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## 8. Increasing Access to Parliaments: A Model for Change

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## Increasing Access to Parliaments: A Model for Change

After examining women's activism within the party ranks, and formal rule changes in party policies to select candidates, this chapter moves on to examine the end result—women's parliamentary presence. Systematic comparison across parties and over time illuminates some common characteristics of parties that lead to increases in women's representation. By using the party as the unit of analysis, one can examine those influences at two levels, the party system and individual party behavior and characteristics. Importantly, many previous cross-national statistical analyses of women's parliamentary presence are essentially static. Yet chapter 1 made clear that women have made great strides in recent years. This chapter takes a dynamic perspective, analyzing both levels of women's parliamentary presence and changes over time.

### **Explanations for the Increase in Women's Representation**

This chapter provides a multifaceted explanation of change in women's representation within the parties of advanced industrial nations. Explanations for the increase in women MPs may be categorized within both the political and institutional opportunity structures, as laid out in chapter 2.

***Political Opportunity Structure Explanations***

Theoretically, the set of political opportunity explanations represents a shift in the power balance, which may open up windows of opportunity for women to gain seats in parliament. These forces may operate outside or inside the party itself.

**Political, Exogenous to Party**

Shifts in women's voting patterns may open up opportunities for women's parliamentary gains by highlighting the potential or realized benefits of obtaining a bloc of women's votes. Time-line analysis of patterns in women's voting behavior in the case study chapters suggested that women's shift to the Left in Britain and Germany might be related to their parliamentary gains. It may be that, controlling for other factors, the gender gap in the vote is a strong influence.<sup>1</sup> I test the hypothesis that a party's accumulation of women's votes (a women's electoral "bonus") heightens women's parliamentary representation.

The British and German case studies also reveal that established parties sometimes respond to new issues after there is pressure from a new rival party. Past cross-national research on other issues suggests that new rival parties play a role in spurring change among the established parties. Thus, I expect that the entrance of a New Left party into the party system will spur parties within the party system to highlight issues of gender equality by running more women for office.

**Political, Endogenous to Party**

Case studies revealed that women's mobilization at the party's grass roots is important to women's ascendance through the party structure. The women's organizations of the German Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, British Labour, and the Finnish Social Democrats were instrumental in putting forward women's demands for greater representation. The women's organization channels women's demands and presents them to the party leadership. Thus, one might expect that pressure generated by women's organizations may prove important when examined systematically across parties, especially when controlling for other factors such as the party's ideology.

In addition, changes in the number of women among the top party ranks may prove important. Women's entrance represents a change of the guard among the party leadership, opening up new opportunities for parties to change the status quo. Chapter 3 illustrates how women's participation in the decision-making bodies within political parties has increased over time. Caul (1999)

finds that across twelve advanced industrial democracies, the proportion of women among party leaders strongly influences the proportion elected to parliament. By gaining power within the party, the opportunities and resources increase substantially for women to lobby for increased representation at the parliamentary level. Further, women's activity within the party creates a larger pool of politically experienced women from which the party can draw for candidate lists. Women's activity at the elite level may act as a mechanism of change. As the number of women among the party's leadership increases, I expect the number of women among the delegation to parliament will increase, as well.

### ***Institutional Opportunity Structure Explanations***

Structural characteristics of parties provide the context for women's parliamentary gains. The rules within some parties are more conducive than in others. Although structural characteristics may not directly lead to change, they can be conceptualized as intervening variables that make it more likely for a party to take a strategic action.

#### **Institutional, Endogenous to Party**

Parties can take direct action to ensure a greater proportion of women candidates by creating formal rules, such as candidate gender quotas. Chapter 4 suggests that candidate quotas bring substantial increases in women's parliamentary presence. For example, the strong and rapid effect of quotas is illustrated by the British Labour Party's adoption of its "all-women shortlists."

