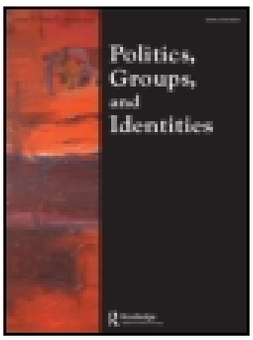

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RESEARCH NOTE

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Measuring gender differences in elite behavior through surveys versus observation: what does the comparison reveal?

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ABSTRACT

Surveys constitute the main method of studying elite behavior. A concern with survey data is that they reflect what elites report they do – not what elites actually do. Alternative, process-oriented approaches such as direct observation can help to address this concern. Examining elected representatives' engagement in debates concerning service provision in the local councils of Albania, I show that observation data – opposed to survey data – portray a picture that is less positively biased towards men and less divided along male and female domains of representation. Findings underscore the importance of using measures that tap into how the behavior of political elites unfolds in practice.

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Surveys; direct observation; gender differences; political elite behavior; elected representatives

Introduction

Surveys constitute the main method of studying elite behavior (Brady 2000; Bailer 2014; Robison et al. 2018). Alternative methods such as direct observation are less common (Rodríguez-Teruel and Daloz 2018; Bussell 2020). One of the advantages of using observation data is that they can help us question and rethink what we learn from survey data (Johnson and Sackett 1998; Rodríguez-Teruel and Daloz 2018). In this research note, I compare the results of using survey data versus observation data in the study of gender differences in elite behavior. I use the term *elite behavior* to refer to local representatives' engagement in debates concerning the provision of services such as education and health. To compare the two methods, I draw on a study that I conducted in the local councils of Albania in 2016: A randomly selected sample of local representatives was invited to participate in a survey where they reported their activities during council meetings. Simultaneously, local representatives' discussions during council meetings were recorded and transcribed. The mixed methods design of the study allows to compare what local representatives report they do with what they actually do.

The case study of Albania provides the opportunity to study gender differences in elite behavior in a context where women's numeric representation in local politics has increased significantly in recent years. Albania is one of the European countries with

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the highest percentage of women in local councils (Council of European Municipalities and Regions 2019) – a milestone reached after the implementation of gender quotas in 2015. Currently, women constitute 43.61% of local council seats (Central Election Commission 2019). The gender equality index in education is 1.5, indicating higher levels of education among women. Women, however, are less likely to participate in the labor market or own a business (Instat 2018), and they are expected to bear the burden of household responsibilities (Dauti and Zhllima, 2016). The substantial increase of women's representation in local councils is viewed with skepticism (Erebara 2015), and more recently with backlash as a new proposal of party leaders seeks to reduce the quota threshold from 50% to 30% (Top Channel 2020).

Two lessons emerged from the comparison. The first lesson is that at the aggregate level the two methods lead to similar results concerning elite behavior. The analysis of survey data and observation data likewise revealed that local representatives were more engaged in debates concerning social welfare and education, followed by road infrastructure, health care, and agriculture. The second lesson is that the two methods provide mixed results concerning gender differences in elite behavior. Survey-based results put the spotlight on men, reinforcing the notion that male representatives are more engaged in the discussion of agriculture and road infrastructure. Meanwhile, observation-based results portray a picture that is less positively biased towards men and less divided along traditional male and female domains of representation. These insights suggest that the kind of data we use has important implications for our understanding of gender differences in elite behavior. Self-reports may reinforce gender stereotypes about women's representation in politics. The discrepancy between self-reports and the systematic observation of behavior highlights the importance of being more critical of self-reports and considering data that tap into how the behavior of political elites unfolds in practice.

