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## Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems

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The following two chapters examine some of the strategies that can be used to overcome the obstacles to political participation outlined in the previous chapter. In this chapter, we focus our attention on two issues. First, we examine the principle steps involved in the legislative recruitment process in order to elucidate how women can increase their chances of getting nominated and elected. Second, we look at one particular mechanism proven effective in increasing women's representation: a country's electoral system. Which electoral systems are best suited to elect women and why? How have electoral systems affected women's representation in different countries? What specific factors should women be concerned about in the actual design of electoral systems? By addressing these questions, we hope to provide some insight on one effective and practical strategy that women can use to increase their parliamentary representation.

### *The Legislative Recruitment Process and its Impact on Women*

The stage at which the party gatekeepers actually choose the candidates is perhaps the most crucial stage for getting women into office.

For women to get elected to parliament they need to pass three crucial barriers: first, they need to select themselves to stand for elections; second, they need to get selected as a candidate by the party; and third, they need to get selected by the voters.

Figure 3.1 indicates the process of choosing members to parliament. While the steps involved in moving from eligible to aspirants to candidates to MPs are the same in most political systems, the actual process varies dramatically from country to country. In particular, party structure, party rules and party norms along with the country's social and political system impact on the recruitment process at different stages.

#### **Selecting Yourself**

The first stage consists of a person deciding that she wants to run for elected office. The decision to aspire to office is generally seen as being influenced by two factors: personal ambition and opportunities to run for office. For women

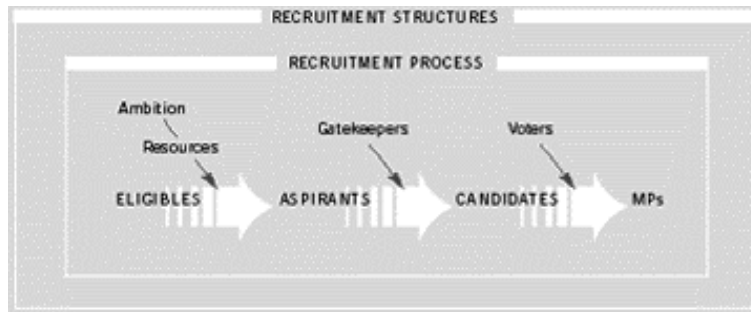
**A women's movement or organization focusing on women's issues can substantially increase the number of potential women candidates aspiring for office.**

openly aspiring to run for office, it is a difficult but necessary step to gaining political representation. A woman's assessment of her chances and therefore her willingness to run will be affected by the number of opportunities to run, how friendly the political environment will be to her candidacy and an estimation of the resources she can generate to help her campaign if she decides to run.

One of the most important factors that can help increase the number of

women seriously considering running for office is the extent to which a country has a women's movement or organizations focusing specifically on women's issues. Women's organizations provide women with experience in public settings, help build their self-confidence and provide a support base if a woman decides to run for office. A woman who can draw on resources from a woman's organization to help support her campaign is more likely to run and is more likely to be seen as a viable candidate by the party apparatus.

**Figure 3.1 Legislative Recruitment System**



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Source: Figure 3.1 is adapted from P. Norris, "Legislative Recruitment", in L. Leduc, R. Niemi and P. Norris, eds. 1996. *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*. London: Sage. p. 196.

**Getting Selected by the Party**

The next step is to get selected by the party. The process of nominating candidates is one of the crucial roles played by political parties. Nomination procedures vary from country to country and can be distinguished by a number of features, including, for example, the breadth of participation and centralization or decentralization of the process.<sup>1</sup> At one end of the spectrum are processes that provide a broad opportunity for people to participate, such as primary elections in the U.S. and all-member party caucuses run by the major Canadian parties. At the other end of the spectrum are systems in which the party leader, national faction leaders, or the national executive choose the candidates – such as the choosing of candidates by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan, which is very much under the control of faction leaders. Depending on which of these procedures is used, party leaders, a broader set of party officials or a significant portion of party rank and file will play the gatekeeper role.

**Box 3.1 The World of Electoral Systems**

The world of electoral systems can be split into nine main system types which fall into three broad families of Plurality–Majority systems, Semi-Proportional (Semi-PR) systems and Proportional Representation (PR) systems.

Plurality–Majority	Semi-PR	Proportional Representation
FPTP	Parallel	STV
UK, India	Japan, Russia	Ireland, Malta
Block Vote	SNTV	MMP
Palestine, Maldives	Jordan, Vanuatu	New Zealand, Germany
Alternative Vote		List PR
Australia, Nauru		South Africa
Two-Round		
France, Mali		

**A. Plurality–Majority Systems**

The four types of plurality–majority systems comprise two plurality systems, First Past the Post (FPTP) and the Block Vote (BV) and two majority systems, the Alternative Vote (AV) and the Two-Round System (TRS).

