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Does increasing gender representation improve policy outcomes?
Evidence from Chinese local governments

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Gender representation

Introduction

- **Representative bureaucracy** has received increasing attention from scholars and practitioners in public administration over the past six decades.

- **Policy fields:**
  - ✓ Police force (Riccucci, Van Ryzin, and Jackson 2018, Hong 2017, Headley, Wright Ii, and Meier 2021)
  - ✓ Fire service (Andrews, Ashworth, and Meier 2014)
  - ✓ Education (Keiser et al. 2002, Zhang 2019, Xu and Meier 2021)

- **Demographic characteristics:**
  - ✓ Race (Riccucci, Van Ryzin, and Jackson 2018)
  - ✓ Gender (Wilkins and Keiser 2006, Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006)
  - ✓ Ethnicity (Pitts 2005)
  - ✓ Profession (Gade and Wilkins 2013)
  - ✓ Socioeconomic status (Vinopal 2020)

Introduction

- However, a significant and unexplained question in current literature is whether there is any difference in bureaucratic representation between the top leader and the top management team (TMT)? (1) Do both of them function in an active way, (2) Which of them plays a more critical role in influencing policy outcomes? and (3) Do they interact with each other?
- There exists a scarcity of studies conducted in Eastern Asia.





Introduction

- In this article, we offer a complementary explanation based on empirical evidence from the case of public complaint service reform in Beijing, the capital city of China, which is starting in 2019 and is called the Beijing Public Compliant System (BPCS).
- By conducting an empirical analysis based on monthly panel data in the context of BPCS, we examine the impact of gender representation on citizens' satisfaction and policy outcomes. The empirical findings show that an increase in the gender representation of top leaders in grassroots government is significantly associated with an increase in citizen satisfaction and policy outcome, suggesting that gender representation of top leaders plays an active role in improving government performance. However, similar results could not be supported in the case of TMT.
- This research supports distinguishing the representative roles of top female leaders and female TMT members, which indicates that female leaders play active roles, and female TMT members function in a passive way.

Applying the theory in Chinese local governments

- **Why?**

➢ As one of the most popular research branches of representative bureaucracy, gender representation was proved to increase positive outcomes for female service recipients (Bishu & Kennedy, 2019) in various policy fields. The influence paths of female representatives can be grouped into three categories.

➢ Firstly, female clients have higher satisfaction and trustworthiness towards governments with higher gender representation, which works through symbolic representation (Riccucci et al., 2014).

➢ Secondly, gender congruence will increase the performance outcome of female clients. Studies find that female physician produce better health outcomes for female patients (Wright, 2021).

➢ Thirdly, female clients are more willing to co-produce public services and make more efforts when confronted with female public officials (Guul, 2018; Riccucci, Van Ryzin, & Li, 2016).

➢ Compared with ethnicity, and race, gender problem exists in China. The current literature leaves a research space: does gender representation improve the policy outcomes **in Chinese local governments**?

