

The Worldwide Obstacles Involved towards Women's Advancement in Politics

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Abstract: Despite significant advances in education and political participation, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions in politics and businesses across the globe. Women's participation in decision-making processes remains at a low level. This very fact is conditioned by the qualities of the democratic development of the society; from the economic, social and cultural development of the country; by heritage and existing mentalities as well as by the features of the transition period that a country is going through. Having said all of the above reasons, this paper concerns the difficulties that women are faced with in adjusting themselves to the current reality of a globalized capitalist world. Women's political participation is a topic of great theoretical and practical interest. As a result, this paper aims to explain the factors and barriers which do reveal the insufficient numbers of women entering high positions in politics.

Keywords: Women, gender, political participation, representation, barriers.

Kadının Siyasette Yükselmeye Yönelik Dünya Çapında Engeller

Öz: Eğitimde ve siyasi katılımı kaydedilen önemli gelişmelere rağmen, kadınlar politika ve iş dünyasındaki liderlik pozisyonlarında yeterince temsil edilmemektedir. Kadınların karar alma süreçlerine katılımı düşük seviyede kalmaktadır. Bu gerçek, toplumun demokratik gelişiminin niteliklerine bağlıdır; ülkenin ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel gelişiminden; miras ve mevcut zihniyetler ile bir ülkenin geçtiği geçiş döneminin özelliklerine göre değişir. Yukarıdaki nedenlerin hepsini söyledikten sonra, bu yazı, kadınların kendilerini küreselleşmiş bir kapitalist dünyanın güncel gerçekliğine uymasıyla yüz yüze kaldıkları zorluklarla ilgilendirmektedir. Kadınların siyasi katılımı teorik ve pratik açıdan büyük bir ilgi alanına giren bir konudur; Sonuç olarak bu yazıda, siyasette yüksek mevkilere giren kadın sayısının yetersiz olduğunu açıklayan faktörleri ve engelleri açıklamak amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadın, cinsiyet, siyasi katılım, temsil, engeller.

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Introduction

Politics has always been viewed as men's struggle to win power. The levers of power are designed, managed and controlled by men. However, the twenty-first century demonstrates a more common perception advocating for an increased women's participation in political institutions that might significantly change the nature of representative democracy, revive and improve the system of management and decision making. Women's participation in political institutions makes a complex and multidimensional process that, at the institutional level, may be deemed as promotion of gender awareness and formation of women-appropriate representative bodies. Given the field of representation, it may be considered as a continuous appointment of women in parliament, encouraging their candidacies and promotion of gender equality in the electoral legislation.

This text deals with the issues relating to the factors that determine the rise of the number of active women participants in the political life and the results of the latest research in this regard.

Over last two decades, the number of women representatives in parliament has been growing steadily on a global level, consequently leading to a specific transformation of the position of women's population from all walks of life. The first assumption made was that the presence of a women candidates at the time of elections or women designers of a public policy, affects at least in two ways the level of women's political involvement. Firstly, the political issues relating to the status of women, debates, and campaigns, as well as the enactment of the law, maybe sooner accomplished with higher numbers of women in parliament. Secondly, women candidates and those already participating in the government make a role model and serve as a powerful symbolic tool or confirmation that politics is not just a man's game. The second assumption says that women's participation in political campaigns, seeking for office, causes more interest in the election

race in the female public, demonstrating better efficiency and ability to win the votes of the female electorate.

Since women attained full suffrage and started being recognized as political actors, numerous initiatives were undertaken from individual states and the most massive international organizations working to promote women 'rights as fundamental human rights. Over the last half-century, women have made significant advances in education, labor force participation, and political activism across the globe. Gender gaps still exist in low-income countries but are much smaller than in previous decades. In middle- and high-income countries, many of these gaps have been reversed. Women have overtaken men in some areas of educational participation and performance: in lower-middle income countries, women are enrolling 11:10 in tertiary education compared to men, and the ratio is 14:10 in upper-middle-income countries¹.

Turning to politics, while female suffrage did not exist anywhere in 1890, women had obtained the right to vote in 96% of the countries in the world by 1994. The few remaining countries have also moved toward female suffrage in recent years. Women obtained the right to vote in Oman in 2003, in Kuwait in 2005, and in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in 2006. These developments have been followed by an increase in the female share of registered voters across the globe. In Egypt, for instance, the share rose from 16% in 1975 to 37% by 2004.² Barbados, Chile, Ecuador, Malta, Puerto Rico, Sweden,³ and the United States now show consistent-

¹ World Bank Gender Statistics Database, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/gender-statistics>.

