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#### Why are there differences in the political representation of women in the 27 countries of the European Union?

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# Why are there Differences in the Political Representation of Women in the 27 Countries of the European Union?

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**ABSTRACT** *Although there have been many studies that address the representation of women in parliament, few explore gender representation in the 27 countries of the European Union. Prior research on women's representation conducted in different areas of the world has emphasized the type of electoral system, quotas, the economic affluence of a country, the timing of women's suffrage, as well as the political culture. In this evaluation these commonly used indicators are complemented by two factors that are not frequently employed – the percentage of women in managerial positions and the political ideology of parliamentary parties. This cross-national analysis reveals that the electoral system type, the number of women in managerial positions and the years women have had the right to vote are the most important factors in determining women's representation.*

**KEY WORDS:** Women representation, Europe, national parliaments

## Introduction

In many Western European countries, women gained the right to vote following the First World War. These rights were renewed after the totalitarian era of the Second World War. In the Eastern European countries men and women regained equal political rights as late as the early 1990s with the fall of the Iron Curtain. As in the past, it has been easier to gain rights than to fully implement them. Why? This is one of the questions that will be examined in this paper. Currently, women, on average, comprise 22% of the deputies in the national legislatures in Europe (Inter Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2007). This number is high by world standards, but still far from equal representation. Only six European countries have a female legislative representation that exceeds one-third, a fraction that is considered the critical mass necessary for women to exercise substantial influence (United Nation Development Programme [UNDP], 1995, p. 41).

Even in advanced industrialized European societies, politics is still largely a male domain that women have difficulty accessing. The weak presence of women on the

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political stage, especially in the top echelon positions, is a structural characteristic of democracies. This under-representation in the political process contrasts sharply with the principles of a fully democratic society, where, ideally, all members have equal rights, freedoms and opportunities, with no artificial restrictions to hinder the attainment of set goals. According to the principle of parity, women have both the right to equal involvement in decision-making processes and the right to take a stand on issues.

The presence of women in parliament might also affect policy making on issues important to women. Scholars have established significant agenda-setting effects, with female deputies pushing for female-friendly policies (Bratton, 2002; Sanbonmatsu, 2003; Swers, 2002). In the Nordic countries, levels of women's representation are the highest in Europe. The governments of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark have promoted gender autonomy by adopting policies that reconcile women's private and public sphere responsibilities, namely employment and childrearing. The same countries have also passed laws on divorce policy, reproductive rights policies, and policies on violence against women that allow females to protect themselves (Lovenduski, 1997; Singh, 1998).

Therefore, whereas a high representation of women might lead to laws favouring equality, a lack thereof might result in a waste of precious talents and skills in the political arena. Politicians' tasks are to promote and support the involvement of citizens without regard to gender to create a favourable legal framework and to afford all citizens equal access to opportunity.

While this is a goal as yet unattained, fortunately the subject of equal political representation of women is on the agenda in Europe. Significant measures in favour of parity have been undertaken. The adoption of the *Charte d'Egalité* (2004) in France and the approval of an anti-discrimination law (2005) in the German legislature are two of many examples of the current political salience of female representation issues.

This paper seeks to achieve a 'most similar case design'. All 27 member states of the European Union are fully democratic societies that are rated 1 or 2 on the Freedom House democracy index (Freedom House, 2007). They all operate under a parliamentary system, and more importantly have engaged in a process of regional integration. The treaties of Maastricht (1991), Amsterdam (1999) and Nice (2001) as well as the Schengen Agreement (1999) established a supra-national and inter-governmental union with enhanced economic, political, cultural and social co-operation among its members. Among others, these treaties installed a common market and a single currency, granted European citizenship to each citizen of each member state, established common labour and environmental rules and attempted to harmonize the educational and social systems of the member states. Despite this movement towards close European integration, women's representation still varies considerably from one member state to the next. For example, in Sweden, the proportion of female deputies in the National Chamber is slightly above 47%, while in Malta it is only 9.2%. What are the reasons behind these substantial differences, and what, if any, specific criteria should be taken into consideration?

The analysis provided here is based on a systematic study of the 27 European Union (EU) member countries. It begins with a short historical overview of women's representation in the respective national legislatures after the Second World War.

In a subsequent step, a cross-national evaluation of different factors – the electoral system type, quotas, GDP per capita, the timing of women’s suffrage, the percentage of women in leadership positions, the political culture and the party ideology of those in power – that affect women’s representation is undertaken.

