

RUSHING INTO GENDER QUOTAS? EDUCATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN USA AND SLOVENIA

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Women as “political minors” are subjected to numerous equal opportunity policies. The so called gender equality in modern societies was established not long ago and consolidation of equal rights is a work in progress. Legal barriers to the ballot are mostly removed and women have de iure equal opportunity to participate in politics as men. However female representatives are greatly outnumbered by male representatives, virtually on all levels of politics. The article examines women’s political (under)representation through the lenses of often tested hypothesis that education is the predictor of political participation. This causality is tested on two compared societies; USA and post-communist Slovenia. Since the role of women in political structures varies greatly due to social standing emerging from broader cultural systems of gender, socio-economic class, and political history, the similarities in final output (number of female representatives) in both countries are to be observed.

Key words: equal opportunity, gender quotas, political participation, political representation.

1 INTRODUCTION: ASSOCIATION BETWEEN FEMALE EDUCATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Education (for men and women) is an ‘especially powerful predictor of political participation’.² There is a range of direct and indirect effects that formal education has upon political participation. Its direct effects include the acquisition of the knowledge and communication skills useful for public

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² Nancy Burns, Kay Schlozman Lehman and Sidney Verba, *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 286.

debate, and direct training in political analysis through courses with current events content. Its indirect effects are many and include the benefits of voluntary engagement in school government, clubs, sports, and school newspapers; these arenas provide young people with exercising leadership, developing civic skills of cooperation and negotiation, and acquiring bureaucratic and organizational skills useful for political activity. Education enhances other factors supporting political engagement, such as access to high-income jobs that provide the resources and contacts for political activity, and access to non-political associations such as charitable organizations or religious establishments that can be a recruitment ground for political activity.³

However this causal relation is not so (or at all) evident when we observe female and male association between education and political participation. Female participation in politics does not appear to increase with their educational status in comparison with men. Women's educational attainments in developed countries now equal those of men, yet the persistently low numbers of women in representative positions suggest that there may be something specific to political institutions that discourages female participation. On the other hand this might only be a transitional phase, since education not long ago was a commodity reserved only for men. "It isn't an accident that women won the right to be educated nearly 100 years before they embarked on the campaign for suffrage".⁴ Early nineteenth century Enlightenment theorists believed that education was crucial to developing the ability to reason and for attaining full citizenship.⁵ Access to education for women expanded in US throughout the 1800s, when first "college" for women was opened. But the first major piece of legislation to address women's right to education was not passed until 1972, when Title IX, also known as the Educational Amendments of 1972 was adopted. The legislation banned sex discrimination in education at all levels of formal education. In Slovenia first obligatory primary education for both sexes was introduced in 1774 by Maria Theresa, but gender equality in secondary education was not introduced until 1848.⁶ At the beginnings education for women was limited to "training focused on building moral character and developing the necessary submissive nature and skills to maintain a marriage, run a household, and supervise children".⁷ We can somehow still talk about male and female fields of studies (e.g. females: education, psychology; e.g. males: business, computer science). Although the concentration of females in some fields traditionally characterized as having high proportions of females has decreased, whereas the concentration of females in some areas that had formerly been mostly male has increased. There is some evidence that the pattern of fields of degrees awarded to females is beginning to more closely resemble that of males.⁸ The educational effects on female political participation levels might be belated, however until so far there is no evidence that this will occur.

There is a wide variation between countries, however, the United States, which outranks other industrialized democracies in terms of the numbers of women in higher education (and in the work force, and in professional

³ Ibid., 141–142.

⁴ Lynne E. Ford, *Women and Politics: The Pursuit of Equality* (Boston: Charles Hartford, 2006), 189.

⁵ Ibid., 191–193.

⁶ Aleksandra Serše, *Učne ure naših babic: Izobraževanje in zaposlovanje žensk nekoč in danes* (Ljubljana: Zgodovinski arhiv Ptuj in Urad za žensko politiko pri Vladi Republike Slovenije, 2000).

⁷ Lynne E. Ford, *Women and Politics: The Pursuit of Equality* (Boston: Charles Hartford, 2006), 190.