Studying elite behavior: survey data versus observation data

Our understanding of political behavior is mainly shaped by survey data (Brady 2000; Bailer 2014; Robison et al. 2018). Surveys, however, suffer from numerous problems. Surveys – particularly elite surveys – are characterized by low response rates, sample selection bias, and non-response bias (Bailer 2014; Rodríguez-Teruel and Daloz 2018; Walgrave and Joly 2018). Survey respondents may face difficulties recalling details or provide erroneous answers to ambiguous questions (Krosnick 1999; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2001). Recall data may be "systematically distorted" – reflect cultural expectations rather than actual behavior (Johnson and Sackett 1998, 303). Another concern is the social desirability bias (Sudman and Bradburn 1974; Benstead 2014; Rodríguez-Teruel and Daloz 2018). To elevate their reputation, political elites may report greater engagement in discussions or report that they spend more time addressing constituents' requests – what they think is expected of them as responsive representatives. Survey responses, as Rodríguez-Teruel and Daloz (2018) highlight, may be about "truth and fiction" (101). Studies show that the response error – the gap between what respondents do and what they report they do – is high especially on socially desirable answers (Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012). Further, characteristics such as gender, class, race, and education may influence the response error (Sudman and Bradburn 1974; Bailer 2014).

Other issues concern the difficulty of accessing and collaborating with elites (Aberbach and Rockman 2002; Walgrave and Joly 2018). Scholars compare mass surveys and elite surveys, highlighting that asymmetrical power relations between researchers and study participants are more pronounced in elite surveys, and they affect the quality of data collected (Desmond 2004; Jabeen 2013; Bailer 2014).

Direct observation – a method mainly used by anthropologists (Johnson and Sackett 1998) – offers an alternative way to study elite behavior. One of the advantages of using observation data is avoiding the response error. Some of the issues that concern elite surveys such as social desirability bias and recall bias are less pronounced in observation data (Johnson and Sackett 1998; Rodríguez-Teruel and Daloz 2018). Another advantage is that observation data may provide a more nuanced understanding of behavior. Representatives are not required to select among a limited number of alternatives – a process that may restrict answers to a set of preconceived ideas. The analysis of observation data can discover aspects that would otherwise go unnoticed. The use of observation data, however, poses several challenges. Political elites can place restrictions on what researchers can observe and when. Observation can also be limited to formal settings – overlooking informal settings (Rodríguez-Teruel and Daloz 2018; Bussell 2020). Another challenge concerns the type of data that can be collected through observation. Data on individual-level characteristics such as political experience and access to networks that can explain political behavior require complementary methods of data collection. Because the kind of information that can be collected through observation is limited, the analysis may be restricted to detecting patterns rather than explaining them.

Explaining gender differences in elite behavior

To explain gender differences in the behavior of political elites, I draw on two bodies of scholarly work that focus on gender socialization and women's substantive representation. Gender socialization has a long-lasting effect on how women and men view their capabilities in politics (Lovenduski 2005). Studies show that women are more likely to question their ability as politicians (Lawless and Fox 2005). Gender socialization also influences how women and men respond to surveys (Rapoport 1982; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997; Mondak and Anderson 2004). Mondak and Anderson (2004) argue that male respondents are more likely to guess survey responses and "perhaps to exaggerate more generally" (510). Between guessing and choosing "I don't know," women are more likely to select the latter. In some of the early work on this topic, the selection of "don't know" has been treated as an effect of gender socialization (Rapoport 1982). The scholarly work on gender socialization is suggestive that survey results will be positively biased toward men; men will elevate their contribution during council meetings.

The literature on substantive representation has established that male and female representatives prioritize different policy areas (see e.g., Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Beaman et al. 2010). While gender differences are context-specific, a pattern found in many countries is that female representatives are more likely to advocate for education, health care, and social welfare, and male representatives for defense, energy, and business (see e.g., Wängnerud 2009; Clayton, Josefsson, and Wang 2016). In line with this literature, I anticipate that men will be more likely to report that they engage in the discussion of what are traditionally recognized as male

domains (e.g., road infrastructure); meanwhile, women will be more engaged in the discussion of female domains (e.g., education). I also expect that the gender gap will be more pronounced in survey data. Self-reports – compared to debates held during council meetings – will be constrained by biases such as social desirability bias and recall bias that will elevate the gender gap.

Methods

This research note draws on a large-scale project conducted in the local councils of Albania during August–December 2016. Two methods of data collection were used: a survey with local representatives and the observation of council meetings. Observation data consist of recorded conversations held between elected representatives and local government officials during council meetings.

