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Finland: Women, Parties, and the Eduskunta

Finland provides an intriguing contrast to the British and German cases. Although the push for women's parliamentary presence did not make much progress in Germany until the late 1980s, and in Britain until the late 1990s, women saw great gains in the 1960s in Finland—an early leader in Western Europe. Figure 7.1 details the proportion of women in the Finnish Eduskunta from 1966 to 2003. Already in 1966, Finnish women made up nearly 17% of the Eduskunta. By the end of the 1970s, women's presence had grown to 26%. By 1991, that percentage leaped to an all-time high of 39%. Yet the figure dropped a bit in 1995, and it has largely stagnated since then. In 1996, all three speakers of the Finnish Eduskunta were women, and in 1999 Finland elected its first woman president.

This chapter will demonstrate the efficacy of a concentration of women's efforts on party politics to women's substantial gains in parliamentary office. Rather than focusing on protest politics, Finnish women concentrated on electoral politics and on parties in particular. Finnish women gradually changed the party culture as they entered party politics full force in the 1960s (Sundberg, 1995b). Finnish women's preference for electoral politics is part of a larger Finnish state-centered tradition. Together, women's party activism and the establishment state-level equality bodies have raised women's status in Finland.

Figure 7.1 Finish Women in the Eduskunta, 1966–2003

Source: IPU (1997), updated with data from www.ipu.org.

Certainly Finnish women have encountered barriers in party politics. Yet their earlier entry into the public arena, relative to women in other Western European nations, encouraged higher numbers of women in politics. By giving women the right to vote and to run for office in 1906, Finland was the second nation to enfranchise women and the first to allow women's candidacies (Kuusela, 1995). Women's enfranchisement coincided with that of most men, and as a result, women encountered fewer entrenched interests in their initial elections than women in other Western European nations (Haavio-Mannila, 1981).

As part of an effort to pay off Finland's debts after World War II, the Finnish government strongly encouraged women to enter the paid workforce. Likewise, Finnish women entered higher education in record numbers a decade earlier than their counterparts in other Western European nations. In addition, spending on healthcare, family allowances, national childcare, and other social transfer payments decreased women's dependence on the traditional family structure. These strong national policies are a unique feature of Finnish society and set women's situation in Finland apart from their situation in other Western European nations.

Many casual observers chalk up Finnish women's high levels of representation to an egalitarian culture in Scandinavian nations. Yet if a general ethos

of gender equality alone accounts for the high percentage of women in parliament, then one might logically expect to observe a high level of equality in other public spheres as well. However, women have not achieved record levels of power in every arena. Women's gains in elected office have not been mirrored by gains among the business, media, academic, or scientific elite (Karvonen, 1995). A 1998 report found a statistically significant deficit for women in almost all of its measures of social status, including family responsibilities (Meklas, 1999). In addition, akin to its European neighbors, gender inequality in Finland continues to manifest itself through income disparity (Haavio-Mannila, 1981). In 1997, although women accounted for 48% of the members of the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions, they only made up 20% of the union's executive committee, and that underrepresentation stands in other unions as well (Nordic Council of Ministers, 1999). In a 1998 survey, 83% of women and 65% of men felt that Finnish women did not enjoy the same status as men (Meklas, 1999). Women's achievements in positions of power in the Finnish Eduskunta appear unique, and it is important to examine the mechanisms behind women's early rise to political power.

It is also important to note that although Finland has historically been tightly linked with Sweden, Finland is not uniformly regarded as Scandinavian. Finland also shares a common history with its eastern neighbor, Russia, which occupied Finland intermittently over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, for all intents and purposes, Finland was granted autonomous status in the nineteenth century (Pesonen, 2000). In 1917, Finland declared itself independent. The confluence of Western (Swedish) and Eastern (Russian) traditions in Finnish society contributes distinct conceptions of gender roles; women's position in Scandinavian society has historically been more powerful than in Russian society.

Political Background

The Finnish governmental structure is both parliamentary and allows for the direct election of a president. In some respects, the president depends upon the prime minister and executive cabinet, yet policymaking is segmented, so that the president leads in foreign policy, and the parliament largely controls domestic policies (Pesonen, 2000). Finland's proportional representation (PR) electoral system uses "open lists." Rather than voting for a predetermined slate of candidates, Finnish voters may cast their votes for an individual candidate on the party's list. Parties receive seats in proportion to their share of the vote, and the first candidates to receive seats are those on the party's list who received the most votes (Pesonen, 1995). Since 1978, Finnish law has required parties to hold primary elections among their members to select candidates.

