Gender in Politics

Pamela Paxton,[1] Sheri Kunovich,[2]
and Melanie M. Hughes[1]

[1]Department of Sociology, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210;
email: paxton.36@osu.edu

[2]Department of Sociology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas 75205

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Abstract

Women's political participation and representation vary dramatically
within and between countries. We selectively review the literature
on gender in politics, focusing on women's formal political partici-
pation. We discuss both traditional explanations for women's polit-
ical participation and representation, such as the supply of women
and the demand for women, and newer explanations such as the
role of international actors and gender quotas. We also ask whether
women are distinctive—does having more women in office make a
difference to public policy? Throughout the review we demonstrate
that a full understanding of women's political representation requires
both deep knowledge of individual cases such as the United States
and broad knowledge comparing women's participation across coun-
tries. We end with four recommended directions for future research:
(*a*) globalizing theory and research, (*b*) expanding data collection,
(*c*) remembering alternative forms of women's agency, and (*d*) ad-
dressing intersectionality.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have documented women's under-representation in politics since the middle of the last century (Duverger 1955, Kirkpatrick 1974, Epstein & Coser 1981, Lovenduski & Hills 1981). But research on the topic accelerated dramatically in the past 20 years. This acceleration is inspired in part by women's increasingly divergent levels of political participation and representation both across, and even within, countries. In some countries, such as Sweden, Argentina, and Rwanda, women have made remarkable progress in participation and representation. But in other countries, women either continue to lack the right to vote (Saudi Arabia) or are entirely represented by male legislators (e.g., Kyrgyzstan, Micronesia, St. Kitts, Solomon Islands, United Arab Emirates). As of June 2006, women comprised 17% of national parliaments around the world and 15% and 14% in the U.S. House and Senate, respectively (IPU 2006, CAWP 2006).

The literature on gender in politics is broad, addressing gender inequality in political acts as diverse as voting, campaigning, and leading, as well as gender differences in political knowledge, socialization, and attitudes, and women's place in political theory. In this review, we focus on women's participation in formal politics including suffrage, voting, running for and holding political office, and political influence. We also touch on gender differences in political attitudes, knowledge, and socialization and in women's social movement activism, as these concepts help inform our understanding of women's formal political outcomes. We do not consider, except in passing, the women's movement, women's grassroots activism, women in the judiciary, women in the military, how politics affects women, or policy outcomes (such as abortion) relevant to women.

Our knowledge of women in politics is still expanding. Indeed, the literature on women in politics could be described as exploding. For example, over 100 new country and regional case studies of quota adoption and impact (only one of the many topics covered in this review) were published since 2000. We selectively review the literature, highlighting important citations that cover both U.S. and international work on women in politics for each broad topic covered.

GENDER INEQUALITY IN POLITICAL OUTCOMES

Women's fight for formal political representation is mostly won. At the turn of the twentieth century, women across many countries had to contest established beliefs that politics was a man's domain (Chafetz & Dworkin 1986). Early suffrage victories were therefore often the result of long and trying national-level struggles (for the United States, see Flexner 1975, McCammon et al. 2001; for elsewhere in the world, see Morgan 1984, Chafetz & Dworkin 1986, Hannam et al. 2000). As time went on, the international women's movement linked these national struggles for political rights, helping to make women's political rights an accepted practice (Rupp & Taylor 1999, D'Itri 1999, Berkovitch 1999). After World War II, women's political rights were legally sanctioned in many countries, often without significant resistance (Jayawardena 1986, Ramirez et al. 1997, Paxton et al. 2006). Today, in all countries with legislatures except Saudi Arabia, women vote alongside men in elections, sometimes even in greater numbers.

Once women gained political rights, it sometimes took them years to exercise their right to vote or stand for office. In the United States, for example, women received the vote nationally in 1920, but women's voter turnout did not equal men's until the 1980s (Andersen 1996, Burrell 2004). Today, women are more likely to vote than men in the United States (CAWP 2006), and across most countries women vote at rates fairly similar to men. Yet women are significantly more likely to vote than men in countries such as Barbados and Sweden, whereas they are considerably less likely to vote in Romania and India (Pintor

& Gratschew 2002). And although women have the legal right to vote and stand for elections in almost every country of the world, cultural barriers to women's use of their political rights, including family resistance and illiteracy, remain (Pintor & Gratschew 2002, Moghadam 2003).

Research also documents gender gaps in policy preferences, party affiliations, vote choices, and forms of political participation (e.g., Shapiro & Mahajan 1986, Conover 1988, Manza & Brooks 1998, Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2004; see Kaufmann 2006 for a recent review). Within a society, the size and direction of the gender gap often varies significantly across different forms of political action. For example, during the 2004 presidential campaign in the United States, men contributed more money than women, but women were just as likely to volunteer (Burrell 2004). In the United States, there are also differences in women's political participation across race, ethnicity, and class (Burns et al. 2001, chapter 11; Welch & Sigelman 1992; Hardy-Fanta 1993; Bedolla & Scola 2006). For example, Latina women are less politically active than white or black women in voting, working on campaigns, and contacting officials (Burns et al. 2001, chapter 11).

