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## *The Intersection of Gender and Minority Status in National Legislatures: The Minority Women Legislative Index*

To date, we are unaware to what extent gains in women's legislative representation have reached minority women. To facilitate cross-national research on minority women in politics, I present and explore new cross-national data on the election of women and men from 431 ethnic, racial, and religious groups to national legislatures in 81 countries between 2005 and 2007. I create a new measure scoring countries by minority women's representation relative to their share of the population—the Minority Women Legislative Index (MWLI). Descriptive analyses show minority women to be substantially underrepresented in national legislatures overall but their level of exclusion varies geographically.

Between 1960 and 2010, the representation of women in national legislatures increased worldwide, on average, by more than fourfold (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2010; Paxton, Hughes, and Green 2006). Women's representation in national legislatures rose in all regions of the globe, at all levels of economic development, and in all types of political systems (Paxton and Hughes 2013). Yet, within countries, women are far from a monolithic group. Differences such as race, ethnicity, and religion not only impact women's identities and interests, but form intersecting social hierarchies that shape women's access to power (Glenn 1999; McCall 2001; Thornton Dill and Zambrana 2009; Weber 2001). It is important to consider, therefore, the extent to which the remarkable political gains achieved by women across the globe in recent decades have included women from racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups.<sup>1</sup>

Incorporating minority women into politics may be necessary to ensure that minority women's interests are represented (Crenshaw 1994). Although representatives of politically marginalized communities often claim to represent all constituents, including those with subordinate identities, these claims may lack follow-through (Strolovitch 2007). Furthermore, minority women have distinct policy interests and priorities

that may not be effectively represented by either majority women or minority men (e.g., Barrett 1997; Bratton, Haynie, and Reingold 2007; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2011). If minority women are excluded from politics, policies designed to benefit women or minority groups may fail to address minority women's interests (Crenshaw 1994; Hancock 2007a). In some cases, empowering minority men without including women may even lead to policies that contribute to gender stratification within marginalized groups (Okin 1999).

Minority women's inclusion in political institutions should produce a range of benefits. For example, recent research suggests that minority women may be even more effective advocates for the rights and interests of minority groups than minority men (Fraga et al. 2005). Increasing the political representation of minority women may also have important symbolic effects. For marginalized groups, legislative representation may positively affect the self-esteem and aspirations of group members (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Guinier 1989; Johnson, Kabuchu, and Kayonga 2003). Greater political representation of marginalized groups may also alter perceptions about those groups in wider society. As Paxton explains, "[P]olitical position carries highly visible status and prestige" (1997, 442). And the presence of subordinated groups in these positions enhances the view that these groups are "fit to rule" (Mansbridge 1999). In sum, the inclusion of minority women into national-level politics could alter policymaking, improve minority women's self-worth and aspirations, and transform wider societal beliefs about minority women.

Understanding within-group variation in women's empowerment may also have important implications for scholarship. If, for example, minority women are largely excluded from power around the world, scholars must reassess the generalizability of existing findings. That is, researchers will need to acknowledge that when we speak about the factors that increase the political representation of "women," who we really are talking about is "majority women." Alternatively, if barriers such as racism, ethnic prejudice, or religious intolerance inhibit women's political representation in some contexts but not in others, models predicting variation in the legislative outcomes of women may be underspecified. Researchers may need to include measures like ethnic or religious heterogeneity in models predicting the political representation of "women."

Despite the importance of understanding the political representation of minority women, the topic has received little empirical attention outside of countries like the United States and Canada (e.g., Black 2000; Garcia Bedolla, Tate, and Wong 2005; Scola 2006; Smooth 2001). Recent gender-and-politics scholarship has noted this gap in the literature

(Weldon 2006). Yet, cross-national research on minority women in politics faces numerous empirical challenges. Similar to other feminist quantitative political research (Apodaca 2009), one central problem is a lack of adequate data. Organizations collecting data on women in parliaments worldwide aggregate women's representation as a group. And to date, there is no complete resource for cross-national data on the political representation of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. Even if raw data were available, measuring minority women's political incorporation is far from straightforward. Unlike studying women, who make up a fairly consistent share of the population across countries, the size of minority female populations worldwide varies considerably. Furthermore, analyzing groups at the intersection of gender and minority status creates additional obstacles to straightforward analysis. Should minority women's political representation be assessed relative to majority women, to minority men, or to their share of the population?

In this article, I seek to overcome these obstacles to cross-national research on minority women in politics. I collect new data on the election of women and men from 431 ethnic, racial, and religious groups in the national legislatures of 81 democratic and semidemocratic countries between 2005 and 2007. Using these new data, I first assess the degree to which increases in women's political representation across the globe have been limited to women from majority racial, ethnic, and religious groups. Putting minority women at the center of the analysis, I develop a measure that scores countries by the degree to which minority women are included in the national legislature relative to their share of the population, a measure I label the Minority Women Legislative Index (MWLI). I also compare minority women's success gaining descriptive representation to their minority-male and majority-female counterparts. Finally, I use descriptive and bivariate analysis to investigate regional variation and consider how various measures of descriptive representation relate to one another.

I draw several conclusions from the analyses presented. The new measure I put forth, the Minority Women Legislative Index (MWLI), suggests that minority women around the world are substantially underrepresented in national legislatures compared to their share of the population. In most countries, minority women's election occurs in small numbers or not at all. Yet, closer examination reveals variation in minority women's descriptive representation, both geographically and compared to other marginalized groups. I find that although minority women occupy a greater share of their respective group's seats than majority women, these numbers are inflated by women's higher levels of representation within some of the most numerically disadvantaged groups.

Indeed, as levels of minority representation increase nationally, female representation relative to minority men decreases. An added benefit of the analysis is that I present the first visual map of minority women's legislative representation worldwide. Before turning to these analyses, I first discuss differences in political representation among women we might expect to find and then some of the complexities associated with cross-national research on minority women in national legislatures.