In addition, the organizational characteristics of the intraparty opportunity structure—the degree of centralization, fractionalization, programmatic orientation, and New and Old Left ideology—are drawn out in chapter 2 and tested in chapter 3 regarding women's representation among the party's national executive committee. These structures, in addition to a few factors that are unique to women's parliamentary representation, will be examined in this chapter.

First, a party's degree of centralization may impact women's access to parliament. Centralization describes the distribution of control over the decision making among levels of the party hierarchy. Chapter 2 suggested that a centralized party might allow party leaders the leeway to promote women candidates—when they perceive the need to do so. Without a centralized and coordinated effort, the Labour Party would have failed to coerce local constituencies into nominating female candidates. Further, chapter 3 revealed that centralized parties are more conducive to women's representation on the party's NEC.

In addition, because fractionalized parties have more links to outside groups, they might provide more points of access to new groups who wish to enter their ranks. Chapter 4 revealed that fractionalized parties are indeed more conducive to women's ascendance to the party's NEC, and by extension, this feature may also be conducive to women's ascendance to parliamentary office.

Similarly, a more pragmatic, as opposed to more rule-bound, party is more likely to support women. Although the pragmatic nature of a party was not found to be instrumental to women's gains inside the party, it may still be important to their gains in parliamentary office.

One conditional factor unique to women's parliamentary representation is the level of candidate nomination. Candidate nomination can be controlled mainly by the local party organization, as illustrated in the British Labour Party, or at some other level. For example, in the German Social Democratic Party, the regional party organization has a great degree of control over nomination to the party lists. Further, the central party leadership may have more control over the process, as illustrated in the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA). The level of candidate nomination may intervene to influence party behavior. A more localized level of nomination makes it more difficult for party leadership to implement a new rule, such as candidate gender quotas. For example, when the British Labour Party adopted all-women short lists, party officials from headquarters in London had trouble persuading local constituencies to follow the policy. Without direct control over nomination, this policy was difficult to enforce.

Another contextual variable is the party's ideological framework. Chapters 3 and 4 revealed that leftist parties are more likely to have women among the party's leadership and to adopt quota policies. By extension, one can expect leftist parties to have higher rates of increase in women's parliamentary representation than rightist parties. In previous research (Caul, 1999), I find that across twelve advanced industrial democracies, leftist parties, and especially those with New Left values, had higher proportions of women in parliament from 1975 to 1992. Likewise, Darcy and Beckwith (cited in Darcy, Welch, and Clark, 1994) find that even when controlling for a party's electoral gains and losses, Socialist, Communist, and Green parties elect one or two additional women per election, compared with parties in the Center and to the Right. Although the leftist orientation of a party is a fairly stable influence and may not be directly related to change, it is likely that the mechanisms that do lead to change are adopted by leftist parties. As such, party ideology is an intervening variable through which other influences are filtered.

#### Institutional, Exogenous to Party Itself

Research on the representation of women often emphasizes the effects of the

electoral system. Several studies have established that party-list, proportional representation systems (PR) with large district magnitudes lead to more women in parliament than plurality systems (Lakeman, 1994; Duverger, 1955; Rule and Zimmerman, 1994; Beckwith, 1994; Matland, 1993; Matland and Studlar, 1996). Rule (1987) concludes that the method of election, when compared with socioeconomic indicators, is the strongest influence on women's parliamentary representation. The standard explanation is that parties are less likely to run a woman in a single-member district because parties worry that they will lose the seat to a male competitor. In contrast, in party-list, PR systems, parties are more likely to add women to the list of candidates in an effort to broaden the party's appeal and to balance the ticket. Women candidates are often viewed as benefits to the party by attracting votes, without forcing established politicians to step down.

For example, in the Finnish party-list, PR system, party officials revealed in interviews that it is the accepted practice to balance their lists—not only balanced in terms of gender, but also age, occupation, and factions of the party—to broaden the party's appeal among all types of voters. This penchant to balance the list, by way of what we might call a “logic of proportionality,” has become the established norm, and the Finnish parties are unlikely to conceive of composing a ticket that was not balanced in such a way.