Applying the theory in Chinese local governments

- **Whether there is a gender representation within the Chinese government?**

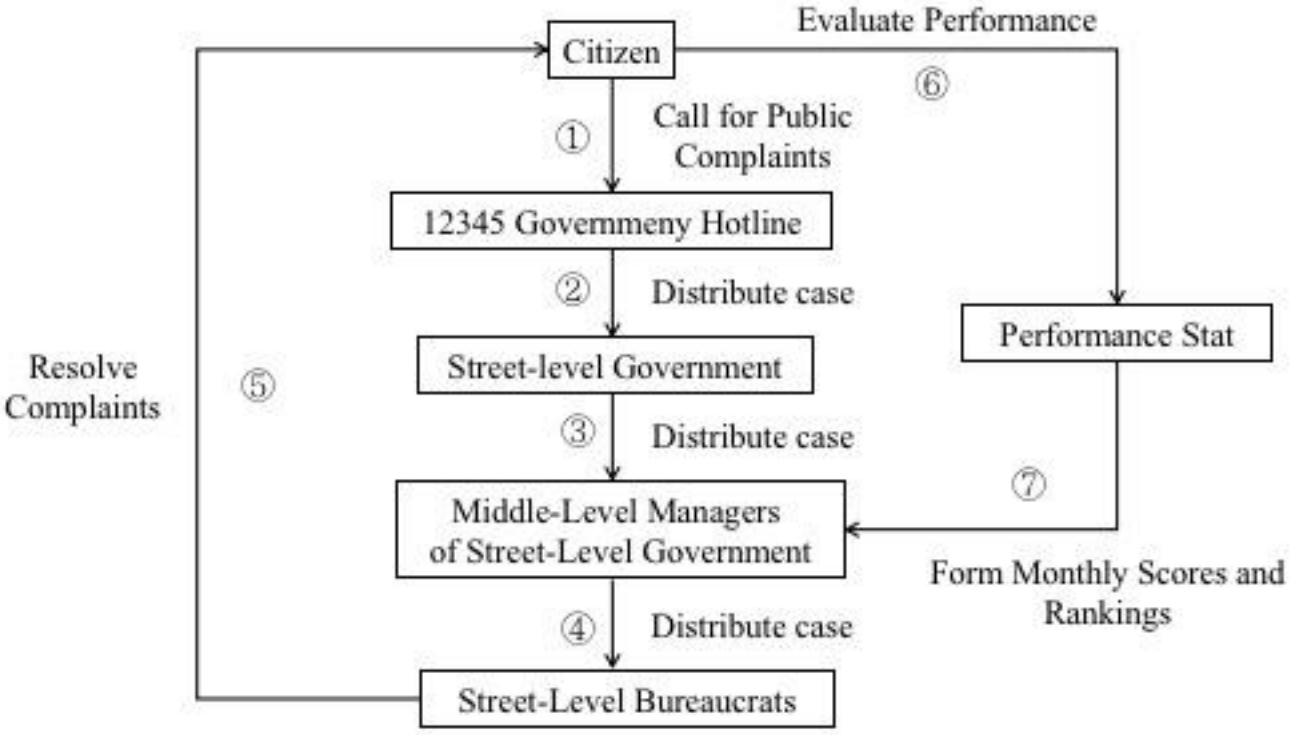
➢ Female has a relatively low representation in China's private and public sectors. For example, the ratio of females to males in Chinese ministerial positions is 0.070, much lower than the global average (0.255).

➢ Gender representation decreases from top to bottom in the Chinese five-level hierarchical bureaucracy. For example, there is only one female in eleven leaders of the State Council of China in 2022. However, at the provincial level, the percentage of female leaders is more than 10% , which is 12% at the city level . The female rate is even higher in grassroots government. We coded the leader's resume of 317 grassroots governments in Beijing, China's capital city, and found females occupying 16% of the leading positions.

➢ This non-dominant but not negligible proportion shows that **passive gender representation** exists in the Chinese local government, providing sufficient motivation to conduct the research.

➢ Although bureaucrats in grassroots governments in China are under an authoritarian regime and top-down political control (X. Chen, 2017), they still have considerable discretion under the outcome-driven performance management (Cai, 2008; Gao, 2009), which makes it possible to transform from passive representation to **active representation**.

Context: Beijing Public Compliant System (BPCS)