### **Differences in Political Representation among Women: What to Expect**

Gender discrimination and restrictive gender roles are barriers women face because they are women. Yet, women also encounter political obstacles rooted in other identities, such as racism, ethnic prejudice, and religious intolerance. That minority women's power may be undermined through multiple channels has been articulated by feminists worldwide, who use terminology like "double burden," "double whammy," "double jeopardy," and "double disadvantage" (Beale 1979; Black 2000; Yuval-Davis 2006). As these terms suggest, the multiple ways minority women experience oppression may mean they are represented in politics at levels lower than majority women.

Yet, minority women may not be universally underrepresented in politics. Indeed, since the 1970s, women of color in the United States have typically outperformed majority women as a share of their group seats at all levels of government, conceptualized as a "puzzle of success" (Darcy and Hadley 1988, 629; see also Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Montoya, Hardy-Fanta, and Garcia 2000; Scola 2006; Takash 1993). For example, at the state legislative level in 2004, women of color held nearly 33% of seats held by their respective groups compared to White women who held 22% of legislative seats held by Whites, a gap that was even wider in the U.S. Congress the same year (CAWP 2012; Scola 2006).

A third possibility is that the political representation of minority women across countries is neither less than nor greater than minority women's in a consistent fashion. Theories of intersectionality, which provide the most widely used framework for understanding the experiences and outcomes of minority women today, see gender as intersecting with race, ethnicity, religion, and other social structures in complex ways (Crenshaw 1989; Glenn 1999; Hancock 2007a; McCall 2001; Nash 2008; Thornton Dill and Zambrana 2009; Weber 2001). Intersectionality scholars argue that one cannot simply add together the disadvantages that come with being a woman to those that come with being a minority to understand the outcomes of minority women (e.g., Crenshaw 1989;

Hancock 2007b). In some cases or contexts, forces of oppression may compound or multiply one another, whereas in other situations minority women may experience advantages relative to majority women and/or minority men. Empirical research across U.S. states also supports this perspective, finding that minority women's legislative representation varies widely (Scola 2006).

Overall, theory and previous scholarship suggest that across the globe minority women could be represented in politics at levels that are lower, higher, or just different than majority women. But empirical research has yet to adjudicate among these competing perspectives. Cross-national scholarship on women's legislative representation overwhelmingly treats women as a single collective (e.g., Fallon, Swiss, and Viterna 2012; Hughes 2009; Paxton 1997; Reynolds 1999), and scholarship on minority women's legislative outcomes is typically carried out as single-country studies, most often in the United States (e.g., Garcia et al. 2008; Fraga et al. 2005; Prindeville and Bretting 1998; Smooth 2006; but see Holmsten, Moser, and Slosar 2010; Hughes 2011). One reason is that, to date, cross-national measures of minority women's political representation have been unavailable. In the next section, I briefly introduce four different ways of assessing minority women's representation in national legislatures.

### **Measuring Minority Women's Political Representation**

Women's share of seats in the national legislature is a widely used measure of women's status around the world, utilized by academics, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations alike. One way to understand where minority women fit into the picture is to subdivide women's legislative representation by majority/minority status (e.g., Black and Lakhani 1997). Minority women's share of total legislative seats is a straightforward measure that can be calculated for any group or set of groups and easily lends itself to tackling a more basic question—whether minority women are represented in a given country at all. But, minority women's share of all seats is less useful for drawing comparisons between majority and minority women, who often comprise markedly different shares of the population.

Scholars interested in women's representation, in particular, have thus tended to use an alternative measure—women's representation as a share of their group's seats in the legislature. Although explicitly a measure of women's success relative to men's, these statistics are traditionally employed to compare electoral outcomes across groups of women (e.g., Darcy and Hadley 1998; Scola 2006). But, measures of

women's success relative to male group members may be less informative for groups that comprise only a small fraction of a country's population. For these small groups, relative measures are typically unstable; electing one woman or man can drastically change the outcome. Assessing relative performance also completely ignores those groups that are unrepresented, even if they are sizeable minorities. And ultimately, although women's share of group seats can be useful for making comparisons, the measure still does not directly account for differences in group size within or across countries.

To explicitly account for population size, researchers have designed a wide variety of measures to assess how proportionally seats in a legislative body are distributed (Benoit 2000). Proportionality indices most often treat political parties as the groups of interest (e.g., Gallagher 1991; Loosemore and Hanby 1971), but they are also used of late to gauge the political representation of ethnic minorities across countries (Ruedin 2009). Although not yet applied to study inequality by both gender and minority status, measures of proportionality easily lend themselves to creating summary measures of descriptive representation. Still, proportionality indices have at least one key limitation when researching marginalized groups: they are agnostic about the origins of disproportionality. That is, increasing the representation of minority groups beyond their population share creates disproportionality in the same way as does the overrepresentation of majority groups. A fourth approach, then, is to weigh the legislative representation of minority women against their share of the population—a direct assessment of how proportionally minority women are represented (Rule and Norris 1992; Welch and Herrick 1992).

Overall, each of the strategies outlined in this section can inform our understanding of legislative diversity around the world. Next, I describe the logic and methods of country and group selection, the process of data collection, and then I turn to the empirical contribution of this article, the measurement task itself.

## **Data and Methodology**

### *Sampling and Data Collection*

My aim was to collect data on the composition of national legislatures from all democratic and semidemocratic countries (Freedom House 2007; Marshall and Jagers 2007) that are recognized as independent by the United Nations and had at least a population of one-half million in 2005. In total, I identified 122 countries meeting these sampling criteria.