First Past the Post is the world's most commonly-used electoral system. In a First Past the Post system, contests are held in single-member districts and the winner is the candidate with the most votes, but not necessarily an absolute majority of the votes. Countries which use this system include the United Kingdom, the United States, India, Canada and most countries which were once part of the British Empire.

The Block Vote is the application of FPTP in multi-member rather than single-member districts. Voters have as many votes as there are seats to be filled and the highest-polling candidates fill the positions, regardless of the percentage of the votes they actually achieve. This system is used in some parts of Asia and the Middle East.

The Alternative Vote enables electors to rank the candidates in the order of their choice, by marking a “1” for their favourite candidate, “2” for their second-choice, “3” for their third choice and so on. If no candidate has over 50 per cent of first preferences, lower order preference votes are transferred until a majority winner emerges. This system is used in Australia and some other South Pacific countries.

The other type of majority system, the Two-Round System, takes place in two rounds, often a week or a fortnight apart. The first round is conducted in the same way as a normal FPTP election. If no candidate receives an absolute majority in the first round, then a second round of voting is conducted between the highest-polling candidates from the first round and the winner of this round is declared elected. This system is used in France, Central Asia and current or former French colonies.

### ***B. Semi-Proportional Systems***

Semi-PR systems are those which inherently translate votes cast into seats won in a way that falls somewhere in between the proportionality of PR systems and the majoritarianism of plurality–majority systems. The two Semi-PR electoral systems used for legislative elections are the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) and Parallel (or mixed) systems.

In SNTV elections, each elector has one vote, but there are several seats in the district to be filled and the candidates with the highest number of votes fill these positions. This system is used today only in Jordan and Vanuatu. Parallel systems use both PR lists and plurality–majority districts running side-by-side (hence the term parallel). Part of the parliament is elected by proportional representation, part by some type of plurality or majority method.

### ***C. Proportional Representation Systems***

The rationale underpinning all Proportional Representation systems is to consciously reduce the disparity between a party’s share of the national votes and its share of the parliamentary seats. Proportionality is often seen as being best achieved by the use of party lists, where political parties present lists of candidates to the voters on a national or regional basis and where there are many members to be elected from each district, thus enabling the representation of even small minorities. Lists can be “open” or “closed” depending upon whether voters can specify their favoured candidate(s) within a given party list (“open” lists), or whether they can only vote for a party without influencing which party candidates are elected (“closed” lists).

List PR systems are the most common type of proportional representation electoral systems. Most forms of List PR are held in large, multi-member districts which maximize proportionality. List PR requires each party to present a list of candidates to the electorate. Electors vote for a party rather than a candidate; and parties receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the national vote. Winning candidates are taken from the lists in order of their respective position. This system is widely used in continental Europe, Latin America and southern Africa.

Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) systems, as used in Bolivia, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Mexico, New Zealand and Venezuela and attempt to combine the positive attributes of both majoritarian and PR electoral systems. A proportion of the parliament is elected by plurality–majority methods, usually from single-member districts, while the remainder is constituted by PR lists, with the PR seats being used to compensate for any disproportionality produced by the district seat results.

The Single Transferable Vote uses multi-member districts, with voters ranking candidates in order of preference on the ballot paper in the same manner as the Alternative Vote. After the total number of first-preference votes are tallied, the count then begins by establishing the “quota” of votes required for the election of a single candidate. Any candidate who has more first preferences than the quota is immediately elected. If no-one has achieved the quota, the candidate with the lowest number of first preferences is eliminated, with his or her second preferences being redistributed to the candidates left in the race. At the same time, the surplus votes of elected candidates (that is, those votes above the quota) are redistributed according to the second preferences on the ballot papers until all seats for the constituency are filled.

*Source: Reynolds Andrew and Ben Reilly. 1997. The International IDEA Handbook of Electoral System Design. Stockholm: International IDEA*

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Another consideration is to distinguish between systems that are patronage-oriented and those that are bureaucratic.<sup>2</sup> In a bureaucratic system of candidate selection rules are detailed, explicit, standardized and followed regardless of who is in a position of power. Authority is based on legalistic principles. In a patronage-based system, there are far less likely to be clear rules and even when they exist there is a distinct possibility that they are not carefully followed. Authority is based on either traditional or charismatic leadership, rather than legal-rational authority. Loyalty to those in power in the party is paramount.

