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Power-seeking, networking and competition: why women do not rise in parties

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ABSTRACT
Why do women fail to rise in parties, especially youth parties? This analysis shows that female party members' preferences regarding the purpose of a committee, networking and the election rule in party organisations differ from male party members' which is likely a reason why women face challenges to rise in parties. This article investigates for the first time these gender based differences in preferences simultaneously by conducting a survey experiment with youth party members. Respondents ($n > 1200$) were asked if they would run for a seat in a decision-making committee of their youth party. In order to analyse which youth party members opt for which opportunities, the purpose of these committees, the networking opportunities they provide, and the election rule for these committees vary at random. The results show that female members hesitate to join committees that would grant them power, and that they are less likely to opt for upward networking opportunities than their male party colleagues. This effect is particularly strong in hierarchically organised youth parties of centre-right parties. Findings on preferred election rules mostly hold for women from left-wing parties. In contrast to men, this group prefers party quotas. Analysing differences by gender and political orientation, this article shows a clear gender preference gap exists both within and across youth parties.

KEYWORDS Youth parties; gender; quota; networking; career

Recent decades have seen a relatively large increase in the representation of women in politics (Interparliamentary Union 2020). Yet in many countries, a ceiling effect for women's descriptive representation can be observed when compared to their overall distribution in the population (Thames and Williams 2013), particularly when it comes to higher political and party office. Scholars disagree about the cause of this inequality:

while some identify structural reasons, such as discrimination due to clientelistic party networks (Crowder-Meyer 2013; Fox and Lawless 2014) or a lack of encouragement (Lawless and Fox 2010; Sanbonmatsu 2006), others identify reasons rooted in women's individual characteristics or their preferences. According to this explanation, women do not value the power-related aspects of politics (Schneider *et al.* 2016), they may make less use of their networks (Granovetter 1983; Greguletz *et al.* 2019), they are more averse to competitive situations, such as elections, especially when elections are perceived to entail personal costs (Kanthak and Woon 2015), and they are less ambitious than men (Fox and Lawless 2014). To account for the various reasons why women do not rise to positions of power, we focus on youth party members' preferences regarding different activities that involve varying levels of *Purpose* and *Networks*, as well as *Election Rules* in our study.

We address the various explanations for this gap by studying a natural pool of potential candidates, namely youth party members. Hence, we investigate the individual preferences within the 'eligibility pool' of the politically interested and aspiring. As the youth party constitutes the starting point for many political careers, we suggest that its given structures, and experiences members have within it may carry over into the future behaviour. Studying preferences of youth party members in the context of political parties is especially important in the European case, given that in established parliamentary democracies, a political career without the support of one's party is nearly impossible. Previous ambition studies have mostly drawn their conclusions from the U.S. case (e.g. Fox *et al.* 2001; Lawless and Fox 2010; Schneider *et al.* 2016). Thus, studies integrating the role of the party in the European context provide a valuable extension of the literature.

Our research is not only motivated by the persistent lack of women in politics, but also by previous research on pre-parliamentary career paths. In an earlier analysis we have shown with our co-authors (Ohmura *et al.* 2018) that positions in youth parties are an important step in a political career, with a rather large share (26%) of all parliamentarians having held an official position in a youth party organisation in Germany. This is particularly typical of career politicians (or so-called *party animals*), who are characterised by a long party career track. What is noticeable about this career track is that very few women choose to follow it: of those who have taken this long path through the party institutions, only 25% are women, in contrast to the group of so-called *career changers* composed of 40% women. *Career changers* are characterised by much shorter party careers before entering parliament, but they also constitute a much smaller group of elected MPs (about 10%). Moreover, we were able to show that the party career serves as political capital leading to further political

success: women are overrepresented in the group of *career changers* whose members are least likely to achieve higher office during their parliamentary careers, whilst they are least well represented in the group of *party animals* whose members seem to fare best. This is confirmed by Verge and Claveria (2018), who show that men benefit much more in their career from holding party office. By acquiring political capital in party office, e.g. through connections, networks, and organisational knowledge, men facilitate their subsequent election to higher political office.

These results motivated us to look deeper into the reasons for this imbalance: why do fewer women take the party career pathway? On the demand side of the parties we find that some parties are still dominated by male networks, leading to gendered recruitment processes (see e.g. Kenny and Verge 2016) or toxic environments where women do not feel welcome (Daddow and Hertner 2021). On the supply side, women may have preferences which make their party career path more challenging: e.g. they are less likely to seek positions of power and upward networking opportunities in their choice of party-related activities, or they may be less ambitious or less competitive (Kanthak and Woon 2015; Niederle and Vesterlund 2011). We argue in this article that by studying these preferences regarding the purpose of party work, the use of networks and the competitiveness of election rules simultaneously, we can gain a deeper understanding of women's underrepresentation in party careers.

In order to study the differences between young women and men, we conducted a survey of members of all German youth parties between 2017 and 2018. This survey asks about their preferences as youth party members, their political views, their choices to seek higher office within their youth party, and their overall ambition to pursue a political career. The central part of the survey consists of a survey experiment in which we present a hypothetical decision situation to the survey participants, asking them to declare their interest in running for different kinds of committees. This information combined with individual level data on the different ambitions of men and women in youth parties allows us to assess which explanations for the gender gap are at the root of women's underrepresentation in politics.

The analysis is disaggregated into two equal parts, one for left-wing and one for centre and right-wing youth parties. This allows us to analyse behaviour in different party contexts. Since in left-wing and green parties, principles of gender parity and equal representation play a central role, they may attract more female members (Pruysers *et al.* 2017). Moreover, parties differ regarding institutional rules such as quotas, the existence of women groups, and organisational cultures, which are characterised by different types of hierarchy (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018).

Lastly, as parties experience varying levels of success at the ballot box, and therefore varying levels of opportunity to promote their members' careers, we also take this into account (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015; Santana and Aguilar 2019).

The case of Germany represents a typical setting of a parliamentary democracy with strong professional parties (Panebianco 1988). In such party-dominated political systems, a political career based on climbing the party ladder is quite common (Fiers and Secker 2007; Ohmura *et al.* 2018). All major German parties represented in parliament have youth parties (Weber 2018), as there are youth parties in other countries with strong party systems, e.g. UK (Rainsford 2018), Netherlands (de Roon 2020), Sweden (Bolin *et al.* 2022), Canada (Cross and Young 2008), Australia (McDonnell 2021), Italy and Spain (Ammassari, McDonnell, Valbruzzi 2020). These youth parties seek to engage young people, encourage their participation in politics, and prepare them for a political career (Weber 2018). As candidate selection is decentralised in Germany, local party elites remain the gatekeepers to political careers (Detterbeck 2016). Results from this study should therefore translate to similar contexts of highly developed countries where equal or higher numbers of women compared to men achieve tertiary levels of education but where party structures remain unattractive or unsupportive to women as future candidates for political office (Verge 2015).