Of the total set, I was able to obtain data on the political representation of minority women, majority women, minority men, and majority men for 81 countries. These countries are located in the West (N = 19 of 20), Eastern Europe (N = 19 of 22), Latin America and the Caribbean (N = 16 of 21), the Middle East (N = 8 of 10), Asia (N = 12 of 17), and sub-Saharan Africa (N = 7 of 32) and represent all levels of economic development. Compared to the full sample of 122, the countries included in the analyses underrepresent sub-Saharan Africa and countries without a single majority group.

I draw on a vast array of data sources to select groups into the analysis for each country. Encyclopedic sources such as the *CIA World Factbook* provide preliminary information about the racial, ethnic, and religious make-up of different countries. I also rely on human rights reports published by the U.S. Department of State, international organizations such as Amnesty International, and the United Nations, which define marginalized groups facing discrimination and abuse worldwide. I draw on specific websites designed to profile disadvantaged groups, such as the World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples and the Minorities at Risk Project. Used together, these sources are particularly helpful in identifying groups that face discrimination or marginalization in societies around the world. A third source of information is case study and comparative research on social or political inequalities around the world. Research across a range of disciplines, including political science, sociology, anthropology, history, and linguistics, provides information about which groups in a society could be classified as “minorities.” Overall, this research relies on the labor of a wide range of scholars and researchers who compiled and published a broad range of studies worldwide.

In a single country, the term “minority” could include indigenous peoples, racial minorities, as well as the descendants of specific immigrant populations. I code majority and minority groups by going through the following three steps: First, I determine which social cleavages (e.g., racial/ethnic, religious, linguistic) in a country are most important. I break down the population into categories based on the most important social cleavage(s) in each country. Second, I research other potential minorities in each country. As minorities are added to the list of groups, other categories are augmented to ensure that the groups are mutually exclusive. Third, I verify that groups that are numerically small are not, in fact, dominant groups. At the same time, I check that larger-sized groups are not, in fact, marginalized or disadvantaged. In countries with no numerical majority, I pay particular attention to context in determining which groups I code as majorities and minorities.<sup>2</sup>



In some countries, group aggregation posed a particular problem, especially in cases where scholarship exposes significant within-group differences. In the United States, for example, some researchers focus on Hispanic legislators as a single group, while other research identifies important differences across Puerto Rican-, Cuban-, Mexican-, and Portuguese-Americans. I thus again drew on country-specific sources to assist in making decisions. In the U.S. case, most sources focus on Hispanics or Latinos/as as a single group, so I analyze all Hispanics together. Notably, because data sources often rely on census data or other government statistics, differences in group aggregation may reflect country-specific differences in boundary-making and/or data-collection techniques. However, I drew heavily on human rights reports and country-specific scholarship to ensure that groups not formally recognized by governments as minorities are still included in the analyses. I also performed auxiliary analyses aggregating groups in different ways. None of the broad relationships among measures are sensitive to changes in group aggregation.

Because I relied on research to help me identify important and politically salient minority groups, I also created “other” or “remainder” categories. These categories are typically aggregates of groups that fit three criteria: (1) they must be particularly small in size, making up less than 1% of the population;<sup>3</sup> (2) during the course of data collection, they were not identified as significant minorities in the country in any data sources; and (3) there is no evidence of political mobilization at the national level. Individuals who cross racial or religious categories (e.g., biracial or multiracial individuals) also sometimes are included in the remainder. Based on these decision rules, I analyzed 431 ethnic, racial, and religious majority and minority groups. Online Appendix A presents a list of these groups, excluding “other” and “remainder” categories. Online Appendix B presents the background and logic of group comparison for one complex case, Lebanon.

From December 2005 to December 2007, I collected data on the share of national legislative seats occupied by minority women, majority women, minority men, and majority men.<sup>4</sup> For each country’s most recent election, I obtained individual-level information such as legislator names, political party, constituency, gender, and minority status whenever possible. The central source of the data is parliamentary websites, which provide at minimum legislator names, parties, and constituencies, but sometimes gender and minority status as well. Supplementary data sources include human rights reports, election websites, *Who’s Who in Leadership*, regional news outlets, and recent scholarship on minority representation. To ensure that the individual data is complete and accurate,



I cross-checked data on minority status and gender with two sources of aggregate data: the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which provides information on female parliamentary representation, and the U.S. Department of State's *Human Rights Report* (2001–2008), which often lists information on minority representation (IPU 2010; USDS 2001–2008).

A significant roadblock in this research is that for a number of countries, English-language skills are insufficient to collect the necessary data. I was successful in collecting data from countries where the dominant language is not English, such as Armenia, Burundi, Iceland, and Peru. However, parliamentary websites and regional news sources with the relevant information are sometimes only available in other languages. Therefore, I employed 17 research assistants with foreign language skills to help collect data in 14 languages other than English, including Arabic, Bulgarian, Dutch, French, German, Hindi, Kiswahili, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, and Turkish.

After collecting data on the composition of national legislatures, the next obstacle was collecting information on group size. I started with cross-national data sources such as the *CIA World Factbook* and encyclopedias, which often report official statistics from country censuses. In many cases, however, I also went directly to the country censuses so that I could aggregate the data to reflect the majority and minority categories I selected. I also drew from recent published research on minority groups, which often provides population estimates for groups lacking official population statistics. Lastly, I selectively used data from the Joshua Project, an online source of data on ethnicity and religion worldwide that is hosted by the U.S. Center for World Mission. For groups with disputed population statistics, I collected upper and lower estimates and used the average of these values. Still, it is important to acknowledge that group size is likely to be estimated with a greater degree of measurement error than other variables.