Gender gaps also vary across countries. For example, whereas women report more politically left party affiliations than men in countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark, women are politically to the right of men in Spain (Inglehart & Norris 2003, chapter 4). And explanations for these gaps vary across countries. In a study of 10 advanced democracies, Iverson & Rosenbluth (2006) conclude that both individual (e.g., women's labor force participation and marital status) and societal characteristics (divorce rates and labor market conditions) are needed to understand the gender gap in support for leftist parties.

Although women's formal political representation is now taken for granted, the struggle for descriptive representation remains. Indeed, gender inequality across all elected and appointed positions persists.

Figure 1 demonstrates that although women have reached important milestones, such as 20% representation in national legislatures in many countries, women's overall representation remains low. Although over 60% of countries have reached at least 10% women in their national legislature, fewer have crossed the 20% and 30% barriers. By February 2006, only about 10% of sovereign nations had more than 30% women in parliament.

Presidents and prime ministers, the top leaders of countries, are also typically men (Jalalzai 2004). Indeed, since 1960, when Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the first female to lead a modern country (Sri Lanka), only 30 women have become the top political executive of their country (Paxton & Hughes 2007). And many of the women elected to the top leadership position in their country, especially in Asia and Latin America, had famous husbands or fathers who preceded them in political life (e.g., Indira Gandhi, Corozon Aquino). Cabinet positions show a similar dearth of female faces, and women are far more likely to hold cabinet spots in health, education, or "women's affairs" than positions associated with finance or defense (Davis 1997, Reynolds 1999, Siaroff 2000, Borelli 2002).

With 14% women in the Senate and 15% in the House of Representatives, the United States far from leads the world in women's political representation (IPU 2006). Women do slightly better at the state level, where they hold 23% of seats (CAWP 2006). Women are also only a small percentage of top executives across the U.S. states. Fewer than 30 women have served as governors since 1925, and even in 2004, women held only 10% of these positions (CAWP 2006).

A discussion of global trends, or a single country, belies significant variation across and within regions of the world. **Table 1** presents historical regional trends in women's national legislative participation along with some examples of regional research. Looking at the table, it is clear, on the one hand,

Descriptive representation: numeric similarity between legislative bodies and the electorate they represent in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, or other demographic characteristics; women achieving high percentages of representation in legislatures

Table 1 Historical comparison of the percentage of women in parliaments across regions and selected regional readings

	1955	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005	Selected readings
Scandinavia	10.4	9.3	16.1	27.5	34.4	38.2	Haavio-Mannila et al. 1985, Karvonen & Selle 1995, Bergqvist 1999
Western Industrial	3.6	4.0	5.5	8.6	12.8	22.7	Norris 1985, Norris 1997, Kittilson 2006
Eastern Europe	17.0	18.4	24.7	27.0	8.4	15.7	Rueschemeyer 1994, Jaquette & Wolchik 1998, Matland & Montgomery 2003
Latin America	2.8	2.7	5.2	8.1	10.0	17.1	Craske 1999, Craske & Molyneux 2002, Jaquette & Wolchik 1998
Africa	1.0	3.2	5.3	8.0	9.8	16.3	Goetz & Hassim 2003, Bauer & Britton 2006
Asia	5.2	5.3	2.8	5.6	8.8	15.3	Jayawardena 1986, Nelson & Chowdhury 1994
Middle East	1.2	1.2	2.9	3.5	3.9	8.1	Moghadam 1994, Karam 1999; Charrad 2001

that Scandinavian nations have surpassed all other regions in their levels of women's political representation at all time points. On the other hand, the Middle East has persistently had the lowest average levels of female representation. Although women's representation in Latin America, Africa, and the West progressed slowly until 1995, in the most recent decade these regions show substantial growth, doubling their previous percentage. Explanations for these gains differ across region. For example, quotas were instrumental in Latin America (Htun 2005), and armed conflict spurred growth in Africa (Hughes 2004, Bauer 2004). Eastern Europe demonstrates that high levels of women's representation need not be permanent; as Marxist-Leninist countries transitioned to democracy, women's levels of representation declined precipitously (Matland & Montgomery 2003). Finally, it is important to remember that women's legislative representation varies within regions. Indeed, Scandinavia aside, many of the countries that lead the world in women's parliamentary representation are non-Western, including Argentina, Burundi, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guyana, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tanzania (IPU 2006).

EXPLAINING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN FORMAL POLITICS

Researchers traditionally distinguish between supply-side factors and demand-side factors when explaining women's levels of political representation within a single country or across the world (Randall 1987, Norris 1997, Paxton 1997). Supply-side factors increase the pool of women with the will and experience to compete against men for political office. Alternatively, demand-side factors are characteristics of countries, electoral systems, or political parties that affect the likelihood that women will be pulled into office from the supply of willing candidates. A third traditional explanation, culture, stresses that beliefs and attitudes influence both the supply of and demand for female candidates (Paxton & Kunovich 2003; Inglehart & Norris 2003, chapter 6; Arceneaux 2001). Newer explanations stress the role and power of international actors and institutional regulations such as gender quotas.