While these various systems emphasize different factors in choosing candidates, under any system an important consideration for parties is presenting candidates that the party believes will maximize their vote.<sup>3</sup> If certain types of candidates are seen as a liability, gatekeepers will shy away from nominating them. Research reviewing several individual

**Aspirants' track record in the party and in the constituency is the most widely valued characteristic in potential candidates.**

country studies reveals that there is a set of characteristics party selectors look for in possible candidates across all countries. The most widely valued characteristic is an aspirants' track record in the party organization and in the constituency.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the strongest manifestation of this is the high rate by which incumbents are renominated. Even for new candidates, a past

history of party participation and activism is important, although not a requirement. Visibility in the community either through one's profession, holding of public office, or other activity is also highly desirable.

Because incumbents and community leaders are disproportionately male, these criteria can hurt women. While different parties will use different and broader criteria, the stage at which the party gatekeepers actually choose the candidates is perhaps the most crucial stage for getting women into office. Whether party gatekeepers see women as desirable candidates who can help the party win votes will be influenced by a number of factors, including a country's culture as well as its electoral system, as we will discuss later.

**Clear, bureaucratic procedures for selecting candidates can have a distinct advantage for women.**

Party rules and norms will affect the way in which a party carries out the actual process of nomination. For women, bureaucratically-based systems that

have incorporated rules guaranteeing women's representation are a significant advantage. In many of the Nordic countries, parties have explicitly adopted quotas guaranteeing that either 40 per cent or 50 per cent of the party's list will be comprised of women. This has had a dramatic and positive effect on women's representation in the Nordic countries.<sup>5</sup> Even when there are no explicit rules to guarantee representation, having clear bureaucratic procedures by which candidates are chosen can be a distinct advantage to women. Clear and open rules provide women the opportunity to develop strategies to take advantage of those rules. When the rules are unwritten it becomes much harder to devise a strategy to break into the inner circle of power.

The case of Norway provides one example of how to take advantage of explicit and clear procedures. Norway has a

**With explicit nominating procedures, women can identify crucial points around which they can mobilize support and press for their demands.**

closed list proportional representation system.<sup>6</sup> Nominating starts with party committees in each county recommending a slate of candidates for the party list.<sup>7</sup> The committee recommendation is sent to a county-wide nominating convention where it must be approved, position by position. Local party members in local meetings choose the delegates to the nominating

convention. With these explicit rules, even before quotas existed, it was possible for women to identify crucial decision points around which they could mobilize to press for their demands. This mobilization was aimed first at the committee recommendation stage and second at the nominating convention stage. They would start by demanding fair representation from the nominating committee. If the party nominating committee failed to satisfactorily take account of their demands, they would organize local female party members to maximize turnout at the local party organization meetings where delegates were selected. In so doing, they could guarantee that delegates who would vote to ensure representation of women were elected to move on to the country convention. Such a procedure could become highly contentious and often merely the threat of mobilization would be sufficient to get party nominating committees to accommodate demands for women's representation in their nominating recommendations, rather than take a chance at having their proposals voted down by the party membership at the nominating convention.

## ***Getting Elected***

The final barrier to becoming an MP is being chosen by the voters. Just how high this barrier is, is a matter of some dispute. Most studies of elections in established democracies suggest that voters primarily vote for the party label rather than for the individual candidates.<sup>8</sup> This is certainly true of electoral systems using closed list proportional

**According to studies, most voters primarily vote for the party label rather than for individual candidates in established democracies.**

representation. In such cases, there is little reason to see the voters as a serious deterrent to women's representation. The crucial stage of the process under these conditions is actually getting nominated by the party.

While this is most typical, it is not true in all countries. There are countries where the personal vote for the candidate is important – just how important is a matter of considerable debate in the political science field. As

researchers have pointed out, however, even if it does not matter how the electorate views individual candidates, since party officials are convinced that it is important, they will continue to carefully choose candidates with an eye to those who they believe will strengthen the parties chances of winning.<sup>9</sup> Most of the countries where the individual candidate is

believed to have some effect are countries with majoritarian, single-member district, electoral systems. Even in these countries, however, there is considerable evidence that female candidates do as well as male candidates when facing the voters directly.<sup>10</sup>

**However, since party officials are convinced that the individual counts, they will continue to carefully choose candidates who they believe will strengthen their party's chances of winning.**

Some proportional representation electoral systems utilize an “open list” ballot – that is, the party nominates many candidates, usually in their preferred order of choice, but the voter has the

ability, if she desires, to influence which of the candidates on the party's list should be elected. When voting, the voter first chooses a specific party ticket, but she then has the option of altering the composition of the list by either demoting specific candidates, for example, by striking their name, or promoting a candidate by advancing the candidate's name to a higher position on the party list (for example, a woman may be the tenth candidate on the official party list, but a voter may move the candidate up to first position).<sup>11</sup>