The survey was conducted with 410 local representatives in 30 local councils (out of 61 in the country) that were randomly selected. A subsample of 11 councils was selected to record meetings. Thirty-seven council meetings were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Council meetings are typically held once a month. In these meetings, local representatives discuss and vote for draft decisions, address issues that concern individuals and communities, and make demands on their behalf. Meetings begin with the head of the council introducing the agenda and inviting local government officials to report on the performance of departments (e.g., departments of finance, public services, and social services). Then, councilors take the floor to ask questions and raise concerns. A typical speech begins with the councilor raising a concern (e.g., access to social welfare programs is interrupted for a group of community members who can barely make ends meet), holding local government officials to account (why access has been interrupted), and demanding that local government officials take action (community members regain access to social welfare programs). It is often the case that elected representatives have communicated their concerns to local government officials beforehand (e.g., through phone calls). Council meetings provide elected representatives the opportunity to make their requests public, hold local government officials to account, and demand responsiveness (see Appendix 3 for an example). I compare the results of using survey data versus observation data in the same councils. The assumption is that differences in results cannot be attributed to study participants or councils' characteristics but the method of data collection.

A paper-and-pen questionnaire was administered in the selected councils. To capture their engagement in discussions, councilors were asked the following question: "Below is a list of topics that are usually discussed during council meetings. Circle the topics for which you have raised your voice and demanded the improvement of the situation during meetings." The list included topics such as education, social housing, water supply, public services, agriculture, and health care.

I used an inductive approach to discover the types of services that councilors discussed during meetings. I coded each speech where councilors discussed services and labeled the speech based on the type of service that was discussed. Coding results were compared with a second coder who coded parts of the text. The analysis – conducted in Nvivo 11 – revealed that when councilors took the floor, they discussed 15 services. I restricted the analysis to education, health care, social welfare, road infrastructure, and agriculture

because these were among the topics for which councilors took the floor more frequently. While reading the transcripts, I identified a list of keywords that corresponded to each topic (e.g., minivan, teacher, cinema, laboratory, curriculum *for education and assistance*; bread, disability, autism *for social welfare*) (see Appendix 2 for more examples of keywords). Selected keywords were used to analyze the text using natural language processing. I used the root word to capture variations of word usage (for instance, teacher and teaching were linked to the root word teach). Any time that a councilor took the floor, his or her speech was searched for the occurrence of keywords. The analysis was conducted in Python 3.6. The measurement of the dependent variable was based on floor-taking, indicating whether councilors took the floor and mentioned selected keywords. The data was stored in excel and exported to STATA 12.1.

Logistic regression was conducted to predict the likelihood that councilors reported to engage in discussions (survey data) and take the floor to engage in discussions (council transcripts). In both models, I regressed binary dependent variables on gender. I controlled for the position held by councilors in commissions (chairs vs. members; survey data) and the order that councilors took the floor (council transcripts). Models included fixed effects for councils to control for time-invariant characteristics.

I conducted several robustness checks. I rerun the analysis on the full sample of 30 councils ($n = 410$) and the sample of 19 councils where meetings were not recorded ($n = 218$). I spot-checked the results of natural language processing to identify instances that did not consist of discussions over selected topics and address concerns over face validity. I rerun the analysis to predict the likelihood that councilors mentioned more than a single keyword in their speech (e.g., local representatives mentioned teacher and classroom – not just teacher – when discussing education) and the intensity of discussions. The intensity of discussions was calculated by dividing the number of keywords by the total number of words in each speech.

Findings

Referring to survey data, local representatives ($n = 192$) were more engaged in the discussion of social welfare (69.27%), followed by education (57.81%), road infrastructure (44.27%), health care (29.69%), and agriculture (26.56%). A higher percentage of women reported taking the floor to discuss social welfare (73.40%) and education (65.96%), and a higher percentage of men reported taking the floor to discuss social welfare (65.31%) and road infrastructure (54.08%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Survey-based descriptive statistics: number and percentage of times councilors reported to take the floor ($n = 192$).