Although the electoral system does not appear to be the direct mechanism of change because of its largely static nature over time, party-list systems may be the most fertile soil in which the proportion of women can grow. Darcy, Welch, and Clark (1994) contend that party-list, PR systems are more conducive to women's representation because legislative turnover is higher than in single-member district plurality systems. The authors reason that for women to win a seat, established male politicians must lose a seat. In single-member districts, there is more emphasis on the personal appeal and constituency work of the incumbent, and thus the party has less power to select or deselect officeholders. In contrast, in those systems where candidates are slated on a list, rather than representing a constituency, there is less emphasis on the candidate. Therefore, it is easier for a party to replace past MPs on a list. For example, the low proportion of women in the U.S. House can be explained, in part, by the drag of incumbency. In the United States, where incumbents are overwhelmingly reelected and are slow to retire, the opportunities for women to run for open seats are few. So, one expects that party-list, PR systems will be associated with larger increases of women MPs owing to greater electoral turnover. Among the set of countries analyzed here, all but one uses a form of PR (the exception is, of course, Britain). Thus, the impact of degree of proportionality will be tested here. This impact is measured using district magnitude, which ranges from 1 to 75 across this set of countries.

In a related manner, where there are swings in the distribution of seats

among candidates, independent of electoral system, there is an opportunity for newcomers such as women to be elected to parliament. Conversely, when members are reelected, there should be little change in the gender composition of the party's delegation to parliament. At the level of the nation, Darcy and Beckwith (cited in Darcy, Welch, and Clark, 1994) establish that electoral turnover is indeed a powerful explanation for increases in women's representation over time. In a study of eleven nations from 1970 to 1984 and in an in-depth study of seven Danish elections, the authors find a clear pattern between party gains at elections and increasing numbers of women in parliament. Therefore, I expect that when a party gains seats, there will also be an increase in the number of women that party sends to parliament. This process is best exemplified by the British Labour Party, which swept the 1997 elections, winning an unprecedented number of seats. Candidates in marginal, and even not-so-marginal, seats were elected. As a result, the Labour Party went from 37 women in their 1992 delegation to parliament, to 101 in 1997. However, the expectations for future women's gains are dismal, because Labour is not likely to win many new seats, and thus there are fewer opportunities for more women to be elected.

It is important to note that parties with open nomination slots will not automatically nominate more women—other factors must be present to encourage them to do so. Thus, as discussed in chapter 2, the electoral rules and seat turnover only create the context in which party-level forces operate.

## Data Analysis

Setting up the “puzzle of women's representation,” as described in chapter 1, I argue that past cross-national research missed important clues in explaining the increase in women's representation by focusing only on static, national-level percentages between nations. Taken together, this research established that party-list, proportional representation systems are the most conducive to the election of women. Indeed, the method of election does matter for comparative levels of women's representation. Yet problematically, while women's representation has systematically increased since the mid-1970s across advanced industrial nations, the electoral systems have remained fairly stable. Therefore, in addition to examining the actual levels of women's representation by party, in this section I examine change in the proportion of women from one election to the next.

In this section, I systematically analyze the mechanisms that influence the proportion of women among a party's MPs. A pooled cross-section of data that includes observations for all national elections between 1975 and 1997 in the ten Western European nations in our study is analyzed.<sup>2</sup> This pooled

**Table 8.1** Multivariate Model Explaining Women's Representation as Party MPs

Explanatory Variable	Percentage Women MPs by Party			
	Levels		Change	
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b
<b>Political Opportunity Structure</b>				
Gender and Vote (Women's Bonus)	.15**	.14**	.10*	.10*
New Left Party	.06		.11*	.09*
Presence of Party Women's Organization	.01		.00	
Women in Party Leadership	.49**	.47**	.16**	.12**
<b>Institutional Opportunity Structure</b>				
Gender Quotas	.07		.09*	.08*
Candidate Nomination Level	-.14**	-.14*	-.09*	-.04
Party Centralization Index	.23**	.61**	.08*	.10**
Party Fractionalization Index	.01		.00	
Party Programmatic Index	.02		.01	
Old Left Ideology	.03		.01	
New Left Ideology	.01		.01	
Electoral System (District Magnitude)	-.12		.01	
Seat Turnover (Change)	.06		.05	
Lagged Percentage of Women by Party			.61**	
Adjusted R-Squared	.37	.57	.74	.75

