

LIVING HISTORY: THE CONTINUING EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM ON WOMEN'S LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATION CROSS-NATIONALLY

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ABSTRACT

Across many parts of the world, colonial domination profoundly altered men and women's relative power. But research has not yet empirically investigated the legacy of colonialism for women's political representation today. In this paper, I use multivariate regression analysis to examine the continuing effect of colonial ties on the degree of gender equality in 103 national legislatures. These countries have histories of domination or control by one of five regimes: Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. I find that the current levels of women's parliamentary representation vary systematically across the colonies of different regimes. Those countries with the lowest levels of female access to power are the former colonies of the imperial powers with the fewest women in parliament. Likewise, the European powers with the highest levels of gender equality in their national legislatures have translated this success to their former dependencies. While colonialism may now be a part of history, colonial linkages remain important to women's representation in national legislatures today.