	All	Women	Men
Agriculture	51 (26.56%)	16 (17.02%)	35 (35.71%)
Education	111 (57.81%)	62 (65.96%)	49 (50.00%)
Health	57 (29.69%)	30 (31.91%)	27 (27.55%)
Social welfare	133 (69.27%)	69 (73.40%)	64 (65.31%)
Roads	85 (44.27%)	32 (34.04%)	53 (54.08%)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.

Women were more likely than men to report they take the floor to discuss education, X^2 (1, $N = 192$) = 5.01, $p = 0.025$. Men were more likely than women to report they take the floor to discuss agriculture, X^2 (1, $N = 192$) = 8.59, $p = 0.003$ and road infrastructure, X^2 (1, $N = 192$) = 7.81, $p = 0.005$. The difference between women and men as regards health care and social welfare was not statistically significant.

Councilors took the floor 4889 times: Women took the floor 1169 times (23.91%) and men took the floor 3720 times (76.09%). Referring to council transcripts, the topics for which councilors spent the most efforts discussing, i.e., took the floor more often, were social welfare (10.57%) and education (6.16%), followed by road infrastructure (4.30%), agriculture (2.21%), and health care (1.53%). Women took the floor more often to discuss education (11.21%) and social welfare (8.55%), and men took the floor more often to discuss social welfare (11.21%) and education (4.57%) (Table 2).

Women were more likely than men to take the floor to discuss education, X^2 (1, $N = 4889$) = 67.80, $p = 0.000$, and health care, X^2 (1, $N = 4889$) = 29.97, $p = 0.000$. Meanwhile, men were more likely than women to take the floor to discuss social welfare, X^2 (1, $N = 4889$) = 6.63, $p = 0.01$ – a difference that disappeared in regression analysis. The difference between women and men as regards agriculture and road infrastructure was not statistically significant.

Survey-based regression results indicated that women were less likely than men to report that they take the floor to discuss agriculture ($p < .01$) and road infrastructure ($p < .01$), and more likely to report that they take the floor to discuss education ($p < .05$) (Table 3).

Transcripts-based regression results revealed that women were more likely than men to take the floor to discuss education ($p < .001$) and health care ($p < .001$). There were no

Table 2. Transcripts-based descriptive statistics: number and percentage of times councilors took the floor and mentioned one keyword ($n = 4889$).

	All	Women	Men
Agriculture	108 (2.21%)	27 (2.31%)	81 (2.18%)
Education	301 (6.16%)	131 (11.21%)	170 (4.57%)
Health	75 (1.53%)	37 (3.25%)	38 (0.99%)
Social welfare	517 (10.57%)	100 (8.55%)	417 (11.21%)
Roads	210 (4.30%)	46 (3.93%)	164 (4.41%)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.

Table 3. Survey-based regression results: predicting the likelihood of reporting to take the floor ($n = 192$).

	Agriculture	Education	Health	Social welfare	Roads
Woman	−1.34** (.40)	.69* (.33)	.26 (.34)	.29 (.33)	−1.09** (.33)
Commission chair	.06 (.45)	.50 (.39)	.11 (.41)	.30 (.40)	.32 (.38)
FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−1.67** (.56)	−1.07* (.42)	−1.32** (.46)	.14 (.39)	−.95* (.44)
χ^2	37.02	22.95	23.85	13.57	27.99
Pseudo R^2	0.17	0.10	0.10	0.06	0.11

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

Table 4. Transcript-based regression results: predicting the likelihood of taking the floor and mentioning one keyword ($n = 4889$).

	Agriculture	Education	Health	Social welfare	Roads
Woman	.12 (.39)	1.11*** (.21)	1.71*** (.23)	−.46 (.27)	.08 (.27)
Speaker's order	.02 (.05)	.05 (.03)	.15*** (.03)	−.07 (.06)	.07* (.03)
FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−3.86*** (.60)	−3.48*** (.32)	−5.32*** (1.06)	−2.06*** (.57)	−3.69*** (.34)
χ^2	0.87	31.35	55.58	3.33	6.73
Pseudo R^2	0.01	0.03	0.07	0.02	0.01

Notes: Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors. Errors were clustered at the council level. Estimations are based on the likelihood of mentioning one keyword.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

statistically significant differences between women and men as regards agriculture, road infrastructure, and social welfare (Table 4).

