

DOES DIFFERENCE MAKE A DIFFERENCE? WOMEN FOREIGN POLICY LEADERS AND STATE CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

Courtney Burns

Dr. Stephen Quackenbush, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to move beyond a “gender neutral” approach in order to answer one big question: does difference make a difference? Specifically, I am interested in the role that female foreign policy leaders play in various conflict processes, including conflict initiation, escalation, defense spending, conflict duration, and finally peace duration. I argue that stereotype bias drives the actions of female foreign policy leaders, specifically, that chief executives have to act more hawkish in order to be taken seriously as a leader. I find that female chief executives are initiating conflict more frequently than their male counterparts, regardless of party ideology. However, party ideology influences conflict escalation. I also find that women chief executives do spend more on defense than their male counterparts. This research has several different implications. A primary implication, however, is the role that stereotype bias plays in the foreign policy actions of female chief executives. If our goal is less war, then we need to be cognizant of the biases we hold.