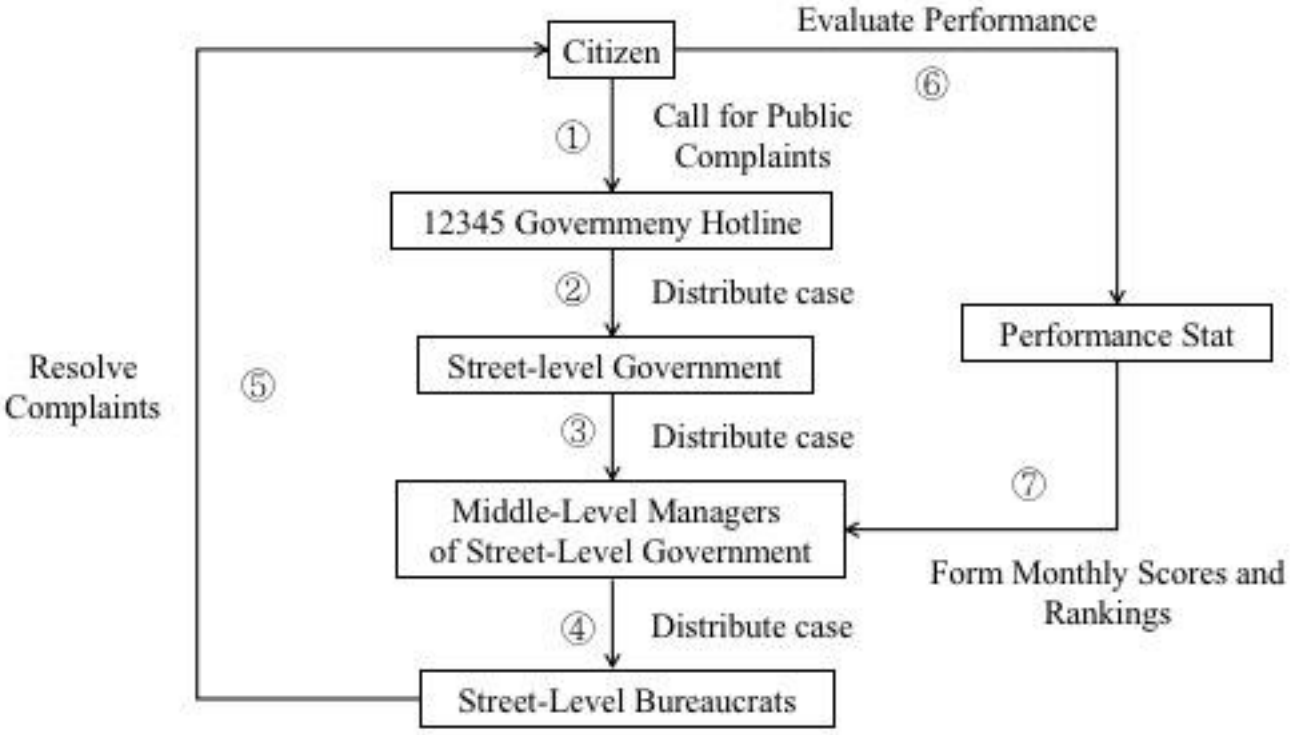
① All citizens in Beijing have equal chance to call for 12345

② Each complaint of citizen will be distributed by 12345 to corresponding street or county

③ Grassroots government will assign complainant's case to a middle-level manager who is specifically responsible for complaints-related area.

④ Then the middle-level will distribute the case to a street-level bureaucracy, or resolve by himself/herself.

Context: Beijing Public Compliant System (BPCS)



⑤ Fifthly, this bureaucracy will directly contact the citizen and help resolve the case within 72 hours.

⑥ Citizens are motivated to make evaluation of their satisfaction and perception of the resolution.

⑦ The performance evaluation made by citizens will become the information basis of Performance-Stat. Performance-Stat will form monthly scores and rankings of grassroots government.

Context: Beijing Public Compliant System (BPCS)

- **Five ways** in **two main patterns** by which gender representation in street-level governments might influence government-citizen interaction.
- Active representation:

✓ **Firstly,** female representativeness will enhance the perception of legitimacy and fairness inside street-level governments. As a result, bureaucrats would pay more attention to less-benefited citizens who have been in an unfair situation in the past.

✓ The ignored groups of people will get deserved benefits and reduce complaints, and this leads to the **second "external" mechanism:** the improved situation of minorities and other clients would decrease the social frictions and thus reduce conflicts and frictions between diverse interesting groups and promote social harmony.