In such a case, being a woman may be either an advantage or a disadvantage. To the degree that women organize and actively encourage the striking of male names, this procedure can produce a surprisingly strong showing by women. A stark example of this occurred in Norway. Norway does not have an open list voting system for the national parliament, but it does for local elections at the municipality level. In the early 1970s, women were able to organize a remarkably effective campaign to promote women. In the 1971 local elections women's representation in several large Norwegian cities rose from being approximately 15–20 per cent of the city council to majorities on the council. This “women's coup” became a source of great surprise and pride at women's abilities to take advantage of the electoral structure. It should be noted, however, that there was a reaction in the following election, when many men who felt that striking male candidates simply because they were men was unfair, went out of their way to strike women candidates. In the following local election and in every local election since, the number of women elected in local elections in Norway has probably been less than it would have been had there been no personal vote.<sup>12</sup>

While this is a cursory look at the barriers facing women as they try to move from merely being in the eligible pool of candidates to actually becoming MPs, it should be clear that among established democracies the crucial points are to convince women to run and to convince the party to choose women as their candidates.

## ***The Effect of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation***

**Changing a country's electoral system often represents a far more realistic goal to work towards than dramatically changing the culture's view of women.**

Political scholars and women strongly emphasize the effect that electoral systems have on women's representation for several reasons. First, the impact of electoral systems is quite dramatic. As can be seen in Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2, the differences in women's representation across electoral systems are not trivial; they are substantial. Just as important is the fact that electoral systems can be and regularly are, changed. Compared to the cultural status of women in society or a country's development level, electoral rules are far more malleable. Changing the electoral system often represents a far more realistic goal to work towards than dramatically changing the culture's view of women.

Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2 present data for 24 established democracies over the post World War II period. They reveal that women have always had a slight advantage in Proportional Representation systems. Until 1970, this advantage was quite small: there is only a couple per cent difference in women's representation in countries with majoritarian or single-member district systems, versus countries with Proportional Representation or Multi-Member District systems. In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, however, there was a dramatic increase in women's representation in PR systems, while only modest gains in majoritarian systems.<sup>13</sup>

Different electoral systems lead to different outcomes. Throughout the developed world in the 1960s and 1970s we saw a wave of what was called “second-generation feminism” – women demanding equal rights on a whole array of

issues, among them greater representation in political bodies. In countries with PR systems, women were able to translate those demands into greater representation. In majoritarian systems, on the other hand, the same demands were made, but they were largely unsuccessful or only very modestly successful.

### **Advantages of PR Systems**

The obvious question is why? Why should countries with proportional representation electoral systems show such a strong increase in representation and majoritarian systems show such a modest effect? There are a number of explanations. First, proportional representation systems have consistently higher district magnitudes, which lead to higher party magnitudes. District magnitude is the number of seats per district; party magnitude is the number of seats a party wins in a district. Party and district magnitudes are important because they affect party strategy when choosing candidates. The party gatekeepers, who must consider which aspirants to choose as candidates, will have a different set of concerns and incentives depending upon the electoral system.

When district magnitude is one, as it is in almost all majoritarian systems, the party can win, at most, one seat in a district. By definition, the party has no chance to balance the party ticket. Because of the strictly zero sum nature of nominating decisions in single-member districts, female candidates must compete directly against men; and often when nominating a woman a party must explicitly deny the aspirations of a man in the same district. When district magnitude increases, the chances that a party will win several seats in the district increase. When a party expects to win several seats, parties are much more conscious of trying to balance their tickets. Gatekeepers will divide winning slots on the party list among various internal party interests.

There are several reasons for this balancing process.<sup>14</sup> First, party gatekeepers see balance as a way of attracting voters. Rather than having to look for a single candidate who can appeal to a broad range of voters, party gatekeepers think in terms of different candidates appealing to specific sub-sectors of voters. Candidates with ties to different groups and different sectors of society may help attract voters to their party. A woman candidate can be seen as a benefit to the party by attracting voters, without requiring powerful intra-party interests represented by men to step aside, as would be required in a majoritarian system.

**Table 3.1 Percentage of Women MPs Across 24 National Legislatures 1945–1998**

Majoritarian (SMD) versus Proportional Representation (MMD) Systems

System/Year	1945	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1998
SMD	3.05	2.13	2.51	2.23	3.37	8.16	11.64
MMD	2.93	4.73	5.47	5.86	11.89	18.13	23.03

**Majoritarian or Single-Member District Systems (SMD):** Australia, Canada, France (from 1960), Japan, New Zealand (1945–1990), United Kingdom and United States.

**Proportional Representation or Multi-member District Systems (MMD):** Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France (1945 and 1950), Greece, \*\* Iceland, Ireland, Israel, \* Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand (1998 only), Norway, Portugal, \*\* Spain, \*\* Sweden, Switzerland and Germany (West Germany \* prior to 1990).