Robustness checks did not alter these conclusions (see Appendix 1). To visualize differences between survey and observation-based results, Figure 1 plots coefficient estimates and their respective confidence intervals. The visual presentation confirmed the conclusion that survey data overestimate men's contribution during council meetings.

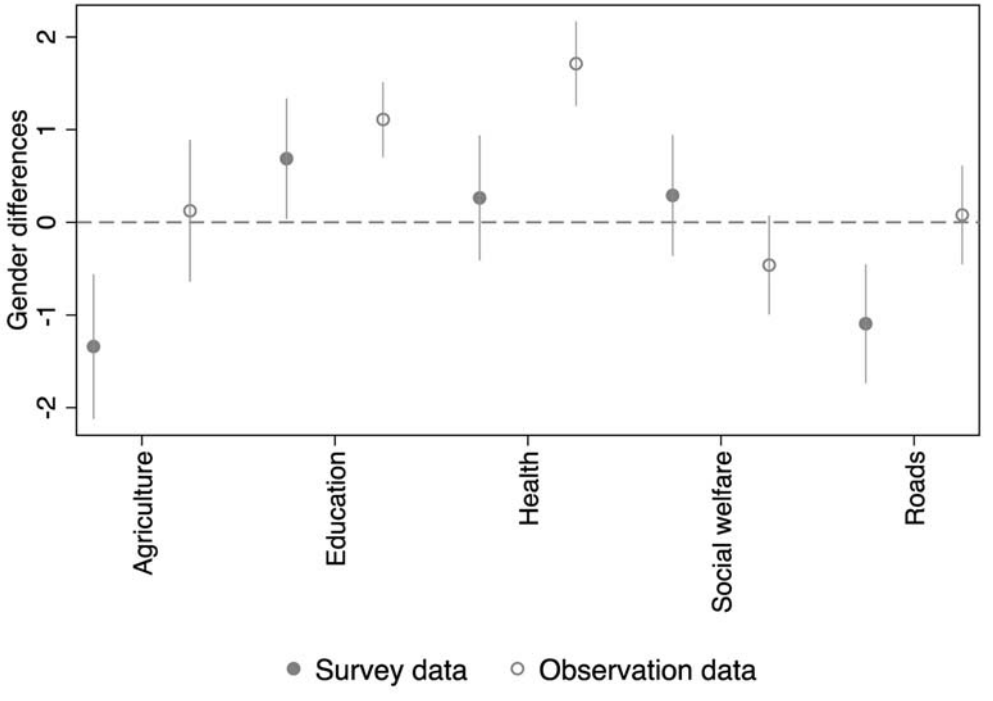

Figure 1. Gender differences – survey data versus observation data. *Note:* Coefficient estimates on the *y*-axis indicate the difference between women and men (reference category) in reporting to take the floor (survey data) and taking the floor (observation data), with 95% confidence intervals, controlling for the position held by councilors in commissions (chairs vs. members; survey data) and the order that councilors took the floor (observation data).

Conclusions and discussions

The purpose of this research note was to compare the results of using two different methods to study gender differences in elite behavior – a paper-and-pencil questionnaire with local representatives and the direct observation of council meetings. Elite behavior was studied in a council setting and it was defined as local representatives' engagement in debates concerning service provision. The comparison suggests two takeaways: First, both methods – at the aggregate level – reveal similar results concerning the types of services that local representatives prioritize during discussions. When asked to report their engagement in discussions, a higher percentage of councilors reported taking the floor to discuss social welfare and education, followed by road infrastructure, health care, and agriculture. The analysis of council transcripts revealed a similar pattern. Second, the two methods lead to mixed results concerning gender differences in elite behavior. Depending on the data we use, we can tell two different stories. The survey-based story puts the spotlight on men, highlighting that men are more engaged in the discussion of road infrastructure and agriculture; meanwhile, women are more engaged in the discussion of education. Meanwhile, the transcript-based story removes the spotlight from men. It shows that men and women are equally involved in the discussion of road infrastructure and agriculture, and women – similarly with what survey results reveal – are more engaged in the discussion of education. Further, women are more engaged in the discussion of health care. The analysis of transcripts reveals a picture that is less positively biased towards men, and less divided along traditional male and female domains of representation. These findings corroborate previous results concerning gender differences in survey responses (Rapoport 1982; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997; Mondak and Anderson 2004), demonstrating that survey results present an elevated view of men's contribution in discussions.