✓ **Thirdly,** when face-to-face dealing with public complaints, female officials are more likely to hold lenient and tolerant attitude which may soothe the complainant in an effective way (Yangfan, 2021). The complainant will be much more satisfied without a conscious effort on the involved bureaucrats.

Context：Beijing Public Compliant System (BPCS)

- **Five ways** in **two main patterns** by which gender representation in street-level governments might influence government-citizen interaction.
- Symbolic representation:

✓ **Firstly,** it would enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of grassroots government, which would ultimately increase complainants' satisfaction and public complaint service performance without making substantial changes.

✓ **Secondly,** female bureaucrats improve gender diversity inside street-level governments, which makes the whole government more sensitive with clients' needs ignored by their male counterparts. As the bureaucrats do not need to make additional efforts in this way, it is still in a symbolic way.

Theory development and hypotheses

- After a rigorous demonstration, we argue that representative bureaucrats will enhance the policy outcomes of public service complaints in Chinese local governments, which awaits empirical tests. However, this argument only stays at the **practical level**. At the theoretical level, we found the **representative bureaucracy theory** still needs to be further advanced.
- There are fewer studies about bureaucratic representation in the leader position compared with street-level bureaucrats.
- Even in scattered studies on minority leaders, results show **puzzle**. Some literature indicates that the representative role of senior leadership is weak. Some scholars believe minority leaders have a negligible impact on policy making. These contradictory conclusions reflect the complex mechanism of bureaucratic representation in leadership positions, which needs further and detailed exploration. When scholars observe gender representation in leadership positions, they seem to ignore the strategic aspect of leadership. Can this inconsistency be attributed to **different recognition of leadership**?

Theory development and hypotheses

- As the most vital predictors of policy outcome, the CEO and TMT (Top Management Team) were seen to influence organization performance in a big way (Cannella, Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Cannella, 2009).
- An intriguing and understudied question is that, whether gender representation of top leaders or TMT is more important in affecting public service performance. Additionally, how does the gender diversity of TMT moderate the influence of top female leaders?
- As the lowest level of an authoritarian regime, the Chinese grassroots government's political power is extremely concentrated on the top authority, which is the same as other hierarchical levels. As a result, the top leader is responsible for steering the entire grassroots government. Although other leaders in the TMT have the decision power, their power is limited and confined to specific policy fields.
- Based on the evidence, we argue that gender representation of top leaders has a more enormous impact on policy outcomes than TMT in China under the authoritarian regime.

Theory development and hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1a: There is a positive relationship between gender representation of top leaders in grassroots governments and public service performance.
- Hypothesis 1b: There is a positive relationship between gender representation of TMT in grassroots governments and public service performance.
- Hypothesis 1c: Compared with that of TMT, gender representation of the top leader has a larger impact on public service performance.
- Hypothesis 2a: There is a positive relationship between gender representation of top leaders in grassroots governments and citizen satisfaction.
- Hypothesis 2b: There is a positive relationship between gender representation of TMT in grassroots governments and citizen satisfaction.
- Hypothesis 2c: Compared with TMT, gender representation of top leaders has a larger impact on citizen satisfaction.

Theory development and hypotheses

- Hypothesis 3a: There is a negative relationship between gender representation of top leaders in grassroots governments and the number of public complaints.
- Hypothesis 3b: There is a negative relationship between gender representation of TMT in grassroots governments and the number of public complaints.
- Hypothesis 3c: Compared with TMT, gender representation of top leaders has a larger impact on the number of public complaints.
- Hypothesis 4a: Gender representation of TMT would moderate the relationship between top female leaders and public service performance.
- Hypothesis 4b: Gender representation of TMT would affect the relationship between top female leaders and citizen satisfaction.

Data and Methodology

- Data source:

✓ Official documents of Beijing government

✓ Beijing government website

✓ Beijing statistical yearbook.

- Dataset:

✓ A panel data-set with 3170 observations, 317 samples in 10 months.

✓ 317 grassroots governments are units of analysis.

✓ All the observations are drawn from February 2019 to November 2019, as the reform is started from January 2019, and data after the December 2019 are not comparable due to the pandemic.