### *Measurement*

Using the data on the race, ethnicity, religion, and gender of national legislators across the 81 country sample, I construct four different kinds of measures. First, I consider variation in the share of total seats in the national legislature occupied by majority men, minority men, majority women, and minority women. Using these measures, I calculate the typical composition of national legislatures across my sample, quantifying minority women's average levels of representation relative to other groups. Second, I calculate relative measures of women's representation—women's share of seats occupied by majority groups

and by minority groups. Third, I investigate political inequalities as a function of both gender and majority/minority status. Using the Gallagher Index of Proportionality, I consider how closely the distribution of sex and minority status in the legislature matches the distribution of groups in the population. To compare legislatures to populations, I use a transformed version of the Gallagher Index of Proportionality (GIP):

$$GIP = 100 - \sqrt{\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n (P_i - S_i)^2},$$

where  $P$  is group  $i$ 's share of the population and  $S$  is group  $i$ 's share of seats in the national legislature, calculated for a total number of  $n$  groups in each country. Higher values of the GIP are associated with higher levels of proportionality—smaller differences between the distribution of the population and the distribution of seats in the legislature. I calculate the GIP for each country overall. I also calculate the ratio of proportionality among female representatives compared to proportionality among male representatives. Scores over 1 indicate that women in a country are more proportionally represented than males, whereas scores under 1 indicate that male representatives more closely reflect the distribution of different groups in the population than female legislators. Thus, I am able to assess whether male or female legislators better reflect the diversity that exists in each country.

Finally, I calculate an index that places minority women at the center of the analysis—a measure of minority women's political representation that adjusts for population share. I call this measure the Minority Women Legislative Index (MWLI), and it is calculated as follows:

$$MWLI = \frac{\%MWNL}{(MinPop/2) \times (SexRatio_{F:M})} \times 100,$$

where  $\%MWNL$  is the percentage of the national legislature filled by minority women,  $MinPop$  is minority groups' share of the general population, and  $SexRatio_{F:M}$  is the female-to-male sex ratio.<sup>5</sup> A MWLI of 100 indicates that minority women are represented in the legislature in the same proportion that they are represented in the general population. A value of 0 means that there are no minority women in the national legislature. Values in between are interpreted as the percentage towards proportional representation minority women have reached in a

particular country. So, a MWLI of 50.0 indicates that minority women are 50% of the way towards representation in the legislature at levels equal to their share of the population. Although rare, values over 100 indicate that minority women are overrepresented compared to their share of the population. Overall, the Minority Women Legislative Index is a specific measure of minority women's political representation that accounts for the distribution of sex and majority/minority status in the population. Table 1 presents this measure for all countries in the analysis, along with the election year used to create the measure.

In addition to taking account of country-level differences in measures, I discuss regional variation. Consistent with cross-national research on female legislators, I use six global regions: Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the West. I also compare measures using zero-order correlations to consider how the MWLI relates to other measures of legislative representation of majority and minority men and women.

## Results

### *Measures of Electoral Representation across Groups and World Regions*

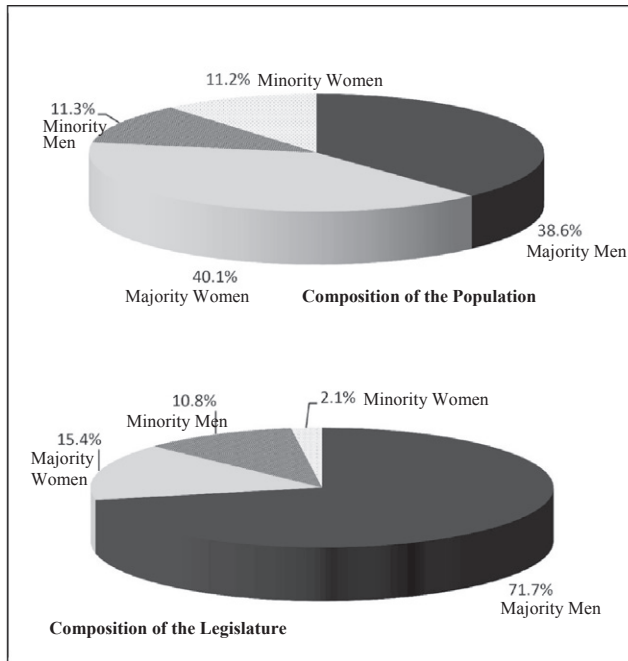
I begin by assessing the distribution of seats in the national legislature across majority men, minority men, majority women, and minority women. Figure 1 compares the composition of the average national legislature to the distribution of sex and majority/minority status in the general population for the 81 countries in my sample. The inequalities are striking. Adjusted for the sex ratio, majority men are only 39% of the typical population, but they hold 72% of seats in the average legislature. Surprisingly, on average, minority men are represented proportionally given their share of the population. Minority men typically make up around 11% of both legislative seats and of the average population. Still, there is considerable variation in the political representation of minority men around the world. For instance, in 16 countries in my sample, no minority men were elected in the year I analyze. At the other end of the spectrum, in ethnically or religiously heterogeneous countries like Lebanon, men from groups identified as "minorities" actually make up a majority of the seats in the legislature.

Women from both minority and majority groups are numerically underrepresented in national legislatures. Majority women make up roughly 40% of the typical population in my sample, but they hold only about one-third that many seats: 15%. The degree of underrepresentation

TABLE 1  
 Countries in Sample, Election Years, and  
 Minority Women Legislative Index (MWLI) across 81 Countries

