

Public Abstract

First Name: Courtney

Middle Name: N

Last Name: Burns

Adviser's First Name: Stephen

Adviser's Last Name: Quackenbush

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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Title: Does Difference Make a Difference? Women Foreign Policy Leaders and State Conflict Behavior

Often we hear that women are more peaceful than men; however, no one has done a study to see whether or not this observation holds for female chief executives, defense ministers, and foreign policy ministers. Thus, I ask the question: does difference make a difference? I theorize that due to stereotypes about commonly held beliefs that women are peaceful and not capable in the realm of war, women leaders must overcompensate and act more hawkish. In order to show legitimacy and capability, I hypothesize that female chief executives will be more likely to be involved in starting conflict, escalating conflict, be involved in long conflicts, and finally see longer peace. I posit that they will self-fulfill stereotypes during peaceful situations if they were elected for being a woman. I find that women chief executives do initiate conflict more than their male counterparts, regardless of which political party they belong to. I have no results for female defense and foreign policy ministers. This research has important implications for two avenues of research: conflict studies and gender studies. Our biases about women leaders can influence foreign policy behavior of women leaders, which affects the country at large, but also the amount of conflict that country may engage in.