Supply-Side Explanations

Not all types of people participate in politics. Supply-side arguments acknowledge that political participation requires both personal characteristics such as interest, ambition, and knowledge as well as resources such as time, networks, civic skills, education, and economic resources. The supply of women available for political office is therefore determined partly by gender socialization, which influences women's interest, knowledge, and ambition regarding politics, and partly by large-scale social structures, which enhance or

limit women's opportunities for education and employment.

The gender gap in political knowledge and interest is well established. Across both developed and developing countries, men are consistently found to be more interested in politics and have more political knowledge than women (Burns et al. 2001, Chhibber 2002, Frazer & MacDonald 2003). For example, U.S. men scored the equivalent of an additional 2 3/4 years of schooling on objective tests of political knowledge compared with women (Verba et al. 1997; but see Mondak & Anderson 2004). The U.S. gender gap in political interest and knowledge also varies by race and ethnicity. Among whites, blacks, and Latinos, black women have the smallest gender gap (compared with black men) in political knowledge but the largest gap in interest in national politics. Latinas are consistently the least interested in and knowledgeable of politics (Burns et al. 2001, chapter 11). Across all races, this gender gap disappears or is even reversed among children and teenagers (Alozie et al. 2003).

Direct political ambition is even more critical for understanding who decides to run for office. Fox & Lawless (2004) compared men and women in the four U.S. professions most likely to yield political candidates—law, business, education, and politics—and found that women are much less likely than men to aspire to political office. Part of the explanation for this difference in aspiration is that these women were less likely than men in these professions to view themselves as qualified to run. Women were also encouraged to run for office less often than men. Women's low levels of political ambition may also be attributed to a paucity of female political role models (Campbell & Wolbrecht 2006).

Interest or ambition aside, women have fewer of the necessary resources to participate in politics. Time to participate in politics is a critical resource, and around the world women have less time than men. Women still perform the lion's share of domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning and are the primary caregivers for children, patterns that may deprive women of the free time required to participate in politics (Corrin 1992, Chhibber 2002; but see Burns et al. 2001, chapter 10).

Supply-side arguments also point to the financial and human capital that both are needed to run for office and that can be acquired through education and employment. As we might expect, therefore, among individuals differences between men and women in levels of education are an important explanation for differences in political participation (Burns et al. 2001). We might also expect that state- or national-level differences in women's levels of education could explain differences in their levels of parliamentary representation. Across countries, however, there has been little evidence to support the argument that the percentage of women in education is a predictor of parliamentary representation (e.g., Paxton 1997, Kenworthy & Malami 1999). But it is difficult to establish a single measure of education that is appropriate across all countries. In the United States, law and other professional degrees provide an important path, and having more women in such pipeline occupations leads to more female state legislators (Arceneaux 2001, Norrander & Wilcox 2005) and state executives (Oxley & Fox 2004). But in Uganda, seven years of education and English language skills are sufficient educational credentials for women (Johnson et al. 2003).

Similarly, research on individuals has found that some types of employment provide women with financial resources, practical skills for organizing, expanded social networks, and more opportunities to discuss and debate politics (Andersen 1975, Schlozman et al. 1999). But like the cross-national findings on education, researchers do not consistently find a positive effect for women's labor force participation on women's legislative outcomes across countries (Rule 1987, Moore & Shackman 1996, Paxton & Kunovich 2003, Gray et al. 2006 versus Paxton 1997, Kenworthy & Malami 1999, Kunovich &

Paxton 2005). But again, is labor force participation the proper measure in all contexts? Women's dominance of factory labor across Asia may boost women's labor force participation rates, but such work roles are unlikely to supply women with experience or skills that will benefit them politically (Matland 1998, Kunovich & Paxton 2005). Indeed, women's labor force participation does not necessarily indicate that women have economic power either in a company or in their own homes (Blumberg 1984, Chafetz 1984, Staudt 1986, Karam 1999). The cross-national research that considers women as managers or as part of professional occupations also finds mixed results but suffers from extensive missing data (Paxton 1997, Kunovich & Paxton 2005 versus Kenworthy & Malami 1999).

Women also gain skills from nonwork activities such as volunteering or social movement activism. In the United States, women use the civic skills and networks gained from their voluntary associations to make the transition to politics (Kirkpatrick 1974; Burns et al. 2001, chapter 9). And across a range of countries women's participation in the women's movement and in grassroots activism provides them with both political experience and political ambition (Fallon 2003, Bauer & Britton 2006). Indeed, some Rwandan nongovernmental organization leaders complain that the best women in civil society are drawn into government or named to commissions or ministries (Longman 2006, p. 138). Voluntary associations, including churches (Burns et al. 2001, chapters 9 and 11), and personal connections (Hardy-Fanta 1993) are also important ways that minority and lower-class women are drawn into participation.

Demand-Side Explanations

Features of political systems shape the rules of the game and strongly influence whether women can attain, and how they attain, political power. In the United States, for example, high incumbent reelection rates must be ac-

counted for when predicting women's possible future political gains (Darcy & Choike 1986, Darcy et al. 1994, Palmer & Simon 2006). A wide range of political factors generates differences in the demand for women's political incorporation. In broad terms, a country's level of democracy sets the general context in which women contest seats or are placed into political positions. Specific features of the political system also affect demand, including the electoral system and the presence and structure of gender quotas. Political parties and party leaders also pull women into or push women out of the political process. And at the individual level, voters may be more or less likely to support female candidates over their male counterparts.