The goal of this paper is to provide an inclusive explanation that weighs the different factors that have an effect on women’s representation in Europe. The data, on which this assessment is based, are drawn from primary sources, such as official party documents and Internet websites of the parties and secondary sources, including journal articles and book chapters. A predominantly quantitative (regression) research design is proposed to test the above-mentioned theses allowing for an evaluation of the level of political representation of women in the 27 member countries of the EU. Thus, this paper should provide insight into one aspect of gender studies.

### **The Development of Women’s Representation in the National Legislatures of the Western European Countries After the Second World War**

In the immediate post-war period, women were highly under-represented in the national legislatures of all western European countries. Women constituted between 0 and 9% of the deputies in the first post-war terms. On average in 1950, women’s representation was 5.4%. The figures remained low in nearly all the countries throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Only the two Scandinavian countries of Finland and Sweden had a female representation that was higher than 10%. Gender issues were apparently not on the political agenda until the late 1960s and early 1970s when the situation changed slightly. For the first time after the Second World War, the emerging social and political movements emphasized post-materialist values. This change in thinking led to, among others, an increase in support for women’s issues. The role of women slowly began to change. Larger numbers of women completed higher education and joined the workforce. Consequently, in nearly all the countries the numbers of female deputies stabilized and steadily increased in the 1970s and 1980s, but at varying paces. By the 1980s, the bar of 10% female representation was crossed in many European countries, particularly the Scandinavian countries, which soon had female representation exceeding 20%. In early 1983, the numbers of female deputies in the different national parliaments vacillated between 0 and 14%, with an average of 8.8%.

Since then, the figures have further increased from an average female representation of 15.4% in the mid-1990s to the current high of 25.5%. Even if the average number of elected women has been augmented considerably in the last 20 years, there are nevertheless vast differences in women’s current representation across the different countries. As a result, the gap has further widened between countries where women have gained increasing representation and countries where formal and informal barriers have denied women access to political power. On the one hand, in countries like France or Malta, the numbers of elected women has not increased in the last two decades; in both countries women comprise only around 10% of elected national representatives. On the other hand, in the Scandinavian countries, but also in Belgium and The Netherlands, women have been highly represented, holding over one-third of the parliamentary seats.

### **Longitudinal Analyses of Women's Representation in the Eastern and Central European Countries**

Before the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Marxist-Leninist-oriented governments of the Eastern European countries had high female representation in the national parliaments. For example, in the late 1980s on average 33% of the national deputies were women. However, claims for equality and quota systems that gave women considerable numerical representation were strictly for symbolic purposes. Legislatures themselves had very little influence on decision making – the decisions were made in the top echelons of party and state power, where women remained virtually absent. Very few women occupied party leadership or central committee leadership positions and no women ever entered the politburo in even one of the countries. Moreover, independent women's organizations were banned. The few rights women had acquired had been granted from above, rather than won through struggle (Montgomery, 2003, pp. 1–9; Waylen, 1994, pp. 350–353).

Due to this arrangement, women possessed little influence in shaping the beginning of the new post Communist era. In sum, according to Waylen (1994, p. 347), by the time of the fall of the Soviet Union, women were poorly placed to 'influence the State and the newly active political parties during the very rapid collapse of the old order...'. Men took over the leadership positions of the newly emerging parties, men negotiated the transition to democracy, and men filled the new power positions (Montgomery, 2003, p. 1). Additionally, all quota provisions were abolished. Consequently, women's share in National parliaments plummeted from a regional average of around 33% at the end of the Communist era to around 10% in the early 1990s. At the first elections, considerable differences in female representation occurred. Women constituted merely 5.7% of elected representatives in Estonia, but already 13.5% in Poland.

In the last decade and a half, the number of elected women has doubled, but still remains inferior to the regional average representation in the Western European countries. Presently, women comprise on average 15% of the representatives in the national parliaments of Eastern Europe. Despite the fact that an overall trend of improvement in women's representation in the region is perceptible (Table 1), females still face many hurdles. As Wilcox *et al.* (2003) document, public opinion is much more patriarchal in its view of the proper position of women. The rejection of Western style feminism may affect all stages of the legislative recruitment process and is likely to lead to reduced support for female candidacies and diminished political ambition on the part of women. With respect to other assets, women have several of the resources traditionally emphasized in Western Europe such as high education and visible positions in society. Yet, they are often disfavoured *vis-à-vis* men in terms of economic resources, which are an important asset in the candidate selection process (Kostadinova, 2003). The countries (e.g. Hungary) that show relatively little gains for women distinguish themselves from countries where women's representation has increased (e.g. Poland) in that politics is mostly dominated by clientellistic parties (Matland, 2003). Only if women in and outside of the parties organize and mobilize themselves to attain higher representation, will women representation increase at a faster rate. An increase in female political mobilization might not only lead, as Jaquette and Woschik (1998) propose, to a convergence between the levels of

