

Women Political Participation and Representation: Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

Increasing women's participation in politics and securing their access to political life is of particular importance to democratic development and sustainability. Efforts to promote and increase women's political participation have taken place all around the world and brought together women from different political, social and cultural groups with the common aim of reaching the goal of gender equality. In some countries- in the Nordic countries-the process of reaching equal representation of women in political institutions and parliament has taken a long time-for example, while in other countries the transition to democracy has contributed to a more rapid development and the overall change in society has opened 'windows of opportunity' to promote women's participation in political life. This article goes through theories of representation and made an analysis to women's representation in international scenario.

KEYWORDS: Political Participation, Democracy and Representation, Women

INTRODUCTION

In the words of Lord Bryce democracy has been used ever since the time of Herodotus to denote that form of government in which the ruling power of the state is legally vested not in any particular class or classes, but in the members of a community as a whole (Bryce 1929). According to Professor Seedeey, democracy as a form of government means "a government in which everyone has a share" (Ali 1996:16). Here sovereignty resides with the people. It is the government by the people and is exercised by them either directly or indirectly. Direct democracy is one in which citizens themselves take part in the affairs of the state. Ancient Greece and Rome followed this way of life. Today only in four small cantons of Switzerland found surviving examples of direct democracy.

In indirect or representative democracy people participate in law making process and control policies through their elected representatives. It is based on the idea that while the people cannot actually presented in person at the seat of government they are considered to be present by proxy (Ali 1996: 23). So in democracies representation occupies a central role. Representation is the relationship through which an individual or group stand for or act on behalf of, a larger body of people.

Contemporary democratic theory possesses three main models of democracy: the aggregative model, the deliberative model, and the anti-domination model. Each model identifies democracy by a distinctive set of characteristics.

The aggregative model identifies democratic institutions by the way 'mass citizens' preferences. In particular, the competition provided by elections creates incentives for public officials to weigh citizens' preferences in ways that maximize the most preferences. Such an understanding of democratic institutions makes voting the "primary political act" (Young 2000: 22).

In contrast, the deliberative model identifies democratic institutions by the ways they subject political disagreements to public reason. Put simplistically, democracy is a way of discussing problems. Democratic institutions are understood by their ability to provide citizens with the opportunity to express and to refine their political positions. In this way, deliberative models do not presume that citizens have fixed preferences; rather, democratic institutions require citizens to justify their preferences and to confront those with whom they disagree.

Finally, the anti-domination model identifies democratic institutions by their ability to resist the arbitrary and unjust use of power. Here, democratic processes resist the monopolization of power. Representative institutions occupy a central location in all three models of democracy.

Women's Representation

A socially inclusive society is regarded as a fundamental principle of democratic governance enabling women to 'have a voice' in making decisions that affect their lives. This relates to an increasingly popular argument that women are entitled to equal citizenship and that political participation is a human right (Bacchi 2006: 40).

Implicit in this view is that legislatures should be inclusive, reflecting the diversity of the society they serve and harnessing the resources and skills of the whole community. Parliaments are by nature intended to represent their societies. Modern parliaments are those in which citizens recognize themselves and find answers to their questions and aspirations. However, women's representation in parliament is increasing very slowly and, in almost every parliament worldwide is still far lower than women's broader representation in their society. As Academic Pippa Norris notes, 'most parliaments worldwide fail to reflect the proportion of women in the electorate....despite trends in the home, family, school and work force and growing recognition of the need for the inclusion and empowerment of women in elected office' (Norris 2006:198). According to the United Nations Developed Programme and UN Women, when women participate in elections as candidate and as voters - decisions better reflect the electorate and democracy is strengthened (UN women and UNDP:2015).

Arguments about Women's Presence in Politics

Universal franchise in free and fair elections has been recognized as a minimum standard for democratic societies. However, in new and established democracies alike, it has become clear that universal suffrage did not in itself lead to the establishment of representative legislatures. Many sections of the population continued to be excluded, mainly the rural poor and the least educated, and still, women. Overall, the proportion of women in legislatures is exceedingly low (IDEA 2005).

Hernes (1987:22) claims that there is variety of arguments about women's political representation and participation. There are three important basic arguments.

Justice and Democracy Argument

This argument means that women's representation is a matter of justice and democracy because all groups in a society should have the right to participate in decisions that concern them. Women constitute half of the population and should get due representation. It is not the qualification of decision makers, nor consequences of their competence for the quality of decisions, nor even that would it be better or different if women participate, but women's participation is a democratic right.

