

## Chapter 11 Women and Political Systems Worldwide

**Melanie Hughes**  
**Pamela Paxton**

Melanie M. Hughes is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, USA. She has published articles on women in politics in such journals as *American Sociological Review*, *Politics & Gender*, *Social Problems*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, and the *International Journal of Sociology*, and has coauthored *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective* (Pine Forge, 2007) with Pamela Paxton. Her current research focuses on the intersection of gender and minority status in national legislatures around the world.

Pamela Paxton is Associate Professor of Sociology and Political Science (by courtesy) at the Ohio State University, USA. Some of her previous research on politics and gender appears in the *American Sociological Review*, the *American Journal of Sociology* and *Social Forces*. She is co-author of *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective* with Melinda M. Hughes (Pine Forge, 2007). Her current research considers women's political participation over time and connections between social capital and social networks.

If I were to bleed realizing  
in these marbled halls only the blood of men  
gets spilled over treaties and laws  
pens poised, demanding;  
I say, let it flow, be my witness,  
Senator, King, and Lord.

Let's talk real democracy;  
it's only once a month and comforting to be  
so regular; no sharp screams and cannon,  
gun and stick; sporadic blood  
is worse than monthlies  
even in your dreams.  
"If I Were to Bleed" (Anon., 2008).

Formal politics, the realm of official state policy, is notoriously a masculine place where women's voices are diminished and men's words are paramount. As the poem "If I were to bleed" suggests, these "marbled halls" are spaces where men "talk democracy" and wrangle over treaties, wars, and laws. This is where men have traditionally ruled and where the presence of women is novel and almost alien. The poem makes the case for women's inclusion; it also hints at the potential transformation of these marbled halls were they to be

inclusive of women's everyday realities. This chapter explores this formal notion of politics and explores women's representation in this arena; it also broadens the definition of politics to include women's informal political activity and addresses political movements at both local and transnational levels that seek to improve women's lives worldwide.

Politics is an important arena for feminist concern because it is where decisions occur that have serious consequences for women's everyday lives. The legitimate power of the state gives authority to certain people who hold official positions in government. This authority allows them to decide how to allocate scarce resources such as tax revenues and to make decisions that may help some people at the expense of others. Decisions by politicians impact individuals' choices by encouraging some behaviors and outlawing others. Public officials also have the power to enforce their decisions, sometimes with force. The power of the state is thus central in shaping major social institutions like the family or education, and codifying particular beliefs and practices into law. Because women have traditionally been associated with the "private" feminized spheres of home and family, they have had to fight to gain entrance into the "public" masculinized world of politics and economics. A web search for the phrase "If women were to rule the world" produces a host of both serious and humorous suggestions of what the world might look like with more women in power. In considering such a scenario it is important to note differences between "women" and "feminism": even though the presence of women in politics generally has a positive influence in promoting legislation favorable to women and children (Swers, 2002), this is not always the case. Feminism is a political belief and strategy for change and is not owned by women. In the reading "Revenge," a poem by Kim Rogers, the reader is invited to imagine a scenario where different forms of justice occur. In this African village, Rogers recognized the responsibility given to victims and their families about the fate of perpetrators.

This chapter begins with a discussion of women's formal representation in politics, exploring this representation worldwide and addressing paths to women's power in politics. The next sections focus on challenges and obstacles to women in politics, providing explanations for women's underrepresentation as well as national and international strategies for their participation in formal politics. The final section addresses the role of women in informal politics and emphasizes the broad efforts of women acting politically to organize and put pressure on established power systems.

## Women's Formal Representation in Politics

The most basic formulation for political equality between women and men is formal representation, meaning that women have the legal right to participate in politics on an equal basis with men. Giving women formal representation means that women have the right to vote, run for political office, and participate in political life. Indeed, looking at the makeup of political figures or public officials in a country highlights who is allowed to make decisions for that society, and, sometimes, who is even considered a "citizen." The reading "Please Mind the Gap" by Alyssa McDonald attests to disparities in the political gender gap. Consider the following statistics and think about their implications for the women in those societies. Did you know, for example, that ....

- The average percentage of women in national parliaments around the world is currently 18%?
- In almost three-quarters of national legislatures worldwide, women make up less than a fifth of political officials?
- In the almost 200 countries in the world, a woman is the head of government (president or prime minister) in only 8 of these countries?.
- Rwanda has had the highest percentage of women in its legislature: surpassing 50%?
- 10 countries have no women in their national legislatures?
- Women gained the right to vote nationally in Switzerland only in 1971?
- In 2005, the United States ranked 61 of 185 countries in percent women in the national legislature, falling behind countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ecuador, and Mozambique?

Perhaps this last bullet surprises you since the U.S. touts itself as a democracy supportive of equal rights. However, since Jeannette Rankin became the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress in 1917, women's representation in U.S. politics has grown rather slowly. It was not until 1981 that women held even 5% of the House of Representatives and there have been years with *no* women in the Senate as late as 1977. In 2009, the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress includes 17 elected female senators (17%) and 75 female Congresswomen (17%). Seventeen percent is certainly an improvement from earlier levels, but it remains far below the percent of women (51%) in the U.S. population.

Women’s representation in the U.S. mirrors that of many other countries. In fact, the United States is right at the world average in terms of its levels of female representation in politics. Although the U.S. does better than some countries, such as Micronesia or Saudi Arabia that have no women in parliament, it is far worse than others. Sweden and Rwanda have over 40% women in their national parliaments, while countries such as Spain, Argentina, and South Africa have more than 30% women in their national legislatures. Like in the U.S., in many countries today, women’s struggle for equal representation in politics proceeds slowly. And some populations and governments remain openly hostile to the notion of women in politics.