Why women do not rise in politics

In Western Europe, women have narrowed the gap regarding social status (their education level is similar to or higher than that of men), yet a representation gap between the sexes persists in politics, which may come down to preferences or structural constraints. We argue that women may exhibit preferences which may not be beneficial for a typical party career. One of the most discussed explanations in recent years has been the lower levels of political ambition of women (Fox and Lawless 2004; for a recent overview of this literature see Piscopo and Kenny 2020). Also women often consider themselves as less qualified for office than men, which may be due to gendered socialisation (Clark *et al.* 1989; Lawless and Fox 2005), lack of encouragement (Fox and Lawless 2004), or an absence of opportunities to learn from peer experience (Holman and Schneider 2018). The lack of ambition and lower self-perception of competence have been well established as possible explanations and will be controlled for in our analysis. Yet, we argue in order to understand women's career paths in politics, that the following three types of preferences require more analysis:

a. *Purpose*

An explanation concerning the purpose or the goals of women stems from their former roles in society. Due to the still persisting historical and economic division of labour, even in Western societies, women tend to hold social roles requiring empathy, whereas men more often hold roles requiring agency (Diekman and Steinberg 2013). Accordingly, female politicians have been found to still seek out behaviours which match their social roles in the expectation of being rewarded by their environment (e.g. in their communication with voters on social media see Beltran *et al.* 2021; Evans and Clark 2016). Consequently, women may be found to be less interested in the power and career aspects of political activities, a choice that may result in fewer career-promoting outcomes. Hence, women seem to be more likely to participate in a political activity when it is framed as fulfilling communal goals, as opposed to when framed as a power-related activity (Schneider et al 2016). However, in pursuing communal oriented tasks and neglecting to seek out power-oriented jobs, women may suffer in their career.

b. *Networks*

Women are said to profit less from networks, which are crucial career-building resources in business and politics, providing resources such as insider knowledge, crucial job market information as well as emotional support (Forret and Dougherty 2004). They are found to be more successful in settings where external, objective, third-party certificates such as academic degrees are rewarded, and they are at a disadvantage in settings strongly driven by informal networks and cronyism, as is the case for parties (Childs 2013; Estevez-Abe 2006; Kopecký *et al.* 2012). One reason for this may be the different preferences for women who tend to cultivate strong ties with colleagues and friends through which they gain emotional support and concrete help which can also be beneficial career wise (Yang *et al.* 2019). Yet, it is the use of the weak ties leading to more outside connections, ideas, and new resources, which are important for building careers (Granovetter 1983). Thus, large networks or being central in several networks are beneficial for men and women. Moreover, women have been found to interact more with people at similar or lower levels, and less with powerful mentors at higher levels who could promote their career (Ragins and Cotton 1991). Possible explanations for this behaviour within networks are: (a) moral considerations, with women not seeking to exploit contacts

for their personal gain instead of strategically contacting influential people; and (b) 'gendered modesty' defined as the feeling of not being able to contribute much to a network (Greguletz *et al.* 2019).

c. *Election Rules*

Women are traditionally socialised to avoid conflict and competitive surroundings (Moore 2005) illustrated by the fact that girls do not participate in competitive activities to the same degree as boys (Fox and Lawless 2014). The resulting aversion towards competition has been demonstrated in lab experiments in which women rather opted for an activity in groups where the leadership was selected by lottery and not by competitive election (Kanthak and Woon 2015; Niederle and Vesterlund 2011; Preece and Stoddard 2015). Party quotas are one remedy against this problem. On the one hand, they ease the competition for women. On the other hand, we argue that they signal to women that parties recognise the need to have females in higher positions, and that the party is officially prepared to work harder to promote female candidates. Previous studies also confirm that women do indeed favour quotas more than men since they benefit from them (for female citizens see Barnes and Córdova 2016; Gidengil 1996; for female politicians see Meier 2008). Thus, quotas may have a positive effect on the participation of women in youth parties, although they do not necessarily narrow the gender gap in parties overall (as shown for example by Ponce *et al.* 2020). Hence, we expect in our study that women in youth organisations appreciate quotas in parties.

In addition to ambition, these three factors – *Purpose, Networks* and *Election Rules* – are used in most of the current studies to explain the different career preferences of women. However, most of the cited studies have looked at only one of the mentioned mechanisms, such as risk aversion (Kanthak and Woon 2015) or community goal orientation (Schneider *et al.* 2016). We argue instead that studying these factors simultaneously next to ambition and their self-evaluation of qualification allows us to compare their respective impact and value in the different contexts of the youth parties.

Alongside the individual preferences of women, we will consider the political context in which careers develop. Recent feminist institutionalist approaches underline how a lack of political ambition is also shaped by context and institutions, such as gendered opportunity structures which favour men (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Kenny 2014). These scholars overcome the classic distinction between supply (Lawless 2015) and demand

(Norris and Lovenduski 1995) factors and highlight how individual and context variables interact when we want to explain the lack of female candidates (Piscopo and Kenny 2020: 4). In particular, male-dominated, party-internal networks create challenging environments for women's political careers (for an overview see Piscopo 2019). They profit less from networks because individuals – in this case men who already are in the party – prefer to recruit people who are similar to themselves (Crowder-Meyer 2013; Fox and Lawless 2014; Jaffé *et al.* 2019). Since women are often not part of these networks, they possess less homosocial capital (Bjarnegård 2013) and receive less support and fewer financial resources. This becomes particularly apparent during nominating processes; these favour aspirants with name recognition, financial resources (Josefsson 2020), or strong clientelist networks (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015), meaning that women are less often nominated when competition becomes fiercer (Funk *et al.* 2017).

This interaction with institutions and context is particularly prevalent in settings where parties play a bigger role in political career paths than they do in the US. In this context of parties, institutions such as quotas have been introduced to enable women to achieve higher positions in parties (Besley *et al.* 2017; Davidson-Schmich 2016; Hughes *et al.* 2017; Krook 2010). Quotas benefit women through the facilitation of access to organisations where male-dominated networks are central decision-making bodies (Krook 2010). Moreover, not only do quotas increase the number of women, but they also do not lower the quality of candidates, as once feared by proponents of meritocratic selection (Allen *et al.* 2016; Besley *et al.* 2017; Murray 2010; Nugent and Krook 2016). Yet these are by no means perfect instruments for increasing women's representation in parties and legislatures, since gendered recruitment patterns persist, with many party leaders and party members still seeking to promote candidates embodying male attributes (Oliver and Conroy 2018). We will contribute to this debate by analysing whether the different career preferences of women vary according to different party settings and ideologies.

Youth parties as a petri dish for the study of political careers

Youth party organisations are designed by parties to give young party members easy access to the party organisation, and to provide them with a protected organisational outlet to voice their political opinions (Bruter and Harrison 2009). Although members of youth parties constitute a particularly well-suited pool of people for investigating political ambition (similar to the studies by Fox and Lawless (2004) who investigated politically engaged people), few studies deal with individual level data on youth party members (Cross and Young 2008). Furthermore, we could find only

one study pursuing a comparative framework across different parliamentary systems: Bruter and Harrison (2009) surveyed young party members from 15 parties in six European countries, focussing mostly on the motivation of youth party members by identifying three types of young politically active party members. The question of gender played only a minor role as a control variable in their relatively explorative analysis.