⁸ National Centre for the Education statistics, *Trends in educational equality for Girls and women* (Washington: National Centre for the Education statistics, 2012).

positions), has seen persistently low numbers of women in formal politics, reaching the highest in 2013 with just 18.3 % of Congress representatives being women.⁹ Uganda, Rwanda, and Mozambique, among the poorest countries in the world with female adult literacy levels of just 41, 60.2 and 28.7 percent respectively, have parliaments in which between 25 to 30 percent of legislators are women. This contrast suggests that the connection between education and engagement in formal representative politics is not directly observable, and invites us to explore the nature of the relationship between women's education and political participation.

The aim of the article is twofold. First to present formal educational attainment levels of females and female political representation in two selected countries, USA and Slovenia.¹⁰ While the general pattern of gender-differences in participation observed by Burns et al¹¹ may well hold for many other nations, there are no cross-national studies of gender-based variations in the kinds of political activities they measure, mainly because of a lack of consistent data on gender differences in voting behaviour, protest activity, voluntary community activity and so on. Explorations and explanations of gender gaps in political activity in other cultures must be sensitive to differing opportunities available for political participation given variations in political institutions and cultures. Given the difficulties of measuring the quantity and nature of women's political participation cross-nationally, we fall back upon the number of women in office, currently the only consistent and comparable source of data showing variations in women's engagement in politics. Though far from an ideal indicator of levels of women's political engagement, it is not entirely unrelated to the question of women's relative political effectiveness in any particular country. Secondly, article is focused on discussing how both countries have addressed the under representativeness of women or so called "democratic deficit".

2 WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: USA AND SLOVENIA COMPARED

Although the correlation between female education and political participation seems to be missing, there still could be some indirect linkage. Higher educational levels attain for higher economic standard, which in turn positively correlate with political participation. For females to have the same opportunities as males in postsecondary education and in the labour market, it is important for them to be equally well prepared academically.

US National Centre for Education Statistics report in 2012¹² stated that women played a major role in the increase of collage enrolment between 1990 and 2000. The enrolment of women in college increased from 7.5 million in 1990 to 8.6 million in 2000, a 14 percent increase over the period. Enrolment of women increased to 10.1 million by 2012, an increase of 18

⁹ See Centre for Voting and Democracy, *Database*, available at <http://www.representation2020.com/us-representation.html> (9 May 2013).

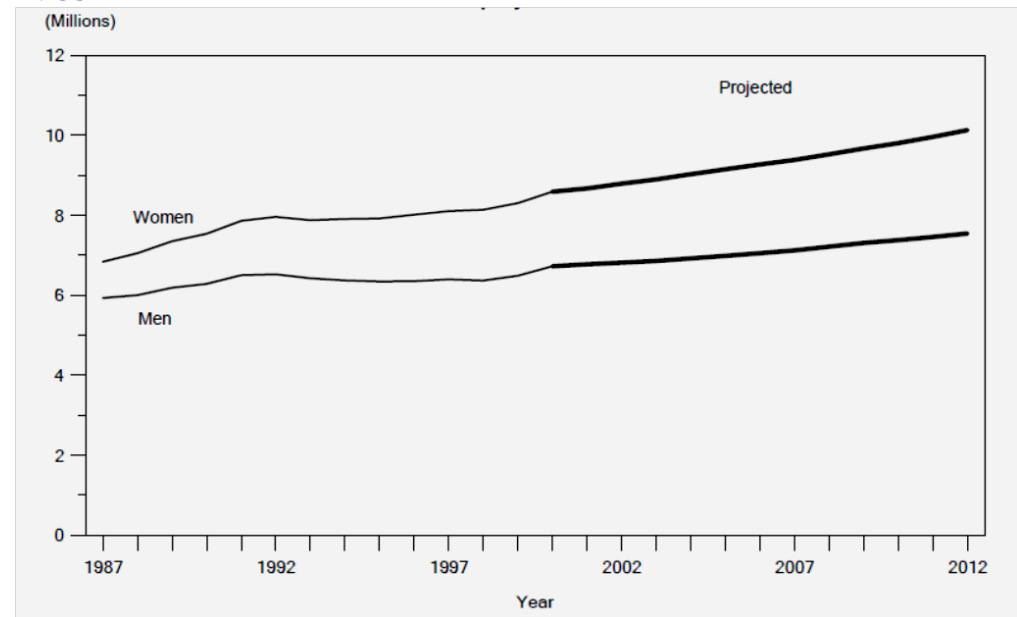
¹⁰ This article is an output of Slovenian-American bilateral research project "The consequences of social exclusion of women from the education system to the women's inclusion in politics". As the aim of the project was to examine women's political action and involvement in Slovenia and the Midwestern region of the United States in relation to the social exclusion of young women into the educational system in both countries, this resulted in choosing these two countries as case studies for this article. For more information on the bilateral project see <http://www.cuppi.si/bilateral-cooperation>.