Table 1: Percent Women in National Legislatures: Historical Comparison of Regions

	<b>1955</b>	<b>1965</b>	<b>1975</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2005</b>
Scandinavian	10.4	9.3	16.1	27.5	34.4	38.2
Western	3.6	4.0	5.5	8.6	12.8	22.7
Eastern Europe	17.0	18.4	24.7	27.0	8.4	15.7
Latin America	2.8	2.7	5.2	8.1	10.0	17.1
Africa	1.0	3.2	5.3	8.0	9.8	16.3
Asia	5.2	5.3	2.8	5.6	8.8	15.3
Middle East	1.2	1.2	2.9	3.5	3.9	8.1

As Table 1 shows, it is clear that Scandinavian nations have surpassed all other regions in their levels of women’s political representation through the last half century. In contrast, the Middle East has persistently had the lowest average levels of female representation. While women’s representation in Latin America, Africa, and the West progressed slowly until 1995, since that time these regions show substantial growth: almost doubling their percentages in the decade between 1995 and 2005. Explanations for these gains differ across region. For example, gender quotas (discussed below) were instrumental to women’s political gains in Latin America, while armed conflict spurred growth in Africa. Eastern Europe demonstrates that high levels of women’s

representation need not be permanent. As Marxist-Leninist countries transitioned to democracy, women's levels of representation declined precipitously (Matland and Montgomery, 2003). In addition, it is also important to remember that women's legislative representation varies within regions. Indeed, Scandinavia aside, many of the countries that lead the world in women's parliamentary representation are non-Western, including Argentina, Burundi, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guyana, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tanzania.

The reading by Gisela Geisler titled "A Second Liberation" on lobbying efforts for women's political representation in Botswana discusses the importance for women in southern Africa to participate in formal politics in order to improve the status of women in those societies. The reading explores the failures of women's movements in one-party states to build productive alliances with women in political party movements and compares the challenges and successes of various lobbying groups in these regions. Geisler emphasizes that women need to unite to form coalitions to create equitable gender legislation.

Women's paths to political office may include a traditional rise through the ranks from lower political office to higher political office. Examples include Golda Meir of Israel and Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom. Some political leaders like Benazir Bhutto, who became Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1988 and the first elected Muslim woman to lead a Muslim country, represented dissident voices. She was assassinated for her politics in 2007 when campaigning to become Prime Minister once again. Women have also gained office around the world by being viewed as a surrogate for a politically-powerful male, typically a deceased husband or father. Examples of this latter path include Corozon Aquino of the Philippines or Indira Gandhi of India. Of course, family ties are one way that men obtain political power as well. After Indira Gandhi was assassinated in 1984, she was succeeded in the prime minister's office by her son, Rajiv Gandhi.

Female voting rights, known as women's *suffrage* (discussed below), is an essential component of women's formal representation in politics. Although today many of us cannot imagine women lacking the ability to participate in the electoral process, just over a century ago, women in almost all countries lacked the basic right to vote. From what some consider the world's first democracy in ancient Greece through the mid-

1800s, political thinkers excluded women from notions of citizenship, and politics was considered a man's domain. Thus, in many countries, suffrage victories followed long and trying national-level struggles. The struggle for suffrage is essential for women's citizenship and for their right to political participation. At this time, over 98% of countries in the world have granted women the formal right to vote and the formal right to stand for election.

Although women almost everywhere have the right to participate in politics, the degree to which women take advantage of those rights varies across countries. For instance, in countries like Guatemala and India, men continue to vote at significantly higher levels than women, while in countries like Barbados, women have voted more often than men in national elections by around 10 percent since the 1950s. In places like Malta, Sweden, Liberia, and the UK, men and women vote at roughly similar rates (IDEA, 2008). Still in other countries, women's participation as voters has clearly grown over time. In both the U.S. and Finland, for instance, men outpaced women as voters through the 1960s, matched rates in the 1980s, and today women now vote in higher numbers in national elections than men.

Although formal representation guarantees that women have the same chance to participate in politics as men, and despite increasing numbers of women voters in many countries, these changes may not necessarily result in women gaining positions of political power. The key here is the difference between "opportunity" and "outcome." Just because you have the opportunity to do something does not mean you can do it. Thus, even though most countries of the world grant women the right to vote and to participate in politics, as Table 1 clearly shows, women remain underrepresented as public officials almost everywhere. Few countries have more than 20% women in their legislative bodies. Women's presence is higher in local, less prestigious political offices but is still not equal to men's participation in public office.

The reading "Leading Women," a joint essay by Emira Woods and Charlayne Hunter-Gault, focuses on female leaders in Africa. Hunter-Gault interviews the first female president on the Africa content, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who is faced with the daunting task of leading a country ravaged by war and corruption. In this interview the President explained that one of her most important priorities was to respond to the needs

of women and children whom she believes are the most vulnerable citizens as well as the promoters of peace.

### **Obstacles to Women's Participation in Politics**

When discussing opportunities and obstacles associated with women's attempts to gain political power, scholars often divide explanations into three groups that include supply-side, demand-side, and overarching cultural factors. Supply-side explanations are those concerned with characteristics people bring to a situation. Researchers in this area are interested in understanding factors that increase the pool of women with the will and experience to compete against men for political office. Demand-side explanations focus on factors that bring women into politics such as characteristics of countries, electoral systems or political parties. These factors affect the likelihood that women will be pulled into office from the supply of willing candidates. The cultural explanation is an overarching perspective based on the premise that cultural beliefs and attitudes influence both the supply of, and demand for, female candidates.