**Table 1.** Percentage of women elected to the National Parliament since 1950

Country	1950	1960	1970	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2007
Austria			5	10	9	20	22	27	32
Belgium	6	7	5	11	15	13	15	27	35
Bulgaria							13	10	22
Cyprus		0	0	0	2	2	5	7	14
Czech Republic						10	13	13	16
Denmark	4	6	9	24	35	36	39	36	37
Estonia						7	13	11	22
Finland	12	14	17	26	31	32	34	37	42
France	7	2	2	4	5	6	6	6	12
Germany	7	9	7	9	10	21	26	31	32
Greece							6	9	13
Hungary						7	11	8	10
Ireland	4	4	4	3	4	6	9	18	13
Italy	8	4	3	8	8	13	14	11	17
Latvia							14	17	19
Lithuania						8	7	11	25
Luxembourg			2	7	14	17	20	20	23
Malta	8	3	4	3	3	3	2	9	9
Netherlands	3	9	8	12	19	26	30	36	37
Poland							13	13	20
Portugal				7	7	8	14	17	21
Romania							7	10	11
Slovakia						12	15	14	20
Slovenia							13	13	12
Spain				7	7	15	19	38	36
Sweden	5	11	14	26	31	38	40	43	47
United Kingdom	4	4	4	3	4	7	9	18	20
Total	5	6	6	10	14	15	16	20	22

*Sources:* Parliamentary offices: National Electoral Commission (Portugal) (2005), Office of the National Council of the Slovak Republic (2005), Republik Österreich Parlamentesdirektion (2005), Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2005). Websites: Assembleia da República (Portugal) (2003), Belgian Parliament (2007), Congreso (Spain) (2007), Deutscher Bundestag (Germany) (2007), Edukunta Parliament of Finland (2007), Estonian Parliament (2007), Folketinget (Denmark) (2007), Globalis (2007) (Italy), Hellenic Parliament (2007), House of Representatives (Cyprus) (2007), House of Representatives (Malta) (2007), Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2007), National Election Office (Hungary) (2007), Parliament Luxembourg (2007), Queens University (2007), Riksdagen (Sweden) (2007), Sejm (Poland) (2007), Tweedekamer (The Netherlands) (2007). Articles/books: Donnelly (2002, p. 94), Guadagnini (1998, p. 219), Kleszcz-Wagner (1998, p. 132), Kjerulf Dubrow (2006), Kostadinova (2003, p. 304), Krupacius and Matonyte (2003, p. 85), Lovenduski (1998), Montgomery and Honszki (2003), Ramsay (2003, pp. 41–43), Saxenberg (2003, pp. 245–250), Siemieriska (2003, p. 221), Vargas (2000), Wagener (1998).

representation achieved in Eastern Europe and those accomplished in the new democracies of Latin America, but also to an advancement of women's representation in Eastern Europe to Western European standards.

### **Different Factors that Affect Women's Representation**

H1: Women's representation will be higher under a more proportional electoral system than under a less proportional electoral formula.

In the scholarly milieu, there is general agreement that electoral institutions are an important factor affecting the level of women's representation. With the exception of

few studies (e.g. Norris, 2004), multiple cross-national investigations by, among others, Champman (1993), Matland and Studler (1996), Rule and Zimmermann (1994), Sawyer (1997) and Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005) have consistently shown that women's representation is higher under proportional representation (PR) than under a plurality system.

The proportionality and permissiveness of a system is mainly defined by the district magnitude. The theory states that when the number of representatives in constituencies increases, the percentage of the vote needed for election diminishes (the general formula is  $100/M + 1$ ) (Rule, 1987, pp. 478–479). Therefore, a rise in the district magnitude should make it easier for party officials to slate female candidates for two reasons. First, parties attempt to diversify their slates to appeal to different constituencies and consequently see the inclusion of women on the slate as beneficial. Second, the costs of slating women decrease with a higher district magnitude (Matland & Brown, 1992; Reynolds *et al.*, 2005, p. 145). On the voters' side, similar dynamics might also apply. Voters could hesitate to vote for a woman if she is the only candidate. However, electors may be more inclined to support a woman as one of several candidates. Therefore, women should do better under a more proportional than under a less proportional system.