Democracy. Focusing on the broad political environment, research considers how democracies, semidemocracies, and authoritarian regimes shape women's access to political positions. On the one hand, in democracies the rules of the political game should be transparent, well detailed, and consistent, helping women to see how they can work within the system to attain power (Paxton 1997). On the other hand, in the absence of true elections, women can be placed into power even when citizens do not support them (Howell 2002, Matland & Montgomery 2003). For example, the remaining Marxist-Leninist countries of the world maintain informal quotas leading to comparatively high levels of female legislative representation. Given conflicting theory on this subject, one should not be surprised that large, cross-national studies do not find that democratic countries have more women in parliament than less democratic countries (Kenworthy & Malami 1999, Reynolds 1999, Paxton & Kunovich 2003, Paxton et al. 2006). Some evidence suggests that women are less well represented in democratic systems (Paxton 1997). Indeed, when authoritarian regimes transition to democracy, the representation of women can decline (Waylen 1994, Yoon 2001, Matland & Montgomery 2003).

An open debate is whether women's representation in nondemocratic national legislatures should be treated the same as women's representation in effective elected bodies. Certainly, the meaning of candidate or legislator fundamentally differs depending on whether a country is a democracy or not. And women's presence in high numbers may be less meaningful if they are unable to truly affect policy (Goetz & Hassim 2003). For these reasons, some researchers consider women in politics solely in democratic regimes (e.g., Matland 1998). Alternatively, other researchers argue that the position of parliamentarian is visible and carries prestige in all contexts, providing women with symbolic power in democracies and nondemocracies alike (e.g., Paxton & Kunovich 2003).

Electoral system. Perhaps the most consistent and well-documented finding in cross-national research on women in politics is the importance of a country's electoral system. Electoral systems determine how the votes cast in an election get translated into seats won by parties and candidates. A general and simplified distinction is between plurality-majority electoral systems and proportional representation (PR) systems. In plurality-majority systems, the voters in an electoral district typically vote for only one person to represent them, and the candidate with the most votes wins. In contrast, PR systems typically ask voters to vote for a party with a designated list of candidates, and parties win legislative seats in proportion to the number of votes they receive.

Women do better in gaining political office in countries that use PR electoral systems (Rule 1981, Norris 1985, Rule & Zimmerman 1994, Paxton 1997, Kenworthy & Malami 1999, Reynolds 1999, McAllister & Studlar 2002, Paxton et al. 2006). And, in countries that use both PR and plurality-majority systems simultaneously, women are elected at much higher rates under the PR system than the plurality-majority system (e.g., Norris 1993, p. 313; Rule 1987). For

example, in New Zealand's 2005 election, women won 43% of PR party-list seats but only 20% of the plurality-majority districts. Similarly, women are a greater proportion of state legislators in the U.S. states that use some multi-member districts (Arceneaux 2001, Sanbonmatsu 2002b; see also Darcy et al. 1994, pp. 160–66).

Women do better under PR systems because these systems typically have higher district and party magnitudes, i.e., the electoral district or party sends a larger number of representatives to the national legislature (Rule 1987, Matland & Montgomery 2003). In a single-member district, getting on the ballot is a zero-sum process in which every female candidate displaces a male. In contrast, in multi-member districts, party gatekeepers feel pressure to balance their published lists of candidates across interest groups in society or in their own party (Welch & Studlar 1990, Matland 2002).

Gender quotas. Recent research has begun to document the importance of gender quotas to women's political representation. Over the past 15 years, more than 60 countries have adopted gender quotas—legislation or party rules that require a certain percentage of candidates or legislators to be women. In 1990, Argentina became the first country in the world to adopt a national electoral law quota, resulting in a 17% increase in women's representation in the Chamber of Deputies in the subsequent election. Rapid gains like those in Argentina have led scholars to argue that a slow and steady expansion of women's representation, such as occurred in Scandinavia, may no longer present the ideal or typical model for increasing women's political incorporation today (Dahlerup & Friedenvall 2005). Indeed, international efforts to implement quotas in Afghanistan and Iraq led to some of the largest jumps in women's representation ever seen (Dahlerup & Nordlund 2004, Paxton & Hughes 2007).

But national gender quota laws do not always generate significant increases in women's

representation. In recent years, quota research has examined why some quotas are more effective than others at increasing women's parliamentary representation (e.g., Dahlerup 2006). Scholars often focus on particular features of quota legislation that may impact the law's effectiveness. Placement mandates, such as two women required among the top five candidates, may prevent parties from burying women at the bottom of party lists (Jones 2004). And sanctions for noncompliance set consequences if party leaders fail to comply with quota regulations (Dahlerup 2006). But the same quota legislation may produce a much different outcome depending on the context in which the quota is adopted (Schmidt & Saunders 2004, Jones 2005).