With a largely homogenous ethnic population and common Protestant heritage, the Socialist/non-Socialist division, often referred to as the “Red-White cleavage,” grounds Finnish voting behavior. This division differs from the traditional Left/Right cleavage dominant in other Western European nations, because there is a strong political center which belongs to the non-Socialist side. Finland is a multiparty system, and no single party has dominated. Coalition governments are common (Pesonen, 1995). There are six major parties in the national parliament, and they can be categorized as follows: the Social Democrats (SDP) and the Left Alliance (VAS), which follows from the Finnish People’s Democratic League (SKDL), fall into the Socialist category; the Center (KESK) and the Conservatives (KOK) fall into the non-Socialist category; and the Green Party (VIHR) falls into its own, independent third group. The Green Party’s popularity coincides with the rise in new issues that are not part of the traditional social class framework. The “Red-White” cleavage has further attenuated in the past two decades with a decline in the number of working-class voters (Pesonen, 2000). Together, the rise of new issues and the deterioration of the class cleavage encouraged a visible process of partisan convergence toward the center of the ideological spectrum by the major Finnish parties over the last fifteen years (Pesonen, 2000). This convergence is best illustrated by the 1987 and 1995 coalition governments made up of the SDP and the Conservatives, without the mediating Center Party.

Finnish Electoral Rules and Women’s Presence in the Eduskunta

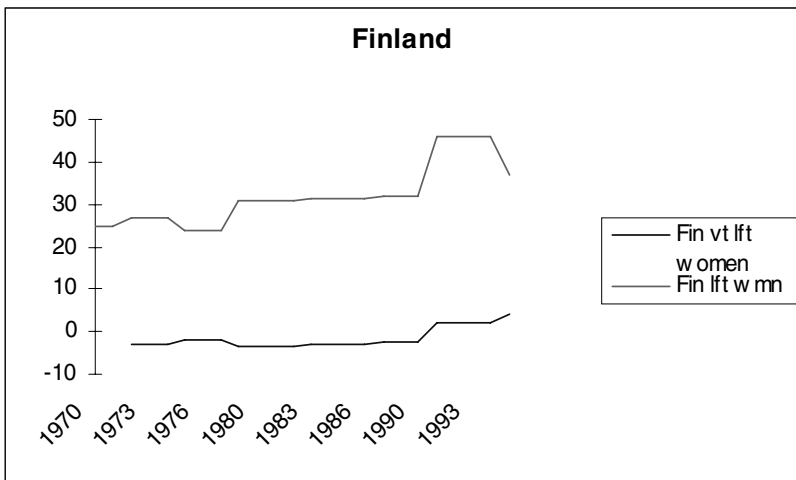
Certainly Finland’s unique electoral rules aided women’s early achievements. In PR systems, parties have a distinct incentive to include women on the party list to appeal to a broad stratum of voters. Yet while women in other party-list, proportional representation systems were bound to “closed lists” and ranked toward the bottom by party officials, Finland’s “open” list meant women could receive individual preference votes. Thus, Finnish women avoided the trap of being ranked so low on the list that they could not be elected. Instead, women candidates proved highly popular among women voters and were often elected by a distinct women’s constituency (Haavio-Mannila, 1981). By the 1972 election, there was no difference in the candidate success rates among male and female candidates (Haavio-Mannila, 1981). In a 1970 poll, 40% of women and 7% of men said they would vote for a female candidate (Haavio-Mannila, 1981). By 1991, those percentages had risen to 57% of women and 25% of men (“Women Members of the Finnish Parliament”). Finnish parties responded to women candidates’ popularity by running even more women in subsequent elections. In essence, electoral rules in Finland did not present the same barriers for women that they did in other Western European nations.