#### *Supply-side explanations*

Supply-side explanations focus on the specific characteristics and "human capital" that people bring to situations that allow them to participate in certain activities. Supply side arguments explain that the money and human capital needed to run for office can be acquired through education and employment. In the U.S., law and other professional degrees provide an important path to political office, and having more women in such "pipeline occupations" leads to more female legislators. In other countries, other occupations or levels of education may be more relevant. For example, in Uganda seven years of education and English language skills are sufficient educational credentials for women to run for political office (Johnson, Kabucha, and Kayonga, 2003). As we might expect therefore, differences between men and women in levels of literacy and education is an important explanation for differences in political participation.

In terms of women and politics, supply-side approaches also seek to identify and enhance these characteristics to increase the participation of women in political life. For example, women gain skills to help them in politics from non-work activities such as volunteering or activism in social movements like labor unions or the women's

movement. A number of studies in the U.S. have shown that women use the civic skills and networks gained from their voluntary associations to make the transition to politics. In addition, across a range of countries, women's participation in the women's movement and in grassroots activism provides them with both political experience and political ambition. For example, some Rwandans complain that the best female volunteers are drawn into government, or named to commissions or ministries (Longman, 2006). Voluntary associations, including churches, are also important ways that women may be drawn into participation. Such organizations are often important to promoting literacy as a precursor to women's political participation. Literacy (the ability to read and write) is an important aspect of personal and social agency, although it has been used as a tool of colonization and for the denigration of traditional forms of knowledge (Burn, 2005). In the reading "Women's Words," author Aimee Dowl discusses the powerful connections between language and women's political rights. She highlights the work of Fatima Sadiqi, A Moroccan-Berber professor, who found that Berber-speaking women lacked information and resources because they spoke a feminized language associated with the home. Dowl describes Sadiqi's work to promote the 2004 Moudawana (Family Law) in Morocco which entitles women to a range of civil rights

Since political participation requires personal characteristics such as interest, ambition, or knowledge, the supply of women available for political office is partly determined by gender socialization, or the ways individuals make sense of, and identify with, the social constructs of femininity and masculinity. These ideas about gender influence people's interest and ambition for politics. To understand the role that gender socialization may play in women's motivation to run for political office, consider the following study of political ambition. Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless (2004) surveyed men and women who could run for political office. That is, they surveyed people in the four professions most likely to yield political candidates in the U.S.: law, business, education, and politics. Looking just at this group of men and women (who share the same professional credentials), women were much less likely to aspire to political office (43% of women compared to 59% of men). And even when they did aspire to political office, the women were less likely to actually run (15% of women compared to 20% of men). Part of the explanation Fox and Lawless found for this difference is that the women were less likely to view themselves as qualified to run. Women stated this belief even



though a parameter of the study was that men and women were actually equally qualified to run for political office. This difference in women's perception of their own qualifications suggests the ways politics is constructed as a masculine endeavor. Having few role models for women also encourages women's lower levels of political ambition (Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006).

A key problem with this focus on gender socialization, of course, is that women's motivations for political office are not only influenced by ideas about gender, but also by other supply-side characteristics such as resources associated with education, money, and time, and power and status that come from other identities like race and ethnicity. Interest or ambition aside, women have fewer of the necessary resources to participate in politics. In terms of time as a critical resource for participation in politics, women worldwide have less time than men since they perform the lion's share of domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning and are the primary caregivers for children alongside their work for paid employment or their efforts outside the home in sustaining families. Responsibility for these tasks may deprive women of the free time required to participate in politics.

The supply-side can help us understand both women's lack of political power in general, but also difference among women in who achieves political office. People's political aspirations are shaped by systems of inequality and privilege like racism, classism and heterosexism that limit and entitle individuals based upon positions vis-à-vis these systems. What this means is that White women are privileged by racism and these privileges provide resources that shape political activity. Economically-privileged women are privileged by classism and those who have few monetary resources are often unlikely to be able to afford to aspire to political office. And, heterosexuals are also privileged in homophobic societies, making it significantly less likely that lesbians, bisexual or transgendered or transsexual people will be able to gain high-level political office and be open with their constituents. There are, of course, exceptions. For instance, in 1999, Georgina Beyer became the world's first openly transsexual elected to parliament in New Zealand. But, examples like Georgina Beyer are comparatively rare. In many countries, gays and lesbians face insurmountable legal obstacles to public office. In more than 70 countries in the world, being gay is against the law, and in several predominantly Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Sudan, gays and lesbians even face execution (Amnesty International 2001, 2008). Overall, the interaction of social forces

such as these creates opportunities for some and challenges for others, ultimately affecting their ability to participate in political life.

### *Demand-side explanations*

What about the demand side of the equation? The demand side refers to the external systems, parties, and individuals that make gaining political office easier or more difficult for women. The “rules of the political game” are important because they influence whether women can attain, and how they attain, political power. In the U.S., for example, high incumbent reelection rates must be accounted for when predicting whether and where women can win elections. A wide range of political factors generate differences in the demand for women’s political participation, including the electoral system and the presence and structure of gender quotas. Political parties and party leaders also pull women into or push women out of the political process. And at the individual level, voters may be more or less likely to support female candidates over their male counterparts.