Another body of research seeks to explain how quotas are adopted. Where gender quotas are resisted by male-dominated legislatures, women's domestic activism or pressure from the international community may be required (Dahlerup & Nordlund 2004, Krook 2004, Paxton et al. 2006). Within parties, women's presence in high-ranking positions may also facilitate adoption (Caul 2001, Kittilson 2006). Yet even without these pressures, party and government leaders may see a strategic advantage to adopting quotas. For example, across Latin America, the adoption of quotas by male-dominated legislators is explained in part by the desire of political leaders to present their countries as modern (Dahlerup & Friedenvall 2005). Competition among political parties may also lead to innovation—a party first adopting quotas—or contagion, when one party follows another in the system (Matland & Studlar 1996, Caul 2001, Baldez 2004, Krook 2004, Kittilson 2006). But despite the range of theories put forth to explain quota adoption, only a few comparative and cross-national studies to date have sought to generalize the process beyond a single case (Squires 2004; exceptions include Caul 2001, Kittilson 2006).

Political parties and party leaders. Political parties may differentially demand women as officers, candidates, and legislators. Parties are gatekeepers: For an individual, man or woman, to run for political office, he or she must be selected and supported by a political party (Lovenduski & Norris 1993, Caul 1999, Sanbonmatsu 2002b, Kunovich 2003, Kunovich & Paxton 2005, Kittilson 2006). The characteristics of political parties therefore matter for women. Parties that are further left in their political leanings tend to espouse egalitarian ideals and are more likely to promote traditionally underrepresented groups such as women (Matland 1993, Caul 1999). In the United States, for example, women have been more successful achieving power in the more leftist Democratic Party than in the Republican Party. Historically, only 36% of women in the U.S. Congress have been Republicans (Paxton & Hughes 2007). Across countries, left party prominence increases the percentage of women in legislative positions (Rule 1987, Kenworthy & Malami 1999, Reynolds 1999, Hughes 2004).

Another important distinction across parties is the composition of their leadership. If women are present in the party elite, they may advocate for a greater number of female candidates or may better support female candidates in their bid for public office (Caul 1999, Kunovich & Paxton 2005). Female party elites may try to support female candidates in elections by influencing list placement or party contributions to candidate war chests. Women in party leadership positions, or even in mid-level positions, can further influence women's numbers by pushing for party rules targeting certain percentages of women as candidates (Caul 1999, 2001; Tremblay & Pelletier 2001; Kittilson 2006).

If a party innovates with regard to women, it may gain electoral advantage. And, because parties compete for voters, innovations made by one party such as fielding more female candidates, if they succeed, are likely to diffuse to other parties (Matland & Studlar 1996). When parties are resistant to change, women may go outside the party structure to form their own "women's parties" (Ishiyama

2003). Women's parties have been formed in a number of countries including Iceland, Japan, Greece, and Russia. But women's parties do not necessarily result in long-term benefits to women's political power (Moser 2003).

Cultural Explanations

Cultural and ideological arguments against women's right to participate in politics create substantial barriers to women's political participation. Historically, beliefs that women did not have the temperament or capability to participate in politics, or that women belong in the private sphere, were codified in political thought (Okin 1979, Coole 1988, Pateman 1989). It took until the twentieth century for feminist political theorists to challenge the position of women in political theory (e.g., Pateman 1989, MacKinnon 1989, Phillips 1995, Williams 1998, Squires 1999). Today, cultural ideas about women can affect women's levels of representation throughout the political process, from an individual woman's decision to enter politics, to party selection of candidates, to the decisions made by voters on election day.

Women face prejudice as leaders because people tend to assume that leadership is a masculine trait. And when women do lead they face a problem—people evaluate autocratic behavior by women more negatively than the same behavior by men (Eagly et al. 1992). Thus, even in countries where women have made gains in employment or education, they face cultural barriers to participation in politics. For example, 25% of the U.S. population still says that men are better suited emotionally to politics, and 15% of Americans agreed with the statement "women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country up to men" (Lawless & Theriault 2005).

When attempting to understand women's political representation across nations or U.S. states, concrete measures of culture are typically not available to researchers. In their absence, researchers have turned to regional membership and religious beliefs to understand the impact of culture. First, as we might expect from **Table 1**, studies that break countries into world regions find more women in power in some regions (e.g., Paxton 1997, Kenworthy & Malami 1999). For example, Scandinavian countries are typically found to have higher numbers of women in parliament both in the past and present.

Similarly, researchers classify U.S. states into three, largely regional, political cultures. Southern states with a traditionalistic political culture generally have fewer women in legislative office (Nechemias 1987) or in executive office (Oxley & Fox 2004). In contrast, states with moralistic values, found mainly in the Northwest and Northeast, have more women in legislative office (Nechemias 1987, Arceneaux 2001). Consider, too, that the United States's western states, which had a frontier ideology of equality, were the first in the world to grant women the right to vote (McCammon et al. 2001).