From this limited literature it is impossible to assess whether youth parties contribute to, or reduce potential gender gaps in political ambition. The literature combining the question of gender and youth participation provides preliminary evidence that young female citizens have a preference for conventional forms of political participation, such as voting, but are less inclined to seek party membership or political office (Hooghe and Stolle 2004). Generally speaking, young male citizens are better represented in youth party organisations than their female peers (Hooghe and Stolle 2005). However, we do not know whether the choices made by women inside the party also influence how likely they are to pursue a party career and gather relevant political career capital inside their party.

Hypotheses

Based on the previous findings, we postulate that youth party membership represents a crucial phase for women in terms of forging their future political career path. All youth parties have a strong incentive to keep and promote their members to ensure their importance within the political system. Hence, youth parties seek to provide career opportunities to their members in various working groups or committees. We present our survey respondents a hypothetical opportunity to participate in a committee in their youth party and study whether female youth party members are less likely to make choices that align with the promotion structures and opportunities of the youth parties than their male colleagues. We measure whether women are more likely to opt for activities which are less power-oriented, which provide fewer upward networking opportunities, and which are less competitive.

> H1 (*Purpose*): Female youth party members are less likely to pursue a candidacy for a committee which is power-oriented (defining political positions and candidate selection) than male youth party members.

> H2 (*Networks*): Male youth party members are more likely to pursue a candidacy for a committee which provides upward networking opportunities than female youth party members.

> H3a (*Election Rules*: Quota): Female youth party members are more likely to pursue a candidacy for a committee with an election rule that includes a quota for women and minorities.

H3b (*Election Rules*: majority voting): Male youth party members are more likely to pursue a committee with an election rule rewarding competitiveness (election by majority).

The survey

The youth party survey constitutes the first large scale survey of youth parties in Germany. Conducted with the support of most of the youth parties (the Young Christian Democrats (Junge Union); the Young Liberals (Junge Liberale); the Green Youth (Grüne Jugend); and the Extreme-Right (Junge Alternative) at the national level, and several state-level organisations of the Young Socialists (Junge Sozialisten) and Extreme-Left (Linksjugend [´solid]),[1] we were able to collect a reasonably sized sample of respondents (n = 1260) who completed the whole survey. The survey invitation was distributed through the national or subnational level of the youth party organisation via their mailing lists or their social media accounts.

The sample we use to assess the broader question of the underrepresentation of women in powerful political positions is highly appropriate. Unlike many experimental studies, ours is not simply based on results from a random group of students, but instead our sample consists of young people who are likely to pursue a political career. A quarter of German MPs held positions in youth parties prior to their election into parliament (Ohmura et al. 2018). Observing this group will grant us extensive insight into the motivations of politicians for future studies. We neither assume this sample to be a random sample of young citizens nor a random sample of youth party members. First, it contains young people who have above average interest levels in politics and are more politically active than the general population. Second, even amongst the already politically active group of youth party members, the survey is likely to attract responses from the more active and possibly more ambitious youth party members. We do not expect this effect to differ between young men and women. With respect to our research question and the gender variable, a sampling bias towards the more ambitious members should therefore not bias our findings. If anything, finding differences between the more active female and male youth party members may uncover differences between those youth party members who are most likely to form the next generation of career politicians. This sample selection provides a further advantage concerning the study of a gender gap in representation: one frequently mentioned reason for women's underrepresentation in politics is the unevenly distributed burden of family and social responsibilities (Franceschet and Piscopo 2014; Krook and Norris 2014). Joshi and Och (2021) show that while a gender-age gap due to family obligations is present in many parliaments, this is not

Table 1. Demographic information of survey participants.

Demographic information	Women	Men	Total
% university educated*	77	72	73
% post-education**	20	26	24
Mean age at entry (current age)	19 (23)	19 (24)	19 (23)

All entries are percentages within the youth party except the mean age at youth party entry. Statistical difference is tested using chi^2 measure of association for within youth party differences: $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$.

the case for Germany. Although we observe fewer women continuing youth party membership past their education, our respondents are relatively young (on average 23 years old) and mostly still in education (76 percent) (see Table 1). The majority of them are therefore rather unlikely to be overburdened by family obligations.

Structure of the experimental survey design

The question with which we seek to investigate our hypotheses asks whether respondents would consider running for a newly created decision-making body within the youth party. The choice sets consist of two committees A and B, with information provided on three attributes defining the committee's purpose, its networking opportunities, and its electoral rule. The three attribute levels describe the character of each committee (see Table 2 for an example of three profiles). Since all attribute levels are varied at random, 27 different profiles, each describing a different committee, are possible. We employed all possible combinations of attribute levels because (a) all combinations were possible and seemed realistic, and (b) the full randomisation of all levels allowed us to make use of the property of statistical independence between outcome and profile, thereby simplifying both estimation and interpretation (Hainmueller *et al.* 2014). The variable *Purpose* exhibits three attribute levels which differ according to the main function of the hypothetical committee. The first level (defining political positions) can be understood as the most important committee regarding actual political decisions. We consider committees influencing political positions and hence the party's programme as central and most powerful in political terms. In our opinion, being able to determine the future direction of the party and its ideology is one the most important goals of party members. A committee where political positions are debated also offers individuals the opportunity to prove their debating skills and the power of their arguments. It can also serve as an arena where individuals can convince others of their talents as future politicians. The next most important committee in terms of power in the party is the committee responsible for candidate nomination inside the youth party. This committee is also powerful but more so in

Table 2. Survey experiment attributes and levels as three possible profiles.

	Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3
Purpose	Defining core political positions of the youth party	Selecting candidates for higher positions within the youth party	Organising events and developing strategies for the recruitment of new members
Networks	Members of the youth party	Proposals are presented to the leadership of the parent party	Work is coordinated with the leadership of the youth party at the federal level
Election Rules	Office-holders are elected by plurality following a nationwide campaign	Office-holders are selected by drawing lots amongst candidates	Office-holders are elected by plurality, taking quotas for women and minorities into consideration, following a nationwide campaign

terms of careers because those candidates that its members have selected for nomination can serve as a useful future network for the committee members in the youth party. Yet, this committee does not provide as many opportunities to showcase its members' debating and discursive competences as the committee defining the political positions. These first two attribute levels allocate significant power to the committee members with regard to determining core policies, as well as allowing them to wield power over their peers who seek to pursue a political career. The third purpose (organising events and strategies for recruiting new members) can be understood as providing a more 'communally' oriented service to the youth party, meaning that it helps to foster the youth party in itself. This activity is the least-power oriented and does little to serve the personal interests of the politically ambitious.

The variable *Networks* presents three different attribute levels: networking opportunities with the youth party membership base, with the leadership of the youth party, and with the leadership of the parent party. Networking with the member base of the youth party is considered the least interesting networking option for the politically ambitious. In contrast, being on a committee with the leadership of the youth party or the leadership of the parent party as the main persons of contact should be very useful for youth party members who wish to build a strong network to further their political career.

Election Rules concerns the competitiveness levels of the candidacy for this office. The pure plurality rule indicates a competitive election process including a large campaign. The plurality rule with quotas describes an equally competitive process with a contingency function to ensure equal women's and fair minority representation. The distinction between these first two attribute levels should give us insight into youth party members' preferences regarding institutionalised forms of inclusiveness. Especially for women, we expect a quota rule not only to be understood as improving

their individual election chances, but also as a statement on the part of the party that female members are valuable and their elevation to higher positions is desired. Hence, being recruited into a party which has existing quotas may even give women a feeling of contributing to the overall good of the party to ensure its functioning and the fulfilment of its internal rules. The third attribute level is lots are drawn amongst all candidates, which indicates no competitiveness (see Kanthak and Woon 2015).