Perhaps the most consistent and well-documented finding in international research on women in politics is the importance of a country’s electoral system. Electoral systems determine how the votes cast in an election get translated into seats won by parties and candidates. A general and simplified distinction is between plurality-majority electoral systems and proportional representation systems. In plurality-majority systems the voters in an electoral district typically vote for only one person to represent them and the candidate with the most votes wins. Voters go into the voting booth and choose from a list of people, one for each party. This is the system in most states in the United States. In contrast, proportional representation systems typically ask voters to vote for a party with a designated list of candidates. Voters go into the voting booth and choose a party, each of which has published a list of candidates. Parties win legislative seats in proportion to the number of votes they receive. For example, if a party won 30% of legislative seats, the party would go down their list of candidates from the top and the first 30% would get seats in the legislature. Sweden and Argentina are examples of countries where a proportional- representation system is in place.

It is well-documented that women do better in gaining political office in countries that use proportional representation electoral systems. For example, in New Zealand

where both proportional representation and plurality-majority systems are in effect simultaneously, during the 2005 national election women were elected at higher rates under proportional representation systems (women won 43% of seats) than the plurality-majority system (women won only 20% of seats). Similarly, countries that switch to proportional representation systems may experience dramatic gains in women's representation. In 2007, for example, when Kyrgyzstan transitioned from a plurality-majority to a party-list proportional representation system, women's representation in the national legislature jumped from 0% to 26%. Women do better under these systems because they can get on a party's ballot without displacing a male. In a typical plurality-majority electoral district, getting on the ballot is a zero-sum process. If one person gets on the ballot, it means another person is not on the ballot. In plurality-majority contests, therefore, parties must make a choice between male and female candidates rather than being able to place both on the ticket. As relative newcomers to politics, when women compete head-to-head against men to be candidates they are disadvantaged. Men have been in politics longer, are entrenched in positions of power, and do not want to give that power up. Further, if women are seen as worse candidates than men, perhaps due to longstanding cultural traditions against women in politics, it is not in the party's interest to run women. The party elite wants candidates whom they believe are electable.

In contrast, proportional representation systems usually operate such that voters vote for parties with published lists of candidates. When a party needs to produce a list of candidates, it is under pressure to balance its ticket across interest groups in society. "Rather than having to look for a single candidate who can appeal to a broad range of voters, party gatekeepers think in terms of different candidates appealing to specific sub-sectors of voters" (Matland, 2002, p. 6). As a result, a political party in a proportional representation system will want to have some women on its list of candidates so it can attract female voters. In addition, if women in the party demand to be included as candidates, it is easier for a party operating in a proportional representation system to accommodate them. The "cost" is lower because men do not have to step aside in order to include women. Instead men and women can run side-by-side on the same party list.

Another factor associated with the demand side of politics is the presence of gender quotas that influence the demand for female candidates and legislators. Gender quotas are defined as legislation or party rules that require that a certain percentage of

candidates or legislators are women. In other words, gender quotas require political parties to field a certain number of female candidates or require a legislature to include a certain percentage of women. In 1990, Argentina became the first country in the world to adopt a national electoral law quota, resulting in a 17% increase in women's representation in the Chamber of Deputies in the subsequent election. Similarly, efforts to implement quotas in Afghanistan and Iraq led to some of the largest jumps in women's representation ever seen. Over the past 15 years, more than 100 countries have adopted gender quotas at the national or party level. Indeed, more countries in the world today have gender quotas in politics than do not. Gender quotas are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Finally, an important demand-side characteristic includes the role of political parties themselves. Parties are gatekeepers: in order for an individual, man or woman, to run for political office, he or she must be selected and supported by a political party. The characteristics of political parties therefore matter for women. Parties that are politically "left" (more liberal) in their political leanings tend to espouse egalitarian ideals and are more likely to promote traditionally underrepresented groups such as women. "Right-wing" parties are more conservative and are less likely to support women's rights to equality. In the United States, for example, women have been more successful achieving power in the more leftist Democratic Party than in the Republican Party. Historically, only 36% of women in the U.S. Congress have been Republicans (Paxton and Hughes, 2007).

### *Cultural explanations*

Culture influences both the supply of, and demand for, women. Cultural expectations about gender mean that even in countries where women have made gains in employment or education, they may face barriers to participation in politics. As surveys of gender attitudes expand across the globe, scholars have increasing evidence that cultural beliefs about women not only vary worldwide but also affect levels of women's activity in politics. For example, when asked whether men make better political leaders than women, the average answer in Nigeria (7% women) is between "agree" and "strongly agree." In contrast, the average answer in Norway (36% women) is between "disagree" and "strongly disagree" (Paxton and Kunovich, 2003). Even in countries

where women's place in politics is accepted, traditional ideas encourage assumptions that male politicians are better able to address foreign policy, defense issues and arms control, foreign trade, farm issues, and other issues associated with the economy, and female politicians are better able to deal with family and child-related policies, poverty, education, civil rights, and the environment (Kahn, 1996). This means that depending on the issue involved, women may have an edge in certain policy debates. Indeed, in the case of the U.S., if voters think that women are better advocates of an issue such as poverty, and they care about that issue, they are more likely to support female candidates (Kahn, 1996).