Finnish Women's Voting Patterns and Parliamentary Presence

Women's political activity has been high since the 1970s, and women's voting rates caught up with those of men in the 1950s (Haavio-Mannila, 1981). Relative to voting patterns in Germany and Britain, the gender gap has played such a small role that the major studies of voting behavior do not emphasize gender differences (Pesonen, 1995; for reviews, see Borg and Sankiaho, 1995; Pesonen, 1999). Past research on the gender gap in Finland shows women are only gradually moving toward the leftist parties, yet these differences are not large enough to be called a "gap" (Oskarson, 1995).

Figure 7.2 displays the trends both in the Finnish gender gap in voting and in the proportion of women MPs from leftist parties. I measure the gender gap as the percentage of women who intend to vote for leftist parties (the Social Democrats, the Greens, and the Left Alliance) minus the percentage of men who intend to do the same.¹ The higher the vote gap line reaches, the more support the Left enjoys among women voters. Indeed, the graph supports previous research. There is virtually no difference in support for the Left between men and women. And still the proportion of women in leftist parties' delegations to parliament grows considerably over this period—jumping in 1980 and the early 1990s. Electoral forces do not appear to underlie women's rise to political leadership in Finland.

Figure 7.2 Finnish Trends in the Gender Vote Gap and Women in the Eduskunta, 1970–95



Source: Finnish Election Studies and IPU (1997). See Appendix B for details.

Party-Level Forces for Increasing Women in the Eduskunta

In contrast to Britain and Germany, Finnish parties made fewer visible efforts to promote women candidates. In several interviews with party officials and MPs from each of the major Finnish parties, there was little indication that the party directly acted to promote women candidates in the 1980s and 1990s. Finnish party leaders and women activists did not perceive women as a special constituency, nor as a key to electoral success. As such, no media campaigns (such as Labour's "Winning Words") specifically targeted women voters as a collective. Further, women's representation in parliament never became a highly salient issue in party politics. In part, there was less need for efforts to boost women's presence—by the 1960s Finland was already a world leader. Finnish women's head start by way of an integrationist strategy in party politics earned them great strides early on.

Party Competition

Like the German Greens, the Finnish Green Party began by running a nearly equal proportion of women and men for election to parliament. Yet the Finnish Greens did not ignite competition for women's votes through political presence. The distinction is that in Finland, running a high proportion of women candidates was not unprecedented. By the time the Greens entered politics, Finland was already a world leader in women's numerical representation.

Women's Strategies in Party Politics

In contrast to the women's movement in most Western European nations, the Finnish movement emerged later and was quite small, even proportionate to the population. Importantly, the Finnish women's movement pursued a strategy unique to Western Europe. In the early days of the movement, while the German and British movements overwhelmingly remained autonomous, Finnish women advocated integration into the existing party structure. As a consequence, Finnish women's ties to political parties have long been stronger than in other Western countries (Jallinoja, 1986; Holli, 1992; Weldon, 2002). Drude Dahlerup (1985) notes that feminism in Finland has been even more closely integrated in the traditional political institutions than it has been in its Nordic neighbors. An interview with a former director of the Council for Equality revealed that this strategy was often referred to by activists as "gaining influence from within."

Rather than dividing efforts outside and inside institutionalized channels,

women's movement activists focused attention on women's organizations within the parties and used the political parties to press for women's equality. Many women in the movement believed that women's oppression was best addressed in a larger package of social and political reforms (Parvikko, 1991). Because parties are issue-aggregating institutions by their nature, they offered the most natural site for women's claims.

Following the Western European pattern, the Finnish women's movement's renewal is rooted in the New Left movement of the 1960s, which was grounded in the universities and attracted a great number of young people (Jallinoja, 1986; Siisiainen, 1992). It is important to note that the integrationist strategy is not limited to the women's movement—it characterizes the entire Finnish New Left more broadly—including the ecological, peace, and antinuclear movements. Further, even students interested in addressing social problems were routed through their school councils into party politics, rather than more fluid protest movements. In short, the New Left in Finland was “not a movement outside the established parties” (Paastela, 1987: 6). This integrationist strategy is rooted in the broad Finnish tendency to look to the state as the ultimate provider of the collective good and social justice (Holli, 1992).

The first main organization of the women's movement, called the “Association 9,” was founded in 1966. Its membership peaked in the late 1960s with 800 members (Holli, 1992). Association 9 was characteristic of the Finnish movement in its strategies and demands. They advocated the adoption of equality between men and women, rather than difference. To back up their equality claims, the Association allowed men to join, and ended up with 28% male membership (Paastela, 1987). Association 9 looked to the state to bring equality to women and therefore oriented itself toward changes in public policy (Holli, 1992).