Respondents were presented with two hypothetical committees, A and B, whose attribute levels regarding *Purpose, Networks* and *Election Rules* were randomly assigned to one of the 3^3 (27) possible profiles. Then, for each committee, respondents were asked if they would run for office in this committee (see Question 1a in the online appendix). We chose a discrete choice design, so as to approximate a real-life decision situation as closely as possible. In our attempt to explain why women do not climb the political ladder to the same extent as their male party colleagues, considering pursuing a candidacy or imagining doing so does not result in actual better representation of women in parties and politics. Beyond seeking to simulate a youth party members' decision situation on whether to run for a committee or not, previous studies have also shown a few discrepancies in the results of discrete choice and rating or scaled designs (e.g. Hainmueller *et al.* 2014). Lastly, respondents were only forced to take a choice in the second step of the decision-making process, allowing them to say 'yes' or 'no' to both committees in the first step. In cases where they answered 'yes' to both committees, A and B, or 'no' to both committees, they were presented with a follow-up tie-breaker question, asking them to decide between one of the two committees, or to choose at least one committee (see Figure 1 for the decision-making process). This allows us to analyse the responses from two different perspectives, one focussing
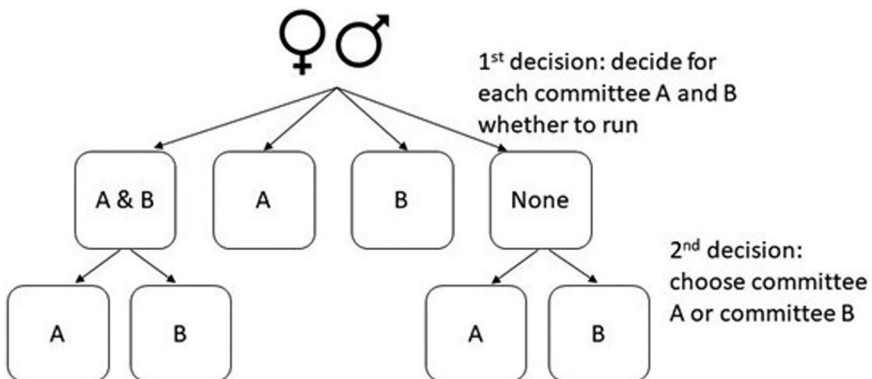

Figure 1. The decision-making process of the survey experiment on presented committees A and B.

on who would put themselves forward as a candidate and who would not (non-forced-choice), and the other investigating what kind of committee in terms of *Purpose*, *Networks*, and *Election Rules* they prefer independent of their intention to run for it (forced-choice). Next, respondents were asked to assess whether they were suitably qualified for the committee presented to them, whether they had held or currently held a leadership position or political office, and whether they had ambitions to hold such an office in the future (see Questions 2 to 3c in the online appendix).

Presence and leadership positions of male and female youth party members

The first and most striking difference between male and female youth party members is simply a difference of presence. This corresponds to the large underrepresentation of women in the parent parties, as illustrated by Davidson-Schmich (2018) for the German case. Of the survey respondents, nearly three-quarters self-identify as men, while only one quarter self-identify as women (Young Union: 79% men, Young Socialists: 72% men, Young Liberals: 70% men, Green Youth: 54% men, Extreme Left: 70% men, Extreme-right: 90% men).[2] The representativeness of the sample by gender within youth parties is difficult to assess directly, as most youth organisations do not have, or do not disclose this information. As a proxy we compare the share of women in our sample to that of the larger scale German Party Member Study from 2017 (Klein *et al.* 2019) (see Table A1 in the online appendix). Our sample shows some small deviations from the larger party survey sample, but overall both samples exhibit the same pattern – one that is also present in previous studies – namely that women are represented to a much smaller extent than their presence in the population. This amounts to about a quarter of (youth) party members, with left-wing parties exhibiting a slightly smaller gender discrepancy (Nonnenmacher 2019).

Moving beyond simple membership and looking at leadership positions within the youth party or elected political office, we again see large differences in absolute numbers between female and male members, but no differences as a proportion of their gender (see Table 3). Overall, even a larger share (61%) of the female respondents declared having held or currently holding a leadership position within a youth party, whereby this difference is only significant for the Young Socialists. The real difference which holds across all youth parties with the exception of the two small youth parties at the ideological extremes, surfaces when youth party members were asked if they could imagine seeking an elected mandate in the future (indicated by the positive values in the last column

Table 3. Control variables: percent of youth party members with leadership positions, elected mandates or future ambitions by gender.

		% Leadership position	% Male-% Female	% Elected mandate	% Male-% Female	% Future ambitions	% Male-% Female
Young Union	Male	68	0	10	3	84	11**
	Female	68		7		73	
Young Socialists	Male	48	−8*	8	2	63	11***
	Female	56		7		52	
Young Liberals	Male	82	1	8	2	89	27**
	Female	81		6		63	
Green Youth	Male	65	−1	11	4	71	21**
	Female	66		6		50	
Extreme-Left	Male	45	−6	5	5	46	11
	Female	51		0		35	
Extreme-Right	Male	56	−19	4	−8	63	1
	Female	75		13		63	
Total %	Male	56	−5	8	2	69	14***
	Female	61		6		55	

Columns "% male–% female": Positive values indicate an underrepresentation, negative values an overrepresentation of women assuming proportional representation according to their share of members. Significance testing of differences between male and female distributions are based on within youth party differences, except the last row (Total) which tests differences across all youth parties. $^*p < 0.1,^{**}p < 0.05,^{***}p < 0.01$.

in Table 3). Here we see that the surveyed women were not as interested in seeking an elected mandate in the future when compared to their male colleagues.

When we translate these figures into absolute terms, where only one quarter of respondents are women, it means that while they are represented in leadership positions in the same proportion to their membership share, there are still fewer women in the (future) leadership.

Crucially, it means that the male pool of members seeking a leadership position or an elected mandate is much larger in absolute terms than the female pool. This indicates a potential supply side problem regarding female candidates for leadership and elected office. Unlike Kjaer and Kosiara-Pedersen's (2019) observation of an hourglass pattern of women's representation in a Scandinavian case, where women's underrepresentation at low levels is corrected at higher levels of politics, in the German case, this pattern of underrepresentation appears to replicate itself at higher levels (Bieber 2022). Thus, while the share of women amongst the youth party members is low in both cases, in the German case current recruitment and selection procedures do not appear to correct the imbalance. These descriptive measures regarding leadership positions, however, give little insight into the career strategy of youth party members, as there are many lower-level positions to go around for active members, and these are generally subject to distribution keys. The use of individual-level decision-making data from the survey experiment, on the other hand, allows us to shed light on the personal career strategy of youth party members.