Religion is another important source of cultural beliefs in most countries. Arguments about women's inferiority to men are present across all dominant religions, and religion has long been used to exclude women from aspects of social, political, or religious life around the world (Paxton & Hughes 2007). But the major religions of the world are differentially conservative or patriarchal in their views about the place of women, both in the church hierarchy and in society. For example, Protestantism promotes nonhierarchical religious practices and more readily accepts women as religious leaders compared with Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity (e.g., Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox). And Islamic law is typically interpreted in a manner that constrains the activities of women (Ahmed 1992; see also Meyer et al. 1998). Researchers have demonstrated that countries with large numbers of Protestant adherents are more supportive of female legislators than countries with large numbers of Catholics, Orthodox Christians, or Muslims

Substantive representation: advocating the interests and issues of a group; for women, ensuring that politicians speak for and act to support women's issues

(Paxton 1997, Kenworthy & Malami 1999, Paxton & Kunovich 2003).

As surveys of attitudes expand across the globe, we have increasing evidence that cultural beliefs toward women in politics vary widely across countries today. For example, when asked whether men make better political leaders than women do, the average answer in Norway is between strongly disagree and disagree. In contrast, in Nigeria the average answer is between agree and strongly agree (Paxton & Kunovich 2003). Researchers have recently demonstrated that differences in surveyed attitudes about women in politics are powerful predictors of women's observed levels of political representation across countries (Inglehart & Norris 2003, chapter 6; Paxton & Kunovich 2003) and in U.S. states (Arceneaux 2001). In fact, Paxton & Kunovich (2003) found that the effect of country regional membership is no longer significant when measures of citizen attitudes regarding women are included.

Although there may be pervasive views about women in politics that prevent women from running or winning, most researchers demonstrate that when they do run, women receive as many votes as men, at least in the United States (e.g., Darcy et al. 1994). In fact, although sex does not appear to matter to men, female voters seem to prefer women as candidates (Seltzer et al. 1997, Dolan 1998, Smith & Fox 2001). And stereotypes can work in women's favor with voters. As summarized by Kahn (1996, p. 9), "male candidates are considered better able to deal with foreign policy, the economy, defense spending, arms control, foreign trade, and farm issues; female candidates are considered better able to deal with day care, poverty, education, health care, civil rights, drug abuse, and the environment." Depending on the issues of the day, therefore, women may have an edge in certain policy debates. Indeed, if voters think that women are better advocates of an issue such as poverty, and voters care about that issue, then they tend to support female candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2002a). Outside of the United States, how-

ever, female candidates do not always do as well as men. Across 73 countries, a 1% increase in the number of female candidates results in only a 0.67% increase in female legislators (Kunovich & Paxton 2005).

International Influences

In addition to the domestic factors discussed already, recent research on women in politics has highlighted the role of international actors and transnational influences in furthering women's political rights and representation (Ramirez et al. 1997, Staudt 1998, True & Mintrom 2001, Krook 2004, Gray et al. 2006, Paxton et al. 2006). Pressure from international organizations, such as the United Nations and women's international nongovernmental organizations (WINGOs), influence women's suffrage (Ramirez et al. 1997), gender mainstreaming policies (True & Mintrom 2001), and the number of women in national legislatures (Paxton et al. 2006). And countries that sign international treaties related to women, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), have more women in political office (Gray et al. 2006, Kenworthy & Malami 1999; but see Paxton 1997, Hughes 2004, Paxton et al. 2006). Further, INGOs have been shown to persuade influential persons in government, hold nations accountable to the international treaties they have ratified, and increase domestic awareness of women's plight (Keck & Sikkink 1998).

DO WOMEN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

It is important that women, as half the population, appear in politics even if they legislate exactly the same as men. But if women bring to office different interests and priorities than men, arguments for their inclusion are even more powerful (Carroll & Dodson 1991). The difference is between descriptive representation and substantive representation. Do

women make a difference to public policy? To answer that question, researchers have asked whether men and women (*a*) prioritize different political issues, (*b*) vote differently on legislation, (*c*) introduce different types of bills, and (*d*) differ in their effectiveness in getting bills passed.

Before summarizing the research in this area, we note the difficulties researchers face in trying to demonstrate that female politicians make a difference to politics. Doing so requires that we first separate women's interests as women from the interest of their party. For example, in the United States, Democratic candidates and politicians, whether they are male or female, are more likely to espouse and vote for liberal policies that are also likely to be defined as of interest to women. A similar issue is how to separate a female politician's actions for women from her actions in support of her constituents. If liberal constituencies are more likely to elect women, then a critic might argue that, if a female politician votes for a health care bill, she is not acting for women but is only faithfully representing her liberal constituents. Assessing women's legislative effectiveness is further complicated by power differentials within legislative institutions, legislative committee memberships, party power, and distinguishing a unique set of "women's interests" (Molyneux 1985, Berkman & O'Connor 1993, Thomas 1994, Reingold 2000). Not all previous research has addressed these difficulties, although newer research typically does account for party and constituent characteristics (e.g., Swers 1998, Schwindt-Bayer 2006).

That is not to say that we know nothing about women's impact on politics. Beginning with policy preferences, research on U.S. state representatives finds that women are more likely than men to prioritize bills related to children, family, and women (Thomas 1991) and health care and social services (Little et al. 2001). Similarly, in Sweden (Wangnerud 2000) and Latin America (Schwindt-Bayer 2006) female legislators articulate different legislative priorities than men.