Women face prejudice as they try to become leaders because many people worldwide assume leadership is a masculine trait and politics is no place for women. Effective leadership has traditionally been associated with masculine traits of aggression, competitiveness, dominance, and decisiveness. Femininity is stereotyped as nurturing, helpful, likeable, gentle, and polite. The resulting "match" between gender and leadership has encouraged men to be seen as more appropriate and effective leaders. Once women do become leaders, however, they often face additional problems because they must serve two (often uncomplimentary) sets of expectations associated with their role as a leader and as a woman. This gendered double standard was illustrated in the ways the media associated with the 2008 U.S. national election represented then-Senator Hillary Clinton and Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin. No male politicians encountered the same high level of scrutiny associated with looks and body or their role as parent. This means that female leaders are often in a difficult position. Should they act the way people expect them to act as women? Should they be nurturing, supportive, and gentle or should they act the way people expect leaders to act with "masculine" behaviors such as aggressiveness and dominance? If female leaders choose the second path, research demonstrates that they will be negatively evaluated. Psychologists have found that people evaluate autocratic behavior by women more negatively than the same behavior by men. Women who act assertively violate the expectations of those around them and are subsequently penalized. Margaret Thatcher, for example, a very assertive British Prime Minister who served during the 1980s, was referred to as "Attila the Hen" and "the Iron Lady" (a name President Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, discussed above, has also been given). Such a situation puts female leaders in a real "Catch-22" since "conforming to their gender role

can produce a failure to meet the requirements of their leader role, and conforming to the leader role can produce a failure to meet the requirements of their gender role” (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 86).

In the reading “Engendering Grassroots Democracy” author Joti Sekhon discusses the ways women in rural India are limited by a variety of social, cultural, economic, and political factors such as traditional gendered expectations of the role and position of women in the family and community, caste and class inequalities, and lack of education. Sekhon analyzes the role of social movement groups working with and for women at the grassroots level and focuses on a feminist organization in the western state of Maharashtra that engages in women’s political empowerment.

Religion is key aspect of culture that influences women’s participation in politics worldwide. Arguments about women’s inferiority to men are present across all dominant religions, and religion has long been used to exclude women from aspects of social, political, or religious life around the world. But the major religions of the world are differentially conservative or patriarchal in their views about the place of women, both in the church hierarchy and in society. For example, in the U.S. and Western Europe, Protestantism promotes nonhierarchical religious practices and more readily accepts women as religious leaders than Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity (e.g., Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox). Similarly, Islamic law is typically interpreted in a manner that constrains the political activities of women (Ahmed, 1992). Researchers have demonstrated that countries with large numbers of Protestant adherents are more supportive of female legislators than countries with large numbers of Catholics, Orthodox Christians, or Muslims.

### **Strategies for Increasing Women’s Participation in Formal Politics**

Because “equal opportunity” in formal political representation does not appear to automatically produce large numbers of women in politics, feminist political theorists have argued that we need new strategies for equal representation. This implies that action must be taken beyond just giving women the right to vote and the right to participate in political life. This section explains notions of descriptive and substantive representation and discusses the role of transnational feminist movements in advocating for women in politics worldwide.

### *Descriptive and substantive representation*

Attempts to address the inadequacies of formal representation point to the necessity of imposing *descriptive representation*: a descriptive similarity between representatives and the population they represent. If women make up 50 percent of the population, for example, then they should also make up roughly 50 percent of legislative and executive bodies. Arguments for descriptive representation hinge on the idea that racial, ethnic, and gender groups are uniquely suited to represent themselves in democracies. In the case of women, the argument is that women are different from men due to different socialization and life experiences and bring a different set of beliefs, experiences, and expertise. Women have different interests than men and those interests cannot be represented by men. Because women can best represent themselves, they need to be numerically represented in politics, not simply formally represented.

As already discussed, gender quotas involve the requirement that political parties include a certain percentage of women candidates. Although quotas are helpful in increasing the numbers of women in politics, national gender quota laws do not always generate significant increases in women's representation. France, for instance, has a 50% gender quota but only 18% women in their national legislature. To understand this, consider what might happen if a national law was passed in the United States requiring Democrats and Republicans to run 20% women for Congress. Parties might choose to run women in electoral contests they were sure to lose, and it would have no impact on the number of women in Congress. Similarly, if national laws tell parties that they must include 30% women on their party lists, those parties could choose to put women in the bottom 30% of the list (where they would be unlikely to be elected). To address these dynamics, quota research has examined why some quotas are more effective than others. Scholars often focus on particular features of quota legislation that may impact the law's effectiveness. Placement mandates, such as two women required among the top five candidates, may prevent parties from burying women at the bottom of party lists. Sanctions for non-compliance introduce accountability and set consequences if party leaders fail to comply with quota regulations. Such provisions are in place in countries such as Argentina, France, and Slovenia, and have had varying levels of success ensuring compliance with quota laws. Some countries understand the strategic advantage in

adopting quotas. Across Latin America, for example, the adoption of quotas by male-dominated legislators happened in part because of the desire of political leaders to present their countries as modern. The reading by Joti Sekhon on women in India (discussed above) explains that while a 1993 Amendment to the Constitution of India granted at least a third of elected positions in village councils to women, translating such a practice to ensure women's participation in reality is more complex.

Political theorists advocating descriptive representation do not assume that all women share an identity with the same interests and concerns and they avoid essentialism (the view that for any specific entity, there is a set of characteristics or properties that any entity of that kind must possess). Instead they advocate that women have common interests because of their social position in societies. Women have shared experiences because their gender has been historically marginalized, because they are generally relegated to certain economic roles, and because they typically have primary responsibility for child and elder care. This implies that their shared experience or social position leads to similar interests allowing women to represent other women. Indeed, women in national legislatures have been shown to increase the amount of legislation favorable to women and children and their welfare, educational and health needs (Swers, 2002).