Career choices in the youth organisation

The following analysis of the choice experiment presents the results for left-wing (Young Socialists, Green Youth and Left Youth Solid), and centre and right-wing (Young Union, Young Liberals and Young Alternative) separately since we expect that the parties offer different settings for their young members, such as different election rules (quotas in left-wing parties), and different cultures, such as a higher level of toxic masculinity which has been found to be the case for right-wing populist parties (Daddow and Hertner 2021). Qualitative descriptions of the largest right-wing youth party in Germany (Junge Union) describe it as training ground for new cadres (Gruber 2009), which is also confirmed by the self-description on this youth party's website where they describe feeling responsible for the rejuvenation of their party. Differences in the career-orientation of youth party members were also found in a previous study of youth organisations identifying different shares of moral or professional oriented members according to party family (Bruter and Harrison 2009). A model covering all youth parties shows broadly similar results (see Table A2 and Figure A1a and A1b in the online appendix), but the split analysis illustrates that some effects are driven by differences between women and men specific to the left or to the centre-right. In our analysis of the choice experiment, the dependent variable in the logit model (see Table 4) indicates the respondent answering 'yes' to running for the randomly assigned committee. Each respondent was presented with two committees, resulting in a nearly double the number of observations compared to respondents. We acknowledge the imbalance of the sample sizes between centre-right and left-wing youth parties, resulting in larger uncertainty in the predictions of the smaller sample. Nonetheless, and thanks to the sufficient size of both samples, both models produce clear results for comparisons of female and male members within groups. The reference category is a male respondent presented with a committee which organises events for membership recruitment, which has networking opportunities with the membership base, and which selects its members by a random draw amongst candidates. This combination of attribute levels describes the committee which is least promising for career success inside the party (no political activities which have a programmatic impact, and no upward networking opportunities), and is least competitive in its election rule. Here we observe the first difference between gender and ideological orientation: young women from the centre and right are more likely to run for the base category, i.e. the committee we describe as least promising for a career in politics. This difference between young women and men regarding the base category is not observable in left-wing youth parties.

Of the three possible purposes (defining the core political positions of the youth party, candidate selection, event organisation for member

recruitment) we consider a committee which defines the political positions of the youth party as the most powerful in political terms. This is also where we observe the differences between male and female youth party members across both left, and centre and right-wing parties: male youth party members are significantly more likely to choose a committee that defines the political positions of the party than a committee that plans events for membership recruitment or selects candidates for youth party office. The opportunity to share their opinions, to demonstrate their rhetorical skills, and the opportunity of influencing political positions is particularly appreciated by men as opposed to committees influencing organisation or personnel.

We also measure the political ambition of the survey participants, since this is a central variable explaining political careers, and as outlined in the theory section, is expected to vary between men and women (Coffé and Davidson-Schmich 2020; Fox and Lawless 2004). Furthermore, we measure whether the survey participants currently hold a mandate in the youth party, since this may influence whether they consider themselves to either have sufficient experience or time for another position.

The results of Table 4 are illustrated in Figures 2a-4b, which display the predictions of the effects of interest. The predicted margins of gender and committee purpose are plotted against the self-evaluation of qualification (survey questions are displayed in the online appendix). As would be expected, the more qualified youth party members think they are, the more likely they are to want to serve on the respective committee.

In Figure 2a and b it becomes apparent that young men across the whole political spectrum have a clear and distinct preference for the most powerful committee, i.e. that which defines the political positions of the youth party. Young men are more likely than not to run for this committee, even if they rate themselves at a qualification level of merely 40 (out of a possible score of 100). Young women from the left, on the other hand, are only equally likely to run for this committee at a self-qualification level of at least 60, which confirms again the central finding of women's lower self-assessment levels when it comes to qualification as a reason for fewer women candidacies (Fox and Lawless 2014). Unlike the men, who have a clear preference for the most powerful committee, young women from the left appear to be as likely to consider a candidacy for the least powerful committee (membership recruitment) as for the most powerful committee. Furthermore, young women from the left appear to shy away from the other power-committee which selects candidates for leadership positions. Even at a self-evaluated qualification level of 100, they only exhibit a 50 percent probability of running for a committee that selects candidates for leadership positions. This can have

Table 4. Committee choice of left-wing and centre/right-wing youth party members.

	Committee candidacy	Left-wing		Centre/right-wing	
		Coef.	s.e.	Coef.	s.e.
	Female	−0.204	0.325	1.146**	0.493
Purpose	Candidate selection	−0.086	0.162	0.004	0.201
	Defining pol. positions	0.733***	0.164	0.809***	0.208
	Female*candidate selection	−0.520*	0.292	−0.507	0.474
	Female*defining pol. positions	−0.607**	0.291	−0.449	0.443
Network	Youth party leadership	−0.359**	0.160	0.139	0.197
	Parent party leadership	−0.406**	0.157	0.580***	0.208
	Female*youth party leadership	0.189	0.286	−0.708	0.519
	Female*parent party leadership	0.109	0.281	−1.244***	0.442
Election	Quotas	0.091	0.157	−0.204	0.207
Rules	Majority	−0.034	0.163	0.532***	0.204
	Female*quotas	0.503*	0.285	0.468	0.485
	Female*majority	0.367	0.290	0.099	0.479
	Qualification	0.019***	0.002	0.022***	0.005
	Youth organ. leadership	−0.437***	0.112	−0.162	0.167
	Elected mandate	−0.871***	0.214	−0.343	0.278
	Future ambitions	0.686***	0.116	1.068***	0.195
	Constant	−1.319***	0.246	−2.801***	0.457
	n Observations	1,608		873	
	n Respondents	815		445	

$^*p < 0.1,$ $^{**}p < 0.05,$ $^{***}p < 0.01.$ reporting: beta-coefficients, (clustered s.e.).