There is also evidence that female legislators vote differently than men. For example, after accounting for party and district characteristics, Swers (1998) found that congresswomen of the U.S. 103rd Congress were more likely to vote for women's issue bills such as the Family and Medical Leave Act. The defections of Republican women from their party created this gender difference (see Gray 2002 for a similar pattern of defection in New Zealand). But the presence of a gender difference in voting was also aided by the dynamics of party power in the 103rd Congress. Women in governing parties have more opportunities to generate legislation but simultaneously have more opportunities to anger party leadership with defection (Swers 2002, p. 17). These Republican female legislators were better able to defect from their party in the 103rd Congress because their party was not in power. Indeed, after Republicans took over the 104th Congress in 1994, Republican women did continue to defect from their party at times, but at a lower rate (Swers 2002, pp. 113–15; see also Vega & Firestone 1995).

Besides voting for existing bills, do women propose bills that are different from the bills of men? Bratton & Haynie (1999) control for party and district characteristics and find that women are more likely than men to introduce bills to reduce gender discrimination and to sponsor bills related to education, health care, children's issues, and welfare policy (see also Thomas 1991). In the Honduran legislature, women are more likely to introduce bills on women's rights but are no more likely than men to initiate bills on children or families (Taylor-Robinson & Heath 2003). And in Argentina, Colombia, and Costa Rica, women initiate 11% more women's issues bills (Schwindt-Bayer 2006). They are also more likely to introduce bills related to children and the family, education, and health.

Interestingly, Kathlene (1995) finds that on a neutral topic—crime—female legislators in the Colorado House of Representatives introduced different bills than their

male colleagues. Female legislators introduced bills that were focused on crime prevention or victim's rights, whereas men were more reactive in their response, introducing bills related to stricter sentencing and longer prison terms. The introduction of different types of bills stemmed from differences between male and female legislators in their views of the origins of, and solutions to, crime.

Are women effective political leaders? Are they able to get their proposed bills passed? To preserve their own power, men may directly work to undermine the power of female newcomers (Duverger 1955, Heath et al. 2005). Indeed, some research suggests a pattern of male domination in the committee meetings where bills are first discussed and debated (Kathlene 1994, p. 569). Further, women-sponsored bills receive more scrutiny, debate, and hostile testimony than male-sponsored bills (Kathlene et al. 1991). But women can be as effective as men in getting their bills turned into law. In U.S. state legislatures, women are more successful than men in getting bills passed that are directly related to women, children, and families (Thomas 1991). Women in state legislatures are also as good as men at passing bills on topics of broad interest to women (education, health care, etc.) (Bratton & Haynie 1999). And in the U.S. Congress, women are as successful as men in shepherding all types of bills into law (Jeydel & Taylor 2003). Men are also no more likely than women to successfully amend other laws, influence domestic spending, or channel money to their home districts. Interestingly, Bratton & Haynie (1999) also find that women are more likely to introduce bills of interest to African Americans (e.g., school integration and funding of sickle cell anemia research). And black legislators are more likely to introduce bills of interest to women (see also Barrett 1995). Finally, across 22 countries and 35 years, O'Regan (2000) finds that the percentage of women in the legislature is related to policy relevant to women.

Critical Mass

A final question is whether women do better in influencing policy when there are more of them in office. Based in the work of Kanter (1977), scholars and activists use the term "critical mass" to suggest that when women reach a certain percentage of a legislature, they will be better able to pursue their policy priorities (Dahlerup 1988). Research has often used 15% to signify movement out of Kanter's skewed group category. Activists more often cite 30% as the necessary threshold for women to make a difference to policy.

But despite the importance of the idea of critical mass to advocates of greater female representation in politics, empirical research provides little evidence that reaching a critical mass matters. In searching for an effect, research has either looked over time at a legislature to see whether something changes when women hit 15% of a legislature (e.g., Saint-Germain 1989, Gray 2002). Or, research compares U.S. states with different percentages of women to see if they sponsor more women's issue bills (e.g., Thomas 1991, Bratton 2005). As in the larger literature on impact, demonstrating an effect of critical mass requires attention to political parties and constituents.

Bratton (2005) considered whether the percentage of women in state legislatures matters for women's sponsorship of bills and their success at passing those bills, controlling for party and district characteristics. She found that women consistently sponsored more women's interest bills than men, no matter what percentage of the legislature they held, suggesting no effect of critical mass. In fact, she found that as the percentage of women in the legislatures of these states rose from around 5% to around 27%, gender differences in bill sponsorship actually diminished. Even more striking, Bratton found that women were better able to pass the legislation they proposed when they were a smaller percentage of the legislature. In discussing her results, Bratton points out that, in contrast to token women in other fields, token women in

politics may never feel that it is a disadvantage to focus on women's issues.

Blanket assertions by activists and scholars regarding the importance of critical mass belie theory and evidence that increasing numbers of women can have a negative effect on outcomes for women. For example, classic sociological research on discrimination suggests that as a minority group's size increases, it becomes a more threatening minority to the majority (Blalock 1967, Lieberson 1980). Yoder's (1991) theory of intrusiveness suggests that when women are a small minority, they can use their token status to draw attention to women's concerns. But when women increase in numbers, they start to threaten the power and privilege of men, leading to competition, hostility, and discrimination.