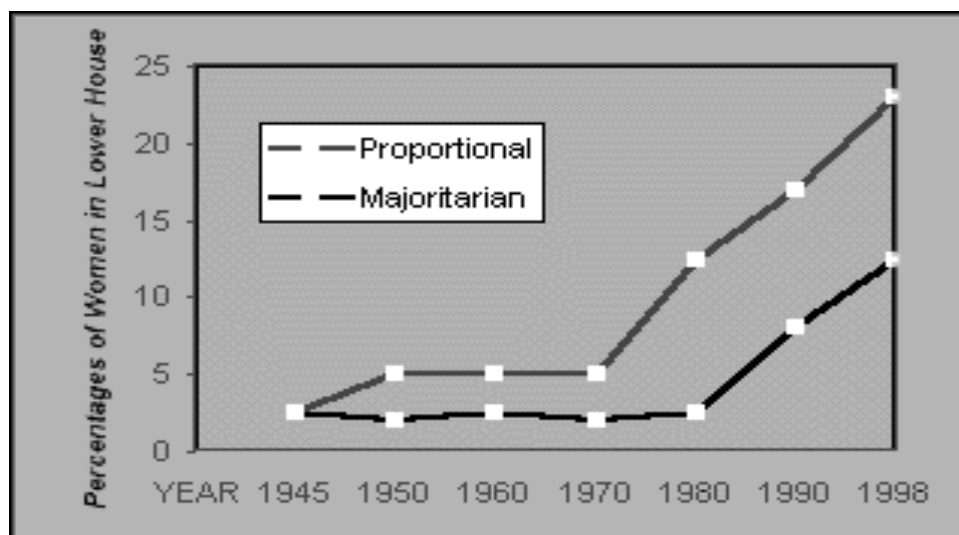
\* Israel did not exist and West Germany did not hold elections in 1945. They are therefore not included in the 1945 numbers. They are all included for all years following 1945.

\*\* Greece, Portugal and Spain became democratic in the 1970s and are therefore only included in the 1980, 1990 and 1998 calculations.

**Key:**  
**SMD:** Majoritarian or Single-Member District Systems  
**MMD:** Multi-member District Systems

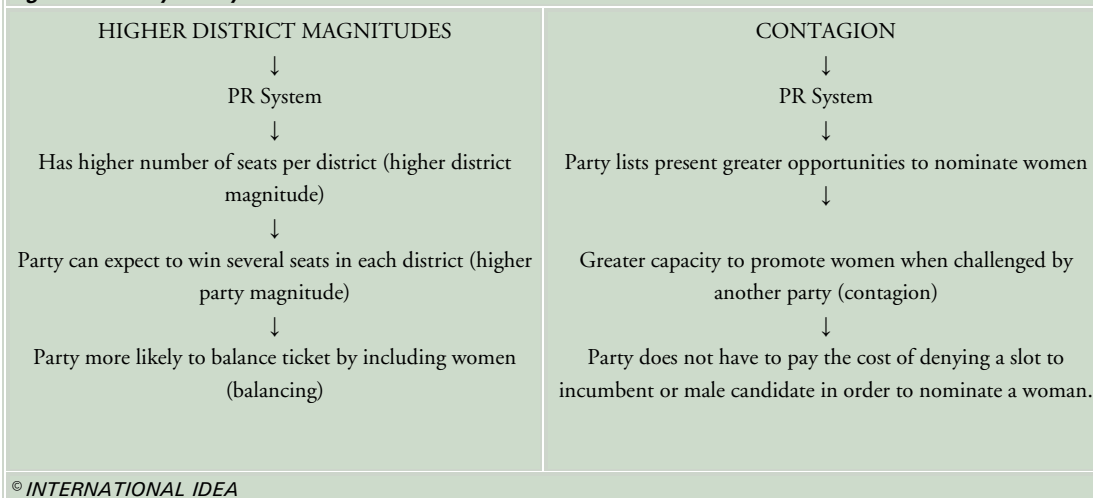
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**Figure 3.2 Percentages of Women in Parliament Majoritarian vs. PR Systems**



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**Figure 3.3 Why PR Systems are Better for Women**



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Conversely, failing to provide some balance, that is, nominating only men, could have the undesirable effect of driving voters away. A second reason for balancing is that within the party balancing the ticket is often seen as a matter of equity. Different factions in the party will argue that it is only fair that one of their representatives be among those candidates who have a genuine chance of winning. Especially when a woman's branch of the party has been established and is active in doing a significant amount of the party's work, women can be one of those groups demanding to be included on the list in winnable positions. A third reason for balancing the slate is that dividing safe seats among the various factions in the party is a way of maintaining party peace and assuring the continued support of the various groups within the party.

