

Political leadership as a gendered concept.

How does it apply to reality?

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Leadership is considered to be an important prerequisite for getting to and for staying in power. Leadership, however, is a gendered concept. Political leadership is very much associated with the "great man model of leadership" characterized by traits and qualities that are usually ascribed to men. These associations are prevalent among voters, in the media as well as among politicians themselves. Women, on the other hand, are said to follow a different and "feminine" style of leadership which is supposed to be more cooperative and consensus-oriented than men's style of leadership.

The gendered concept of leadership may also be one of the reasons why it is regarded as being more difficult for women to get to power than to stay in power. In election campaigns and mostly confronted with male competitors, female candidates have to juggle between contradictory social expectations, being tough enough for the job of a leader and at the same time demonstrate traits that are regarded as feminine.

During the last years, more and more women made it to top positions in politics worldwide thus providing for an increasing number of cases for studying the allegedly female style of leadership. This paper takes up two of these cases, the German chancellor Angela Merkel and the president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet. Both women reached the top post almost at the same time (2005/2006) and have since been re-elected. Both came into office by their own efforts and not because of any family background. Both were the first women to hold the top executive position in their country. Both had to do with male competitors during the campaign.

The paper will first analyze and then compare the leadership style of both women. The different political environment of Bachelet and Merkel, a presidential system with a dominant president in Chile and a parliamentary system with a dominant prime

minister (chancellor) in Germany, allow to take into account structural factors (executive power) that influence the leadership style of top politicians. The comparison of the two female top politicians shows that institutional structures exert a major influence on the style of leaders. Their individual personality also plays a role, and both seem to superimpose the influence of gender on leadership styles.

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