Findings suggest that using self-reports to study gender differences in elite behavior can result in biased results that downplay women's contribution and reinforce gender stereotypes about women's role in politics. A process-oriented approach such as direct observation that taps into how elite behavior unfolds in practice can help us question what we learn from self-reports and gain a better understanding of gender differences in elite behavior. Observation data –particularly in contexts such as Albania – can be used to challenge the skepticism with women's representation and the backlash against gender equality in politics. Future studies should focus on the private behavior of elected representatives: the ways that elected representatives engage with local government officials and advocate on behalf of constituents, beyond council meetings. The observation of private behavior – compared to public behavior – requires deeper engagement in the field and poses additional challenges for researchers (see e.g., Bussell 2020). But it is through the systematic observation of behavior – in formal and informal settings – that we can gain a comprehensive understanding of gender differences in elite behavior.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Table A1. Survey-based descriptive statistics: number and percentage of times councilors reported to take the floor in councils where meetings were not recorded ($n = 218$).

	All	Women	Men
Agriculture	57 (26.15%)	20 (17.86%)	37 (34.91%)
Education	136 (62.39%)	79 (70.54%)	57 (53.77%)
Health	75 (34.40%)	38 (33.93%)	37 (34.91%)
Social welfare	157 (72.02%)	86 (76.79%)	71 (66.98%)
Roads	83 (38.07%)	35 (31.25%)	48 (45.28%)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.

Table A2. Survey-based descriptive statistics: number and percentage of times councilors reported to take the floor ($n = 410$).

	All	Women	Men
Agriculture	108 (26.34%)	36 (17.48%)	72 (35.29%)
Education	247 (60.24%)	141 (68.45%)	106 (51.96%)
Health	132 (32.20%)	68 (33.01%)	64 (31.37%)
Social welfare	290 (70.73%)	155 (75.24%)	135 (66.18%)
Roads	168 (40.98%)	67 (32.52%)	101 (49.51%)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.

Table A3. Transcripts-based descriptive statistics: number and percentage of times councilors took the floor and mentioned more than one keyword ($n = 4889$).

	All	Women	Men
Agriculture	58 (1.19%)	17 (1.45%)	41 (1.10%)
Education	235 (4.81%)	99 (8.47%)	136 (3.66%)
Health	48 (0.98%)	26 (2.22%)	22 (0.59%)
Social welfare	210 (4.30%)	56 (4.79%)	154 (4.14%)
Roads	122 (2.50%)	23 (1.97%)	99 (2.66%)

Table A4. Survey-based regression results: predicting the likelihood of reporting to take the floor in councils where meetings were not recorded ($n = 218$).

	Agriculture	Education	Health	Social welfare	Roads
Woman	−1.12** (.37)	.76* (.31)	−.17 (.32)	.11 (.30)	−.63* (.32)
Commission chair	.71 (.41)	.32 (.37)	.21 (.37)	.40 (.35)	.96 (.37)
FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	.01 (.77)	.15 (.75)	−.42 (.74)	.45 (.74)	1.44 (.84)
χ^2	38.49	26.36	25.55	22.49	47.68
Pseudo R^2	0.17	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.17

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

Table A5. Survey-based regression results: predicting the likelihood of reporting to take the floor for the full sample ($n = 410$).

	Agriculture	Education	Health	Social welfare	Roads
Woman	−1.22*** (.27)	.73** (.23)	.03 (.23)	.05 (.21)	−.87*** (.23)
Commission chair	.42 (.29)	.43 (.26)	.21 (.26)	.59 (.25)	.60* (.26)
FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	.05 (.77)	.16 (.75)	−.52 (.74)	.48 (.74)	1.58 (.84)
χ^2	74.45	51.91	49.57	46.73	74.47
Pseudo R^2	0.17	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.14

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

Table A6. Transcript-based regression results: predicting the intensity of discussions ($n = 4889$).