- H2: Countries that have legally imposed quotas or in which several parties have implemented quota clauses are more likely to have more female deputies than countries where there are no quota clauses.

The second institutional factor, quotas, is seen as an efficient, but rather selective method of increasing women's representation (Squires & Wickham-Jones, 2001). There are only two countries (Belgium and France) that have legally binding quotas. In the former country the same sex may not constitute more than two-thirds among the parties' candidates and the first three places on the list cannot be awarded to the same sex<sup>1</sup> (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IDEA] & University of Stockholm, 2007). In the latter, a law passed in 1999 and enacted in 2000 requires parties to present equal numbers of women and men on candidate lists for the European elections, but not for the national elections (Lister, 2003, pp. 54–56; Mazur, 2002, pp. 72–73). In the same way that legally binding quotas are atypical, relatively few parties have binding intra-party clauses. Out of the 150 national parties that have sent deputies to the national parliaments, only 13 parties have implemented quota rules of 30% or more (IDEA & University of Stockholm, 2007; Krook, 2003). By reason of the selectivity of quotas, it is expected that they do not play a major role in determining women's representation.

### **Socio-economic Factors**

- H3: The higher the wealth of a country, the higher the representation of women in that country.

There are contradictory findings on whether the wealth of a country is an important factor in determining women's representation. Moore and Shakman

(1996) and Paxton (1997) included the variable in their worldwide study, but found no evidence of its relevancy. In contrast, Matland (1998) found indirect effects, but only for rich countries. He states that development leads to a weakening of traditional values, decreased fertility rates, increased urbanization, and greater educational and labour force participation for women, and attitudinal changes in the perception of appropriate roles for women. Even if all countries can be considered relatively rich on a worldwide scale, there are considerable differences in the GDP per capita, ranging from over \$60,000 for Luxembourg to under \$10,000 for some Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria or Romania (International Monetary Fund, 2007). This variance justifies an inclusion of this factor in the studies.

H4: The longer the time span during which women could legally vote, the higher their representation will be in parliament.

A second socio-economic factor that may have an effect on women's representation in the national parliaments is the length of the time span during which women have possessed active and passive voting rights. In the European context, the time of suffrage extension varied markedly. For instance, whereas women in Finland gained the right to vote in 1906, women in Portugal and Spain could not vote until 1981 (IPU, 2005). According to Kenworthy and Malami (1999) and Matland (1998), voting rights stand for the political empowerment of women. The theory states that the earlier women gained equal political rights, the earlier they could get involved in politics. In the long run, this involvement should lead to women's political empowerment and to more female deputies.

H5: As women occupy more leading professional positions, their political representation will increase.

A third structural factor that may play a role in determining women's representation is the percentage of women in managerial positions. Through lobbying, managers are often directly or indirectly involved in political decision-making processes and usually show a high interest in politics. Parties normally recruit potential candidates with high occupational status. If women do not have access to professional opportunities, they will not have the human and financial capital to run for office and it will be less likely that they will be selected as possible representatives by parties (Darcy *et al.*, 1994; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). An increase of women in leading professional occupations, such as managerial positions, should therefore lead to an increase in female representatives. Moreover, women who are professionally successful might also seek access to political power. Thus, increased levels of women in top echelons positions should result in demands for a more equal representation between the genders. In this respect, this analysis differs from other studies (Welch, 1977, and Matland, 1998) that have examined the effect of labour force participation on women's representation. In this inquiry it is assumed that work force participation, *per se*, has less of an impact on women's interest and involvement

in politics. Rather, it is presumed that political participation increases with professional status.

### **Cultural Factors**

H6: Women's representation will be higher in a country with an egalitarian political culture than in a country with a traditional political culture.

The model also controls for the variable, political culture. Political culture may be described as the embodiment of the attitudes and values of a society, which define the roles an individual may play in the political process (Hill, 1981, p. 160). According to Inglehart and Norris (2003, pp. 140–141), cultural attitudes and values continue to influence the proportion of women in parliament. Traditional values of gender inequality should remain a major obstacle to the election of women. In traditionalistic cultures, female participation in legislative politics is likely to be discouraged by elite opinion leaders and the public, both of whom want to maintain a male-oriented status quo.