detrimental effects, since candidate selection can be a very powerful arena for promoting friends and allies, building certain ideological alliances and future political networks. Women from the centre and right exhibit less distinct preferences than men in their youth parties. While men from the centre and right indicate a clear preference for the committee defining political positions, women appear to exhibit a similar hierarchy of preferences, favouring defining political positions over organising events for membership recruitment and selecting candidates, but not at conventional levels of significance. The difference we observe regarding the effect of self-evaluated qualification of women on the left only running for a committee if they feel very qualified, does not materialise on the centre and right. Here both women and men are willing to throw their hats into the ring for the most powerful committee, even if they perceive their own qualification levels to be relatively low. As noted at the beginning of the analysis, women from the centre and right are, however, significantly more likely to run for the committee combining the least favourable opportunities for career promotion than their male colleagues (see first row of Table 4). Our first hypothesis is therefore confirmed with regard to power committees. Female youth party members, especially those from the left spectrum, are less likely than their male colleagues to strive for positions on committees which we deem more promising for a career inside the party (defining political positions and candidate selection).
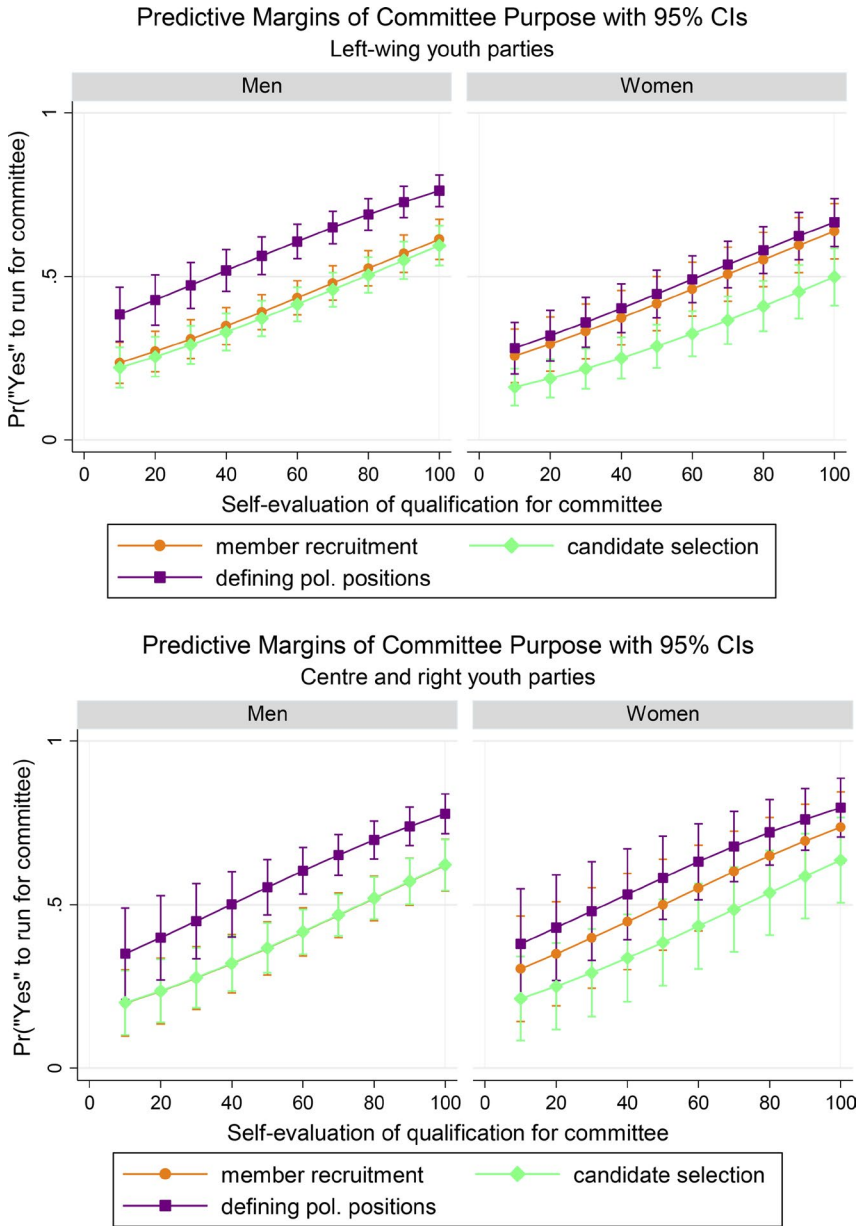
Figure 2. (a) Predictive margins of committee purpose of left-wing youth parties. (b) Predictive margins of committee purpose of centre right youth parties.

Regarding networking opportunities (see Figure 3a and b), we observe a difference between youth party members from the left, and the centre and right political spectrum. On the left, both young men and women do not exhibit a clear preference for a specific networking opportunity.
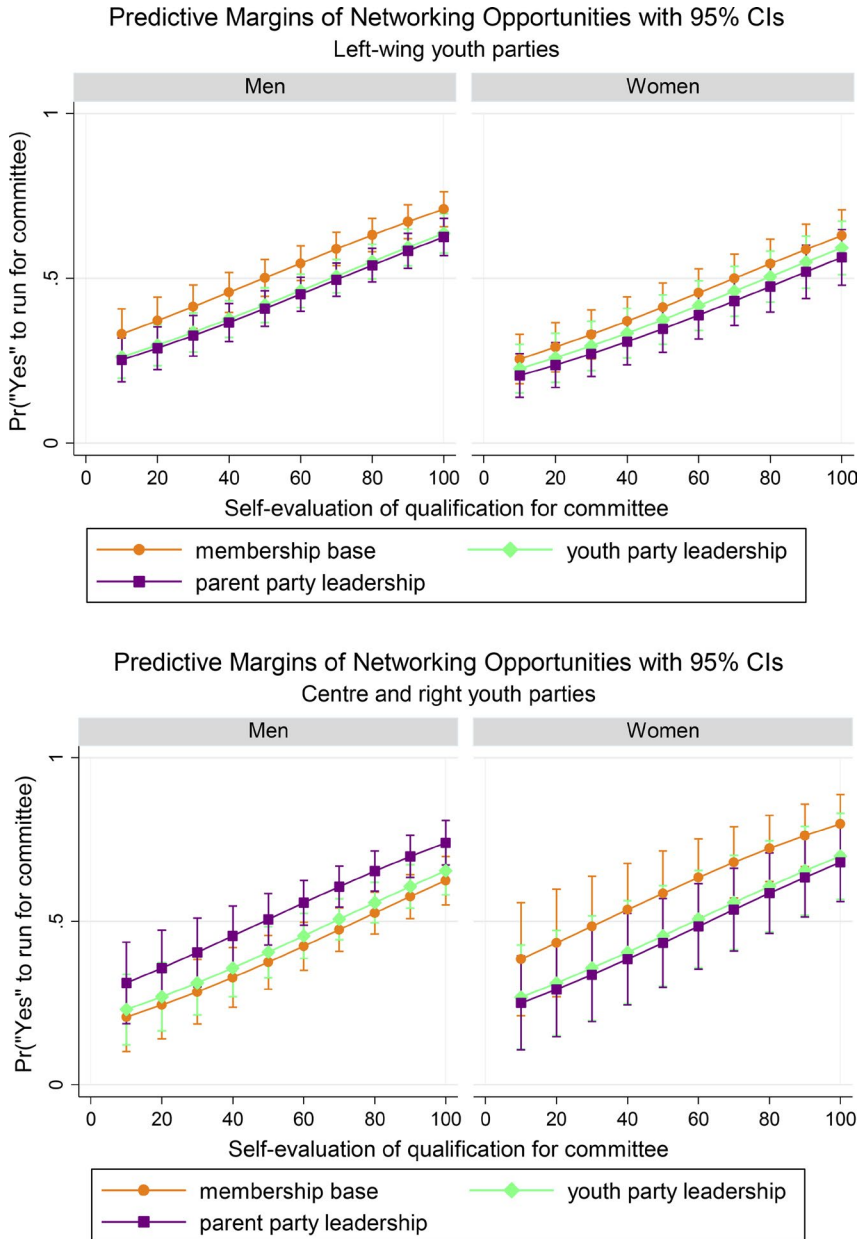
Figure 3. (a) Predictive margins of networking opportunities for left-wing youth parties. (b) Predictive margins of networking opportunities for centre and right-wing youth parties.