² El Sayed, Shawki, "Lobbying for Increased Participation of Women in Egypt," *The Arab Quota Report: Selected Case Studies Quota Report Series*; this report was compiled from the findings and case studies presented at a workshop held on 5-6 December 2004, in Cairo Egypt.

³ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. "Voter Turnout by Gender," available at: http://www.idea.int/vt/survey/by_gender.cfm

ly higher female voter turnout than male.⁴ Women suffrage is the first basic step towards women involvement in politics and decision-making which in turn, will result in her overall advancement as a human being.

Improvements in educational attainment, professional development, and political participation have not been translated into significant increases in female leadership in politics. While some women have risen to the pinnacle of political power -such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Dilma Rousseff, newly elected as president of Brazil, Latin America's largest and most populous country- statistics show that less than 19% of legislators in the world today are women⁵. To answer these questions, I must identify the constraints on female leadership. This paper takes the duty to determine the barriers which obstacle women around the world towards advancement into high political offices.

The crisis of sexuality is weakening heterosexuality's pre-eminence, and absolute dominance as women's sexuality is being encouraged (some may say exploited by the market) and mainstreamed. Dominant modes of (social) interest formation are being contradicted by gender equality policies and legislation, by men becoming more involved and more interested in being more engaged in child-rearing (the rise of 'the new man') and women's growing interest and/or ability to play a full role in the labor market (what may be described as the rise of or the freedom of 'the new woman')⁶.

Arguments for more increased representation of women in politics are both normative and practical. On the normative side

⁴ Female voter turnout has exceeded male voter turnout in the United States in all presidential elections since 1980, as shown by data from the Center for American Women and Politics, available at: http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/voters/documents/genderdiff.pdf.

⁵ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

⁶ Giddens, *Sociology*, n 7, 612; see Jane Lewis and Mary Campbell, 'UK Work/Family Balance Policies and Gender equality 1997-2005' (2007) Vol 14 No 1 *Social Politics* 4-30 for a discussion; and Oriel Sullivan, *1WminLawRev* 1- 43.

Lovenduski (2000)⁷ states that it is unfair that “men monopolize the political arena” and the pragmatic arguments focus on the real impact of women participation in politics. In the last decades numerous conventions, international agreements and norms were formulated that sanction gender equality in political representation and promoting women in politics as a fundamental human right. Despite ongoing efforts it is largely accepted that women are underrepresented and continue to face challenges and obstacles in entering the political sphere. “In order to overcome challenges and empower women in politics it is important to first and foremost diagnose the specific barriers women face”⁸

The career path usually begins with participation in lower political levels, leading to the accumulation of knowledge, experience and resources indispensable for further progress, but often ends here, with no possibility for women to continue progressive stepping upwards on the political scale”⁹. Women are prevented in their career advancement due to artificial barriers based on stereotypes and prejudices in attitudes and they do not relate only to the top of a power pyramid, but also to the central control position, especially when it comes to minority groups.

As Liljana Cickaric scholar from the Institute of Social Sciences of Belgrade makes known¹⁰, key political, economic and ideological factors contributing towards the insufficient representation of women in political institutions include female lack of interest in politics, challenged by the double burden of professional and home-related activities, conservative ideas about

⁷ “Albanian Women Participation in Politics and Decision-Making”. Discussion Paper. Gender Alliance for Development. (f.5) Tirana, November 2015. Retrieved on 02.08. 2017.

⁸ Harcourt W. 2011. Gender Equality and Development Effectiveness Summary of Global Report. Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC). 2014. Women & Political Representation Handbook on Increasing Women’s Political Participation in Georgia.

⁹ ČIČKARIĆ Liljana “Reconsidering Gender and Women in Politics” Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia. (p.4)

¹⁰ Ibid.

the role of women in a society, created the negative public image of women politicians, the masculine character of the political institutions and the lack of support for women aiming to engage in politics. „The absence of women from the political and public life shall be understood both as part of a global discriminatory process and the result of the prevailing stereotypes and prejudices about female candidates for political functions”¹¹. Cultural representation of women’s participation in politics undergoes a process of evolution, exhibiting an ever-increasing number of female politicians over the previous 20-year period. Women are still facing systematic biases present in the context of the electoral bodies and the structure of political parties.

