resources that provide an existential foundation for women's political empowerment. I believe that women in more economically developed countries, with higher levels of women's education, and women's labor force participation, will be more likely to press for political empowerment (Alexander et al., 2018; Bergh, 2006; Duflo, 2012; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Stockemer and Sundström, 2016).

The level of economic development is operationalized through the GDP per capita, transformed by the natural logarithm. It comes from the Maddison Project Database (2020) (Bolt and Van Zanden, 2020). To examine the effect of women's education and women's labor force participation, I utilize two indicators from the United Nations Human Development Dataset: expected years of female schooling and the percentage of the female population that is employed (UNDP, 2022).

*Political control variables.* In this study, I distinguish between the general level of democracy and such institutional guarantees of participatory equality as the gender quotas in parliament. The general level of democracy is measured through the institutionalized democracy index, which comes from the Polity5 dataset (Marshall and Gurr, 2020). This index accounts for the competitiveness of political participation, the openness and competitiveness of executive recruitment, and the chief executive's constraints (Coppedge et al., 2021: 351–352). Originally, it was an 11-point scale. I transform it to an interval scale ranging from 0 to 1, where the higher values on the scale indicate a higher level of democracy (Coppedge et al., 2021: 43).

Yet, institutionalized democracy does not guarantee equal parliamentary representation for women (Paxton and Kunovich, 2003; Stockemer and Sundström, 2016; Tripp and Kang, 2008). Therefore, gender quotas are implemented to improve representational equality. Overall, gender quotas can mitigate negative economic and political (Paxton and Kunovich, 2003; Stockemer and Sundström, 2016) effects on women's political empowerment. They level out the constraints on women entering the political elite (Hughes et al., 2015; Tripp and Kang, 2008).

I introduce three variables for lower (or unicameral) chamber gender quotas and linearly interpolate the missing values.

The first variable refers to statutory and reserved seats quotas. It is an ordinal scale with responses ranging from "0"—no national-level gender quota; "1"—statutory gender quota with no

sanctions; “2”—statutory gender quota with weak sanctions; “3”—statutory gender quota with strong sanctions; to “4”—there are reserved seats in the legislature for women (Coppedge et al., 2021: 157; Hughes et al., 2018).

Previous research, however, indicated that “reserved seat” quotas are distinguishing features of semi-democratic and non-democratic states. Reserved seats can be effective in patriarchal countries because they assist women in obtaining at least some parliamentary representation (Dahlerup, 2007; Rosen, 2017).

Nevertheless, rank-order rules and the presence of a quota’s threshold are the most widespread features of gender quotas in democratic countries, and they have proven to be effective options for increasing women’s parliamentary representation and improving equality of opportunity for women (Dahlerup, 2007; Rosen, 2017). Therefore, I add V-Dem measures for these features of the quotas: “lower chamber gender quota placement mandate” and “lower chamber gender quota threshold” (Coppedge et al., 2021: 158; Hughes et al., 2018).

“Lower chamber gender quota placement mandate” is a binary (0–1) indicator for the presence of list rank-order rules. Because some parties place women in the middle or at the end of their party lists, which puts them at a disadvantage and reduces or even prevents their election to the legislature, it is critical to account for women’s candidate placement in electable positions on the party list (Dahlerup, 2007; Rosen, 2017).

The “lower chamber gender quota threshold” is a percentage of total legislative seats for female representation. Thresholds improve the implementation of quota legislation and, as a result, ensure the quickest way to increase women’s representation (Krook, 2010; Rosen, 2017).

Two other indicators—civil society organization (CSO) participatory environment and government reaction to CSO—measure the interactions between the state and civil society. These variables clarify the character of the relations between the state and civil society. The CSO’s participatory environment measures the degree of the CSO’s independence from the state and the character of people’s activity in it. It is an interval scale, with responses ranging from the state fully controlling the CSO and people’s participation in them being nonvoluntary, to numerous CSOs and people participating in their activities being voluntary (Bernhard et al., 2015; Coppedge et al., 2021; Pemstein et al., 2020). The government’s reaction to CSOs assesses whether the government represses the CSO and the extent to which civil society enjoys full freedom of self-expression. The scale is an interval where the higher values are associated with a lack of CSO repression. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables. The correlation matrix is shown in Appendix A.

## Analysis

I draw on the merged, harmonized dataset, which combines data from Polity5, V-Dem, the WVS/EVS, and the Maddison Project. I employ two types of analyses. The first and main one is generalized linear regression modeling, where the contextual variables are nested in the countries. Models incorporate both the fixed and random effects of time. Fixed effects of time lessen biases resulting from unobservable factors that fluctuate over time but hold steady across nations. I also incorporated a random slope of time into the model to determine whether the impact that time has on empowerment varies from one nation to another. Consequently, time in the fixed statement measures the global impact of time on women’s political empowerment across all countries. Time in the random statement measures the variation in the effects of time on women’s political empowerment across nations.