Country	Year	MWLI	Country	Year	MWLI
Afghanistan	2005	55.1	Japan	2005	0.0
Albania	2005	0.0	Jordan	2003	2.4
Argentina	2005	0.0	Kuwait	2003	11.5
Armenia	2003	0.0	Kyrgyzstan	2005	0.0
Australia	2004	0.0	Latvia	2002	0.0
Austria	2002	11.7	Lebanon	2005	0.0
Bahrain	2002	0.0	Lithuania	2004	7.6
Bangladesh	2005	0.0	Malaysia	2004	16.7
Belgium	2003	34.9	Mauritius	2005	42.4
Benin	2003	7.8	Mongolia	2004	0.0
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2002	50.8	Montenegro	2006	10.8
Botswana	2004	0.0	Netherlands	2003	68.4
Brazil	2002	0.0	New Zealand	2002	40.1
Bulgaria	2005	9.7	Nicaragua	2001	0.0
Burundi	2005	232.7	Norway	2005	6.4
Canada	2006	39.5	Panama	2004	0.0
Cape Verde	2006	0.0	Paraguay	2003	0.0
Chile	2005	0.0	Peru	2001	10.5
Colombia	2006	46.2	Philippines	2004	33.9
Comoros	2004	0.0	Poland	2005	0.0
Costa Rica	2002	58.5	Portugal	2005	0.0
Croatia	2003	23.5	Rep. of Korea	2004	0.0
Cyprus	2001	0.0	Romania	2004	10.9
Czech Republic	2002	0.0	Russian Federation	1999	15.2
Denmark	2005	14.1	Serbia	2007	5.0
Ecuador	2002	11.4	Singapore	2001	28.0
El Salvador	2006	0.0	Slovakia	2006	23.3
Estonia	2003	10.6	Slovenia	2004	12.5
Ethiopia	2005	40.5	Solomon Islands	2001	0.0
Fiji	2001	12.6	Sri Lanka	2004	16.7
Finland	2003	116.4	Sweden	2002	28.1
FYR Macedonia	2006	29.4	Switzerland	2003	32.1
France	2002	12.5	Turkey	2007	9.6
Georgia	2004	0.0	United Kingdom	2005	26.4
Germany	2005	16.2	United States	2004	27.4
Greece	2004	0.0	Uruguay	2004	0.0
Guatemala	2003	3.1	Venezuela	2005	9.2
Honduras	2005	17.3	Yemen	2003	0.0
India	2004	12.0			
Ireland	2002	0.0	Mean		16.9
Israel	2003	0.0	St Dev		31.4
Italy	2006	3.9	Coef of Variation		0.5
Jamaica	2002	0.0	Min		0.0
			Max		232.7

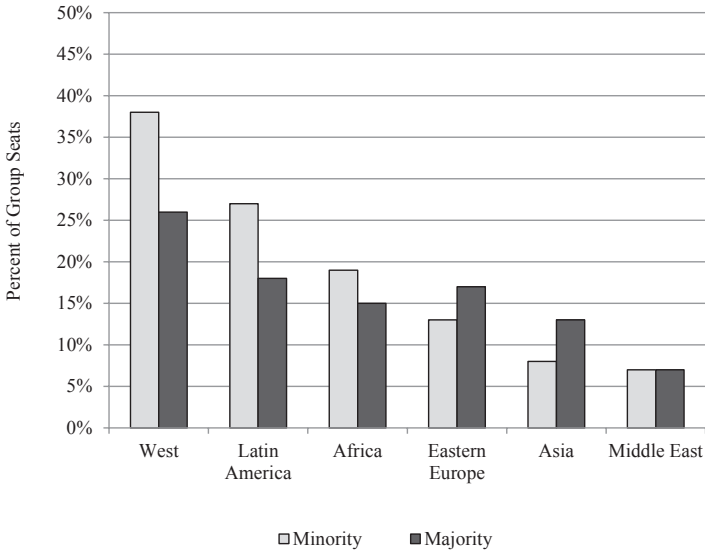
FIGURE 1  
Composition of the Average Population and Legislature,  
81 Countries



for minority women is even more severe. Minority women, 11% of the population, hold just 2% of seats in national legislatures, on average. This low average is fueled in part by a substantial number of countries with no minority women serving in the legislature. In recent elections in 21 countries, one or more male minorities were elected to the national legislatures at the same time that minority women were wholly excluded from power. Only in Austria, Costa Rica, and Norway did the opposite occur, where minority women obtained representation in the absence of any minority men. Overall, in most countries of the world, minority women's legislative presence is miniscule or absent altogether.

Although majority women outnumber minority women in absolute numbers, research based in the United States suggests that minority women may outperform majority women as a share of group seats (e.g., Scola 2006). At first look, this pattern also exists worldwide. On average, women hold 20.5% of minority group seats, while majority women hold 17.5% of majority seats. But, country-by-country analysis reveals that

FIGURE 2  
Percent Women of Majority and Minority Seats by Region,  
81 Countries



majority women outpace minority women relative to men from their groups in 41 countries, while minority women only outperform majority women by this metric in 23 countries. Furthermore, the margin of advantage for minority women is greatest in countries like Austria, Colombia, Finland, Peru, and Slovenia, where minorities hold only a small share of legislative seats. Thus, minority women only perform particularly well as women when minorities are not well represented.

I present average statistics for both majority and minority women by region in Figure 2. Both majority and minority women are generally better represented as a share of their group in the West than in other regions of the world. But, only in the West, Latin America, and Africa are minority women elected to a higher share of their groups' seats than majority women. The margin of difference between majority and minority women in the West is fairly large—38% of minority seats are occupied by women, 12% more than majority women's share of majority seats. A similar pattern is evident in Latin America. Alternatively, the largest margin of advantage for majority women appears in Asia, where majority women hold 5% more of group seats, on average, than minority women. Eastern Europe has a slightly smaller gap—only 4%. And, in the

Middle East, women from majority and minority groups are elected at similarly low levels.