These cultural barriers are declining in advanced industrialized nations. Secular trends of cultural patterns towards post-materialist values seem to challenge traditional sex roles and facilitate the entry of more women into power. Therefore, the more a culture is liberal and egalitarian, the more receptive the public will be to women's issues and the higher the demand will be for an increase in women's political participation (Inglehart & Norris, 2001; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). The current applicability of this idea will be evaluated in this analysis.

### **Party Ideology**

H7: The more seats held by left-wing parties, the more women will be represented in parliament.

The parties' ideological beliefs may present an additional explanation for female participation in legislatures. Leftist parties espouse more egalitarian beliefs than right-wing parties and are known for their greater support for gender equality (Caul, 1999; Norris, 1993, p. 320). As Matland and Studler (1996) suggest: parties to the left might feel the need to be sensitive to groups traditionally excluded from the circles of power, and this may include women. The women's movement has also been traditionally linked to left parties (Jenson, 1995).

Caul (1999) finds that a high percentage of left-wing parties' parliamentary representatives correlates with a comparatively high number of female deputies. Other scholars (e.g. Lovenduski & Norris, 1993) contend that there is an equal distribution of support for female candidacies across parties in the same nation. Whether right-wing parties, which supposedly hold a more traditional view on women's roles in society, endorse fewer female candidacies than do left-wing parties will be examined in this analysis.

### Data and Method

This paper uses regression analysis to test the correlations between the independent variables – the electoral system type, quotas, the GDP per capita, the number of years women have had the right to vote, the percentage of women in managerial positions and the political culture, as well as the party ideology of the parliamentary parties and the dependent variable – the proportion of women in the lower house of the national parliament. This study covers all 27 member countries of the European Union.

The dependent variable for this study is the percentage of female legislators in the lower house of the national parliaments in April 2007, which was collected from the Inter Parliamentary Union (2007) database on women in parliaments. For the first independent variable, the electoral system type, three categories exist – proportional systems,<sup>2</sup> semi-proportional systems<sup>3</sup> (mixed systems and single-transferable vote systems – STV<sup>4</sup>) and plurality systems.<sup>5</sup> The fact that three categories exist necessitates the creation of two dummy variables. First, proportional systems, which all have a district magnitude of five or above are coded one. Majoritarian and semi-proportional systems are coded zero. Second, all semi-proportional, which are characterized by their low district magnitude (Italy 1.3, Lithuania 2.0, Hungary 2.2, Ireland 4.0 and Malta 5.0), are coded one, and the two remaining systems are coded zero. Data on electoral systems and the district magnitude were mainly collected from the Electionworld (2007) database, from the Electoral System Design database provided by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2007) and from the respective websites of the national parliaments.

Concerning the second variable, quotas, all countries that either have legally imposed quotas, or in which the majority of parties – calculated by their seat share – have implemented party clauses of 30% or more, are differentiated from countries in which quota rules are non-existent. The majority principle is selected because, if more than half of the seats are distributed to parties that guarantee one-third representation to women, other parties face high pressure to also include women in similar numbers on their list. The party clause of 30% is chosen, because the United Nation considers a 30% membership in political institutions the critical mass that enables women to exert meaningful influence on politics (UNDP, 1995, p. 41). A representation of approximately one-third or more of women in parties or parliaments could thus translate into the advancement of women issues in these bodies. In the regression, all countries with quotas are coded one, while all other countries are coded zero. Data on quotas were gathered from the Global Database of Quotas for Women established by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and the University of Stockholm (2007).

The first socio-economic factor, GDP per capita, is introduced into the analysis as a measure of wealth. A widely used economic indicator, GDP per capita is the value of all goods and services produced domestically in one year within a particular country divided by the country's total population. Thus, this measure provides a picture of average individual wealth. The data for the variable were obtained from the International Monetary Fund database (2007).

The second socio-economic factor, the time women have had the right to vote, is calculated differently compared to most studies. In contrast to Rule (1981) and

Kenworthy and Malami (1999), who examined the year women gained the right to vote, this study focuses on the overall years during which women have had the right to vote in democratic elections. Neither the time span during which countries suffered under totalitarianism nor those of the Communist era in Eastern Europe are included in this study. Even if during these times women officially had the right to vote, they had virtually no power. As previously explained, the legislatures had, if any, only symbolic power. Under totalitarian oppression the situation for women was even worse. Women were literally absent from power positions.