Earlier, the implementation of gender quotas as an empowerment policy revealed the “recoiling effect” (Hughes et al., 2015: 359). The increasing ties of WINGOs prompted the adoption of pro-gender equality policies when women’s political empowerment came up for discussion. Despite the

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics.

Variables	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Women's political empowerment	3196	0.71	0.19	0.04	0.97
WINGO ties, log	3196	3.58	0.74	0	4.87
Emancipative values	3196	2.41	0.81	0	5
GDP per capita, log	3196	9.03	0.91	6.28	11.95
Women's labor force participation	3196	0.50	0.11	0.08	0.90
Expected years of women's education	3196	12.36	3.33	1.52	19.94
Institutionalized Democracy Index	3196	0.56	0.34	0	1
Lower Chamber Gender Quotas	3196	0.58	0.64	0	4
Lower Chamber Gender Quota Placement Mandate	3196	0.32	0.40	0	1
Lower Chamber Gender Quota Threshold	3188	0.27	0.12	0	0.61
CSO participatory environment	3200	0.77	1.29	0	4
Government reaction to CSO	3200	0.95	1.54	0	4
Year	3291	2001	11.50	1981	2021

GDP: gross domestic product; CSO: civil society organization.

Sources: World values survey–European values study integrated dataset; varieties of democracy; Maddison project database; Polity5; the United Nations human development dataset; World Bank.

In the analysis, variables are centered at the grand mean.

expansion of the global women's movement, governments tend to oppose policies that would empower women. Therefore, the effects of gender quotas and WINGOs on empowerment should fade over time.

The final model adds an interaction term between WINGO ties and emancipative values to see whether the impact of WINGO ties on women's political empowerment varies with the distribution of emancipative values. The effects of WINGO ties on women's political empowerment are expected to be stronger in contexts where emancipative values are more prevalent than in contexts where emancipative values are absent or less prevalent.

I use GSEM to examine the directions of the relationships between women's political empowerment, WINGO ties, and emancipative values. I specify the first equation as a regression model with women's political empowerment as the response variable. The second equation introduces the moderation effects of emancipative values on WINGO ties. To address multicollinearity and autocorrelation issues, I estimate the model with robust standard errors, which are less sensitive to violations of the independence and normality assumptions. In addition, the bootstrapping option is utilized to address the issue of model stability when multiple data clusters are present. The bootstrap option in GSEM enables researchers to evaluate the robustness of their model by estimating the variance of parameter estimates across multiple bootstrap samples. This can help determine whether the model is stable and reliable or whether it is sensitive to certain data characteristics or model specifications.<sup>4</sup>

## Regression analysis

Table 2 presents three regression models. The WINGO ties and control variables are incorporated into Model 1. Then Model 2 adds the emancipative values. And finally, Model 3 includes the interaction term between WINGO ties and emancipative values.

Model 1 examines the first hypothesis that there is a positive association between a country's ties with WINGOs and women's political empowerment; as the number of WINGO ties increases, there is a tendency for women's political empowerment to increase as well. Indeed, the test reveals

**Table 2.** Models for women's political empowerment.

Variable	M1	M2	M3
<b>Fixed effects</b>			
Intercept	0.71*** (0.02)	0.72*** (0.02)	0.72*** (0.02)
WINGO ties, log	0.36* (0.15)	0.36* (0.15)	0.36* (0.15)
Emancipative values		0.1*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Emancipative values*WINGOs			1.8 (1.6)
GDP per capita, log	0.004 (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)
Women's labor force participation	0.002 (0.01)	0.002 (0.01)	0.002 (0.01)
Expected years of women's education	0.001 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)
Institutionalized Democracy Index	0.1*** (0.01)	0.1*** (0.01)	0.1*** (0.01)
Lower Chamber Gender Quotas	0.004* (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)
Lower Chamber Gender Quota Placement Mandate	0.01 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)
Lower Chamber Gender Quota Threshold	0.1*** (0.01)	0.1*** (0.01)	0.1*** (0.01)
CSO participatory environment	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Government reaction to CSO	0.005** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)
Year fixed effects	0.01*** (0.001)	0.01*** (0.001)	0.01*** (0.001)
<b>Random effects</b>			
Country var(_cons)	0.02 (0.004)	0.02 (0.004)	0.02 (0.004)
Year random slope	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Var(residual)	0.002 (0.000)	0.002 (0.000)	0.002 (0.000)
<b>Fit statistics</b>			
Log-likelihood	4249.59	4258.45	4259.13
Akaike's information criteria	-8469.2	-8484.9	-8484.3
Bayesian information criteria	-8380	-8390	-8383.15
N (observations)	2,830	2,830	2,830
N (countries)	87	87	87

GDP: gross domestic product; CSO: civil society organization.