Still, because women do not always represent women in ways that improves their wellbeing, another type of representation has been presented: *substantive representation*. This form of representation works to ensure that women's interests are advocated in the political arena. Substantive representation requires politicians speak for, and act to support, women's issues. The implicit criticism of descriptive representation is that increasing the numbers of women involved in politics is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for women's interests to be served. For women's interests to be represented in politics, female politicians have to be willing and able to represent those interests. As a result, advocates of substantive representation argue that not only must the numbers of women in politics increase, but those women must also receive support when they attempt to act for women's interests. For example, women's caucuses can help achieve substantive representation by supporting women and providing them with resources. The bipartisan U.S. Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues is case in point. It attempts to move women's issues forward in the U.S. Congress and links like-minded congressional



women to each other and to outside groups. Some advocates of substantive representation argue that rather than simply electing women to political office, we should elect feminists, either women *or* men, who are more likely to be directly supportive of women's interests (Tremblay and Pelletier, 2000). Substantive representation is discussed in the reading "*Dal Dy Dir/Stand Your Ground*" that describes gender parity in the Welsh Assembly where there are equal numbers of men and women. This reading gives some background to Welsh politics, reviews the women's movement in Wales, and addresses future challenges for this small country that is a part of Great Britain.

However, just as the problem with descriptive representation was whether women can represent other women, so an issue with substantive representation concerns the politics associated with "pro-woman" or "women's interests." Who actually is "woman" and what are her interests given the competing interests across women as a group? In other words, given the diversity of women within societies in terms of such identities as race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, class, sexual orientation, and linguistic group, whose interests are being served? Although women's unique relationship to reproduction and the family cuts across other social categories, women are not a monolithic group. This means that female politicians of a particular racial, ethnic, caste, or class may not desire to, or be able to act for, *all* women. Given that in most societies access to political office occurs in part as a result of class privilege, can an elite or upper-class woman represent the interests of her less economically privileged sisters? Indeed, as of 2008, all women in the legislatures of Albania, Bangladesh, Denmark, Israel, and Panama are from the dominant racial, ethnic, and/or religious groups in the societies. In this way, even when talking about substantive representation, we must also remember to ask whether female politicians, in their desire to address the interests of women actually represent all women, or whether they represent only rich, or white, or Western interests.

### *International efforts for the advancement of women in formal politics*

Transnational feminist movements are powerful contemporary forces attempting to promote women's involvement in politics. As transnational women's movements advocating for a broad array of women's rights have grown in size and strength through the twentieth century, they have worked to expand women's political rights through international organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations

(Berkovitch, 1999). For example, as early as 1943, U.S. suffragist Alice Paul and her World Women's Party lobbied for inclusion of the phrase "the equal rights of men and women" in the preamble to the UN Charter. In the decades that followed, pressure on the UN by women's international organizations continued as feminists worked to keep women, and the political rights of women, on the agenda of the UN and its conferences.

As already discussed in other chapters, women's political rights and representation have also been a focal point of UN World Conferences on Women of the 1970s and 80s. For example, one resolution at the First World Conference in Mexico in 1975 called on governments to pay special attention to political rights of women (United Nations, 2000). At the outset of the second conference in Copenhagen, conference delegates suggested that one of the obstacles preventing attainment of goals set out in Mexico was that too few women held decision-making positions. And at the 1985 NGO forum in Nairobi, the most heavily attended workshop was "If Women Ruled the World," where 18 female parliamentarians from around the world discussed women's contributions as political leaders and the struggle to gain support for women's political representation (United Nations, 2000). By the 1990s feminists concerned about women in politics were calling for a "critical mass" of women in parliament of 25 or 30 percent.

The "Platform for Action" coming out of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in 1995 clearly advocated for increased political representation of women. By 2000 several feminist organizations were calling for full equality: 50% of national seats. For example, in June 2000, the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) launched a 50/50 campaign to increase the percentage of women in local and national politics worldwide to 50%. Since its inception, the campaign has been adopted by more than 154 organizations in 45 countries.

International influence directly affecting women's formal representation in politics is most apparent in the two recent constitutional transitions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Arguably, neither of these countries had either a strong internal demand or supply of women for political office. But outside agents were central in the formation of their new, post-war constitutions that both include substantial gender quotas. Though Nordlund (2004) finds no evidence that the UN actively promoted the adoption of a gender quota in Afghanistan, it did strongly advocate increases in women's parliamentary representation. In fact, the UN actively worked to get the issue included on the agenda.

Further, the international community pressured for women to be represented at the table during constitution building. Women's inclusion during this stage, and a lack of other options for increasing women's representation, may have been influential in the choice to adopt gender quotas (Dahlerup and Nordlund, 2004).

The influence of international organizations on women's political outcomes may also operate through financial channels. International bodies grant the loans and provide the foreign aid that poor countries so desperately need. Countries receiving international aid may be more likely to respond to external suggestions for change, including the adoption of quota laws. In Bangladesh, for example, a UN funded governance program allegedly facilitated both the extension of lapsed quota legislation and an increase in the quota threshold from 7% of women political candidates to 30% (UNDP, 2000).

International bodies may also work directly to increase the supply of female candidates running for office. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided training to female political candidates in Vietnam that in 2000 contributed to a rise in women's representation in Vietnam's national legislature from 18% to 26% (UNDP, 2000). More indirectly, the UN, the International Labor Organization, the World Bank, and a wide range of international nongovernmental organizations have provided money, personnel, and training to promote women's empowerment through employment training, education, and/or access to valuable resources. These programs may encourage women with the knowledge, skills, and interest to run for political office.