Data and Methodology

●Model: Random-Effect Model with time as well as district (districts are higher level governments of grass roots governments) fixed and robust standard errors clustered by grassroots government in parentheses.

✓Independent variables: satisfaction, performance score and number of complaints.

✓Gender representation: gender of top leader (317) & female proportion of CPC commitee of streets and towns (2,284).

✓Longitudinal data structure: serial observations on 317 units because the secretaries of grassroots government generally remain stable over time.

Data and Methodology

Table 1 Summary statistics of key variables

Variables		N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dependent variables	Satisfaction	3164	78	16	20	100
	Perception	3164	61	22	0	100
	Score	3170	78.84	12.43	40	100
	Rank	3170	165.72	95.07	1	333
	Number of complaints	2536	67.35	64.92	2	1112
Independent & moderation variables	Gender representation of party secretary	3130	0.16	0.37	0	1
	Gender representation of TMT	1569	24.94	9.35	0	52.94
	City (dummy=1 if in urban area)	3189	0.42	0.49	0	1
Control variables: (local level)	Population (per 10,000)	3170	8.32	7.26	.45	47.7
	Fiscal revenue (per capita, logged)	3170	10.18	1.59	4.81	14.7
	subdistrict	3170	0.43	0.5	0	1
Control variables: (individual level)	Age	3130	49.11	5.39	34	61
	Age^2	3130	2440.43	519.55	1156	3721
	Bachelor's degree	3130	0.34	0.47	0	1
	Master's degree	3130	0.62	0.49	0	1
	Doctoral degree	3130	0.04	0.19	0	1
	Home town	3130	0.46	0.5	0	1
	Upper-level work experience	3130	0.75	0.43	0	1

Note: The monthly and jurisdictional dummies are not shown to save space.

- ✓Citizens are generally satisfied with local government performance in handling their requests, with a mean of 78.
- ✓The performance of local governments varies substantially, suggesting it is relevant to explore their variations.
- ✓Among all the Party secretaries, 16% are female.
- ✓The average age of Party secretaries is 49, and 62% has a Master's degree.
- ✓About 46% of them are originally from Beijing, and 75% has work experience at higher levels.

Results

Table 2 Female Representation of party secretary and Performance

Variables	*Model 1* *Performance Score*	*Model 2* *Performance Rank (Robust check)*	*Model 3* *Satisfaction*	*Model 4* *Perception (Robust check)*	*Model 5* *Number of complaints*
Gender Representation of party secretary	2.09***	-22.73***	2.64***	2.79**	-8.92*
	(0.69)	(7.21)	(0.86)	(1.26)	(5.39)
City	1.52	-21.70	2.38	2.60	14.74
	(1.22)	(13.45)	(1.50)	(2.17)	(12.20)
Population	-0.16***	1.73***	-0.17***	-0.31***	3.96***
	(0.05)	(0.57)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.65)
Fiscal revenue	-0.14	1.60	0.34	-0.17	3.66**
	(0.23)	(2.41)	(0.27)	(0.45)	(1.85)
Street	2.88***	-30.86***		4.21***	-10.44**
	(0.62)	(6.68)	3.83***	(1.10)	(4.54)
			(0.73)		
Age	-0.24	2.83	-0.06	0.24	0.45
	(0.62)	(5.98)	(0.01)	(1.15)	(3.53)
Age^2	0.00	-0.03	0.00	-0.00	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.04)

The results in Model 1 and Model 2 illustrate that gender representation is positively associated with performance scores, and an increase in gender representation generates a higher performance score.

The results indicate that a grassroots government with a female Party secretary is associated with a significant increase of 2.64 points in satisfaction score. Model 4, which takes citizen perception as the dependent variable, provides a robustness check for Model 3, showing the same result.