The Association collapsed in 1970 when its activists opted to move solely into party politics. Women activists saw parties as the true site for decision-making power, and thus party politics provided the best opportunity for the movement's goals to be translated into reality. The presence of women in the Eduskunta became key to “real” equality (Holli, 1996). Most of the members of the Association 9 joined the political parties, and my interviews uncovered that many of these former members went on to elected office. Most women politicians and party officials revealed in their interviews that their political careers began in the university movements and shifted soon after to the party organizations, where they worked their way to the top, often eventually running for office. Bergman (1991) refers to this process in the Finnish system as the “party politicization of protest.” Subsequent outside women's organizations were founded, but none ever achieved more than a few hundred members (Jallinoja, 1986). Laurel Weldon (2002) notes that it is “difficult for women to simultaneously maintain strong intraparty organizations and

autonomous organizations” (79). With few outside women’s organizations, women activists in later years had little choice but to take their demands to the political parties (Sundberg, 1995).

Each of the Finnish parties has a women’s organization. And these organizations have been well funded. In 1975, the government mandated that one-ninth of all state support for political parties be given to the party women’s organization. This policy did not prove especially popular among men and women alike, but it was adopted, nonetheless (Holli, 1996).

Certain factions of Finnish women in party politics shunned intraparty women’s organizations altogether. Some women felt that women’s organizations, by their nature, inhibit women’s progress. This belief is rooted in the dominant ideology of the Finnish women’s movement that equal status is achieved through equal treatment (Haavio-Mannila, 1981). Among Finnish women there has been a long-standing preference for men and women to work together to further party goals (Dahlerup, 1985). The main principle of the Finnish sex role debate has been to de-emphasize gender difference in favor of equality and sameness (Eduards, 1985; Holli, 1997).

Many activists in the 1970s subscribed to this attitude and regarded the women’s organizations as separatist, and thus contradictory to their goals of equality (Parvikko, 1991). Dahlerup (1985) points out that official party histories make scant mention of the women’s organizations. In my interviews, few party officials, regardless of party, offered details on the women’s organization within the party, and they had to be prompted to mention these organizations at all. In short, even with subsidies, there appears to be less focus on separate women’s organizations than in other Western European nations.

Yet many women have joined forces to keep women’s equality on the current political agenda. In 1988, women across the political parties came together to form the Network of Women in Finland’s Parliament (NYTKIS). Several women MPs from each political party were interviewed, and they mentioned the role of NYTKIS in getting women parliamentarians together to discuss women’s issues and equality. Yet surprisingly, no interviewee could remember when they last met, nor who the current leader was, suggesting a diminishing role for NYTKIS in the late 1990s. NYTKIS works with the Council for Equality to bring attention to women’s voice in politics. During the 1991 elections, women MPs described a NYTKIS-sponsored campaign called “Elect 101 Women to the Eduskunta.” With 200 members total, winning 101 seats would mean the number of women representatives would exceed 50%. The campaign built quiet support, but it certainly did not achieve its ambitious goal.

While women’s early and massive entrance into party politics underscores the history of women and parties in Finland, there are differences in women’s roles in the three major parties of the Finnish system—the Social Democrats (SDP), the Center Party (KESK), and the Conservatives (KOK), and the fol-

lowing sections will briefly lay those out. The focus of this section is to understand how women gained power within the Finnish parties. Women's presence on the NECs of the Finnish parties is especially important for women's parliamentary representation, because the NEC has the power to demand that regional party lists contain more women (Sundberg, 1995). By 1975, women already averaged 10–15% across the Finnish parties' NECs.

The Social Democrats

Women's membership in the SDP has increased considerably—from 34% in 1977 to almost 40% in the 1990s (Sundberg, 1995). Yet women's representation in the party's leadership has not always matched their participation at the local level. In the 1970s, women made up less than 10% of the party's NEC. Through mobilization within the party, SDP women achieved powerful positions.

