

ROOT OF CONFLICT

Root of Conflict Podcast

Episode: The Wars of Queens

featuring

Oeindrila Dube, Philip K. Pearson Professor of Global Conflict Studies, Harris School of Public Policy

interviewed by

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Full Transcript

U3CP Introducer: Hi, my name is Rachel Deck and you're listening to University of Chicago Public Policy Podcast.

Aishwarya Raje and Mwangi Thuita: You're listening to Root of Conflict, a podcast about violent conflict around the world and the people, societies and policy issues it affects. You'll hear from experts and practitioners can conduct research, implement programs and use data analysis to address some of the most pressing challenges facing our world. Root of Conflict is produced by UC3P, in collaboration with the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflict, a research institute housed within the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago.

Oeindrila Dube: Some queens, especially single queens found themselves attacked to a greater degree. When Elizabeth was ruling England, King Phillip II of Spain thought he would be easily unseating her and restoring Catholicism to England.

Recording of Queen Elizabeth: Tell Phillip, I fear neither him nor his priest nor his armies.

Oeindrila Dube: But then the war of the Spanish Armada suggested history would take a different course.

Recording of Queen Elizabeth: Tell him if he wants to shake his little fist at us, we're ready to get him such a bite, he'll wish he'd get his hand in his pocket.

Oeindrila Dube: So, Phillip had at the time amassed what was the greatest fleet ever, 130 ships.

Recording of King Philip: There is some wind coming, Madame, that will sweep away your pride.

Oeindrila Dube: Despite this, Elizabeth outmaneuvered him.

Recording of Queen Elizabeth: I, too, can command the wind, sir! I have a hurricane in me that will strip Spain bare if you dare to try me!

Oeindrila Dube: The perception that the queen would be easy to unseat may have led other monarchs to attack them.

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Aishwarya Raje: The story of Queen Elizabeth is just one example in European history of how female leaders were no less likely to engage in warfare than their male counterparts. In fact, as we'll soon discover, the research shows that women leaders in this period of history were more likely to go to war than male leaders. My name is Aishwarya Raje and in this episode of Root of Conflict, I spoke with Dr. Oeindrila Dube, the Phillip K Pearson Professor of Global Conflict Studies here at the Harris School of Public Policy. Professor Dube recently co-authored a paper titled Queens, which examines the question of whether states led by women are more or less prone to conflict than states led by men. Professor Dube walks us through the empirical approaches used in this research, as well as how to interpret these findings within the broader context of the study of gender and conflict. Professor Dube, thank you so much for joining us.

Oeindrila Dube: Thank you for having me.

Aishwarya Raje: So, to start off, what led you to do this research specifically? What led you to want to answer the question of whether states experienced more peace under female leadership versus male leadership?

Oeindrila Dube: I was actually inspired by the work of Esther Duflo who received the Nobel Prize in Economics this year. She had done some work with co-authors that showed that when there are female leaders, in a development context, you actually end up getting different policies. So, she was looking in the context of India and she was looking at Indian villages that were ruled by female *pradhans* and finding that when you had female leadership, you had a different set of outcomes than when you had male leaders. I thought this was fascinating. And I started thinking a lot about whether this could be applied to the context of conflict.

Would we observe that areas led by women actually display different conflict behavior than areas led by men? As I started thinking about this, I realized this is a question that has to be answered at a different level than a village. It has to be really examined at the national level because most conflict policy in a broad sense is set at that level. That in turn led me to the challenge of thinking about how would you identify a causal effect of female leadership on war. Because women tend to come to rule during certain time periods or electorates that are willing to elect them into office, might have certain views that also influence conflict. So, it seemed challenging to disentangle this in the modern-day era. This is what actually led me to look in the historical context where I thought conditions of hereditary succession would actually enable us to come up with a credible answer to this question of whether female leadership affects war.