¹¹ Nancy Burns, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Sidney Verba, *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹² National Centre for the Education statistics, *Trends in educational equality for Girls and women* (Washington: National Centre for the Education statistics, 2012).

percent from 2000. Historical growth in enrolment in degree-granting institutions has led to a substantial increase in the number of earned degrees conferred. Just as the unprecedented rise in female enrolment contributed to the increased number of college students, so too has it boosted the number of degrees conferred. Between 1986–87 and 1999–2000, the number of degrees awarded to women rose at all levels. In 1999–2000, women earned the majority of associate's, bachelors, and master's degrees, 44 percent of doctor's degrees, and 45 percent of first-professional degrees. By 2011–12, the number of degrees awarded increased across all levels.

FIGURE 1: ENROLMENT IN DEGREE-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS BY SEX IN USA



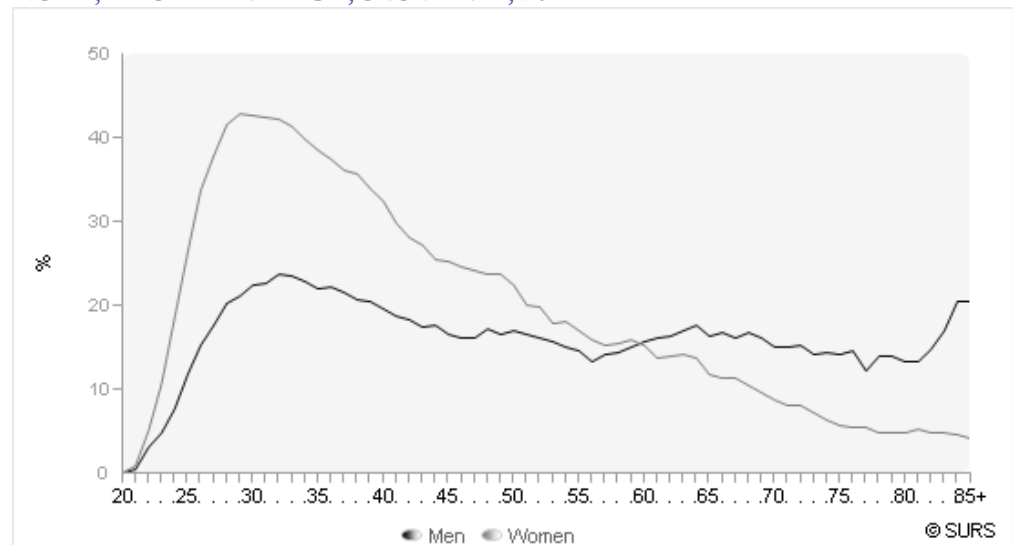
Source: National Centre for the Education statistics.

In Slovenia the paradox of highly educated but politically passive females is also evident. On average women in Slovenia are better educated than men¹³ and the highest difference is observed among those with a university degree (12.5 % of employed women and 10.4 % of men). Since 1995 there were constantly about 10 % more women graduates at universities and independent higher education institutions. Like in US women predominate in higher education and at faculties devoted to areas of health and social work, economy, social sciences, pharmacy and medicine.¹⁴ There is also increasing rate of women who complete postgraduate studies. In 1995 only 37 % of doctors of science were women, while in 2003 their share was already slightly less than 50 %.

¹³ Measured by the average school years of employed people.

¹⁴ See Statistični urad Republike Slovenije (SURS), *Dan žensk*, available at https://www.stat.si/novica_prikazi.aspx?id=4548 (3 May 2013).

FIGURE 2: POPULATION WITH TERTIARY EDUCATION, AGED 20 OR MORE, BY SEX AND AGE, SLOVENIA, 2011



Source: Statistični urad Republike Slovenije (SURS).