In his study of turnout rates, Franklin (2004) states that female empowerment is a slow process. During the first elections after gaining suffrage, women's turnout rates were significantly lower than those of men. However, the gap has decreased, as successive cohorts have grown accustomed to voting. The same socialization process has occurred for women holding office. When examining only the year women first gained the right to vote, it may be assumed that women in Sweden and Poland have had the same amount of experience and the same influence in politics. This appears incorrect. In 1990, women in Sweden had already been politically socialized for over 80 years, whereas Polish women had just regained full political rights, after having been excluded from most political offices for approximately 50 years. Having been deprived of political rights for nearly five decades, women in the Eastern European countries have had to re-learn their political rights and duties. Of the two possibilities, (1) the overall years women have had the right to vote in democratic elections, and (2) the year women gained suffrage, the former variable covers these nuances in political engagement and socialization, better than the latter, and is thus employed for this study. The variable – the overall years women have had the right to vote in democratic elections – was calculated by the author on the basis of the IPU publication *Women in Politics 1945–2005* (2005).

The third socio-economic variable – the percentage of women in leading professional professions – is gauged by the percentage of women who are employed as managers. Managers are persons classified as directors and chief executives, production and operating managers, as well as other specialist managers and managers of small enterprises. The data were retrieved from the Social and Economic Domain: Women and Men in Managerial Positions database, which was established by the European Commission (2006).

To operationalize the concept of political culture, this study uses data from the World Value Survey (2001). Unlike Paxton and Kunovich (2003), who aggregate individual responses from World Value Survey on the six relevant questions on gender attitudes, this study is contrived to use general data from the World Value Survey, which gauges the polarization between materialist and post-materialist values. In many countries (e.g. Austria, Belgium) that are covered in this study, the questions pertaining to women's role in politics, education and the labour force were not asked in the World Value Survey. That is why a more precise measure than Inglehart's Value Map could not be established.

Inglehart's Value Map (World Value Survey, 2001) is composed of a two-dimensional scale – (1) traditional/secular-rational and (2) survival/self-expression values – that includes all major areas of concern, from religion to politics to economic and social life. Both dimensions, for which Inglehart developed a ranking from –2 to +2, are relevant for this study. For the first dimension, low scores stress

traditional and highly religious values, whereas high scores stress an equal opportunity structure. For the second dimension, a low ranking indicates that the populace embraces materialistic values, whereas a high ranking implies high self-expression values. A political culture that grants women equal opportunities and in which women can successfully express demands (e.g. childcare policy and protection against domestic abuse) is a prerequisite for an egalitarian society. Thus, for the purpose of this study the two scores are added and included in the models as the cultural variable.<sup>6</sup>

The last variable is the percentage of seats held by left wing parties in the lower house of the national assembly. Leftist parties are defined as those that are green or new left as well as socialist/social democratic or communist. Data about the distribution of seats of left-wing parties in the respective national assembly was collected from the Electionworld (2007) database and the websites of the national parliaments (Table 2).

This regression model shows a highly predictive value. It accounts for nearly 75% of the variance in women's representation. The three factors – first, the electoral system type, second, the percentage of women in managerial positions, and third, the overall years women have had the right to vote – have most explanatory power. They account for more than 69% of the variance in the model. None of the other indicators play a decisive role in determining women's representation.

Concerning the electoral system type, this regression model indicates that female candidates have significantly higher chances of being elected under a list proportional system than under any other system. Nearly twice as many women are elected under PR than under plurality or semi-proportional systems. On average, women occupy more than 26.7% of the seats in parliaments whose members are elected under PR. In contrast, the percentage of female legislators elected under either a semi-proportional system or a majoritarian system is only 15.2%. All the countries where women comprise more than one-third of the deputies operate under a genuinely proportional system. In contrast, none of the semi-proportional or majoritarian systems has more than 25% of women deputies.

**Table 2.** Model 1 – National Parliaments

	B	SE	Sig.
Institutional factors			
D_PR	13.9	4,363	0.005
D_SemiPR	5,475	5,211	0.307
D_Quotas	4.228	4.168	0.324
Socio-economic factors			
GDP per capita	-1270 (E-04)	0.000	0.432
Year of women's suffrage	0.227	0.103	0.041
Women in managerial positions	0.505	0.212	0.029
Cultural factors			
Inglehart's Value Map	2.642	1.645	0.126
Party ideology			
% left-wing parties	4.574 (E-02)	0.100	0.653
Constant	-17.393	10.211	0.106

$R^2 = .744$ ;  $N = 27$ .