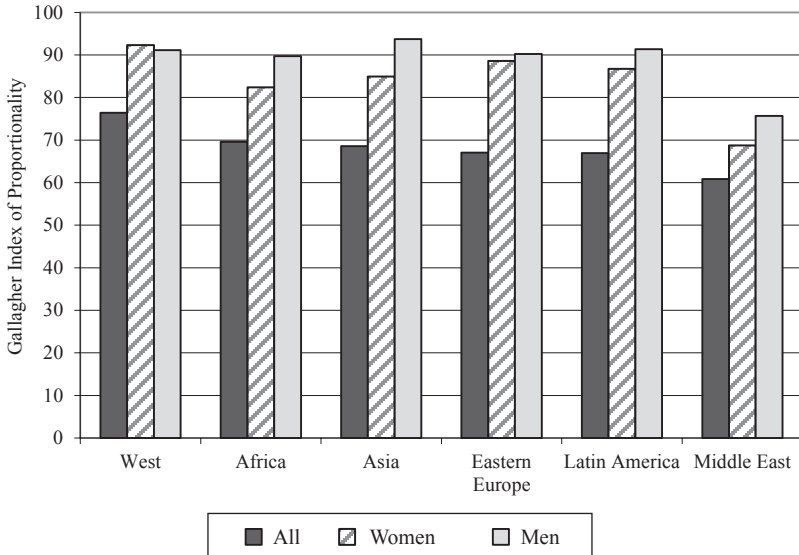
Thus far, I have presented descriptive measures that evaluate inequalities by gender and minority status separately. A different approach is to consider how these inequalities combine. In this section, I weigh how the seats in the legislature are distributed relative to the share of different groups in the general population using the Gallagher Index of Proportionality (GIP). The GIP accounts for disproportionality in legislatures arising from the underrepresentation of both women and minorities and can be interpreted as a summary measure of descriptive representation. According to the GIP, the countries with the most proportional legislatures are Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Costa Rica. On the other end of the spectrum, the most disproportional legislatures were elected in Armenia, Jordan, Yemen, and Comoros. It is noteworthy that these values are fairly similar to the ranking of countries by women's political representation. This is because most of the disproportionality in legislatures arises from gender disparities in representation. Indeed, with a GIP of 83.4, Argentina demonstrates that even countries with no minorities serving in the legislature can still have fairly high levels of proportionality if (1) the share of women in the legislature is high, and (2) the share of minorities in the population is low.

Another way to look at proportionality is to consider the relative levels of proportionality among female and male representatives. Measures of proportionality by region are displayed in Figure 3. Overall, the most proportional legislatures are in the West, and women are most proportionally represented in the West. But, men are most proportionally represented in Asia. Not surprisingly, women are not proportionally represented in the Middle East. But because of the underrepresentation of Shi'a Muslims in many Middle Eastern countries, men are not far behind women in disproportionality. Levels of proportionality among men and women are very close to one another in both the West and Eastern Europe, where the margin of difference between the two groups is less than 2.

The main limitation of the GIP, however, is that the measure is agnostic about whether disproportionality is generated from over- or underrepresentation of minority groups. That is, the representation of minority men by 5% over their share of the population will generate just as much disproportionality as their underrepresentation by 5%. Therefore, I calculate a final measure, the Minority Women's Legislative Index (MWLI), which focuses more explicitly on minority women's representation but still accounts for minority women's share of the general population.



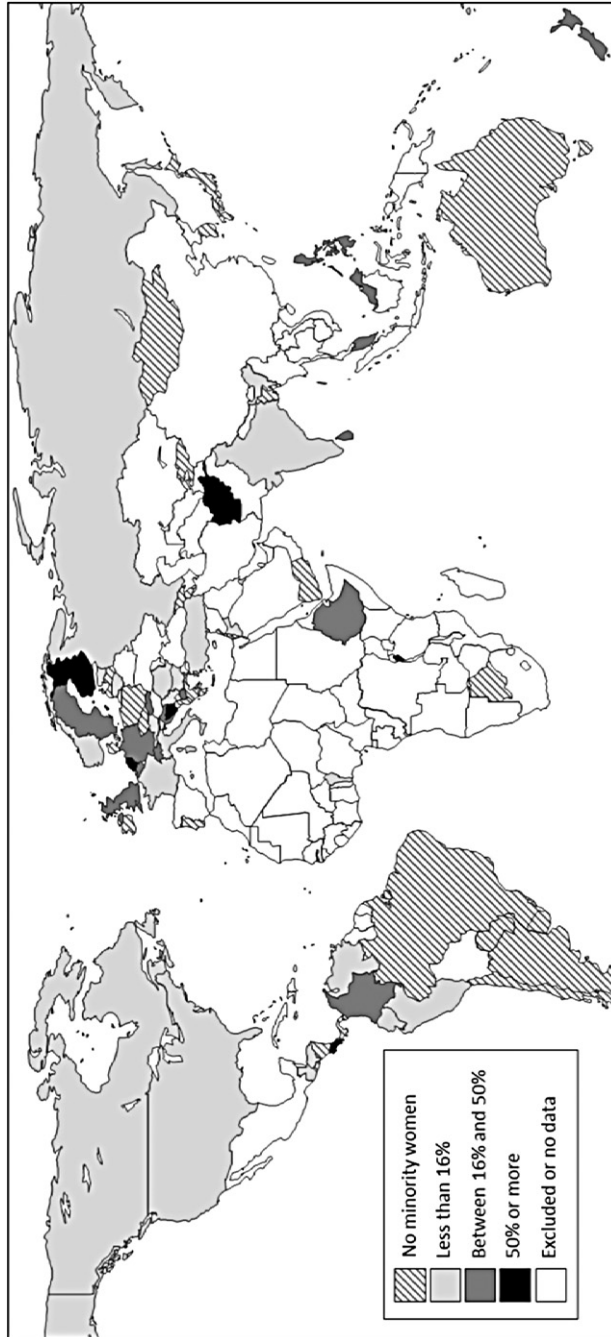
FIGURE 3  
Gallagher Index of Proportionality by Region  
for All Legislators, Among Female Legislators,  
and Among Male Legislators, 81 Countries



The Minority Women's Legislative Index (MWLI) takes the total percentage of minority women in parliament and divides that percentage by their share in the population, adjusted by the sex ratio. Figure 4 maps the MWLI scores for countries in my sample geographically. Countries with no minority women are shaded using gray diagonal lines, while countries with minority women in the national legislature are shaded in solid gray. Darker shades of gray are associated with higher MWLI scores, with scores of 50 and above shaded in black. Countries in white are missing or are excluded from the analysis based on level of democracy, country size, or sovereignty. Overall, Figure 4 demonstrates substantial variation in minority women's political power both within and across regions of the world.