The trend of increasing women educational levels in comparison to men is well observed in Figure 2. Male population didn't experience major changes in educational levels as 30 year old man is approximately as educated as his 85 years old senior. Female population on the contrary is today almost ten times more likely to be highly educated then eighty years ago. According to UNESCO report¹⁵ this is a global phenomenon. Although access to higher education remains problematic in many countries, the last four decades have brought a major expansion of higher education in every region of the world, and women have been the principal beneficiaries in all regions. Female enrolment at the tertiary level has grown almost twice as fast as that of men over the last four decades for reasons that include social mobility, enhanced income potential and international pressure to narrow the gender gap. Nevertheless, enhanced access to higher education by women has not always translated into enhanced career opportunities, including the opportunity to use their doctorates in the field of research.¹⁶

3 PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

The extent of women's participation in politics and women's access to decision-making can be seen as the key indicators of gender equality in a society. Gender equality in decision-making is to be viewed in the context of whether women are in the position to make or influence public decisions on the same footing as men. This is why for the purpose of this article we focus solely on the number of female representatives in elected bodies as opposed to more elaborate understanding of female political participation. Measuring political participation with the positions of public office to which women have been elected is extremely crude. We can hardly discuss political *participation* with these measures, but more likely about political *representation*. Numbers of women in representative politics are not the best indicator of the extent and intensity of women's political participation because there is no necessary

¹⁵ See UNESCO, *World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education*, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/unesco-world-atlas-gender-education-2012.pdf> (12 April 2013).

¹⁶ Ibid.

relationship between the two.¹⁷ At our own peril we analyzed the number of female office holders and tried to test can serve as an indicator to discuss the second goal of the article, that is how successful are both countries in overcoming “democratic deficit”.

The most common reforms in innovations in political participation have been provisions for increased representation of women.¹⁸ Most of these provisions take the form of quota policies for enhancing inclusion of women in the politics. There are different types of quotas that can be categorized in three groups: reserved seats, party quotas and legislative quotas.¹⁹ Reserved seats appear primarily in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.²⁰ These types of policies create separate electoral rolls for women, female candidates have special electoral districts, or seats for women are redistributed as a party's proportion of the popular vote. This type of policy is different as it guarantees women representation,²¹ while other two “only” guarantee a percentage of women among political candidates (thus they might not be elected). Party quotas are the most common type of gender quota and can exist alongside the presence of other types of quotas to promote women's representation.²² Party quotas are adopted voluntarily by individual parties. Legislative quotas are similar to party quotas in that they address party selection processes, but they are not voluntary by nature. The national legislation requires that all parties nominate a certain proportion of female candidates. These policies take important steps to recognize “gender” as a political identity. The prominent feature of legislative quotas is that their status as a law enables sanctions for noncompliance and is a subject to oversight from external bodies.

Although globally implemented this policy remains controversial. Promoters of women quotas emphasize that quotas compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats that women's experiences are needed in political life and that quotas may only be temporary measure until we overcome »democratic deficit«. Those that are opposed explain that quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference over men, that quotas are undemocratic, because voters should be able to decide who is elected and that quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside. According to pros and cons of the gender quotas there are different implementation solutions depending on countries' political climate, historical background and external pressures (e.g. EU directives for EU member states). Below we present case of Slovenian gender quotas and USA lack of

¹⁷ Relatively large numbers of women were found in politics in socialist countries in periods when women's independent civil society activity was suppressed under single-party governments. See Maxine Molyneux, “Women's Rights and the International Context: Some reflections on the post-communist states,” *Millennium*, 23, 2 (1994), 301. More systematic study of other types of political participation by women, such as voting behavior, lobbying activity, associational activity, and membership of political parties, is needed to illuminate the factors promoting higher rates of women's engagement in these activities.

¹⁸ Mona Lena Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ See e.g. Pippa Norris, *Electoral Engineering: Voting results and political behaviour* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁰ Mona Lena Krook, “Gender Quotas as a global phenomenon: Actors and Strategies in Quota Adoption,” *European Political Science*, 3, 3 (2004), 60.

²¹ These measures often provide for low levels of female representation, usually between 1 and 10 per cent of all elected representatives. See Mona Lena Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²² Petra Meier, “The Mutual Contagion Effect on Legal and Party Quotas: A Belgian Perspective,” *Party Politics*, 10, 5 (2004), 583–600.

them and how this mechanism (or the lack of it) has influenced inclusion of women in politics.