Aishwarya Raje: And just given the popular notion that women are inherently less violent than men and the women led states are bound to experience more peace and prosperity, were you surprised by your own findings that show that having a female leader increased the chance of going to war by 39 percentage points during this almost 450-year time period in European history you examined?

Oeindrila Dube: I thought it would be a fascinating question to answer precisely because so many leading thought makers of our time have made very strong claims that female leaders will be more conciliatory than male leaders. Francis Fukuyama has even said that the recent period of democratic peace between the world's developed countries can be attributed to female leadership. Steven Pinker has written that men are responsible for all the wars and genocides in the world. When I read these claims, it really reinforced my desire to want to answer this question. And I suspected that the answer we would find is not necessarily one that female leadership leads to peace.

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I thought we might find there's no difference. In that regard, I was surprised to see that the effect actually goes in the opposite direction and that states led by women historically in the context of Europe found themselves participating in wars 39 percentage points more as you highlighted.

Aishwarya Raje: And it would be great if you could just walk us through some of the main variables that you used in your statistical analysis, as you went through this research. I know one of them was, you controlled for the number of siblings that previous monarchs had, and you also, had the, the firstborn male variable. I mean, how did some of those factors and some of those variables contribute to your overall finding?

Oeindrila Dube: Yeah. Let me give you a bit of an overview of the approach that we used for the analysis. So, I mentioned earlier that we focused on Europe under conditions of hereditary succession. And we did that because essentially hereditary succession under those conditions, it was largely accidents of birth that would determine who came to power. Specifically, if the previous monarchs happened to have a firstborn child who was male, you were much more likely to get a king the next period. Conversely, if they had a first-born child who happened to be female, you were much more likely to get a queen in the next period. If the previous monarchs had a sister to whom the throne could pass, you were also more likely to get a queen the next period. Notice that these forces of gender, such as whether the previous monarchs happened to have a firstborn child who was male, are largely determined by nature, they're as good as random. So, in essence, during this period, history gave us a series of natural experiments that we could exploit.

So, how did we exploit this natural experiment? Well, we actually used these two gender forces, whether the previous monarchs had a firstborn child who was male, and whether they had a sister, as instruments for whether or not a woman was in power. So, this gave us exogenous variation that we could use, in instrumental variables framework, to look at the causal effect of female leadership on war. We also included other control variables. For example, we included polity fixed effects, which meant we were basically looking within a particular polity like within Spain or within England and looking at time periods in which, within that polity, there was a female leader versus a male leader. So, this takes care of a lot of potential confounds by controlling for any time-invariant features of a polity that may happen to be correlated with conflict outcomes. We also control for decade-fixed effects because there's just decades where conflict happened to be higher.

And we also controlled for the number of total siblings that the previous monarchs had. This is primarily motivated by the use of the sibling instrument. Notice that you might be worried that the chances of a previous monarch having a sister may be higher if two periods ago, those monarchs had a whole pile of children. And so, there is a higher chance of having one of them be female. Plus, then you would get from the angle of this period, a whole bunch of aunts and uncles who might also be duking it out for the throne, fighting over the throne. This would create the worry, just that the presence of all of those other types of aunts and uncles running around would itself create fights over succession. So, we wanted to control out for that effect. And we did that by controlling for the presence of these aunts and uncles.

Aishwarya Raje: In addition to these controls, you also had to make sure that you would address potential small sample bias in this experiment, especially because you are looking at 29 Queens over this period. So, can you talk briefly about some of the methods that you use to reconcile that?

Oeindrila Dube: Absolutely. So, when we put this data together there was no pre-existing data, the track to the genealogy of all the polities from 1480 to 1913, which is the time period in which we were working. And that also considered the genealogy of all these polities, as well as the extent of war they experienced. So, we put all of this data together. We actually coded Wright's epic book, *A Study of War*, and matched all of that to the genealogy data to come up with our sample. So, in the sample, we have 18 polities that have at least once had

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a queen historically, but we're able to track all of these 18 polities for the entire time period that they were in existence.