In the analysis, variables are centered at the grand mean. Independent variables are lagged by 5 years. Standard errors in parenthesis.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

a positive, statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) association between the WINGO ties and women's political empowerment. On average, a one-unit increase in WINGO ties is associated with a 0.36 unit increase in women's political empowerment, controlling for political and socio-economic factors. Thus, the findings demonstrate that increases in the WINGO ties are linked to increases in women's political empowerment, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Political control variables such as institutionalized democracy, lower chamber gender quotas, quota thresholds, and a lack of governmental repression against CSOs are expected to increase women's political empowerment. In contrast, economic and social control variables such as economic development, female labor force participation, and expected years of female education have no effect on women's political empowerment. The reason for such figures is that the political control variables, particularly institutionalized democracy and a lower chamber gender quota threshold, have such strong effects on women's political empowerment and high statistical significance ( $p < 0.001$ ) that the economic and social variables cannot compete with them in terms of influence on women's political empowerment. Also, since the dataset is longitudinal and independent variables are included with 5-year lags, we can conclude that the current level of women's political empowerment is not susceptible to the past levels of economic development, female labor force participation, and education.

Model 2 incorporates emancipative values. The model fit improved after the emancipative values were introduced, as indicated by the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC), which decreased in Model 3 in comparison with Model 2. The emancipative values are statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  and are related to women's political empowerment. For each unit increase in the emancipative values, the predicted value of women's political empowerment increases by 0.1 units, all else being equal.

Furthermore, Model 3 explores the possibility that the level of emancipative values influences the relationship between the WINGO ties and women's political empowerment, as Hypothesis 2 presumes. It introduces the interaction term between the WINGO ties and emancipative values to test this relationship. The introduction of the interaction term decreased the emancipative values' coefficient from 0.1 to 0.05, while the effects of WINGO ties remained the same. The interaction term is statistically insignificant. As a result, the findings do not provide proof that the spread of emancipative values affects the connections between the WINGO ties and women's political empowerment. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 does not receive empirical support.

In all models, we observe positive time fixed effects. They inform us about the progression of women's political empowerment over time. The test revealed that the initial concerns about the recoiling time effects of governmental policies on women's political empowerment were unjustified. In addition, each model's random slope of time equals zero, that is, the same for all nations, which is a noticeable observation. It implies that there is no significant variation in women's political empowerment over time that cannot be explained by the time fixed effects and other covariates included in the model. In other words, there is no significant variation in the women's political empowerment variable that is unique to each time point and is not accounted for by the time fixed effects and other covariates in the model.

### *GSEM path analysis*

I employ GSEM path analysis to examine specifically the directions of the relationships between WINGOs, values, and women's political empowerment. Appendix B contains the model's output. As it was expected and illustrated in Figure 1, the WINGO ties and emancipative values are positively linked to women's political empowerment.<sup>5</sup> However, the WINGO ties and emancipative values do not interact. Each has a distinct impact on women's political empowerment.

## Discussion and conclusion

The study adds to the literature on women's political empowerment, WINGOs, emancipative values, and world culture. It improves our comprehension of the global cultural scripts' diffusion toward national women's political empowerment and the contribution made by WINGOs in this process. Unlike most studies, this article examines both values and empowerment and WINGOs and empowerment within a larger world culture theoretical framework.

I investigated two hypotheses. It appears that the WINGO ties and emancipative values are linked to women's political empowerment. Women's political empowerment is correlated with an increase in WINGO ties and emancipatory values. This is consistent with previous world culture research, which found a strong correlation between the number of a country's ties with INGOs and the implementation of world culture scripts. The greater socialization in the international community encourages countries to implement gender-equal world culture scripts (Avdeyeva and Melin, 2021; Fallon et al., 2012; Givens and Jorgenson, 2013; Pandian, 2019; Wotipka et al., 2018).

Also, countries with flourishing emancipative values manifest higher levels of women's political empowerment, as previous research has predicted (Alexander and Coffé, 2018; Alexander and Welzel, 2011; Brieger et al., 2019; Ertan et al., 2018; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Welzel, 2013). Emancipative values open people's minds and inspire them to fight for empowerment (Welzel, 2013).

Nonetheless, the more nuanced analysis demonstrates that WINGO ties do not interact with emancipative values. The association between WINGO ties and women's political empowerment appears to be independent of the level of emancipative values, which is contrary to what we initially expected.