	Agriculture	Education	Health	Social welfare	Roads
Woman	.36 (.37)	1.10*** (.28)	2.24*** (.30)	.21 (.18)	−.15 (.54)
Speaker's order	.09 (.05)	.03 (.02)	.13** (.04)	.01 (.03)	.05 (.03)
FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−3.19*** (.29)	−5.40*** (.46)	−7.81*** (1.30)	−5.12*** (.34)	−6.52*** (.56)
χ^2	3.74	28.77	94.70	2.21	8.38

Notes: To capture the intensity of discussions, I used the ratio of keywords, which was calculated by diving the number of keywords by the total number of words in each speech. I used negative binomial regression because the outcome variable was over-dispersed. Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors. Errors were clustered at the council level.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < .001$.

Table A7. Transcript-based regression results: predicting the likelihood of taking the floor and mentioning more than one keyword ($n = 4889$).

	Agriculture	Education	Health	Social welfare	Roads
Woman	.29 (.30)	1.20*** (.15)	1.49*** (.31)	.15 (.17)	−.15 (.25)
Speaker's order	.02 (.03)	.03 (.02)	.11 (.04)	−.03 (.02)	.09*** (.02)
FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−3.97*** (.46)	−3.69*** (.33)	−6.10*** (.77)	−2.81*** (.30)	−3.39*** (.32)
χ^2	32.96	132.04	71.52	62.47	65.56
Pseudo R^2	0.05	0.07	0.14	0.04	0.06

Notes: Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors. Errors were clustered at the council level.
*$p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
***$p < .001$.

Table A8. Transcript-based descriptive statistics: number and percentage of times councilors took the floor on other topics ($n = 4889$).

	All	Women	Men
Greenery service	74 (1.51%)	21 (1.80%)	53 (1.42%)
Social housing	53 (1.08%)	10 (0.86%)	43 (1.16%)
Irrigation	46 (0.94%)	11 (0.94%)	35 (0.94%)
Kindergartens	48 (0.98%)	20 (1.71%)	28 (0.75%)
Street cleaning service	132 (2.70%)	18 (1.54%)	114 (3.06%)
Street lighting service	53 (1.08%)	9 (0.77%)	44 (1.18%)
Sewage	51 (1.04%)	11 (0.94%)	40 (1.08%)
Sports	49 (1.00%)	13 (1.11%)	36 (0.97%)
Transportation	49 (1.00%)	15 (1.28%)	34 (0.91%)
Water supply	66 (1.35%)	9 (0.77%)	57 (1.53%)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.

Table A9. Survey-based descriptive statistics: number and percentage of times councilors reported to take the floor on other topics ($n = 410$).

	All	Women	Men
Greenery service	156 (38.05%)	78 (37.86%)	78 (38.24%)
Social housing	135 (32.93%)	62 (30.10%)	73 (35.78%)
Irrigation	113 (27.76%)	37 (18.23%)	76 (37.25%)
Kindergartens	168 (41.28%)	94 (46.31%)	74 (36.27%)
Street cleaning service	191 (46.59%)	90 (43.69%)	101 (49.51%)
Street lighting service	133 (32.44%)	62 (30.10%)	71 (34.80%)
Sewage	219 (53.94%)	86 (42.57%)	133 (65.20%)
Sports	109 (26.59%)	34 (16.50%)	75 (36.76%)
Transportation	117 (28.75%)	51 (25.12%)	66 (32.35%)
Water supply	213 (51.95%)	89 (43.20%)	124 (60.78%)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.