Proportional representation systems help women because a process of contagion is more likely to occur in these systems than in majoritarian systems. Contagion is a process by which parties adopt policies initiated by other political parties. We set out to test whether major parties would more quickly move to promote women when challenged on this issue by another party in PR systems than in majoritarian systems. The assumption was this should happen both because the costs of responding would be lower in PR systems compared to majoritarian systems and because the gains may be greater. The costs would be lower in a PR system because the party would have several slots from which it could find room to nominate a woman; in majoritarian systems, where the party has only one candidate, the party might have to deny renomination to an incumbent or deny a slot to the male candidate of an internal faction that has traditionally received the nomination, in order to nominate a woman. The gains may be greater because in PR systems even a small

increase in votes, caused by adding women to the ticket, could result in the party winning more seats.

To study this question, we looked for contagion effects in Norway and Canada. Looking for contagion effects in elections prior to the dominant Labour Party adopting quotas, we found that contagion occurred within local districts in Norway. The Norwegian Labour Party increased the number of women in winnable positions in exactly those districts where they faced a serious challenge by the Socialist Left, the first party to adopt quotas in Norway. When we tested for a similar effect in Canada – that is whether the Liberal Party was more likely to nominate women in those districts where the New Democratic Party had nominated women, we found no evidence of such an effect. In other words contagion occurred in the country with a PR electoral system and did not in the country with a majoritarian electoral system.<sup>15</sup>

More generally it is worth noting that gender quotas as a policy clearly have been contagious in Norway. In 1977, only two parties with less than four per cent of the parliamentary seats had quotas. In 1997, five of the seven parties represented in parliament, with approximately 75 per cent of the seats combined, have officially adopted gender quotas.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Why are Some PR Systems Better than Others?***

While proportional representation systems are superior for women, not all PR systems are equally preferred. There are a number of particulars that can help or hinder women's representation within the broader umbrella of PR systems. There are three specific issues that deserve mention: district magnitude, electoral thresholds and the choice between “open list” and “closed list” forms of proportional representation.

Three factors that facilitate women's representation in PR Systems:

- **Higher District Magnitude:** Parties have the chance to compete for and win several seats, allowing them to go further down the party lists, where women are usually listed.
- **High Electoral Thresholds:** Discourage the creation of “mini-parties” which often let in only one or two representatives, usually male.
- **Closed Party Lists:** The party determines rank ordering of candidates and thus women's names cannot be struck off or demoted.

As noted, the driving force behind women doing better in PR systems is the ticket balancing process which occurs when the party sets up their election list in each electoral district. What is crucial, if women are to win seats in parliament is that parties have to win several seats so that they go deep into the party list when selecting MPs. Previously party magnitude was defined as the number of seats a party wins in an electoral district. In designing electoral rules, women will be helped both by having high district magnitudes and by electoral thresholds, because of their effects on average party magnitude. Not surprisingly, there is generally a strong positive correlation between average district magnitude and average party magnitude. As the number of seats per district increases, parties will go further down their lists (that is, win more seats) and more parties will have multi-member delegations. Both should increase women's representation. The limiting case and the one that may be the most advantageous for women, is if the whole country is simply one electoral district. There are other considerations that may render this proposal unattractive. In many countries it is often seen as important to guarantee regional representation, in which case some geographic form of districting may be preferred.

This is a system similar to the one used in the Netherlands, which has a very high level of women's representation (36 per cent) and in Israel, which has a low level of women's representation (below 15 per cent). As the results for the Netherlands and Israel indicate, electoral systems cannot guarantee high representation levels. One lesson that can be learned from looking at Israel is that having a high electoral threshold, which is the minimum percentage of the vote that a party must have before being eligible to win a seat, is important to increase women's chances. In Israel the level of support needed to win a seat has been extremely low; it was recently raised to 1.5 per cent which continues to be quite low. The low threshold has encouraged the creation of many mini-parties, which often let in only one or two representatives. Overwhelmingly, parties tend to have male leaders and party leaders inevitably take the first few slots on the list. Women first tend to show up a little farther down the list when the party concerns turn to ensuring ticket balance. If the party only elects one or two representatives, however, even though many of their candidates in mid-list positions are women, women will not win any representation.

When designing electoral systems there is in effect a trade-off between representing the voters who choose small parties and increasing the descriptive representation of the legislature by having more women from the larger parties. To test this hypothesis, data from both Costa Rica and Sweden were evaluated. Both of these countries use electoral thresholds. Simulations show that electoral thresholds had precisely the predicted effect of increasing women's representation. Women may look favourably upon proposals to establish the whole country as one electoral district, but it would be an important strategic addendum to make sure that electoral thresholds are included in the proposal.