Slovenia

Since gaining independence in 1991 there were some major changes in gender equality policies in Slovenia. The new Constitution guarantees equality for both sexes in electoral processes, additionally provisions on gender equality in politics is stipulated in legislation.²³ Thus Slovenia has legislative quotas for females. These legislative quotas were introduced after the accession in EU and as a consequence of adopting *acquis communautaire*. There is 40 % for European Parliament elections since 2004, 40 % for local elections (20 % for the first election after adoption) since 2005 and 35 % for the National Assembly (25 % for the first election after adoption) in 2006.

TABLE 1: INTRODUCTION OF LEGAL QUOTAS IN SLOVENIA

YEAR	ELECTION LEVEL	IMPLEMENTATION
2004	European	All parties respected the 40 % quota – 42 of 91 candidates (46 %) were women.
2006	Local	All parties more than respected the 20 % quota - just under 33 % of the 26,721 candidates were women compared to 21 % at the previous (pre-quota) elections in 2002.
2008	National Assembly	All parties respected the 25 % quota – around a third (33 %) of nearly 1200 candidates were women compared to a quarter (25 %) in the 2004 election.

Source: European Commission.

However the results have not wholly lived up to expectation. The 2004 European elections, which were the first held in Slovenia, were successful in terms of the numbers of women candidates put forward and subsequently elected. The law stipulates that for European elections at least one of each gender is in the first half of each list (for 7 seats). Nevertheless, of the thirteen party candidate lists, a woman was at the top of only three and these were all lists of smaller parties that actually won no seats. All the women that did get elected therefore came from lower positions on the list and could have missed out had the party won fewer votes.

The first local elections subject to the legislative quota resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of women councillors elected compared to the previous elections but still there are more or less four male councillors for every one woman. Again, the law requires at least one of each gender in

²³ Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, that obliges the government to respect the principle of balanced representation of women and men. To encourage political parties to develop strategies or special methods to increase the likelihood of women being elected the Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men stipulates that all registered political parties in Slovenia shall adopt, every four year, a plan for the promotion of a more balanced representation of women and men within the bodies of the party and on candidate lists for all elections. Second legal incentives were the amendments to the Act on elections to European Parliament, which were adopted in March 2004. The amendment to the article on candidate list introduced the 40 % representation of both sexes on a candidate list and an obligation that at least one candidate of both sexes must be placed in the upper half of the list. The enactment of this so called 40 % quota rule was backed up by the forthcoming adoption of an amendment to the Constitution which would oblige Parliament to pass electoral legislation providing for positive measures. The last normative change aimed to tackle the under-representation of women in elected representative bodies was the change of the Article 43 on »Right to vote« of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. The Slovenian parliament proclaimed this change in 2004. By it a new paragraph was added to the Article 43, which confers on the law the responsibility of defining measures for the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men in standing as candidates in elections to state bodies and bodies of local communities.

the first half of each party list but the fact that the share of women elected (22 %) did not come closer to the share of candidates (33 %) tends to suggest that they were not often put in the highest positions. The number of female mayors does not rise as the number of local councillors. Most probably since there are no quotas for female candidates (candidates are elected by majority, not proportional system), although the body of mayor is very strong in local-government system and thus an important figure.

TABLE 2: SHARE OF ELECTED FEMALES ON LOCAL, NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVEL

YEAR OF ELECTIONS	LOCAL LEVEL		NATIONAL LEVEL National Assembly deputies	EUROPEAN LEVEL European deputies
	Mayor	Local councillor		
1990			27 (11.3 %)	
1992			12 (12.3 %)	
1994	5 (3.4 %)	299 (10.6 %)		
1996			7 (7.8 %)	
1998	8 (4.2 %)	365 (11.7 %)		
2000			12 (13.3 %)	
2001	12 (6.2 %)	423 (13 %)		
2004			11 (12.2 %)	3 (42.8 %)
2006	7 (3.3 %)	721 (21.5 %)		
2008			12 (13.3 %)	2 (28.7 %)
2010	10 (4.80 %)	730 (21.91 %)		

Source: Milica Antić Gaber, "Slovenska politika – dobro zastražena moška trdnjava," in *Ženske na robovih politike*, ed. Milica Antić Gaber (Ljubljana: Založba Sophia, 2011), 236.