Electoral research has demonstrated how men and women sometimes have different political preferences. Men are typically thought to be more concerned about taxation, business policies, etc., while women care more about issues related to the welfare state. Most studies established a sound link between the number of women in parliament and the policy aimed at preserving women's rights and addressing the issues relating to family and child protection¹². Quantitative female presence makes a prerequisite for qualitative changes relating to the process of political decision-making, primarily through their greater motivation to promote and fight for the realization of women's human rights and interests. It was found that an increase up to 30% in the number of women in parliament-as much as necessary to reach a critical mass- elicits qualitative changes in the patterns of dominant institutional culture and value-normative social framework¹³.

Greater participation of women in legislative and executive

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sarah CHILDS, Julie WITHEY, “Women Representatives Acting for Women: Sex and the Signing of Early Day motions in the 1997 British Parliament”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 52, No.3, 2004, (p. 552-564).

¹³ ČIČKARIĆ Lilijana “Reconsidering Gender and Women in Politics” Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia. (p. 5–6).

authorities results in faster mechanisms of adopting gender equality. A more substantial number of women among parliamentary representatives results in accentuation of the issues of social justice; more women in ministerial positions mean significant presence and influence of women's organizations to political parties. However, the de-gendering of institutions should be taken more seriously than mere female placing at higher positions, both in the public and private sector, since it does not warrant the observance of equal rights in the process of decision-making. The de-gendering of institutions primarily implies the de-gendering of political elites, and it is implemented via actors in institutions, the programs whereof are focused on women and institution-based broaching of the gender topic.

The Barriers

Scholarly discussions¹⁴ (Shvedova, 2005; OSCE/ODIHR, 2014) corroborate that barriers to political participation challenge not only the participation and representation of women but also, the status of women in parliaments and decision-making. The barriers which do obstacle women' participation into entering politics can be categorized as follows:

Political Obstacles

The first set of obstacles focuses on the real and perceived masculinity and male dominated political arena of a country. According to Shvedova (2005), the rules of the political game are set by men, and that the political arena is predominantly a reflection of the domination of men in society, and so, "this creates obstacles even in the decision of women to enter politics"¹⁵. In most countries, the difficulties for women's participation in politics and decision-making exist "either by virtue of laws being enacted and not

¹⁴ OSCE/ODIHR. 2014. Handbook on promoting women's participation in political parties. Downloaded by <http://www.osce.org/odihr/120877?download=true> 37

¹⁵ Ibid.

followed or by virtue of laws not even existing in the first place”¹⁶ (Shvedova, 2005: 34). Also in the set of political hindrances, is included as well the lack of substantial support from political parties for women candidates and campaigns. According to many studies (Shvedova, 2005, IDEA, 2005, OSCE/ODIHR, 2014), the low participation of women in politics is connected also to the selection and nomination processes within political parties that influence their position as candidates and decision-makers. At the same time, it is proved that women organizations within political parties, called *women forums* and outside the political system such as civil society organizations representatives can have a substantial impact in promoting women leaders (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). In the conditions where this cooperation between the above-mentioned is lacking or their existence is missing in the first place, a gap is created between the potential of women and their opportunities in the political arena (Shvedova, 2005; OSCE/ODIHR, 2014).

Socio-Economic or Structural Barriers

As a second essential set of barriers the socio-economic status of women in society has a direct influence on political institutions and elected bodies (Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (HREMC), 2014)¹⁷. Scholars suggest that social and economic conditions of women in society rank second after the electoral system in the factors impacting their political representation (HREMC, 2014). Sociological empirical research provides evidence that there is a socially constructed gender hierarchy which leads to an unequal division of power and prestige between men and women. As a woman, this socially structured gender hierarchy is a very determinant factor in determining those few women who will break this, let me call it so “inherited iron curtain” towards new

¹⁶ Ibid. Shvedova, N. (2005) Obstacles to women participation in Parliament. http://www.idea.int/publications/wip2/upload/2.%20Obstacles_to_Women's_participation_in_Parliament.pdf.

¹⁷ “Albanian Women Participation in Politics and Decision-Making”. Discussion Paper. Gender Alliance for Development. (p. 6) Tirana, November 2015. Retrieved on 02.08. 2017.

roads in their career' advancement towards power and prestige.

Connell's works¹⁸are, according to Giddens¹⁹, modern classics that integrate masculinity and patriarchy into an umbrella theory on gender relations and gender inequalities. Connell considers that male social power creates a social structure that leads to female subordination (1987) and conceptions of masculinity and femininity lead to continued male dominance reproduced through socialization of both men and women. Connell argues that this gender order is produced through three components: labor (domestic and in the market), power (physical and through sites of authority) and cathexis (intimate relationships including parenting). While separate components, they cross cut and interrelate to produce a gender hierarchy. Also the existence of the male-dominated model results in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style policies (Bari, 2005, p. 34)²⁰.