Results

Table 3 Female Representation of TMT and Performance

	Model 6	*Model 7*	*Model 8*	*Model 9*	*Model 10*
	Performance Score	*Performance Rank (Robust check)*	*Satisfaction*	*Perception (Robust check)*	*Number of Complaints*
Gender	-0.01	0.13	-0.05	-0.06	-0.12
Representation of TMT	(0.03)	(0.33)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.22)
City	0.05	-1.22	-0.03	-0.08	22.14
	(1.53)	(17.22)	(2.02)	(2.53)	(16.53)
Population	-0.15*	1.64*	-0.17	-0.28**	3.78***
	(0.08)	(0.88)	(0.11)	(0.13)	(1.06)
Fiscal revenue	-0.13	1.10	0.14	-0.11	6.93**
	(0.45)	(4.41)	(0.54)	(0.86)	(2.92)
Street	3.48***	-37.62***	4.36***	5.33***	-6.43
	(1.00)	(10.43)	(1.14)	(1.62)	(7.33)
Age	-1.58	18.06*	-2.00	-2.61	0.24
	(0.99)	(9.40)	(1.29)	(1.70)	(4.83)
Age^2	0.02	-0.19*	0.02	0.03	-0.02
	(0.01)	(0.10)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.05)

The proportion of female administrators in the TMT is not significantly related to policy performance, either citizen satisfaction or the number of complaints. Empirical regression results don't support hypotheses 1b, 2b, and 3b, but provide support for hypotheses 1c, 2c, and 3c.

Results

Table 4 Moderating effect of Female Representation in TMT

Variable	*Model 11*	*Model 12*	*Model 13*	*Model 14*
	Performance Score	*Performance Rank (Robust check)*	*Satisfaction*	*Perception (Robust check)*
Gender of party secretary	3.37	-35.88	3.71	7.95
	(2.40)	(26.19)	(3.59)	(5.91)
Gender of TMT	-0.01	0.16	-0.05	-0.04
	(0.03)	(0.34)	(0.05)	(0.07)
GP × TMT	-0.02	0.25	-0.03	-0.16
	(0.08)	(0.90)	(0.12)	(0.19)
City	0.02	-2.12	0.13	0.16
	(1.41)	(16.10)	(1.93)	(2.40)
Population	-0.14*	1.51*	-0.16*	-0.26**
	(0.07)	(0.78)	(0.10)	(0.12)
Fiscal revenue	-0.19	1.70	0.08	-0.19
	(0.41)	(4.07)	(0.51)	(0.80)
Street	3.63***	-39.10***	4.49***	5.65***
	(0.95)	(9.98)	(1.10)	(1.58)
Age	-1.67*	19.04**	-2.11*	-2.70*
	(0.91)	(8.65)	(1.21)	(1.59)
Age^2	0.02*	-0.19**	0.02*	0.03*
	(0.01)	(0.09)	(0.01)	(0.02)

Results show that the female proportion of TMT does not significantly change the relationship between female Party secretary and public performance or citizen satisfaction. The empirical results do not support hypotheses 4a and 4b.

Discussions and conclusion

- This study analyzed the influence of gender representation on public complaint performance, citizen satisfaction, and the number of complaints in the context of BPCS. We find that gender representation of Party secretaries in grassroots government can significantly improve citizens' satisfaction with government, enhance government performance in dealing with public complaints and decrease the number of complaints.
- Additionally, gender representation of TMT could not play an active role in performance and satisfaction improvement.
- The two sets of parallel hypotheses support that the gender representation of top leaders in our research context functions more actively. However, gender representation of TMT works in a more passive way.

Limitations

- Some limitations of this study should be acknowledged.
- First, we encounter the most frequent difficulty in estimating the impact of representative bureaucracy, which is that the composition of the public workforce remains stable over time (Hong, 2017). We try to overcome it by observing multi-period data and conducting a random-effect model which fixes time and units and cluster robust standard errors by grassroots government. Future studies can take advantage of reforms or significant events changing the composition of the public workforce to make a better estimation.
- Secondly, our analysis is carried out on the meso-level, which needs support from more micro-level data.

Thank you!

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