Recourse Argument

Recourse Argument claims that the society lose when women are not participating in politics, because women have different knowledge of values and experiences than men, for that reason do men and women compete each other and make better decisions together for the whole society. It is even important to have women in decision-making positions because male decision-making politicians might forget, overlook or omit the consequences of political decision for women. Women's participation in politics would change the meaning, the condition and the quality of decisions because they have different gender experiences than men that are needed to create a wide decision area that is thought through from different perspectives for all of the citizens best. The influx of women in politics increases generally the level of competence and represents relevant and valuable experience. This argument considers the absence of women from teaching and research and from political life as a waste of valuable experience, and that is why women should be producers of political decisions in cooperation with men and not just consumers.

Conflict of Interest Argument

This argument implies that men and women have inconsistent and different interests. Women interests are underrepresented, repressed or hidden. There are conflicts in the political system between women and men, and between dominant values and repressed values. Women need to be allowed to participate equally as men to make the conflicts between them visible, which in short term increases the level of conflict but leads to change that benefit women's interests in the political system. But in long term the political system will be less conflict-filled. It is important to have women in politics because they need to observe women's political interests and not risk that their interests will be less value next to men's interests.

Pitkin View on Representation

Most theoretical discussions of representation begin with Hanna Pitkin (1967). Pitkin's classic work 'The Concept of Representation' set the terms of how we discuss and think about political representation. Pitkin identified four alternative views of representation:

The formalistic view- It stresses on the processes of authorization and accountability;

Descriptive representation- It stresses on the extent to which representatives "resemble" or "look like" the represented;

Symbolic representation- It examines the emotional response of the represented to the representative; and

Substantive representation- It stresses on the activity of advancing the represented interests.

Each view of representation provides an alternative approach for assessing the representation of women within a democratic polity. Women could vote their representatives in and out of office (formalistic view). Women could look like or share certain experiences with their representatives (descriptive representation). Women can feel represented (symbolic representation). Finally, their representatives can act on women's behalf, advancing "women's interests" (substantive representation).

Moreover, Pitkin's analysis of political representation also shows why assessing the proper representation of women is such a difficult task. After all, Pitkin holds that the concept of representation is itself paradoxical: each of the different views of representation contains different and sometimes contradictory standards for how political representatives

should behave. For instance, the descriptive view assesses representatives by their correspondence with their constituents while substantive view can assess a representative by their ability to be good delegates (follow the expressed preferences of their constituents) or good trustees (follow their understanding of the best interests of the represented).

Not surprisingly, conceptions of the representation of women possess similar contradictions. Women can be represented when their representatives follow the expressed preferences of women and women can be represented when a representative ignores the expressed preferences of women and acts in what she thinks are women's best interests. The standards for assessing representatives can contradict one another. Thus, Pitkin's understanding of political representation seems to dictate the need for objective criteria for identifying who counts as constituent as well as objective criteria for identifying the objective interests of constituents. Pitkin's analysis of political representation is helpful in identifying different approaches to representing women; however, to the extent that women are heterogeneous group and to the extent that the concept of gender can expand or constrict, Pitkin's concept of representation is less helpful for determining whether women are being properly represented in democracies.

Democratic representation has multiple dimensions. Given these changing ways that women are being represented, it is important to assess how of these different forms of representation increase or decrease women's can power in democratic politics, specifically, how they increase or decrease the ability of women to hold their representatives accountable. As Squires (2005) and Childs and Krook (2006) suggest, it is important not to assess not only who represents and what gets represented but also to examine how the substantive representation of women occurs.

Normative and Empirical Theories

The value of political equality is central to normative theories of democracy: it is argued that women are equal citizens and therefore should share equally with men in public decision-making. By contrast, empirical theories define democracy by the presence of institutions such as: freedom to form and join organizations; freedom of expression; the right to vote in elections and to stand for public office; the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes; freedom of information and availability of alternative sources of information; free and fair elections; and institutions for making government policies that depend on votes and other expressions of preference (Dahl 1984). This multifaceted understanding of empirical democracy is used to help explain the descriptive representation of women in national parliaments. In fact, empirical democracy is a much more complex concept that encompasses a range of practical realities. **Substantive and Descriptive Representation**

How representation should be achieved is a controversial issue. In this connection, distinguish two of the most central concepts which are based on different normative assumptions (Manin 1997, Mansbridge 2003, Pitkin 1967, Powell 2004): substantive and descriptive representation.

The first concept of representation is substantive representation which starts with the claim that representatives should "do what the citizens want" (Powell 2004: 91). The adherents of this position state that good representation depends on how well the representatives match with the ideological views of the citizens.