The masculinities-femininities hierarchy, illustrated by reference to masculine and feminine ideal types, pervades aspects of the public and private spheres through cultural dynamics. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity (as evidenced principally through marriage and heterosexuality, authority, paid work and physical strength) is hierarchically dominant and resistant femininity subordinate²¹. That is not to say that all men embody or subscribe to hegemonic masculinity but many men will benefit from it and be complicit in it. He considers that there are some subordinated masculinities including homosexual masculinities ranked at the bottom of the masculine scale, but that femininities are hierarchically equal to, or below, subordinate masculinities and thus well

¹⁸ Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Polity Press, 1987); Raewyn Connell *The Men and the Boys* (Allen and Unwin, 2001); Raewyn Connell *Masculinities* (Polity, 2005).

¹⁹ Giddens, Anthony. *Sociology*, n 7, (p. 610-11).

²⁰ "Bari, F. (2005). *Women's Political Participation: Issues and Challenges*. (p. 34) Accessed 15/08/2017 at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/enabling-environment2005/docs/EGM-WPD-EE-2005-EP.12%20%20draft%20F.pdf>

²¹ "Giddens, *Sociology*, n 7, (p. 611-2).

below hegemonic masculinity. Interestingly, emphasized femininity (ranked at the level of homosexual masculinity), is deemed to complement hegemonic masculinity through '*compliance, nurturance and empathy*' as well as sexual availability. At the bottom of the hierarchy are subordinated femininities including resistant femininities and those that reject the emphasized versions of femininities²². Consequently, Connell argues that gender difference is really gender inequality as a result of gender power and hierarchy.

It is assumed that women would not have enough time to deal with governmental issues. Then if women spend time on politics and legal issues, they have to compromise their responsibilities (traditionally women should care of children and family) that cause extra obstacles for them in everyday life. But this does not mean that these women are weak, inferior, isolated or independent, it is just a matter of choice. They can share the time between the family and political life because women's participation in politics emphasizes the quality of life and reflects the priorities of families and ethnic and racial minorities.

Other essential elements are the limited access to education and training and the duality women face standing between family duties and public representation which further hamper the enabling environment for them to run for office and be elected (HREMC, 2014; UN Women, 2015).

Ideological and Psychological Barriers

Last but not least, psychological and ideological factors play a role in incentives or lack thereof, for the engagement of women in politics (HREMC, 2014)²³. This category of barriers focuses on pre-determined social roles of men and women, the perception of politics as a dirty game and most importantly the way women are portrayed in mass media. The predominant belief that women belong home and they cannot afford to be part of the harsh politi-

²² "For a discussion see Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*, n 3, chapter 8.

²³ *Ibid.*

cal world has impacts on how confident women are to run for elections and participate in politics. Traditional gender roles that see women as mothers and homemakers restrict them significantly to these assigned roles (GADC, 2008)²⁴. The working arrangements of governance institutions are usually inflexible, making it difficult for women to balance their work with unpaid caring responsibilities (Brody, 2009)²⁵.

In conclusion as far as the barriers towards the advancement of women are concerned, categories identified above create challenges that appear persistently in the debate about women political participation. These challenges as mentioned above include: balancing work and family obligations (GADC, 2008), segregation into lower-paid jobs and inequality of pay (GADC, 2012), the feminization of poverty (GADC, 2010) and gender-based violence (GADC, 2014).

Conclusion

The low level of women's participation in political and public life resulted, primarily, from socio-economic conditions, gender segregation in the labor market, the gender wage gap and the feminization of poverty. No less significant group of factors is the level of education, professional affiliation, and social capital of the family, which determine the level of interest and women's individual capacity building to involve in politics. Political factors have a significant influence on the level and scope of the political participation of women. In the first place, it is the manner in which the issue of gender equality is interpreted and treated in political parties.

²⁴ Gender Alliance for Development Centre (GADC). 2008. The division of the private and public life in the Albanian households – a gender based approach. Retrieved on 02.08. 2017, from "Albanian Women Participation in Politics and Decision-Making". Discussion Paper. Gender Alliance for Development. (f.6) Tirana, November 2015

²⁵ Brody, A.2009. Gender and Governance. Overview report.

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