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**Book Review: *Contagious Representation: Women's Political Representation in Democracies around the World* by Frank C. Thames and Margaret S. Williams**

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*Contagious Representation: Women's Political Representation in Democracies around the World.* By Frank C. Thames and Margaret S. Williams. New York: New York University Press, 2013, 208 pp, \$40.00 (cloth).

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Analyzing women's political representation in legislative, executive, and judicial office in 159 countries across 62 years is without a doubt an ambitious undertaking. There is little question, then, that Frank C. Thames and Margaret S. Williams took on Goliath himself when crafting *Contagious Representation: Women's Political Representation in Democracies around the World*. Such a sweeping research design is particularly risky at a time when research on gender and politics is rapidly expanding and thus becoming more specialized and nuanced. Yet, risk-taking was necessary to test the book's exciting thesis: women's representation in one political institution affects their representation in others.

The book opens with a narrative of women's recent political gains. Whether looking at women's share of seats in national legislatures or women's ascension to the highest ranks of executive leadership, signs of women's increasing political inclusion seem to be everywhere. Women's expanding labor force participation, growing cultural support for women as politicians, and use of certain political institutions have all been shown to benefit women politically. Thames and Williams seek to add to what we know by articulating processes of contagion. But, they also push the field in the direction of a "unifying theory . . . [that explains] the variation we see across institutions, time, and region" (p. 3).

Contagion is not a new idea in the social sciences or in the gender and politics literature. However, Thames and Williams theorize contagion in an unusually broad manner here, articulating three mechanisms through which contagion could operate within and across political institutions: (1) as women make up a larger share of selectors, so should the institutions over which they have influence; (2) as one institution becomes more diverse, the perceived risks of diversifying other institutions decreases; and

(3) institutions may add women strategically to increase legitimacy and better compete for power against other institutions in the same country.

In chapters two and three, Thames and Williams examine links between women's legislative representation and executive leadership. Although they do not find that electing women executives (presidents and/or prime ministers) increases women's legislative representation, they present evidence of the reverse. In chapter four, the authors turn their attention to the courts, finding that increasing women's legislative representation also predicts higher numbers of women on high courts in OECD countries. Then, in chapters five and six, the authors turn their attention to gender quotas—policies or laws requiring that women are included as candidates or legislators. Results suggest that party quotas are contagious within a system and increase the likelihood that countries will adopt quotas at the national level. However, women's legislative and executive leadership does not increase national quota adoption. Across all of the empirical chapters, the authors round out their global analysis with in-depth attention to women's political representation in the United States, France, Japan, Sweden, and Ireland. Chapter seven closes the book with a discussion of why contagion matters.

Students and scholars less familiar with the field should be aware of potential limitations. For example, the review of existing literature is incomplete. The problem is at least partially a disciplinary one, as Thames and Williams do not include even the sociological research that speaks most directly to their argument (e.g., research on the effects of women party elites on women's selection as candidates). But given their efforts to incorporate literature on women's representation in political parties, legislatures, executives, and courts, some gaps may be unavoidable.

The book also gives short shrift to women's increasing representation in the economically developing world, particularly in Africa. Certainly, the authors mention notable cases like Rwanda (even though Rwanda is not a democracy). But, there is little attention to some of the complexities involved in studying developing countries or the mechanisms that might be particularly salient in one context over another. Of particular concern is a lack of systematic attention to democratization as a longitudinal process (beyond including a count of years of democracy), especially since the authors use democracy as a principle criterion for case selection.

Finally, Thames and Williams took on the exceedingly difficult task of summarizing complex quantitative research in book form. The authors present a streamlined and relatively clear discussion of their statistical analysis throughout the text. But, including a larger selection of statistical

information and alternative models in a methods chapter or technical appendix is often necessary for quantitative analysis to be convincing and appear robust. For a methodologically sophisticated audience, the analyses may raise important questions that remain unanswered.

In *Contagious Representation*, Thames and Williams set out to show that women's political representation can be contagious. Although evidence of contagion reads as mixed and not all results are entirely convincing, the text is likely to stimulate interesting discussion in graduate classes on gender and politics. In my opinion, the authors may not have slain Goliath, but they may have roughed him up a bit.

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