The MWLI indicates that in only two countries in this study are minority women overrepresented compared to their share of the population: Burundi and Finland. In another four countries, minority women are represented at levels 50% of their share of the population or higher: Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Costa Rica, and the Netherlands. The lion's share of countries, in contrast, includes minority women in much

FIGURE 4  
Minority Women in Legislative Index by Country



smaller numbers than their share of the population. On average around the world, minority women are represented at only 16.9% of their population share.

Regionally, Africa has the highest average MWLI scores (46.2), followed by the West (24.4). Thus, in the West, minority women are, on average, about one-quarter of the way towards proportional representation. Comparing average MWLI scores, Asia (14.6), Eastern Europe (11.0), and Latin America (9.8) fall in the middle. The Middle East (2.9) has by far the lowest MWLI score—on average, minority women in Middle Eastern countries are only 2.9% of the way towards proportional representation.

### **Comparing Measures of Representation: Regional Summary and Zero-Order Correlations**

So far, I have presented a range of different measures of group representation in turn. Yet, considering these measures together paints a clearer picture of the electoral representation of women, minorities, and minority women than any single measure. Therefore, in Table 2, I summarize the multiple indicators of representation by world region. For instance, in the West, countries have fairly low levels of minority representation in absolute terms but perform well on every other measure. This pattern suggests that in the West, minority groups make up a smaller share of the population than in other regions. But, these small groups are relatively well represented. Indeed, proportionality among both male and female representatives is high relative to other regions. Majority and minority women also perform well relative to male members of their groups in Western countries. The Middle East, in contrast, is on the other end of the spectrum. Middle Eastern countries elect fairly high numbers of minority men to the national legislature in absolute terms, but the region performs poorly on all other indicators of fair representation.

On average, countries in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America fall somewhere between these two extremes. In Asia, minority men appear to be represented at substantial levels, but women's representation remains low. Still, minority women in Asia are represented in national legislatures at levels closer to their share of the population, on average, than most other regions. The pattern is quite different in Eastern Europe, where both women and minorities are represented at moderate levels, but minority women's representation lags behind. Latin America, while less successful than the West at generating proportionality and high levels of minority women's representation, follows a similar pattern of low

TABLE 2  
Comparing Measures of Representation across Regions

Region	Minority Men's % of Seats	Minority Women's % of Seats	Women's Share of Majority Seats	Women's Share of Minority Seats	Proportionality among Women	Proportionality among Men	MWLI
West	Low	Low	High	Very High	High	High	High
Eastern Europe	Medium	Low	Medium-High	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Medium-High	Low-Medium
Latin America	Low	Very Low	Medium-High	High	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Low-Medium
Africa	High	Low-Medium	Medium	Medium-High	Low	Medium-High	Very High
Asia	Medium-High	Low	Low-Medium	Low	Low-Medium	High	Medium
Middle East	Medium-High	Very Low	Low	Low	Very Low	Low	Low

absolute numbers of minority men and women alongside better performance on the other indicators. Although there are only a small number of African countries in my sample, it is notable that African countries do fairly well on all measures except for proportionality among women. This finding demonstrates one of the limitations of the GIP, since disproportionality among female legislators in Africa arises from the overrepresentation of minority women (i.e., Burundi).

Another way of understanding the larger picture of representation by gender and minority status is to consider how different measures of representation relate to one another using zero-order correlations, which I present in Table 3. Overall, the strongest correlations in the table are between the same measures for different groups. For instance, minority women's and minority men's share of seats in the legislature are strongly correlated ( $r = 0.62$ ), as are male and female proportionality scores ( $r = 0.63$ ). Majority and minority women's share of seats are also strongly related ( $r = 0.55$ ). However, there are at least a few other notable results.

Interestingly, the MWLI has a stronger relationship in the zero-order with majority women's share of seats ( $r = 0.33$ ) than with the share of the legislature occupied by minority men ( $r = 0.21$ ). Therefore, majority women's political experiences are in some ways more informative for predicting minority women's success than values related to minority men's political representation. Majority women's political outcomes are even as closely related to minority women's overall legislative success as other measures of minority women's representation. Specifically, minority women's share of seats in the legislature is similarly correlated to majority and minority women's share of group seats ( $r = 0.19$  and  $0.24$ , respectively).

That minority men and women's political representation is not necessarily a straightforward relationship is evident in the negative correlation between minority men's share of legislative seats and minority women's share of minority seats ( $r = -0.23$ ). As minority men's representation increases, minority women's share of group seats declines. Thus, increasing minority men's representation is associated with higher representation for minority women as measured by the MWLI. But, as the share of minority men increases, minority women's success relative to male members of their group decreases.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Until now, we knew very little about variation in the legislative representation of minority women across countries. Cross-national

TABLE 3  
Zero-Order Correlation of Measures of Representation

Variable	Percent Minority Men	Percent Minority Women	Women's % of Majority Seats	Women's % of Minority Seats	GIP Among Women	GIP Among Men	MWLI
Percent Minority Men	1.00	0.62***	-0.18	-0.23 <sup>†</sup>	-0.32**	-0.28*	0.21 <sup>†</sup>
Percent Minority Women	0.62***	1.00	0.19 <sup>†</sup>	0.24*	-0.06	-0.24*	0.66***
Women's % of Majority Seats	-0.18	0.19 <sup>†</sup>	1.00	0.55***	0.14	0.20 <sup>†</sup>	0.33**
Women's % of Minority Seats	-0.23 <sup>†</sup>	0.24*	0.55***	1.00	0.08	-0.07	0.44***
GIP among Women	-0.32**	-0.06	0.14	0.08	1.00	0.63***	-0.15
GIP among Men	-0.28*	-0.24*	0.20 <sup>†</sup>	-0.07	0.63***	1.00	-0.06
Minority Women Legislative Index	0.21 <sup>†</sup>	0.66***	0.33**	0.44***	-0.15	-0.06	1.00