There are various reasons why women perform better under a PR system. The above study provides enough evidence that proportional systems supply parties with an incentive to 'gamble' by including women candidates on their lists. A woman candidate can be seen as a benefit to the list by attracting voters, without the significant costs of requiring powerful intra-party interests represented by men to step aside (Henig & Henig, 2003, p. 100). Parties in single constituency majoritarian systems are likely to present male candidates. Because of the zero-sum game – only one candidate is nominated in each district – a candidate is more likely to be chosen if she or he has a national reputation, electoral experience and success, and is likely to be positively identified by most voters. Parties still believe that, in general, men fulfil these conditions better than do women (Matland, 1998, p. 112). Similar logics prevail for semi-proportional systems. The small district magnitude also makes parties prefer female candidates over male candidates.

The second statistically significant factor is the percentage of women in managerial positions. It appears that the chances of women being chosen as a candidate rise with professional status. As hypothesized, an increase of women in leading positions expands the pool of female candidates from which parties can choose. Moreover, a high percentage of women in powerful positions puts pressure on parties to grant adequate representation for females. In countries (e.g. Cyprus, Italy), where less than one out of five women occupy a leading position, the percentage of female legislators is less than 20%. In contrast, in countries such as The Netherlands or Sweden, where around one-third of the high echelon positions are held by women, more females (> 33%) are present in the respective national parliaments.

The third significant factor is the overall years women have had right to vote. States with a long-standing tradition of female involvement tend to have a higher number of female legislators than those countries in which women had been deprived of political rights over a long period of time. This may explain why the Eastern European countries, in which women did not gain or regain equal political rights until the late 1980s and early 1990s, have, on average, lower numbers of female legislators than the Western European countries. Among others, this variable may also explain the high female representation in the Nordic countries, in which universal suffrage rights have existed uninterrupted for approximately 85 years.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the selectivity of quotas, this measure of positive discrimination does not play a major role in the model. However, in the respective countries (e.g. Belgium), where quota provisions are enacted, quotas are a determining factor that boosts female representation. When applied more frequently by states or by the parties themselves, their relative importance with regard to women's representation should increase.

Similar to quotas, the variable GDP per capita has no explanatory value in the model. Wealth alone does not guarantee a higher representation of women. Rather, it is necessary that women participate in the public life. With regard to the variable, political culture, its sub-optimal operationalization only allows for a tentative interpretation of its importance in Europe. More precise measurements are necessary to confirm or disconfirm the findings of this study. A provisional interpretation might suggest that the cultural differences are not considerable enough to influence the representation of women in parliament. All 27 countries of the European Union

are post-industrial – the majority of the working population is employed in the service sector – and all are moving towards European integration. With open borders and a common European market, ideological differences might also lessen.

The factor – the percentage of seats held by leftist parties – proves to be highly insignificant in the model. Despite the fact that in 21 out of the 27 states left-wing parties have a higher number of female representatives than their right-wing counterparts – with a vote share of around 26%, they surpass right-wing parties by more than one-third in female representation – the impact of these findings on the overall representation of women is very limited. Only in two plurality systems, where an increase or a decrease in the total vote share of 5% can lead a party to win or lose more than 100 or 200 seats, might it be important for the overall representation of women whether a right- or a left-wing party is in power. An example is Great Britain. The landslide victory of Labour in 1997 nearly doubled the overall number of women in Parliament. Women's representation increased from 9.3% to a total representation of 18.2%. When the party took over governmental control after 18 years of Conservative predominance, it elected 102 out of the 120 female representatives (Lovenduski, 1998).

The influence on the overall number of female representatives by who is in power (the right or the left) is much smaller in the proportional systems in Europe. Under a proportional system, an increase or a decrease of its vote share of 5% makes the party only gain or lose around 5% of the seats. Therefore, the patterns of representation of the different parties are relatively stable and strong increases and decreases in the proportion of female representatives are very unlikely. The development of women's representation in the German Bundestag highlights this tendency. Instead of increasing abruptly, the number of female representatives has grown slowly and steadily in the past decades. Whereas in the United Kingdom the landslide victory of Labour in 1997 triggered a nearly 100% increase in the overall representation of women, the comparable landslide of SPD/Green coalition in 1998 only led to a moderate increase in the total number of female deputies of 8% (Kürschners Volkshandbuch, 1999).