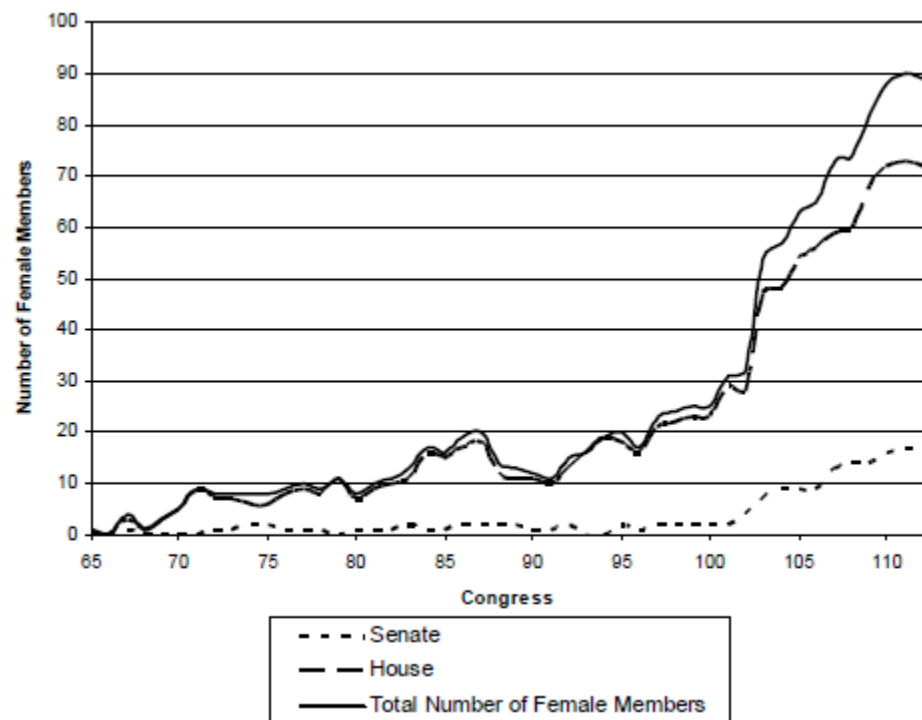
Finally, in the recent national elections, despite a substantial improvement in the number of women candidates, just one additional woman was elected to the National Assembly and the share of 13 % keeps Slovenia firmly in the lowest tier amongst EU Member States (23 out of 27). The reason, as all too often, was simply that women candidates were not placed in winnable constituencies.

USA

USA does not apply gender quotas. As of the 1970s, women occupied almost no major elective positions in U.S. political institutions. Ella Grasso, a Democrat from Connecticut, and Dixie Lee Ray, a Democrat from Washington, served as the only two women elected governor throughout the decade. Not until 1978 did Kansas Republican Nancy Kassebaum become the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate in her own right. By 1979, women comprised fewer than five percent of the seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, and only about ten percent of state legislative positions across the country.²⁴

²⁴ See e.g. Lynne E. Ford, *Women and Politics: The Pursuit of Equality* (Boston: Charles Hartford, 2006).

FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS (1917–2011)



Source: Congressional research service.

As explained in the figure 3, women are becoming rising force in politics in USA. Thirty years ago, women held a mere 10 % of all state legislative seats in the country, today they hold 24 % of 7,383 seats nationwide. Currently 20 women currently serve in the US Senate and 98 serve in the US House of Representatives, while 76 women hold state-wide elective office including 5 state governorships.

However women are still under-represented. Large gender disparities are also evident at the state and local levels, where more than three-quarters of state-wide elected officials and state legislators are men. Further, men occupy the governor's mansion in 44 of the 50 states, and men run City Hall in 92 of the 100 largest cities across the country. Of the 320 state-wide elected executive offices across the country women hold **23.4 %** (76) offices.²⁵ The number of women serving as mayors, on city councils, and as county commissioners and supervisors is on the rise. As a result of the large number of offices held at the local level, data is still being compiled, however key statistics include: a) Among the 100 largest cities in the country, 12 have women mayors, b) Of the 252 mayors of U.S. cities with populations of 100,000 and over, **17.6 %** (44) are women and c) Of the 1,248 mayors of U.S. cities with populations of 30,000 and above, **17.4 %** (217) are women.²⁶

In light of the importance of women's presence in politics, it is critical to understand why so few women hold public office in the United States. Somewhat surprisingly, it is not because of discrimination against female candidates. In fact, women perform as well as men when they run for

²⁵ Governors – 5; Lieutenant Governors – 11; Attorneys General – 8; Secretaries of State – 12.