Note: <sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed).

research on minority women in politics faces numerous challenges, one of which has been a lack of data on and measures of minority women's legislative representation. To address that gap, I drew on a wide range of scholarly sources in 14 languages and assistance from country experts to select groups and collect data on majority and minority men and women serving in national legislatures. The resulting unique dataset spans 431 groups in 81 countries. To explore the complexities and patterns in this data, I constructed a range of descriptive measures of representation. These statistics demonstrate consistent and observable patterns of minority women's legislative representation alongside important regional differences.

The results show minority women to be substantially underrepresented in national legislatures. Minority women, comprising 11% of the population, hold just 2% of seats in the average legislature. This stark inequality arises, in part, from minority women's total exclusion from power in many countries. Indeed, in almost one-quarter of the sample, minority women are not represented in the national legislature but both majority women and minority men hold seats. Emphasizing minority women's empowerment may therefore be a useful strategy for activists and others interested in advancing diversity in national legislatures.

The analyses also demonstrated, however, that minority women are not uniformly excluded from political representation. In particular, the underrepresentation of minority women is less pronounced when compared to that of majority women. Of countries where minorities and women are represented in the national legislature, minority women even hold a slightly larger share of group seats, on average. In short, the cross-national statistics provide some evidence of a "puzzle of success" for minority women outside of the United States. However, as minority representation increases, women's share of seats declines. That is, as minority groups start to look numerically more like the majority, the gap in the political representation of men and women increases. Such dynamics underscore the importance of analyzing gender and minority status together.

I also find distinct patterns in legislative inequality across world regions. Cross-regional variation in the political representation of majority men, majority women, minority men, and minority women might suggest how the origins of minority status impact minority women's representation. Compare, for example, the West and Latin America. In both the West and Latin America, minority representation is generally quite low. But, focusing only on seats held by minorities, women perform better relative to their male counterparts in the West than in Latin



America. Given the high numbers of indigenous minority groups in Latin America relative to other regions, minority women's underrepresentation relative to their male peers in Latin America may point to particular obstacles faced by indigenous women in the struggle for legislative representation. A similar insight is possible when looking at the Middle East, where majority men appear to hold disproportionate power, leading to high levels of underrepresentation for women, minorities, and minority women. Perhaps societies divided primarily along lines of religion, as in most of the Middle Eastern countries analyzed here, have weaker norms for broad political inclusion than societies oriented by other axes such as race/ethnicity.

Yet, even if these inferences prove to be incorrect, we must consider what we can learn from applying a cross-national perspective to research on women from marginalized groups in electoral politics. Scholars have called for this research not just to illuminate variation, but to understand the varied ways that gender and minority status interact and the varied ways that marginalized groups may seek change (Weldon 2006). If greater proportionality by gender and minority status is the goal, the patterns identified here suggest different strategies may be necessary in different world regions to get there. For example, in Eastern Europe, where minority men have had some electoral success, focused interventions should address the political underrepresentation of women relative to men from their groups. In contrast, in the Middle East, targeted interventions promoting minority women relative to minority men would be useless in the presence of broad inequalities by minority status.

A final contribution of this article is to present a measure of minority women's legislative representation for use by other scholars of politics and gender, the Minority Women Legislative Index (MWLI). This measure alone demonstrates that minority women are often woefully underrepresented in national electoral politics. But, considerable variation in minority women's political representation also exists. Thus, future analyses should go beyond descriptive analysis to *explain* regional and national differences. Such research is crucial if we hope to go beyond categories of "women" or "minorities" to also consider the access to power by individuals at the intersection of these social groups.

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## NOTES

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1. In this study, I apply the term “minority” to both numerical minorities—racial, ethnic, and religious groups that make up less than a majority of the populace—as well as to disadvantaged groups—those that have experienced social, economic, or political marginalization, either by law or by custom. However, I do not consider groups that are socially, economically, and/or politically dominant to be “minorities,” regardless of group size. Two well-known historical examples of numerically small advantaged groups are Whites of European descent in South Africa and Sunni Muslims in Iraq. I also limit my analysis to race, ethnicity, and religion, excluding disadvantage by other axes such as sexuality, class, disability, and age.

2. Despite my efforts to carefully code majority and minority groups, it is possible—perhaps even likely—that another researcher may have come to different conclusions regarding which groups are majorities and minorities. For example, in his comparative analysis of electoral systems and minority representation, Lijphart (1986) identifies the Maronite Christians in Lebanon as a minority, while I code them as a majority group.

3. Research on minority groups often focuses only on groups that comprise more than 1% of a country’s population (e.g., Fearon 2003). But, this approach may be less appropriate here, where it is important to be able to distinguish between the election of five representatives from a single minority group and the election of one representative from each of five minority groups.

4. Because the data were collected over a two-year period and represent the results of elections in previous years (the composition of legislatures in 2005 reflects the results of elections that took place as early as 2001), the data do not represent a perfect cross-section in time. For one country, Russia, I was unable to obtain current data but did obtain data for the prior election in 1999.

5. The MWLI adjusts for the sex ratio of the total population. It is possible that the sex ratio for majority groups is different than the sex ratio for minority groups. However, disaggregated population information broken down by majority/minority status, and sex is not consistently available across countries.

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