As a result, findings contradict those suggestions in world culture and the INGOs literature that INGOs have limited explanatory power in the effectiveness of global culture scripts implementation at the national level (Boyle et al., 2015; Kim, 2020; Noble and Austin, 2014; Swiss, 2016; Swiss and Longhofer, 2016; Yoo, 2022). Indeed, even when national economic, social, political, and value factors are controlled, the significance of the WINGO ties remains.

The main contribution of the article is the discovery of a null interaction effect between WINGO ties and emancipatory values. This empirical finding helps to expand the literature on women's rights and improvements in autocracies (Bjarnegård and Donno, 2023; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2022; Donno and Kreft, 2019; Donno et al., 2022). Not only in autocracies but also in democratic regimes, WINGOs can coexist with weakly manifested emancipative values without needing to complement or strengthen one another.

WINGOs' shaming of governments for not following international rules has the potential to bring about legal changes to improve women's rights even in the absence of popular support for these reforms (i.e. when emancipative values are weakly manifest). Both democratic and autocratic regimes can "capitalize" on their cooperation with WINGOs for the sake of international prestige and regime stability.

Contrary to expectations derived from the previous findings, democracy per se is still a salient factor for women's political empowerment. Some studies find that the effects of a democratic regime on empowerment fade as gender-equalizing features like a proportional representation system, gender quotas, or a higher percentage of women in parliament become more important (Ertan et al., 2018; Paxton and Kunovich, 2003; Tripp and Kang, 2008), but this study finds that the level of democracy matters.

This research has several implications. First, because WINGOs have an impact on women's political empowerment, women should not wait until the national environment, particularly the value context, is more favorable for their active participation in public life. Participation in WINGOs can improve women's agency because they absorb global cultural scripts and



transmit them at the national level. International experience makes women's voices more prominent at the national level, including on the national political scene (Alvarez, 2000; Hughes et al., 2018; Wilson, 2007).

However, NGO-ization limits the achievement of feminist objectives (Wilson, 2007). Although WINGOs promote women's culture in general and aid in women's political empowerment, their focus is more on long-term change. These organizations are mainstream, tend to adhere to institutional practices, and condemn radicalism. After all, not all women and women's activists agree with this framework, and some opt for the rejectionist approach, which means they refuse to work in the mainstream, institutionalized frame because they view mainstream and institutional approaches as archaic and unresponsive to contemporary challenges (Smith et al., 2021).

When the proliferation of WINGOs first began, it had a significant impact on women's political empowerment. WINGOs only represent a subset of the total universe of women's organizations. They refer to the mainstream institutionalized direction of the women's movement, which evolved from the fight for suffrage in the early twentieth century to the establishment of gender quotas and the agenda of overcoming inequalities in women's organizational participation between the Global North and the Global South.

More research should be conducted to investigate the universe of women's organizations, including activist organizations with diverse ideological profiles and non-mainstream radical ones that reject to fit into the institutionalized framework. In addition, a new research methodological frame that can test the causality of the relationships between organizations, values, and empowerment can be valuable. These studies will help us more accurately comprehend nature and the mechanisms that underpin women's political empowerment.

### **Author's note**

I confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

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### **Supplemental material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

### **Notes**

1. Boli and Thomas (1997) provided the following explanation for "world culture" scripts. Individualism is the recognition of the individual's prevalence over collectivities such as family or clan. Individuals with similar needs and desires make up humanity as a whole (universalism). They are diverse but endowed

- with the same rights and duties (world citizenship). Individuals organize for the purpose of taking action (rational voluntaristic authority) in order to achieve not only economic growth but also self-actualization, equality, security, and a comfortable life (rational progress) (Boli and Thomas, 1997).
2. Although multidirectional causality cannot be tested with cross-sectional over time data, I acknowledge the potential for multicausality and integrate an understanding of the ways it works in Figure 1.
  3. List of countries: Albania, Algeria, Afghanistan, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Great Britain, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, India, Ireland, Iran, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Latvia, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Moldova, Nigeria, Nicaragua, North Macedonia, Netherlands, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Venezuela, Ukraine, Uruguay, USA, Uzbekistan, and United Arab Emirates.
  4. In cross-sectional data that is not a panel, it is difficult to test for possible multidirectional causality between variables as we do not have repeated measurements of the same countries over time. Instead, we only have one observation per country (or per individual) at a single point in time. With these data, we cannot establish a true causal relationship between the variables, but we can draw conclusions about the directions of the variables and whether changes in one variable are related to changes in another variable over time. This analysis will provide useful insights into the interplay between WINGOs, emancipative values, and women's political empowerment at the country level.
  5. I conducted additional analyses to explore the reversed paths in the relationships between WINGOs, emancipative values, and women's political empowerment, considering the possibility that women's political empowerment might generate WINGOs and emancipative values. However, the results of these analyses indicated that the coefficients of these reversed paths were not statistically significant.

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