²⁶ See Congressional research service, *Women in the United States Congress: 1917–2012*, available at www.fas.org/spp/crs/misc/RL30261.pdf (29 April 2013).

office.²⁷ In terms of fundraising and vote totals, the consensus among researchers is the absence of overt gender bias on Election Day. When women run for office – regardless of the position they seek – they are just as likely as their male counterparts to win their races. The fundamental reason for women's under-representation is that they do not run for office. There is a substantial gender gap in political ambition; men tend to have it, and women don't. And the gender gap in ambition is persistent and unchanging.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper set out to review evidence about the relationship between women's education and political participation, with a view to assessing whether more education for women can be seen to shift their levels of engagement in politics. Given the evidence above, it is difficult to assert conclusively that more and better education makes women more active in politics. In both presented countries women are better educated than men. On the other in both countries women in politics are under-represented. Surprisingly Slovenia despite employing gender quotas has slightly lower share of women in politics (legislative branch). However altogether Slovenia ranks 23rd, USA 78th on the list of share of women in politics.²⁸

Qualitative studies suggest that cultural variables are more significant than education in shaping the rate and nature of women's participation in politics.²⁹ Galligan, Clavero and Calloni believe that west and east (thus western and eastern societies) have different recent historical approaches to the notion and practice of gender equality.³⁰ Liberal democracies were oriented towards gender equality as a complex range of diversities and differences experiencing social marginalization and inequality and seeking inclusion and equality in policy outcomes. Gender equality was conceptualized differently in socialistic countries. It was a component of a political ideology that based on ending the social inequalities among human beings. While liberal democracies have posed challenges for the inclusion of a gendered perspective in politics, the ideology of communism was based on presumption of equality among all.

Aside differences in historical background other factors substantially influence share of women in politics. The proportional representation is the electoral system that returns the highest proportion of women to parliament. Parliaments using proportional representation elected 22.6 % women deputies, compared with 18.1 % using the plurality-majority electoral system, and 19.1 % using a mixed system.³¹ Where women were appointed to a chamber in 2011, they represented, on average, 15.2 % of members. Under proportional representation, voters cast their votes by party, and in some cases also by individual, and seats in parliament are allotted in proportion to the votes each party receives. This system provides an incentive for parties to broaden their appeal by adding women to their party lists. In some cases, where parties mandate the percentage of women to be included on lists – as in the rule of “every second seat a woman” – the results can be significant.

²⁷ Lynne E. Ford, *Women and Politics: The Pursuit of Equality* (Boston: Charles Hartford, 2006).

²⁸ See Inter Parliamentary Union, *Database*, available at <http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm> (30 April 2013).

²⁹ Lynne E. Ford, *Women and Politics: The Pursuit of Equality* (Boston: Charles Hartford, 2006).

³⁰ Yvonne Galligan, Sara Clavero and Marina Calloni, *Gender politics and democracy in post-socialist Europe* (Leverkusen Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2007).

³¹ Inter Parliamentary Union, *Women in Parliament in 2011: The Year in Perspective* (Geneva: Inter Parliamentary Union, 2011).

Inversely, a plurality-majority system sees women compete directly with men in single-member constituencies. In the absence of a cultural acceptance of women parliamentarians, this can prove a difficult race for women.

Irrespective of the electoral system and use of quotas, across the globe, there are insufficient numbers of women candidates running for national parliaments. Challenges for women candidates include insufficient funds to run a campaign, high expectations from the electorate and the antagonistic nature of competitive political parties. In addition, women tend to have fewer resources at their disposal, less experience in running for office and in public speaking, and a lack of support from spouses and family. Women also have multiple roles, and balancing them all can be very difficult.

The future is not bright for women in politics. The continuing financial crisis dramatically impacted not only on the economies but also on women's participation in national parliaments. Women lost ground in Cyprus, Estonia, Portugal and Spain, where "electoral realignments" – or the replacement of a dominant coalition of parties by another – occurred. In such cases, a large number of incumbent seats are lost (typically, those more 'marginally' held by women), and are not always replaced by women from the incoming party or coalition of parties.

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