Further, alongside lobbying to increase the representation of women in formal politics, the international women's movements has also taught participants social movement tactics and encouraged resistance to enduring cultural beliefs that work against women's participation in politics. Women swap ideas to develop new strategies for action and unite with other women from their home countries to seek common goals. For example, activists from Namibia and Uganda have described how UN conferences on women encouraged domestic women's organizations in their countries to pressure their governments to adopt national gender policies (Bauer, 2006; Tripp, 2006). In this way, national and local women's organizations may also join with international forces to encourage women in politics. By taking advantage of links to international agencies and movements, local women's groups can gain leverage, information, money, and other

resources that would otherwise be out of reach. Keck and Sikkink (1998) call this process of seeking international support to pressure governments to act the “boomerang effect.” One active example of this process is underway in Namibia, where women pressing for 50% women in parliament have linked to the WEDO’s global 50/50 campaign, lending greater resources and legitimacy to their efforts (Bauer, 2006).

### **Women’s Efforts in Informal Politics**

It is important to emphasize that there is more to women’s involvement in politics than their relationship to formal politics and the official governmental decision-making arena. Indeed, the relative absence of women in politics is in part caused by a tendency to define politics as official electoral activities and focus on women as “state actors.” Such an approach underestimates their role in politics and ignores their political activity in community-based activism and national social movements. In addition, as the reading “The Public and Private Domain of the Everyday Politics of Water” by Juana Vera Delgado and Margreet Zwarteveen suggests, strategies for feminist action should not solely be aimed at formal laws and policies. In their ethnographic research in the Andes of Peru, Delgado and Zwarteveen describe the struggles of Peruvian women to gain access and control over water and land. Power over these resources reside in practices embedded in culture and manifested in norms and customs, occurring in social domains such as the household that are not usually associated with water management. The authors argue that a focus on non-formal water powers, or everyday water politics, reveals important sources of agency for women. Water was also an issue for women’s organizations in the reading “The Post-Katrina, Semiseparate World of Gender Politics” by Pamela Tyler. This article discusses the activities of three women’s organizations formed in 2005 to deal with the aftermath of the destruction and flooding associated with Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, USA. It addresses how race and social class identities affected the work of these different organizations.

As Ruth Lister (2003) explains, a distinction should be made between the level of women’s political representation and women’s political activity. Even though in many countries women are absent as state actors in formal positions of power, they have been active in labor and union movements, peace activism, and environmental groups. They have also worked to challenge the political system through informal struggles to inherit

property and control their wages, the right to divorce, the struggle for universal female education, and the right to be safe in their homes. For example, women used their roles as mothers to protest human rights abuses and advocate for democracy in Latin American countries. Perhaps the most famous example of women fighting for democratization is the “Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,” a group of mothers who protested the ‘disappearance’ of their children by the Argentinean military. Beginning in 1977, mothers gathered on Thursdays on the Plaza de Mayo, wore distinctive white headscarves, and processed in front of the presidential palace carrying pictures of their kidnapped children. Over time, the number of women participating in the weekly demonstration grew, and drew international attention to human rights abuses in Argentina.

The rest of this section is devoted to a focus on the movement for female suffrage or women’s voting rights as a key aspect of the struggle for women’s political representation worldwide. It is one example of the importance of women’s political activity in the informal arena for advancement in the formal political area.

### *Suffrage*

Suffrage movements for female voting rights are similar in incorporating community-based informal political activity as well as national and international social movements. The timing of these movements, however, has varied. By 1893, for example, when New Zealand became the first country to introduce universal suffrage, movements to enfranchise women were in full swing in many Western countries. Ann Knight, a British Quaker, produced the first recognizable women’s suffrage pamphlet in 1847; a year later, the first formal demand for women’s right to vote in the U.S. was made at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York. By the 1860s, the “first-wave” women’s movement had begun in France and Germany, followed by Scandinavian countries in the 1870s and 1880s. Women’s movements in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East often lagged behind, developing in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Suffrage movements worldwide also varied in size. Although movements in countries like Denmark, Germany, and Japan were intermediate in size (Chafetz and Dworkin, 1986), most had small first-wave women’s movements and some proceeded with little national opposition. The U.S. and British suffrage movements had considerable

opposition. They were also the largest with both national and regional organizations and with an array of tactics that included militancy and civil disobedience. The term militancy was first applied to the activities of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a British suffrage organization founded in 1903. The first act of militancy occurred in October 1905 when WSPU leaders interrupted an election meeting and were arrested after suffragist Christabel Pankhurst spat at a policeman. U.S. suffragist Alice Paul learned from the British WSPU and directed women in militancy in the United States. Overall, militancy in women's suffrage movements encompasses a wide range of behaviors including the disruption of meetings, tax resistance, refusing to fill in census forms, breaking windows, arson attacks on public buildings, and other forms of property destruction. Imprisonment and painful forcible feeding in response to hunger strikes were often consequences of militant tactics by first-wave British feminists. Women outside of the United Kingdom also used militant tactics. In 1911, for example, Chinese suffragists launched an attack on the National Assembly in Beijing after being refused the vote. In Japan, Egypt, Iran, and Sri Lanka, women organized demonstrations and stormed legislatures (Jayawardena, 1986; Randall, 1987). Still, many suffragists were reluctant to turn to militant tactics. In countries as geographically distant as Europe and South America, women shied away from street demonstrations and distanced themselves from militant tactics to avoid being seen as "unwomanly," immodest, unpatriotic, or too radical. In addition, since militancy was not always perceived as successful, some activists were reluctant to use it. Movements in New Zealand, Canada, and Scandinavia, for example, were successful in achieving suffrage early on without using militant tactics. Suffragists in Western countries also gained experience and learned various strategies and tactics through participation in other social movement such as anti-slavery (abolition).