Another characteristic that distinguishes proportional representation systems from each other is whether they use

closed party lists, where the party determines the rank ordering of candidates, or open party lists, where the voters are able to influence which of the party's candidates are elected via personal voting. There is relatively little empirical work as to whether these different forms of ballot structure help or hinder women gaining access to parliament.

The crucial question is whether it is easier to convince voters to actively vote for women candidates, or easier to convince party gatekeepers that including more women on the party lists in prominent positions is both fair and more importantly, strategically wise. It would not be too surprising if the answer actually varied from country to country. It is possible, nevertheless, to make some cautious suggestions. While there is a temptation to recommend open party lists, because this would allow women voters to move women up through preferential voting, closed lists are likely to be superior for women.

First, the experience from preferential voting, that is, open lists, in local elections in Norway for the last 25 years has been unambiguous: it has hurt women. In every local election after 1971 there have been fewer women elected than would have been elected without a preferential vote. One must realize that while preferential voting provides the opportunity for some voters to promote women, this can easily be outweighed by the opportunity for other voters to demote women. In Norway, the negative effect has consistently outweighed the positive effect. It is perhaps important to note that if this effect has shown up in Norway, which has a deserved reputation for being highly progressive on issues of gender equality, it would hardly be surprising to find similar effects in countries with more traditional views on the proper role for women. It may be that in countries with more traditional views, or even within specific districts within a country, voters with traditional views of women's roles would go out of their way to strike or lower the women's names on the party list. So the first objection is that strategically the use of preferential voting may backfire for women.

The second objection to open lists is that it lets the parties "off the hook". That is, they are not responsible for the final outcome. The final outcome then rests with thousands of individual voters making individual decisions. If the sum of all those individual decisions is that women are voted down and out of parliament, the parties cannot be held responsible, as they cannot control how their supporters vote. With closed party lists, however, it is clear it is the party's responsibility to ensure there is balance in the party delegation. If women do poorly under these conditions it cannot be explained away as the responsibility of voters. By using closed lists, the party has the opportunity to look at the composition of the complete delegation rather than having the final outcome be the summation of a number of individual decisions. Under these conditions parties could be held responsible for women's representation. If representation failed to grow, women could search out parties that were more willing to consider their demands for representation.

### ***Lessons for Expanding Women's Representation***

A number of lessons for increasing women's representation can be drawn from the above discussion on the legislative recruitment process and the impact of electoral systems.

- 1. Women should organize themselves inside and outside political parties.** Being organized in interest groups both inside and outside political parties provides valuable experience for women and gives them a power base on which to build if they aspire for office. Political groups as well as professional groups, such as women doctors or women lawyers' associations, can play an important role as a recruiting ground for women candidates. Being organized also increases visibility and legitimacy. In addition, in political parties where women commonly do a considerable amount of the essential party work, it is important to be organized into a woman's caucus that can lobby for improved representation.
- 2. Women should urge parties to set down clear rules for candidate selection.** It is more likely that women will benefit if parties have clear bureaucratic procedures for selecting candidates rather than a system based on loyalty to those in power. When the rules of the game are clear it is possible for women to develop strategies to improve representation. When the process is dominated by patronage, rules can be murky and decisions are often made by a limited number of persons, who are almost certainly predominately male.
- 3. PR systems are better than majoritarian systems for increasing women's representation.** Of the 10 highest-ranking countries in terms of women's representation, all utilize proportional representation electoral systems. Single-member district majoritarian systems have consistently proven to be the worst possible system for women.
- 4. Some PR systems are preferable to others.** Systems that guarantee high party magnitudes through a combination of high district magnitudes and electoral thresholds are expected to be superior for women. Ireland, for example, which uses a "single transferable vote" form of proportional representation with small (3–5 members) electoral districts has lower levels of female representation than majoritarian systems in countries such as Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. The optimal system for women is likely to be when the whole country is one district. As noted earlier, however, such a proposal will not always be a viable option and often there will be good reason to divide the country into

several geographically-based electoral districts. Systems which utilize two “tiers” of representation, combining national lists with regional or local constituencies, have often proved to be amongst the most effective in maximizing women's representation. Sweden, Denmark, Germany and New Zealand are all examples of such systems and are all amongst the top 10 countries in the world when it comes to levels of female representation in parliament.

**5. Women should keep in mind all variables and alternatives with regard to electoral system design.** Even when there is broad agreement on a system based on geographical districts, there will usually be different ways of implementing such a proposal. Those interested in increasing women's representation should not be indifferent to these alternatives. The existing research suggests that the more seats in the national legislature the better it is for women, because this will increase party magnitude. When deciding how many geographic districts should be formed, the fewer districts created the better for women, again because this will increase party magnitude. In addition, women should be watchful when the number of seats in each voting district is determined. Often this process results in the over-representation of rural districts and the under-representation of urban districts. It is exactly in urban districts, where non-traditional roles for women are more common and where there are far more resources for women interested in participating in politics to draw on, that women tend to do well. Work done in several countries has shown that women tend to win more seats in urban areas than they do in rural areas. Women's groups should watch carefully to see that when the number of seats per district is determined, that the distribution of seats is as close to “one person/one vote” as possible.