Table 4 indicates that there is a preference for networking with the membership base, as opposed to upward networking opportunities both for young men and young women. This effect is mainly driven by the

preferences of the Green Youth and the Extreme-Left, which is in line with the grass-roots orientation of these youth organisations. For youth parties from the centre and the right, the picture is more differentiated. Young men from the centre and right have a clear and statistically significant preference for networking with the leadership of the parent party. This can mainly be explained by the indicated committee choice of young men from the Young Union. Previous studies illustrate a strong career orientation of members of the Young Union (Gruber 2010; Leif 2010: 38). This would confirm our findings regarding the choice of committee regarding power and networking opportunities, but only for its male members. Young women from the right are less eager to network with the leadership of the parent party. Therefore, our second hypothesis is rejected for left-wing youth parties, but not for youth parties from the centre and right-wing. Here networking opportunities appear to be a relevant factor in male youth members' willingness to serve on a committee.[3]

At first glance, the results for the election rules are mixed and less obvious. Young men from left youth parties have no preference, or they do not base their candidacy decision on this feature, while female youth party members appear to favour a quota rule, especially compared to the random selection of committee members (see Figure A1a in the online appendix). In centre and right-wing youth parties, men appear to have a more similar but statistically more significant preference for a majority election rule than the women in these youth parties (see Figure A1b in the online appendix). So far, the model has considered whether a respondent replied 'yes' or 'no' to each of the presented committees, allowing them all options, including saying 'yes' or 'no' to zero, one, or both committees (see Figure 1 for an explanation of the decision-making process). In the survey, respondents who chose to answer 'yes' to both committees, or 'no' to both committees, were asked in a second step to choose one committee. More than half of the respondents were required to take this second step in the decision-making process. This strategy allows us to go beyond the question of who would join a committee (which as we can see from the control variables in Table 4, is strongly driven by whether respondents already hold a leadership or elected position), and dig deeper into the preferences regarding institutional rules, such as election procedures. Nearly all results remained the same (see Table A3 in the online appendix), with the exception of the election rule, where results are much more pronounced. Here we see a clear and different hierarchy of preferences between female and male youth party members (see Figure 4a and b), both within the left and the centre-right political spectrum.
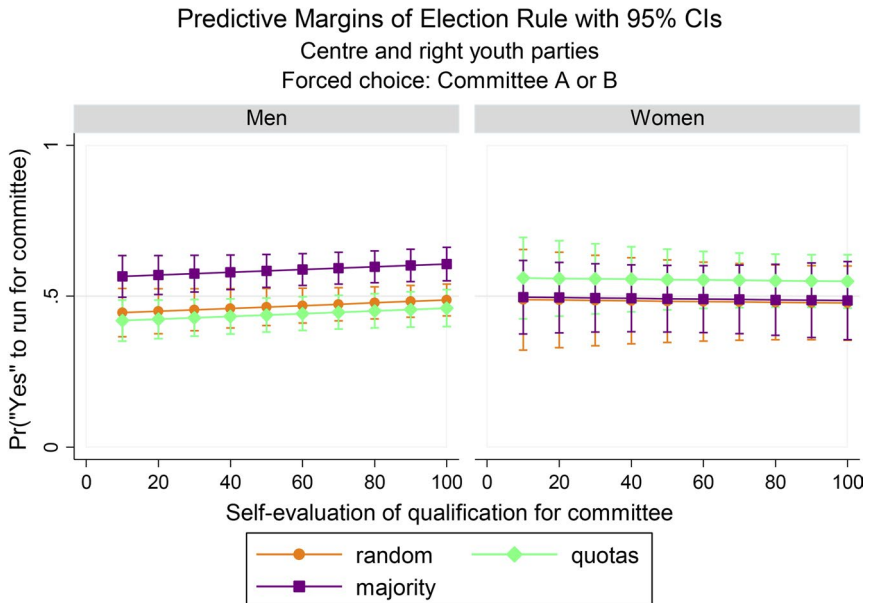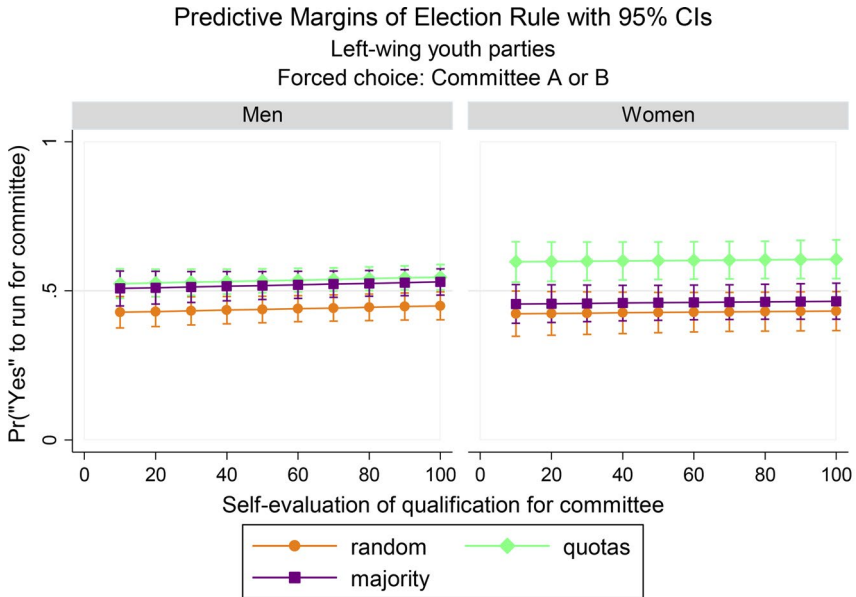
Figure 4. (a) Predictive margins of election rule for left-wing youth parties, forced choice. (b) Predictive margins of election rule for centre and right-wing youth parties, forced choice.

Amongst female members on the left, the probability of running for a committee increases strongly and significantly under a quota election rule, while male members of the right show a significantly stronger

preference for a majority rule. Interestingly, left-wing women's preference for quotas appears to be independent of their self-evaluated qualification levels. This contradicts the notion that highly qualified women are reluctant to support quotas as they appear to downgrade their own achievements. It would seem that on the left, the female youth party members recognise that quotas are an effective tool for disrupting the homophilic networks within parties and helping to put them on the ballot instead of dismissing them as an unpopular crutch. This goes in line with the finding that institutions can have symbolic effects signalling the inclusiveness of a political system, which makes citizens more likely to engage in political life: for example Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer (2010) show that particularly women, as a historically marginalised group, appreciate more proportional electoral systems, since they give them better chances for political participation than majoritarian election systems. Correspondingly, we find that young women in our study possibly interpret quotas as an important signal that they are wanted in a party. This distinct preference for quotas is not found amongst the women in centre and right-wing youth organisations. This could be explained by general attitudes towards the role of state: particularly women who strongly support government action to improve citizens' wellbeing, who tend to be found in left-wing parties, support electoral quotas for women (Barnes and Córdova 2016). Although there is anecdotal evidence of female conservative top politicians praising the quota for supporting their careers,[4] this does not appear to translate to the women in their youth organisations. They, however, also do not share the clear preference for a majority election rule that the men in their youth parties have. In both cases, the rule of drawing lots is least preferred, which might be related to the fact that it is extremely rare and hardly used in actual political committees. Our finding, however, also contradicts previous findings that show women to be risk averse in pursuing an election (Kanthak and Woon 2015).