The second concept, descriptive representation focuses on minority empowerment. According to this idea, representation is good when the composition of the body of representatives mirrors the composition of the body represented.

In descriptive representation, the normative principle of equality implies inclusion of all the various population groups. The absence of a group or its underrepresentation means that certain views are suppressed; when all citizens are equal, all groups of a society have an equal right to be represented in parliament. According to the idea of substantive representation, however, the representation of policy positions is more important than the mirroring of demographic characteristics, because people primarily vote according to their ideological preferences. Equality in this sense means mirroring ideological positions. Based on these normative grounds, there is a debate on which form of representation should be preferred. For instance, it is argued that descriptive representation destroys substantive representation (Cameron 1996) or that the underrepresentation of important groups leads to misrepresentation of their specific preferences because these preferences cannot be represented by anyone who is not directly affected (Phillips 1995).

Intrinsic and Instrumentalist Theories

The worldwide discussion on the greater political participation and representation of women has been surrounded by intrinsic and instrumentalist argument. The intrinsic argument looks at equal participation of women in politics from the democratic and human rights perspective (Jayal 2005). It contends that women constitute half of the world's population and therefore it is only rational that they should participate equally in governance with men. Women will feel truly represented and recognised in the democratic process if only more women are elected. Therefore, it is only fair that women should have at least an equal say in the use and distribution of national resources. Politics is an arena where such decisions are taken. It also argues that a society where women are not represented equally is undemocratic and unjust. It is important that women participate equally in formal political structures in their countries. This is a simple justice argument that contends that no country can claim itself truly democratic if half of its female population is not represented in its political institutions (Paxton and Hughes 2007).

Lister (1997) points out that policy institutions and processes must be represented by women because their interests differ from those of men. Accordingly, women cannot articulate their definite views in the decision-making process through indirect representation alone. That is why their perspective must be articulated directly in political debates and in the decision-making process in order to ensure true development. To ensure justice in a society, it is crucial for women to take part in the political system.

The instrumentalist argument pushes for women's greater political participation by point out that men and women are different. Women have different interests and political priorities owing to their gender differences. Women across the world have shared experiences that male-dominated decision-making bodies do not serve the interests of women adequately. Therefore, it is argued that women in politics will bring a special attention centers and female values to politics Equal rights to vote have not proved strong enough to deal with this problem. Many empirical studies conducted in various social and political contexts uphold the theory of the politics of the presence (Wangnerud 2000, Young 2000).

Fast Track and Instrumentalist Approach

Women's participation has given rise to different discourses or perspectives too. One of the perspectives is known as Incrementalist perspective. It believes that gender equality is a phased phenomenon. According to this discourse gender equality develops gradually, step wise and as a concerted effort where state intervention may assist in moving equality in the high direction. Dahlerup (2006) and colleagues distinguish between fast-track and incremental models regarding the number of women elected; however, there are no clear boundaries here. Whether changes are seen as fast or not depends on the reference points used. However, if the development in Sweden is contrasted with the development in Rwanda, the differences in the models are striking. By the beginning of the 1970s, parties in Sweden had started to implement measures, often referred to as soft quotas, in order to increase the number of women elected. During the 1970s Sweden crossed the threshold of 20% women in parliament; the proportion climbed past 30% during the 1980s and 40% during the 1990s. This step-by-step development, spanning almost four decades, lies behind the current figure of 47.0% women in the Swedish parliament (Bergqvist 2000, Freidenvall 2006). Rwanda's situation is much different. Whereas Sweden's twentieth century history is characterized by political stability, economic growth, and peace, Rwanda is one of the poorest countries in the world, and its modern history contains disastrous wars. Gender quotas were implemented in Rwanda as a part of the reconciliation process after the genocide in 1994. In 1994 women made up 17.1% of the national parliament in Rwanda. After the election in 2003, the number was 48.8%. The number of women tripled in less than ten years (Devlin and Elgie 2008). By December 2017 it reached 61.30%.