**6. While PR systems are better in the long run, immediate results cannot be guaranteed.** While changes in the electoral system make greater representation more likely and in the long run there is no question that electoral system changes will help women improve their representation levels, an immediate effect cannot be guaranteed. While PR systems have, on average, higher proportions of women than majoritarian systems, this will not be true for every case. Furthermore, researchers find that PR systems do not, on average, help women in developing countries. The non-effect for the electoral system variable in developing countries is an important example of a more general point. While certain institutions or rules may advantage one group or another, an effect will appear only if the group is sufficiently well organized to take advantage of the situation. If not, the institutional arrangement can have no effect on outcomes. The failure of PR to help women in lesser-developed countries is an example of this and it is also seen in the relatively small difference between proportional systems and majoritarian systems for the period 1945–1970. If the forces interested in women's representation are not effectively organized, then the electoral system is expected to have only limited effect.

**7. Changing the electoral system is only one part of a more comprehensive strategy for improving women's representation.** Women will need to become active and effective voices within their individual parties and within society as a whole to be able to take advantage of the institutional advantages certain electoral structures provide.

### **Endnotes**

1. Gallagher, Michael. 1988. “Conclusions”. In Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh. eds. *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective: The Secret Garden of Politics*. London: Sage.
2. Norris, Pippa. 1996. “Legislative Recruitment”. In LeDuc, Niemi and Norris. eds. *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*. London: Sage.
3. Clearly this is not the only concern and sometimes not even the primary concern. Concern for party unity or intra-party factional fights may from time to time trump the vote maximizing desire, but in the long run parties in democracies are forced to be concerned about winning votes. If not, they run the risk of disappearing from the political stage.
4. Gallagher. 1988. p. 248.
5. While quotas are often credited with being responsible for the lead that Nordic countries have in terms of women's representation, it should be noted that Nordic countries were generally world leaders even before such rules were adopted. Causality may run from being a world leader to adopting rules, rather than the rules causing one to become a world leader.
6. A proportional representation system is any system which consciously attempts to reduce the disparity between a party's share of the national vote and its share of the parliamentary seats. For example, if a party wins 40 per cent of the votes, it should win approximately 40 per cent of the seats. Closed list is a form of list PR in which electors are restricted to voting for a party only and cannot express a preference for any candidate within a party list.
7. Valen, Henry. 1966. “The Recruitment of Parliamentary Nominees in Norway”. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 1. No. 1. pp. 121–166; and Valen, Henry. 1988. “Norway: Decentralization and Group Representation”. In Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh. eds. *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective*. London: Sage.
8. Leduc, Niemi and Norris. 1996.
9. Bochel, John and David Denver. 1983. “Candidate Selection in the Labour Party: What the Selectors Seek”. *British Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 13. No. 1. pp. 45–69.

10. Darcy, R. and Sarah Slavin Schramm. 1977. "When Women Run Against Men". *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Vol. 41. pp. 1–12 and; Welch, Susan and Donley T. Studlar. 1986. "British Public Opinion Toward Women in Politics: A Comparative Perspective". *Western Political Quarterly*. Vol. 39. pp. 138–152. é
11. Seats are allocated in the following manner. All ballots are first counted to determine how many seats each party is to receive. Based on the ballot count each party is allocated a certain number of slots. For example, the Labour Party may win 20 seats on the city council. To determine which 20 candidates will fill those Labour slots, each Labour Party ballot is examined with votes for individual candidates counted based on where they appear on the ballots of those who voted for the Labour Party.
12. Hellevik, Ottar and Tjor Bjørklund. 1995. "Velgerne og Kvinnerepresentasjon" ("Voters and Women's Representation"); In Nina Raaum. ed. *Kjønn og Politikk* (Gender and Politics). Oslo: Tano Press.
13. There is a considerable accumulation of comparative evidence that underlines the structural advantages of PR in advantaging women's representation. Of the top 10 countries as of February 2002 in terms of women's representation – Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand, Argentina and Mozambique – all utilized various forms of proportional representation. Several individual country situations in which electoral systems have been changed have further emphasized the apparent structural superiority of PR systems.
14. Valen. 1988.
15. Matland, Richard E. and Donley T. Studlar. 1996. "The Contagion of Women Candidates in Single-Member and Multi-Member Districts". *Journal of Politics*. Vol. 58. No. 3. pp. 707–733.
16. Quotas are elaborated upon in the following chapter.

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