Note: Table entries are standardized regression coefficients. Dichotomous country variables are also included in Models 1b and 2b but are not shown. Denmark and Finland are significant in each. Dichotomous country variables are not included in Models 1a and 2a because the presence of country-specific variables such as electoral system serves as a proxy-country dummy variable. See chapter notes for full explanation.

Significance Levels: \*\* =  $p < .05$ , \* =  $p < .10$

cross-section of 547 cases provides enough observations to control for several factors. Measures were collected from published national statistics and other data sources for each of the independent and dependent variables. A full explanation of the variables and data sources of the data can be found in Appendix A.

### Multivariate Analyses

The goal is to determine which influences affect both levels of women in a party's parliamentary delegation and change in the proportion of women, and how these influences work together. Using the hypotheses outlined in the previous section, I create multivariate models to test the combined influence of



these explanatory factors. The dependent variable in the first set of models (Models 1a and 1b) is the percentage of women in parliament by party—the actual numbers. In the second set of models (Models 2a and 2b), the dependent variable is also used as a lagged variable in the equation—to explain change in the levels.

The multivariate analyses are presented in table 8.1.<sup>3</sup> Model 1a contains all of the hypothesized influences on the level of female party MPs.<sup>4</sup> Among the political opportunity structure explanations, there are two statistically significant predictors, a party's share of women's votes, and the proportion of women among the party's leadership (NEC). Neither the presence of a New Left Party nor a women's organization within the party is a significant predictor of levels of women's representation. Further, among the institutional opportunity structure variables, both a decentralized level of candidate nomination and a centralized party structure emerge as statistically significant influences on the number of women in a party's delegation to parliament.

The strongest and most significant explanatory variables from this original "full" model are entered by themselves in a separate equation to assess their importance without the interference of the weaker variables. Model 1b presents the results of the scaled-down model. The same explanatory variables remain significant in this model, the predictive power of a centralized party organization skyrockets, and the explained adjusted variance climbs to nearly 60%.

In search of mechanisms to increase women's representation, the second set of equations examines *change* in the proportion of women. As expected, in the "change" models, the lagged percentage of women by party is the strongest variable, and it explains the cross-sectional variance.<sup>5</sup>

First, the results of the "full" model predicting change (Model 2a) reveal that a women's bonus in party's votes (or a deficit in men's votes) is a significant predictor of increases in women's representation. Further, increasing numbers of women in party leadership positions is a strong and significant predictor of increases in parliament. Importantly, although not significant when explaining static levels of representation, when it comes to explaining change, the presence of a New Left party in the system and the use of gender quotas are statistically significant and therefore appear to be mechanisms of change. As observed when examining static levels of women's representation, a decentralized level of candidate nomination and a centralized party structure are the most conducive for women. Surprisingly, neither a party's ideology nor the electoral system's district magnitude proves statistically significant in explaining change.

As with the first set of models, the strongest explanations from the full model are entered separately in a scaled-down model (Model 2b). The results reveal that the explanatory variables that were significant in the full model remain so in the scaled-down model, except the level of candidate nomination.

It appears that a decentralized level of nomination is not a consistent or robust indicator of change in women's representation. The model's explanatory power holds constant, and together these influences explain 75% of the adjusted variance in party-level change in women's parliamentary representation.