## Conclusion

This study notes that the ideal conditions for a high representation of women are a highly conducive electoral system, a high percentage of women in managerial positions, and a long-standing tradition of female political empowerment. These three indicators can explain much of the variance in women's representation. All other factors seem to be irrelevant in the European context. By including as many variables as possible into the evaluation, this analysis provides a rather complete picture of the current state of women's representation in the 27 member countries of the European Union. Yet, the evaluation can be further refined. The effect of special events such as the German re-unification, which led to an increase of around 10 percentage points in the representation of women in the National Parliament, has not been examined. Moreover, the claim, expressed by French political scientist Maurice Duverger (1955) in his classic study *The Political Role of Women*, that women show significantly less interest in politics than men, could be re-assessed and could be put into perspective with other variables. Finally, factors such as

incumbency could be further included in the analysis. Future research could examine these variables.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to know if the three indicators that have been deemed the most fruitful for this study bear the same value in other regions of the world. If the hypothesis of similar findings is true, after having been tested by a regression model and a cross-national dataset, it can be implied that the electoral system type, the percentage of women in managerial positions and the number of years women have had the right to vote are the three variables on which the number of female deputies is mostly dependent.

For the development of women's representation in Europe, a further slow, but steady increase in female deputies is expected across national levels. In countries where women have relatively recently regained full political rights, a considerable increase in women's representation is likely, as younger cohorts enter the political realm. In the established Western European countries it is estimated that the numbers will either remain constant or slightly increase. One factor that might impinge a rapid rise of women deputies is the fact that major shifts in electoral formulas are not expected. The deadlock of electoral reform in Britain exemplifies this point. The only way to boost women's representation in the short run is by massive adoption of quota laws, especially in countries where the number of female deputies is low. Since the likelihood of this is low, it is anticipated that parity will not be achieved in the coming years unless dramatic changes occur.

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### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> For the 2007 general election, the law obligates parties to fill the first two places on the list with candidates of different genders.
- <sup>2</sup> Under a List Proportional Representation (List PR) system each party presents a list of candidates for a multi-member electoral district, the voters vote for a party, which receives seats in proportion to its overall share of the vote. In some (closed list) systems the winning candidates are chosen from the lists in order of their positions on the lists. If the lists are 'open' or 'free', the voters can influence the order of the candidates by marking individual preferences (IDEA, 2006). The following countries operate under PR: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and The Netherlands. As a mixed system, Germany is also listed under PR because the overall number of seats is allocated by PR.
- <sup>3</sup> Mixed systems are constituted by a mixture of two principles of electoral system design: Majoritarian systems, which usually have single-seat districts with plurality rule and proportional systems (IDEA, 2006). In the three European examples – Hungary, Italy and Lithuania – the majoritarian element is dominant; for this reason they are classified as semi-proportional systems.
- <sup>4</sup> Under this system (Ireland and Malta), each county is divided into multi-member constituencies, each of which has three or four representatives. Parties put forward as many candidates as they believe could win in each constituency. Electors indicate their order (1, 2, 3, 4 . . .) among all the candidates in his or her electoral division. The total number of votes is counted and then this total is divided by the number of seats in a constituency to produce a quota. To be elected, candidates must reach the minimum quota. If no candidate reaches the quota, when the first preferences are counted the person with the least votes

is eliminated and his or her votes redistributed according to second preferences. This process continues until all seats are filled (Norris, 1997, p. 303).

- <sup>5</sup> In majoritarian electoral systems, winning candidates are those having attracted the most votes in a given electoral district, either by a simple majority of the votes ('first past the post') or by an absolute majority in a two ballot system (IDEA, 2006). Great Britain operates under the former formula, France under the latter.
- <sup>6</sup> Cyprus and Malta are not included in Inglehart's Value Map (World Value Survey, 2001). For the purpose of this paper both countries are attributed the score of 1.2. Due to its close ties to Greece, Cyprus's culture should be similar to Greece's. This justifies attributing for Cyprus the same value as for Greece. For Malta, the score of 1.2 is chosen because as a former English colony, many cultural traits should be similar to those of Great Britain's culture. However, 0.3 points are deducted because Malta, as a southern European country, is supposedly more traditional.
- <sup>7</sup> The exact numbers of years during which women have had the right to vote are: 85 years for Denmark, 91 years for Finland and 84 years for Sweden (IPU, 2005).

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