So, we get a very long sample of 3,586 polity year observations. And we use all the years of data, but we are looking at time periods in which a queen is ruling versus a king is ruling. So, that's the overarching view of our sample. Now within these 18 polities, there are 193 distinct reigns of monarchs, distinct sets of rulers who are willing at a given point in time. And 18% of them, or 34 of these reigns are ruled by queens. And within those 34 reigns, there are 29 distinct queens as you highlight. So, this is not a large sample. So, what are the ways in which we actually address this small sample issue? We have two approaches. The first is we want to make sure that there's no one outlier queen who is very aggressive, who is driving the entire effect. So, we take a series of steps to look at this.

We drop each polity one at a time. Then we drop each queen one at a time. Then we drop two randomly chosen queen, two at a time. And we verify that none of the estimates are sensitive to any particular outlier. That's one approach. The other approach is anytime you have small number of polities, like in our case, we have 18 polities, and we want to essentially make sure we're getting inference right, by doing something called clustering our standard errors on the level of the polity, because in general, we think the extent of war is going to be correlated over time within a polity. and we want to control for that effect when we're doing inference. So, we cluster our standard errors at the level of the polity, but anytime you have very few clusters – in our case, we have 18 clusters and that's smaller than 40 – and if you have a smaller than 40 clusters, you can undertake a procedure called the wild bootstrap procedure for the standard errors, where it's essentially as if you're resampling your data over and over again. And using this adjustment, we are able to show that the effects remain in place after appropriately using this wild bootstrap procedure. So, that's the other way in which we address the small sample bias that can affect inference.

Aishwarya Rajee: So, in addition to that, I would imagine when you're doing these very robust statistical analysis, when you're studying something like gender dynamics within political structures, you would also have to take into account factors like social norms and discrimination against women. How, as a researcher, are there any challenges that you face and taking into account these very important factors that aren't necessarily as quantifiable as some of variables that you just mentioned?

Oeindrila Dube: Yeah. I think in our case, social norms played a big role in the story that we were telling. And even though they are, as you highlight, very difficult to measure directly, we looked for patterns in the data to tell us something about the norms and the gender norms of the time. So, as an example, when we first saw that there are effects on queens participating in wars more, what we immediately recognized was this was in a time period when based on gender norms, a lot of people perceived women to be very weak rulers, and that created the possibility that the war participation may have arisen because they were actually being attacked by others rather than going on the attack. So, this led us to actually look separately at participation in wars, in which queens were attacking versus getting attacked. And when we looked at this outcome, we saw that on average women were actually participating in wars as attackers.

And there was actually no significant difference in the rates at which women were getting attacked relative to men. And we think this countered the idea that on average women were getting attacked more, but at the same time, we did uncover interesting nuance based on the marital status of the monarch. So, when we desegregated further, what we saw is single queens, that is queens who are not married during their reign, did actually get attacked more than single kings. And so, we thought this was consistent with the idea that single queens in particular may have been perceived as weak by others and therefore attacked more. But on the flip side, when

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we looked at the tendency to attack, we saw that married queens actually attacked more than married kings or, and single kings, which of course led us to wonder why would that be the case?

Why would married Queens go on the attack more? We dug into this. And what we found in terms of our exposition also had to do with the role of gender norms. What we found is that married queens did something married kings were less inclined to do. They often put their spouses in charge of official positions and key aspects of governance, which boosted the capacity of their reigns. And they utilized this greater capacity in order to pursue more aggressive war policies. On the flip side, perhaps because of gender norms of the times, married kings were not very inclined to put their wives in charge of official governance positions. As a result, they had lower capacity in their reigns. And this could explain the difference between the rates of aggressive war participation, especially amongst married queens relative to married kings.

Aishwarya Raje: For me, this was probably the most fascinating area of your research. You were looking at Europe specifically from 1480 to 1913, as we mentioned, which was a time period where quote, unquote, winning a war was mostly correspondent to gaining territory. And the research that you conducted shows that not only were female monarchs more likely to go to war than male monarchs, but there were also less likely to lose territory in the wars that they participated in, meaning they were more likely to be victorious in these conflicts. And I think there are a couple ways to interpret this, but what do you make of this piece of research?