## Discussion

The multivariate models reveal that both political and institutional opportunity structure influences are important influences on change in the gender composition of a party's delegation to parliament. Further, forces both in the party system and within the party itself heighten women's opportunities for office. Select explanatory variables from each category are found to be statistically significant across the different models constructed in the data analysis. From the political side, parties that garner more women's votes, relative to men's, have higher numbers of women MPs and have experienced greater increases in women MPs over time. Clearly electoral forces are at work here. Because the difference (or "gap") in women's and men's votes is a lagged indicator, meaning it is taken from the previous election, this sequence suggests that having more women among a party's supporters leads to more women in office, rather than the other way around.

Overall, one of the strongest and most consistent indicators of both "levels" and "change" is the increase from the previous election in the percentage of women on the party's national executive committee.<sup>6</sup> Having more women in the party's leadership before the elections appears to be key to getting more women elected. After women become more entrenched in the higher ranks of the party hierarchy, women then also gain entrance into the parliament in higher numbers. The results of this model indicate that women's presence is key at the top of the party hierarchy, but the mere presence of a women's organization is not as important. This finding lends support not only to the importance of political factors within the party, but also to the elite-led, top-down theory of party change. It appears that women among the party decision makers can lead the way toward women's gains in parliament.

Further bolstering the important role of party leadership is the finding that centralized parties have higher numbers of women in office and experience greater increases in women's representation. This finding suggests that where party leaders have the power, they can support women candidates for office and can compel the local and regional party organizations to follow their lead. As part of the institutional opportunity structure, a centralized organization creates a context conducive to women's efforts from above to pressure and gain results in parliament.

An important difference follows from separately examining the levels and

change. The impact of New Left parties and quotas is limited to the statistical model that measures change in women's parliamentary presence from one election to the next. New Left parties and quotas are mechanisms for women's gains. As the New Left party brings gender equality to the top of the agenda and runs a high number of women for office, other parties appear to follow their lead and run more women. In addition, parties that adopt candidate gender quotas register larger increases in women's progress.

Because decentralized candidate nomination loses its significance in one model, it is one of the weaker indicators. Yet it may loosely shape women's parliamentary representation. How can one square this finding with the finding that a more highly centralized party leadership is conducive to women's representation? The central party leadership can take an active role in responding to women's demands for more equitable representation, even when nomination is largely conducted at the local levels. In a centralized party, national authorities have the power to persuade local constituencies to implement standard policies to promote women.

Although I predicted that ideology would strongly condition women's opportunities within the party, measures of both New and Old Left values in the party were weak and insignificant in each instance. While chapters 3 and 4 find ideology impacts women's opportunities for ascendance through the party ranks to the national executive committee and impacts the likelihood that a party will adopt quotas, ideology does not emerge as an important factor in predicting women's parliamentary presence, *ceteris paribus*. Parties further to the left on the ideological scale do *not* appear to be registering higher levels of women in parliament than other parties across the ideological scale. Perhaps the center and rightist parties had more ground to make up—overall, rightist parties started out at lower levels in the 1970s, and there was much more room for progress. Some leftist parties, especially those in Scandinavia, began in the 1970s with levels that left them with less area to cover in their progression toward 50% women in parliament.

It is also surprising that many of the other institutional opportunity structure explanations prove weak and insignificant in the quantitative analysis. Specifically, past research emphasized the importance of electoral rules and seat change for creating the space for women to make gains. In this analysis, a party's overall gain of seats in the legislature relate weakly to women's gains. In a similar fashion, proportionality in the electoral system (as measured by district magnitude) exerts little influence. Although past research establishes that party-list, PR systems with high district magnitudes are strong indicators of *levels* of women's parliamentary representation, this does not appear to be the most direct mechanism of *increases* in the proportion of women in parliament. Despite the fact that the proportionality of the electoral rules is a fairly stationary variable, it was included in the model to predict change, not only

because it is an important control variable, but also because theoretically a PR system should provide the opportunity for other mechanisms of change, such as quotas, to work.

All in all, the results of the multivariate model point toward simultaneous bottom-up pressures and top-down strategies behind efforts to promote women for office within a changing political opportunity structure. Women's role in this process proves vital—women are important to increasing their representation in parliament, both as a voting bloc and as leaders within the party hierarchy.