Women fighting for suffrage in different nations faced unique obstacles grounded in distinctive cultural, political, and/or religious circumstances. Almost always, ideologies (sets of values) that attempted to reinscribe traditional gender and maintain women's political subordination were raised to challenge women's political advancements. Across Latin America, for example, traditional values and machismo served to hinder women's progress (Lavrin, 1994), and in Uruguay, one opponent to suffrage invented a new term, *machonismo*, to describe women's desire to imitate men in

the hopes of diverting women from their political aspirations and keep them on their “natural” path (Hannam, Auchterlonie, and Holden, 2000). Authoritarian regimes and conservative parties tended to oppose democratization and the extension of voting rights to women. Direct government suppression of independent women’s organizations occurred at various times in France, Russia, China, Japan, Indonesia, Iran, Brazil, and Peru (Randall, 1987). In the Middle East, cultural interpretations of Islam was (and is) used to justify women’s continued exclusion from political participation even though this religious creed recognizes women’s rights.

Suffrage movements and outcomes were impacted by the characteristics of their members. Across the world, the leaders and members of suffrage organizations tend to be largely educated, urban, and relatively economically-privileged women. In some countries such as India, Syria, and the United Kingdom, this resulted in the adoption of limited suffrage that included education or property restrictions years before universal suffrage was achieved. Racism has also posed a significant obstacle to women’s suffrage struggles. Black women in the U.S., for example, were often marginalized or excluded from participating in White women’s suffrage organizations. The notion that Black women would also get the vote almost prevented ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment that gave U.S. women the vote in 1920 (Flexner, 1975). However, despite their marginalization, Black women in the U.S. made important and visible contributions to the suffrage struggle. In 1851, for example, Sojourner Truth gave a now famous speech titled “Ain’t I a Woman,” questioning the exclusion of black women from calls for political rights. Abolitionists such as Harriet Tubman and Frances Ellen Harper were active in the movement, addressing women’s suffrage at meetings. Black women also often formed their own suffrage associations. By the 1900s, Black suffrage clubs were active in the U.S. cities of Tuskegee, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Memphis, Boston, Charleston, and New Orleans (Giddings, 1996).

Racism also impacted women’s suffrage in other countries. In former colonies (countries formed as a result of early imperial expansion by such nations as France, Belgium, England, and the Netherlands, suffrage often came later for colonized indigenous women than for colonizing White women. In Indonesia, in 1941, Dutch women, but not local Indonesian women, were given municipal voting rights. Similarly, only European women in British-occupied Kenya were given the vote in 1919 and

indigenous women had to wait until 1963 when universal suffrage was introduced as the country gained its independence. As empires began to dismantle, newly recognized countries granted both men and women the right to vote in their constitutions. Ultimately, varying national debates about women's rights gave way to an internationally-recognized universal belief in women's enfranchisement (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan, 1997; Paxton, Hughes, and Green, 2006).

Interestingly, it was sometimes countries with longer histories of democratic principles that held out, continuing to deny women rights. In Switzerland, for example, women received the right to vote in local elections as late as 1990. Another group of "holdout" countries with different motivations for preventing women's suffrage are in the Gulf region of the Middle East where until recently, political rights had not been extended to men or women. In 1999, women secured voting rights in the country of Qatar, followed by Bahrain in 2001, and Oman in 2003. One of women's most recent successes took place in Kuwait, when following a drawn out battle and several failed attempts, women were finally granted the right to vote in May 2005. Despite these suffrage struggles and victories, women's equal citizenship is not yet universal. In Lebanon, proof of education is required for a woman to vote, while a man is not subject to any education restrictions. Women's vote is optional, while men are required to vote by law. In Bhutan, only one vote per family is allowed at the village level, meaning that women may be excluded. As of 2005, Saudi Arabia still refuses to allow women the right to vote.

International political meetings and congresses were places where feminists also advocated for women's suffrage. In 1878, for example, the first international women's congress held in Paris, France, was attended by the United States and ten European countries. It was followed in 1910 by the first International Feminist Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Socialist women also participated in the early international movement with the International Socialist Women's Conference in 1907 and the International Communist Conference of Working Women in 1920. Suffrage was one of the central goals of this early international women's movement. Indeed, many of the first international women's organizations were founded with women's suffrage in mind. For example, in 1904, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance was founded with the principle that "[w]omen should be vested with all political rights and privileges of



electors” (International Alliance of Women, 2005). Research also suggests that early international events had profound implications for local suffrage movements. For example, according to Morgan (1984), the International Feminist Congress was a watershed moment for Argentina’s suffrage movement, inspiring women across the country.

Although women are grossly underrepresented in politics making up less than 10 percent in many countries and reaching 50 percent in only one, women worldwide have made inroads into every area of political decision-making. While for centuries they lacked basic political rights, women today have won the right to vote in almost all countries. Many nations have observed steady and sometimes even dramatic growth in the numbers of women participating in local and national legislatures. And, since 1950, over thirty women have led their nations as head of government. In fact, women not only serve as political leaders, but are grassroots activists, revolutionaries, and everyday voters participating in political activity in unprecedented numbers. Truly, despite how much work still needs to be done in this area, the increase in women’s political participation over the last century is one of the success stories of the contemporary world.

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