Critical Mass Theory on Women Representation

In studies of women's legislative behaviour, the concept of critical mass is widely used as a tool for understanding the relationship between the percentage of female legislators and the passage of legislation beneficial to women as a group. Gender and politics scholars and activists suggest that this pattern is due not to the inclinations of female office holders, but rather to the fact that there are fewer women than men in almost all elected assemblies. They argue that women are not likely to have a major impact on legislative outcomes until they grow from a few token individuals into a considerable minority of all legislators. Only as their numbers increase will women be able to work more effectively together to promote women-friendly policy change and to influence their male colleagues to accept and approve legislation promoting women's demands. Gender quotas ensure that women make up a certain minimum percentage of the candidates on each party's list (or minimum percentage of MPs in the case of reserved seats). Today, most quota systems aim to ensure that women constitute at least a 'critical minority' of 20–30 percent (Trembaly 2006). Over the last thirty years, 'critical mass' has gained wide currency among politicians, the media and international organisations as a justification for measures to bring more women into political office (Grey 2006, Krook 2005). The debate on 'critical mass' in women and politics research can be traced back to three seminal works, two by Kanter (1977a, 1977b) and one by Dahlerup (1988), which, respectively, analyse the experiences of women who form small minorities in the corporate and political spheres. Later Childs and Krook made clarification on the concept of critical mass (Childs and Krook 2008).

Parity theory

The concept of “parity” began to take root by late 2000s (IPU 2015: 5). In different regions-Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, and the Arab States efforts have shifted the target to 50 percent, referred to as “parity”. This trend began in 2000s in such European states as Belgium, France, and Portugal.

World Average Women in Parliament

Table 1: World Averages of Women in Parliament in February 2019

World average	Single house/ Lower house	Upper house/ Senate	Both houses combined
	24.3%	24.1%	24.3%

Source: <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

The table 1 shows as on February 2019, 24.3 % lower Houses of the Parliaments constitute women. When both the Houses combine women constitute an average 24.3%.

Regional Averages

Based on the regional groupings of IPU report, the table shows below the percentage of women in different regions of the world.

Table 2: Regional Averages of Women in Parliament in February 2019

Regions	Single house/ Lower house	Upper house/ Senate	Both houses combined
Nordic countries	42.5%	-	-
Americans	30.6%	31.4%	30.7%
Europe (Nordic country included)	28.6%	28.0%	28.5%
Europe (Nordic countries not included)	27.2%	28.0%	27.4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	23.9%	22.2%	23.7%
Asia	19.9%	17.4%	19.4%
Arab states	19.0%	12.5%	18.1%
Pacific	16.3%	36.0%	18.4%

Source <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

- Nordic countries have only lower House.

Regionally, Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland) far surpass all other regions of the world in percentage of women legislatures with 42.5%. Since 1995, the Nordic countries have always been at the highest in representing women, with averages consistently over 38 percent. Sweden has always been the top performer; it now has 46.1 percent of its parliamentarians being women, followed by Finland (42%), Norway (41.4%), Iceland (38.1%) and Denmark (37.4%) (IPU 2019). Nordic countries are followed by America with 30.6%, Europe (including the Nordic Countries) with 28.6% Europe (excluding the Nordic Countries) with 27.2%, Sub-Saharan Africa with 23.9%, Asia with 19.9%, Arab states with 19.0% and the lowest in Pacific with 16.3% women in parliaments.

Aggregate Change in Women Representation

Notable change can be visible in women representation in between July 1995 and January 2017, both houses combined

Table 3: Aggregate Change in Women Representation Between 1995-2017

Aggregate change in Regional Ranking:-1995-2017			
	In 1995	2018	Aggregate change
World average	11.3	24.3	+13
Americas	12.7	30.7	+18
Sub-Saharan Africa	9.8	27.3	+17.5
Arab states	4.3	18.0	+13.7
Europe (Nordic country included)	13.2	28.5	+15.3
Pacific	6.3	18.4	+12.1
Asia	13.2	19.6	+6.4
Nordic countries	36.4	42.5	+6.1

Source: IPU “Women in parliament in 2018 The year in review” P.2 (Aggregate change calculated by the author)

Americas

The table 3 shows, over the past 23 years, American region witnessed the highest aggregate change of +18 % in the Women’s average share in the region. It rose from 12.7% in 1995 to 30.7% in 2018. No county in the region exceeded the 30% mark in their single or lower house of parliament in 1995. By 2015, nine countries attained 30% and three countries attained 40% of and Bolivia rose above 50% (53.1%) of women in lower Houses.

By late 1990s, Latin America contributed mainly to these advances. Latin America introduced gender quotas across their parliaments. As a result women attained high Parliamentary gains. Quotas implemented are mandatory, requiring political parties to nominate a minimum percentage of female candidates. Quota in nearly all Latin American countries was 30% percent. The latest adopters include Chile (January 2015) and Colombia (July 2011). The concept of “parity” began to take root by late 2000s (IPU 2015: 5). In United States of America the number of women in the Senate is 25% and in the House of Representatives 23.6%.