Oeindrila Dube: Yeah, So, we were finding that women were participating more in wars and more as attackers. So, it was natural to wonder, were they better off on account of it? And we didn't find anywhere an existing coding of what it meant to win the war. No one had coded, this was the winner. This was the loser. So, we decided to look at territorial gain as a proxy. And as you highlight, what we find is that queens were more likely to experience territorial gain relative to kings. Not only that, but we also, found that queens were no more likely to face internal revolt. They didn't face higher risks of civil war. Their reigns were not shorter. They were no more likely to be assassinated, which is all part and parcel of an account that they were not worse off, and if anything, experienced territorial gain. Now you might wonder, how does the territorial gain square with the finding that some queens, especially single Queens found themselves attacked to a greater degree? So, here I think an anecdotal account is actually quite useful. So, the anecdote that I would like to share about this is the case of Queen Elizabeth.

When Queen Elizabeth was ruling England, King Phillip II of Spain thought he would be easily unseating her and restoring Catholicism to England. But then the war of the Spanish Armada suggested history would take a different course. So, Phillip had at the time amassed what was the greatest fleet ever, 130 ships. Despite this Elizabeth outmaneuvered him. The armada had set sail for England and was going to the Port of Calais. And the British sent in eight fire ships that were ships ablaze. And these fire ships caused chaos. The Spanish ships tried to cut their sails and run in the process. They collided with one another. And the next day they faced a fierce naval battle with the English, in which the English pioneered all these new techniques, like how to conduct a bombardment from afar without having to board the ships.

It was a total victory for the English and a disaster for the Spaniards. Only 67 of the 130 ships made it back to Spain. Only 10,000 of the 30,000 sailors made it back. And this launched England into a period of naval supremacy for hundreds of years to come. So, what we draw from this is that sometimes the perception that the queen would be easy to unseat may have led other monarchs to attack them, but they ultimately prove victorious. And this is consistent with why they didn't lose territory. If anything, they gained it.

Aishwarya: Do you feel like this research could speak more broadly to the causes of conflict? And I know you in the paper, it very specifically says, this is not a commentary on whether or not women are inherently more

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or less violent than men, but how much of the roots of conflict are the causes of conflict? Do you feel, based on this research, it's solely based on individualistic tendencies of the leader, versus maybe internal struggles and turmoil, or is it just a combination of two?

Oeindrila Dube: I think surely both play a role. A lot of my other research has looked at how broad-based conditions such as economic conditions can lead to conflict. But I think what this research highlights is that there is room for leaders of certain types to play a role, both in terms of how they conduct their leadership and how they structure their reigns and how they structure the way in which they rule. These factors can actually play a role in terms of decisions to be aggressive, and this can also lead to an effect on conflict. So, I would say that the circumstances matter, but so does leadership and that's part of what this research highlights.

Aishwarya Raje: I think the natural reaction for anyone who has read this Queens paper would be to want to apply the findings to a modern day context, and to see if it's true that in modern day, our female leader is also statistically more likely to engage in war than male leaders. And in the paper, you've cautioned against making that direct connection because just the face of international warfare has changed so much in the past century, and because a lot of current or more modern female leaders are democratically elected – they're not necessarily selected as leaders through familial succession – but you do mention that there is still a positive relationship between female executives and power and more recent conflicts in modern democracies. So, can you speak a bit more to the potential modern-day applications of your findings?