Appendix B

	Examples of Keywords
Agriculture	registry, livestock, farming, agriculture, damage, farm, hectare, cadastre, pasture, flood, land, ditch, turbines, pumping, drainage
Education	education, library, scholarship, roof, didactics, winter, window, van, gymnasium, hygiene, cannabis, cinema, classroom, dormitory, laboratory, books, teacher, narcotic, fireplace, gym, guard, school, student, transportation, winter, stove, fire, curriculum, textbooks, plaster
Health	ambulance, nurse, doctor, disability, center, health, hospital, psychologist, cancer, diagnosis
Social welfare	assistance, bread, gifts, divorce, emergency, pension, medicine, unfortunate, autism, head of household, flour, destitution, chicken, deafness, sickness, poverty, orphan, paraplegia, Roma, Egyptian, blindness, protection, support, marginalization, subsidy, homeless
Roads	asphalt, bitumen, snow removal vehicle, pothole, lane, highway, underpass, street, traffic light, stair, road signs, traffic, sidewalk, bridge, gravel, boulevard, infrastructure, intersection, parking

Appendix C

Excerpt from a Council Meeting (Council 3)

Meeting Held on October 21, 2016

Councilor, 6, woman: We – as a municipal council – should be concerned about a problem. What I have observed is the increase in cannabis use in school facilities. If you go out and look around, what you will see is that there are not only boys but girls as well … because of this, I will invite the municipal council, the municipal police. What we can do is to create a group that will take this problem seriously. We have a problem that I consider very important, and with fatal consequences for the new generation. We should think how we as councilors can bring together the community and people who deal with order to work on this issue. My proposal

is that the municipal council establishes a working group that coordinates activities and monitors law enforcement institutions. The municipal police should increase the number of police officers who deal with this problem. This is my proposal and I stand firm to it.

[…]

Chairperson, man: Any other discussion from the council?

[…]

Citizen, 3, woman: […] I have submitted a request to the municipality […] five months ago. I am a citizen as well. I have been sick for four years. I have been severely sick. I am the head of household, I have kids, and I demand from the municipal council. I have sent a letter to the municipality. I have addressed it to the head of the council and you – the municipality. The letter was returned to me by the director. You did not give me a house; the house was not given to me. Not only do I not have the house, but my house was taken without giving me any money. Now, I have come here to ask for help, to help me from municipal taxes and to tell me how long it is going to take. Thank you! Or, you tell me that as a government we can't help you and let us die. I demand that the law is enforced for me as well because of the situation in which I am in. I want help and I am saying help for bread. I don't have any money to pay for the house and I am going to be evicted from the house. I died, I don't know where to go. The bill is due, and no one cares if I am dead or alive. The thing that you care about are investments: where we will invest, where we will invest.

Councilor, 6, woman: […] we have spoken together about this and many times. You benefit the disability entitlement, according to the Albanian law. You're right. Now, where does the problem of this lady lie? The lady has benefited social housing […]. She needs financial aid. If we – as a municipal council – give her 10 thousand new lek, she will have 100 thousand new lek per year. If this municipality does not have the will and the municipal council says that we don't have the right to do it, we don't have financial resources to help, we can reach the General Directorate of the Social Service and the General Directorate can address it to the Prime Minister's Office and allocate a public fund for special issues. If the municipal council does not have enough funds to help, we can address this issue to the social service, and this is the only way to help this lady, if there is good will. The letter has a deadline and you – as the head of the council – know that letters that come from citizens should be addressed in commissions because citizens write letters and do not get any response. We should be more attentive because I am not a new councilor.

Councilor, 1, man: Chairperson, the lady is in a difficult situation. She has been sick for many years. It must be said that we express good will and because she does not have financial opportunities – now we are talking about legal procedures – at least as regards financial aspects, it should be voted by the council. The lady wants help today and I think that because this situation is a special case – because it is not the first time that she is asking for help from the municipality because she has many problems. I think that the council should consider the possibilities that exist to provide quick help to overcome this situation […]. The lady needs help today and I propose that next month, in this meeting, we help her, whatever the municipality can because the situation is alarming. This doesn't have anything to do with parties. There is only one party here. This is my suggestion and I think that all councilors can give their contribution.

Citizen, 3, woman: Sorry, one more second! [interrupted]

Chairperson, man: We take the issue to the commission of the municipal council for socio-economic issues and the responsible directorate of the municipality.

Citizen, 3, woman: I thank you chairperson for solving my problem. God bless you! Thank you very much!