The SDP was the first party to establish a women's organization at the turn of the century. In 1891, the SDP was also the first to call for women's right to vote and stand for election in their party program. The SDP women's section traditionally recruited new women members and campaigned for the party, and since the 1970s, the women's organization has acted as an interest group by pushing for greater influence within the party (Haavio-Mannila, 1981b). In addition, the women's organization has backed women candidates for office, and several SDP female parliamentarians have benefited from this support.

The SDP's women's organization was quite influential in the 1970s, especially at the district level, where many women worked in student and city politics. For their support, the women's organization made demands on the party leadership since the 1970s. The number of "women's issues" discussed at party conferences, such as abortion rights and childcare, jumped noticeably since the women's organization pressed its claims (see Ramstedt-Silen, 1990, as quoted in Sundberg, 1995).

Although the SDP women's organization is stronger than in rival Finnish parties, it has wielded less influence than its sister organizations in Britain and Germany. While the women's section exerted some power in the 1970s, even in the leftist SDP some women were reluctant to participate in a separate women's track, preferring to work within the mainstream party organization. According to at least four different Social Democratic MPs interviewed, the women's organization has lost some power and size over time as it became more popular to work only within the mainstream party organization. SDP women increasingly came to believe that real change would only come through cooperation between women and men.

The SDP has close ties with Finnish trade unions, and unions have not been terribly supportive of women. The opening of this chapter described the

underrepresentation of women in union decision-making bodies. In interviews, SDP members of parliament revealed that their female presidential candidate (and eventual victor in the February 2000 election) did not gain the full union support that was automatically granted to the party's presidential candidates in the past. These women MPs suspected that the tempered support of unions was caused by the fact that the presidential nominee was a woman.

SDP women's strategies to channel the bulk of their energies and resources within the regular party organizations earned women significant and early progress within the party hierarchy, culminating in women making up 33% of the NEC by the early 1990s. The lack of ties to outside women's groups allowed women to concentrate their full effort on climbing in the party ranks. However, by 1995 women's representation on the NEC dropped to less than 13%. Without strong and sustained claims from women, the party has allowed women's representation to ebb and flow, rather than maintaining women's gains.

The Agrarian/Center Party

The KESK does not officially record membership by gender, and thus it is difficult to assess women's presence at the party's grass roots (Sundberg 1995). Elina Haavio-Mannila (1981b) estimates women's membership at 46% in 1980. While the SDP experienced the largest increase in women members, the KESK began with a high number of women members even in the early 1980s. Yet, according to women in the party, the proportion of women activists in the KESK appears a bit lower than in the rival parties. Women activists from these rival parties revealed that the KESK's low number of women stems from its base of support in the rural areas of Finland, where historically fewer women were active in politics altogether. The influx of women into politics came primarily from the urban areas, especially Helsinki, where the university students joined parties in record numbers. Low levels of women's activism were matched by low levels of women's representation on the party's NEC in the 1970s and 1980s—under 15%.

While women members may not be the most visible political activists in the party, the KESK houses the largest women's organization of all Finnish parties. A grassroots organization, centered in the rural localities, the women's section earns its title as a "federation." The KESK Women's Federation had 70,000 members spread among 860 local branches in 1980 (Dahlerup, 1985). Although the KESK women's federation is large, its size is not indicative of its power. The KESK women's section differs from its leftist counterparts in its very limited demands for greater representation.

Similar to women in the SDP, the majority of women achieving higher posts in the KESK followed the central party track to higher party posts.

Those KESK party officials interviewed rose to higher party posts through years of work, and did not make use of the women's organization. Rather, these women considered the mainstream party channels as far more conducive to a party career. In an interview, a KESK party official scoffed at an old initiative to increase women's participation in the party. Branded "one woman politics," the policy sought to get each committee and electoral list to contain one woman. Yet women in the party soon realized that one woman on a party body was simply token representation, and thus they urged the party to abandon this practice in favor of encouraging women more generally. KESK women desired equality—equal access for men and women alike, rather than special, token gestures.

Although they made few claims, the quiet and weakly organized strategy of women in the KESK led to some progress through the party hierarchy. By 1995, women made up 23% of the NEC. The limited progress is not only a function of the weak women's federation, but also to the dominant party ideology that stresses the importance of promotion through the ranks based solely on an activist's "merit" and a reluctance to intervene to promote women to higher positions within the party.