Oeindrila Dube: Sure. So, the findings that you're referencing of the positive correlation in the modern-day era is actually worked on by Koch and Fulton, who show that for the sample of the developed democracies in the post-1970 period, when you have a female executive, you actually have greater spending on the military and you have more participation in conflict behavior. Now there again haven't been too many female executives in that period, so, we have to be careful in terms of drawing too much from that correlation, but certainly that same correlation is there in the modern period as what we observed historically. So, it certainly doesn't seem like the existing evidence for the modern period is inconsistent with what we're finding. And I think the applicability of what we're finding, goes back to what you said about how my takeaway from this isn't a statement about the inherent violent tendencies of one gender over the other. My takeaway from this is even if men as individuals are more aggressive in certain settings, or even have more violent proclivities, when it comes to leadership and the state, leaders do what is best for their country as a whole and policies aren't necessarily set based on one's own individualistic, genetic tendencies. A female leader will consider what the consequences of conflict are for her state as a whole and make decisions accordingly in the same ways that male leaders might.

And to the extent that we see differences emerging in the rates at which leaders are engaging in conflict, they have more to do with the approach they take to organizing their reign and perhaps in the modern day to organizing their cabinet and who they bring into power and how they structure the way in which their administration will function, which will then lead to different policies. So its applicability to the modern day era is that female leadership styles might be different, different organizations and organization styles may emerge as a result, and these may produce a different set of policy outcomes.

Aishwarya Raje: And just going off of that and going back to statements by Francis Fukuyama, Steven Pinker, even President Obama a few months ago said in some remarks that if we had more female leaders in the world, we would be more peaceful, better decisions would be made. So, just based on your remarks, do you feel like the gender of a leader is overemphasized in determining whether or not we can see a more peaceful world, and how do we still encourage more female leadership and more female representation without conflating between gender and more peaceful political outcomes.

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Oeindrila Dube: That's a great question. So, first let me say that there is this whole emphasis on women as peacemakers and people who claim that women should get involved in peace processes because that will inevitably produce a more peaceful outcome. My response to that is should women be involved in peace processes? Yes, they should be. They're typically underrepresented in just about every political process, including peacemaking processes. So, yes, they should be included, because women are 50% of the population and they should have equal voice in all kinds of policies, including in the ones that are geared toward producing peace.

Does that necessarily mean that women disproportionately will be favoring the peaceful outcome? That is not clear, but I think that the question of whether they should be part of the process should be separated from what the presumption is that they will be doing. Reflecting on why it is that women are 50% of the population, but much smaller fraction of world leaders, it's possible that part of the reason could be because of this overly simplistic view that women may not be appropriately aggressive as world leaders. During the last presidential election, you had many statements by-then candidate Trump claiming Hillary Clinton was weak, that she would be weak as president. These kinds of statements, these kinds of presumptions may create hesitation in electing female leaders to office. But if we look at the evidence, we do not think that we see any evidence suggesting that women will be overly conciliatory and that the policies they set will therefore inhibit or hurt the development of their state.

Aishwarya Raje: My final question is simply, what do you hope to see as the next chapter or the next frontier of research on gender and conflict? What do you think are some questions that still need to be answered?

Oeindrila Dube: Two come to mind. I think it would be interesting to see a kind of micro, modern day analog to the work that we've done by seeing if mayors who are elected to municipal governments end up experiencing or putting into place different types of policies around crime. And therefore, if there ultimately are any effects on things related to crime and violence, this would be a way of building on what we've done historically at a macro setting and bringing it into a kind of modern-day micro chapter. So, I hope some work comes out that is able to speak to that. I would also be really interested in this question of whether peace processes end up producing systematically different outcomes with the participation of different types of leaders including female leaders. I do think it's a fascinating question, and I think we would have a lot to learn from an analysis that would look at that head-on and look at that directly.

Aishwarya Raje: Great. Professor, thank you so much for your time.

Oeindrila Dube: Thank you.

Aishwarya Raje: Thank you. Thank you for listening to this episode of Root of Conflict, featuring Professor Oeindrila Dube. Special thanks to Mwangi Thuita for producing this episode and UC3P and the Pearson Institute for their continued support, the series for more information on the Pearson Institute's research and events, visit thepearsoninstitute.org and follow them on Twitter.