Europe

A remarkable change in the share of women elected to national parliament can be seen in countries of Europe between 1995 and 2018, from 13.2% to 28.5%. By 2018, the number of countries having 30% women in Parliament rose from 5 to 17 and the countries surpassed 40% increased from 1 to 5. Europe’s top ranking countries still include three Nordic countries. The Nordic countries always rank both regionally and globally for the high share of women in parliaments (42.5%), although their rates of change vary somewhat. This result stems from women’s mobilization to ensure that political parties nominate roughly equal number of male and female candidates.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have an average of 27.3% women in their national legislatures (both Houses combined). Number Countries in this region have made remarkable progress in achieving a ‘critical mass of women leaders’ in political and public affairs since the 1990s. Women’s representation made notable progress in the Sub-Saharan African countries, where their average share of Parliament increased from 9.8%

in 1995 to 27.3% in 2018. In 1995, no States in this region had elected more than 30% women to their single or lower houses. By 2018, 15 countries have elected more than 30%, four have elected more than 40%, and one (Rwanda) has elected more than 60% of women to their lower or single houses. Four of the world's top 10 countries, in terms of women's share of single or lower houses of parliament, are in Sub-Saharan Africa: Rwanda, with 61.3%; Senegal, with 41.8%; and South Africa, with 42.7%.

The adoption of legally binding electoral gender quotas are the key contributing factor behind this substantial change. Where quotas were in place, it kept the share of women's parliamentary seats relatively stable. Where quotas were not in place, substantial setbacks were recorded.

Arab States

In terms of women's share in parliament, Arab region is largely behind other regions. Starting from a lower baseline, from 4.3% in 1995 Arab States gains 18.0% in 2018 (+13.7 points). No Arab State elected more than 30% women to its single or lower house in 1995. The best performers at that time were Iraq, at 10.8%, and Syria, at 9.6%. Striking developments have made in terms of access to rights. Until recently, not all Arab States had granted women political rights. Women gained suffrage in Oman in 2003, Kuwait and Qatar in 2005, the United Arab Emirates in 2006, and Saudi Arabia in 2011. Algeria is in a better position with 25.8% women in parliament. Followed by a royal order in Saudi Arabia, reserving 20% of the seats for women, representation in parliament rose to 19.9 percent in 2013.

Pacific

The regional average increased from 6.3% in 1995 to 18.4% in 2017 (+12.1points). In 1995, no Pacific country had more than 30% women in its single or lower house of parliament. Among Pacific Island States, Fiji, at 16%, has taken the lead by 2017. In 2014, women's parliamentary representation declined from 16.2% in 2013 to 15.7% in 2014 (-0.5 points). The highest gains made by women in parliament in 2016. These gains came in the wake of the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration that focused more attention on women and decision-making (IPU 2016).

Asia

As compared with Arab or Pacific countries, Asian countries elect more women to their national parliaments. Asia has not kept pace with the rest of the world in women representation. Their aggregate rate of change is only +6.4 points (13.2% in 1995 to 19.6% in 2018). No Asian State had attained 30% women's representation in its single or lower house of parliament in 1995. The regional leaders, China stands with 21% and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with 20.1% of women. By 2018, Nepal, with 32.7%, overcome 30% threshold. Philippines with 29.5 come close to 30%. Overall, small gains and frequent setbacks have resulted in Asia losing ground relative to other regions. It is noted that in 1995, Asia ranked second, tied with Europe. By 2018, it dropped to fourth place among the six regions, having lost momentum as other regions gained it (IPU 2015:9). India recorded the region's only setback, only 14% women in lower house by 2019.

CONCLUSION

Political participation is the hallmark of a democratic setup. Nature, success and effectiveness of democracy largely depend on the extent to which equal, effective and actual participation is provided by the system to all its citizens. As women comprise

about half of the population, this section of society requires due attention in the system and a due share in process. Women's representation is a matter of justice in democracy because all groups in a society should have the right to participate in decisions that concern them. The past three decades have witnessed an impressive rise in the share of women in national parliament around the world. The global average was doubled during this period. In a number of countries, record numbers of women candidates contested the elections. While not all of these candidates won, the attempt highlights women's own personal conviction that they have something important to contribute to the political process, and their fortitude in standing up for their political rights. In the past, the worldwide average of women in parliament has increased by significant margins in course of a year. Quotas have been a key contributing factor, as a fast track, to inroads by women into political life in many countries. However Women make up less than 10 percent of the membership of 31 chambers and there are no women at all in four Houses. Improvement in the representation of women in this domain has been steady, but there is still a long way to go to attain Parity.

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