The Conservatives (KOK)

In the late 1970s, women's membership in the KOK was estimated to be the highest of all Finnish parties (Dahlerup, 1985). Yet the KOK has not realized the same increases in women members as the SDP. Further, women's membership figures were not matched by presence among the party decision makers. While women made up about 50% of the membership, the KOK had 18% women on its NEC in 1975.

The Finnish Conservative women's organization was established after its counterpart in the SDP, yet it grew larger by the late 1970s (Dahlerup, 1985). The Conservative women's organization is independent and enrolls its own members. While women have had a strong presence at the party's grassroots, the women's organization applies weaker pressure on the party leadership than does its SDP counterpart.

In interviews, party officials and MPs made it clear that, like the KESK, the KOK's conservative ideology shapes women's views on their role within the party. Most contend that they do not desire any special treatment, nor do they strongly mobilize around women's issues. To an even larger extent than other Finnish parties, Conservative women eschew the separatist route, in favor of mainstream institutions.

Although the Conservatives began the 1970s with almost 20% women on the party NEC, without further pressure from women within the party, women's share of the NEC stagnated and never approached the 50% goal that

was supposed to evolve naturally over time, based upon women's talents and hard work. Instead, the proportion of women bounced between 20% and 10% throughout the 1980s, and it culminated in the 1990s with the same 20% they began with in the early 1970s. In an interview, a leader in the KOK, and speaker of the Eduskunta, Riita Uosukainen, stressed that there were no future plans to promote women within the party hierarchy, as those who were motivated to attain higher office would find no significant barriers.

Party Rule Changes

While Germany was experiencing a contagion of quotas across the party system, and the British Labour Party was tinkering with its short lists, Finnish parties avoided quotas altogether. In interviews, party officials and women MPs from each of the parties insisted that there had been little discussion of such a policy within their party. Because there were no formal party rule changes in Finland, one might be tempted to gloss over this aspect of the Finnish case. Yet the case in which an event did not occur—Sherlock Holmes's "dog that didn't bark"—may shed considerable light on the absence of key conditions identified in the previous narratives. It is important to examine why the Finnish parties appear to have avoided the quota debate altogether.

Chapter 6 revealed that the German Green party was important in setting a precedent for quotas. However, the Finnish Greens did not follow the same path: they have not adopted formal quotas for candidates for parliament. Sundberg (1999) reports that the Finnish Greens adopted quotas for internal party positions. Yet in interviews, several high-ranking Green Party officials indicated that the policy was less a formal quota, and more an informal, agreed upon norm for achieving gender balance within the party—part of the party ethos in equality for all. So in short, the Finnish Greens have not served as an impetus for formal rule changes.

Another important influence on the adoption of quotas in Britain and Germany was growing volatility among female voters. Finnish parties felt little electoral pressure based on a constituency of women voters. Relative to Britain and Germany, women's votes have been consistently spread more evenly across the party system. Thus, electoral competition has not played the same role in encouraging quotas as in the other two cases.

Further, among the Finnish parties, the women's organizations made fewer publicized claims for representation and never mounted a campaign within the party. Interviews with party officials revealed that the Finnish parties lacked the high-profile party women advocating quotas that we found in Labour and the SPD. Yet one still might ask why the women on the National Executive Committees of the Finnish parties did not press for quotas. This question is

especially intriguing for the Finnish SDP, whose leftist ideology suggests that quotas would be an acceptable practice to increase women's representation.

The same reason behind the reluctance to form strong women's organizations in Finland may partly explain the lack of a debate over quotas: Finnish women's strategy has been to integrate into the mainstream institutions of the party, and to downplay any form of women's separatism. The predominant ideology surrounding any Finnish discussion of gender relations is that equality is preferable to special treatment for women (Parvikko, 1991). Hence quotas, which offer women special protection, are considered an anathema to equality.

Even more important than being incongruent with ideology, quotas in Finland may not have been deemed necessary, given Finnish women's high levels of representation in parliament by the 1970s, relative to other Western European countries. The great strides by Finnish women early on relieved much of the pressure for candidate quotas. Further, parties often resort to stringent (and thus more controversial) quotas when women are continually ranked low on the party list. With Finland's open list, party gatekeepers could not keep women in unelectable positions on the list.

State-Level Forces for Women's Equality

A discussion of women's role in the Finnish political arena would be incomplete without some attention to the state's engagement in promoting equality. This book focuses on the party level, but it is essential to examine state-sponsored bodies, because they have often been sites where party women have struggled to make their claims.