The control variables do not reveal any unexpected results: youth party members who already occupy a youth party leadership position or an elected office are less likely to seek a seat in any of the proposed committees since they might simply lack the time. Members with future political ambitions are twice as likely to say yes to a candidacy for any of these committees, and as the self-evaluated qualification level rises, so does the likelihood of pursuing a candidacy in any of the committees.

Conclusion

Youth parties represent an important starting point for many political careers, but the effects vary according to party settings and gender. By analysing these career stepping-stones, our research examines the

beginning of the career path as a potential explanation for the under-representation of women in higher positions in politics. In contrast to studies which focus either on individual or structural factors, we analyse the different preferences of males and females towards the purpose, networking, and the competitiveness of elections. This contributes to a more complex understanding of women's political career trajectories as a result of preferences in more or less women-friendly settings, and it helps to overcome the traditional supply-demand division in the gender literature. The use of an experimental survey design allowed us to analyse whether systematic differences exist in the committee choices female and male youth party members make. We found that young men prefer to work in powerful committees where they can define political positions. This clear preference for committees wielding power does not apply to young women. Regarding networking opportunities, we showed that particularly young men in centre and right-wing youth organisations strategically choose networking opportunities with the parent party. When investigating a possible competition-aversion of youth party members, we discovered a preference of young women from left-wing parties for a party quota (in contrast to general competition and lottery procedures). For the first time, we simultaneously studied these three mechanisms identified in the previous literature – *Purpose*, *Networks* and *Election Rules* – which allows us to compare these factors directly.

While this analysis contributes to the literature on the gender gap by identifying differences in the stated preferences of young men and women, the lessons to be learned from these differences in the pursuit of more equal gender representation are open to some interpretation regarding party organisation to be explored in future research. The survey data indicate that male members across the political spectrum are more likely to choose committees which we consider the most promising for a potential political career. In the existing party structures, this clearly represents a problem for gender equality from two different perspectives. First, if young women are less likely to pursue positions that will promote their future political careers, they will remain underrepresented at the higher levels in politics in the descriptive sense. Secondly, if young women are not pre-sented in the core decision-making bodies within their parties, they cannot influence policy, and thereby ensure that the interests of female party members are represented. Although women want to focus on policy issues, as reported in interviews conducted by Davidson-Schmich (2018), we show that young women do not jump at the opportunity in the same way as their male peers when presented with the opportunity to influence policy decisions for the youth parties. Furthermore, if young women avoid par-ticipating in a committee that selects candidates for leadership positions, they forego the opportunity to promote other women, to further each

other's careers, and to build strong networks. Yet, we should not rule out the possibility that young women strategically pursue activities that are more community- than career-oriented, such as membership recruitment. It is possible that women prefer recruiting new members to strategically increase the share of women in the youth party, especially in centre and right-wing youth parties. It is also imaginable that women knowingly avoid certain conflictive activities such as candidate selection in gendered party structures where they are underrepresented, instead opting for more community-oriented activities which are in less combative territory.

Regarding networking, we identify differences which pose questions for further research. Amongst centre and right-wing youth party members, we observe young men stating a clear preference for activities that create opportunities for them to network with the parent party leadership. This seems like a sound strategy to build a career, as the parent party often recruits candidates for political positions from their youth organisation. Reasons as to why (possibly equally ambitious) young women do not show the same enthusiasm for networking with the leadership of the parent party could range from their moral qualms at the prospect of using their connections for their own benefit, or to ascribing little importance to this activity (Greguletz *et al.* 2019).

Regarding the election rule, we observe a strong preference for a quota rule by female members from the left once we force them to choose one committee. We interpret this as a vote in support of quotas, which may be considered an acceptable help in promoting careers amongst left-wing politicians where women have benefitted from them in the past.

The lack of young women in leadership positions thus seems to be partially driven by different activity preferences of young men and women, but also by different party settings. We emphasise that these individual preferences of women (lower interest in power-oriented committees, no strategic use of informal ties, preferences for quotas) should not be regarded as deficits, but as resources which need to be understood and valued: women should be seen in the light of reliable party members who contribute to communal efforts, seek to build strong ties with other members, and who are committed to the membership base.

Here we identify two (of likely more) approaches to address this problem: firstly, party structures need to change to remove competitive promotion procedures and networking environments that do not serve women equally (Verge 2015) such as nomination rules that favour candidates with name recognition, strong networks, or financial means (Josefsson 2020). The use of quotas for the allocation of party and political positions which are preferred by women on the left would furthermore signal parties' intentions to promote inclusiveness, while on the right it might have the effect of discouraging men from pursuing a

candidacy. A paradigm shift of youth parties and parent parties towards better rewarding communal tasks, such as membership recruitment, in contrast to focussing on power-oriented activities would allow women to advance their careers by pursuing activities more favourable to them. This would also serve the overall aim of parties, as growing the share of women amongst their membership base should be a high priority for all (youth) parties, considering the current underrepresentation of women.

The second approach is to address this problem at the level of the individual. Identifying systematic differences in career decisions between men and women can help women consider future career decisions. The fact that men, even those who evaluate themselves as rather unqualified for a committee, show an intention to run for an important position, may change young women's minds about entering their own names in the running. The aim of this study is to illustrate, especially to young women who are planning a political career, where their engagement is needed to improve women's representation at all levels of politics.

Notes

1. Membership numbers for the youth organisations are, according to various internet and direct resources as follows (2018). Number of respondents in brackets: Junge Union (Young Union): 102,069 (307), Jusos (Young Socialists): 70,000 (509), Junge Liberale (Young Liberals): 10,300 (47), Grüne Jugend (Green Youth): 9221 (139), Linksjugend/'solid' (Extreme-Left): 6441 (121), Junge Alternative (Extreme-Right: 1655 (70).
2. The current (last available year in brackets) share of men in youth parties is the following: Young Union (no information given to us when contacted, but 73.6% share of men in the parent party (Niedermayer, O. (2020). Parteimitglieder in Deutschland: Version 2020 (Vol. 31). https://www.polsoz. fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/systeme/empsoz/team/ehemalige/ Publikationen/schriften/Arbeitshefte/index.html)), Young Socialists (no information given to us when contacted, but 67.4% share of men in the parent party ibid.), Young Liberals (82.1% (2020), Young Greens (no information given to us when contacted, but 59.5% share of men in the parent party ibid.), Extreme Left (68%), Extreme-right (refusal to disclose when contacted but 82.9% share of men in the parent party (Niedermayer 2020)).
3. Several anecdotes concerning successful politicians in the Young Union illustrate this phenomenon: mentors from the parent party support members of the Young Union, a close cooperation between parent and youth party is considered a crucial step in the career ladder, e.g. https://www. sueddeutsche.de/politik/parteien-der-lange-weg-nach-oben-1.443109-2 [accessed 19 February 2022]. Similarly, a former female politician from that party underlines how she had underestimated the importance of networks and 'rope teams' in that party (https://www.zeit.de/2019/04/christine-haderthauser-csu-machtkaempfe-machismo-frauen/seite-2 [accessed 19 February 2022]).

4. See Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (party leader of the CDU) in a report about women in politics: 'We still need the quota' https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article12714648/Die-Frauen-uebernehmen-die-Macht-in-der-CDU.html [accessed 23 May 2020].

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