Although the Finnish state has been quite active in devising policies to promote gender equality, women have still had to push for increasingly more effective policies over time. In 1962, the principle of equal pay for equal work was introduced through the Equality Act. Yet even with such a policy early on, in the 1990s, the difference between male and female full-time wage earner's salaries averaged 19% (Office of the Ombudsman for Equality, 1999). In 1966 the Council of State commissioned a study of the state of women (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 1999). The study amounted to little more than lip service, and a state body was deemed necessary. In 1972, the Finnish government established the Council for Equality. Under the direction of the prime minister's office, the 13 member council is made up of representatives from all of the major political parties. It is charged with promoting equality between men and women, and it makes regular reports to the Eduskunta (Council for Equality, 1999; Raevaara and Taskinen, 2004). However, the council had little power to enforce policies, and such power was clearly necessary to achieve real gains.

In 1987, the Act of Equality Between Men and Women set up a monitoring mechanism to track women's progress and eliminate discrimination (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 1999). To ensure the act was carried out, the office of Ombudsman for Equality was established. The idea for an Ombudsman's office originated in the equality movement of the late 1960s (Raevaara and Taskinen, 2004). With the ombudsman now reporting directly to the prime minister, the council took a backseat on gender equality policy (Holli, 1996).

While Finnish parties have not adopted candidate gender quotas, in 1995 a national law to promote equality was adopted. The constitution was altered to allow for positive actions to achieve gender equality in social activities and decision-making bodies. However, the amendment does not apply to elected bodies. The law requires at least 40% of each sex in government committees, advisory boards, and "corresponding bodies," and within the boards of state majority companies (Raevaara and Taskinen, 2004). As a result, the internal bodies of all Finnish parties rose to 40% women.

The stronger role of the state in Finland, relative to other Western European nations, is largely caused by two factors. First, the common first response to social problems among most Finns is to look toward the state. In other words, there is a state-centered tradition within Finnish culture. Second, in the case of women's equality, the state took a more active role because women had already established a foothold in state institutions early on, especially in the parliament. By the time the 1995 gender equality law was adopted, women had already made inroads at the highest echelons of parliamentary politics. In a circular fashion, women's political gains have reinforced themselves through a reconfiguration of state policies.

Conclusions

Taken together, women's strategy and favorable electoral rules contributed to strong gains for Finnish women in the Eduskunta. The Finnish women's movement illustrates how national contexts exert strong influence over movements, which in turn shape efforts within parties. Specifically, the larger movement's full-force focus on party politics heightened women's presence in all parties from the 1970s. This early strategy is unique to the Finnish parties. What is striking about the Finnish parties' women's organizations is that while they are fairly large and well financed, their role appears weaker than in other countries where women have made successful claims. A common theme in all of the party narrative is that many party women avoided the women's organizations, for fear of being labeled isolationists.

Importantly, the rules of the game favored women in Finland. Women have

less need to pressure parties for parliamentary presence. Instead, women can lobby female voters. In Finland, parties have less control over nomination than in the rest of Western Europe, because of party primaries among party members. Further, Finnish parties have no control over the ranking of candidate lists. So the rules give parties incentive to offer women on candidate lists, through the logic of balancing lists to appeal to voters. And the rules allow voters to specifically select women candidates, no matter where they appear on the party list.

Women achieved substantial representation through Finnish parties early on, yet women still have a way to go in Finnish politics. Over the last three decades, women in the British Labour and German SPD and CDU have come close to achieving 50% women among the top party leadership. Similarly, since the 1970s, women's parliamentary presence has been nearly stagnant, and Finland has been surpassed as the world leader. In some respects, the Finnish case may represent the "tortoise and the hare" fable. As chapter 1 illustrated, women's representation in the Eduskunta leaped ahead of other Western European countries in the 1970s. While women in other countries were galvanizing and organizing against their underrepresentation, Finnish women had already made gains. The absence of a strong women's movement outside partisan channels precluded the reinvigoration of party women's organizations. In short, the reluctance of women in the Finnish party system to make strong claims for representation based on their identity as women, and their reluctance to call for new party rules, has made it difficult for women to gain truly "equal" representation.