Indeed, some evidence supports this alternative perspective. In the New Zealand legislature, when women reached approximately 15% of the legislature, there was a "rise in hostility toward women politicians" (Gray 2002, p. 25). In the United States, Rosenthal (1998, p. 88) compared men and women's behavior in legislative committee meetings where women held few leadership positions and where they held many leadership positions. She found that women in the committees were more likely to be inclusive and cooperative as the percentage of women in leadership positions increased. But men were less likely to be inclusive and cooperative as women increased in leadership power. Rosenthal's finding suggests that both Kanter and Yoder may be correct. Women did feel more comfortable using a female legislative style (Eagly & Johnson 1990) when there were more of them in power. But men appear to have been threatened by female power and subsequently reduced their tendency to compromise or cooperate.

WHAT IS NEEDED? FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

We have attempted to summarize the extensive literature on women in formal politics.

Where do we go from here? In this section, we suggest four interrelated directions for research yet to come, focusing on current problems and future promise.

Globalizing Theory and Research

Researchers know a great deal about women in formal politics in the West, especially in countries such as the United States, the UK (e.g., Norris & Lovenduski 1994), and Norway (Bystydzienski 1995). Much less is currently known about women in developing countries (Waylen 1996, Matland 1998, Hughes 2004) and in some regions such as Asia. Future research must globalize our present understanding of women's political participation, representation, and impact by (*a*) determining which theories developed in the West apply to the non-Western context, (*b*) developing new theories for non-Western and less developed countries and regions, and (*c*) investigating whether these newer theories apply to other regions or globally.

Expanding Data Collection

The field will move forward as we collect the appropriate data to test theories. Although progress is being made on some fronts, such as the collection of data on gender quotas, data quality issues continue to bedevil research, and data are completely lacking in some important areas, especially in subnational areas and on specific parties. Further, although many important case studies have already examined women's political outcomes over time within a small number of countries, cross-national longitudinal research is in its infancy (for exceptions see Paxton 1997, McAllister & Studlar 2002, Paxton et al. 2006). Future research must expand data collection on women in politics by (*a*) developing more precise measures of the causes and consequences of women's political participation; (*b*) collecting longitudinal data on women's participation, representation, and impact; and (*c*) collecting subnational data on women's participation

and representation and more extensive data on women in political parties.

Remembering the Alternative Forms of Women's Agency

Weldon (2002) admonishes researchers to think "beyond bodies" in understanding how women can have an impact in politics. In fact, today most national governments have some form of women's policy machinery or government office devoted to promoting the status of women (Weldon 2002). An institutionalized women's policy machinery produces a single, direct route to government cooperation with agents, such as women's movements, who traditionally act outside the state (Stetson & Mazur 1995, Friedman 2000). Indeed, Weldon (2002) found that across 36 democratic countries, a strong women's movement acting in conjunction with an effective women's agency predicted the extent of government commitment to domestic violence. One of the most challenging but important topics for the future is to understand how women's political power and influence is affected by their actions in both traditional and nontraditional political structures. Future research must consider women's substantive representation through (*a*) the critical acts of individual women (Childs & Krook 2006), (*b*) women's movements working both within and outside the state to promote women's interests (Beckwith 2000), and (*c*) the state apparatuses that constrain or enhance women's attempts to influence policy from within and without (Charrad 2001, Banaszak et al. 2003).

Addressing Intersectionality

Women are not a monolithic group (Crenshaw 1991, Hill Collins 2000, Hooks 2000). Class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion are just a few of the cleavages that divide women. We need to recognize that, even if women are present, laws are likely to be designed and implemented in exclusive ways if minorities are not at the table (Barrett 1995, Hill Collins 2000, Richards 2005). As should be clear from the paucity of research cited in this review, current research often compares women and men while ignoring distinctions between women. Our efforts to present information about women at the intersections of disadvantage are currently complicated by the fact that countries and political parties do not keep good records of the race, ethnicity, and class backgrounds of their politicians. Also, introducing divisions reduces sample sizes, making statistical analysis difficult (Bedolla et al. 2005). Finally, understanding intersection cross-nationally requires greater attention to the experience of women in the global South (Tripp 2000). Future research must address how women negotiate competing identities in the realm of politics by (*a*) collecting better data on the race, ethnicity, religion, etc., of women; (*b*) moving beyond assessments of different groups, e.g., studying women or minorities, to assessments of intersecting difference (e.g., Black 2000, Fraga et al. 2005, Weldon 2006); and (*c*) addressing both domestic and global divides among women.

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RELATED RESOURCES

International IDEA: an international organization that (as one of its aims) promotes political equality and participation of underrepresented groups such as women. For data on women's political participation and gender quotas, see **http://www.idea.int/gender/**

Inter-Parliamentary Union: an intergovernmental organization that collects data on parliaments across countries. For archived data on women's representation in parliaments, see **http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm**

Women's Environment & Development Organization: an international organization that advocates for women's equality in global policy and campaigns for equal representation of men and women in politics. For information about the 50/50 campaign, see **http://www.wedo.org/campaigns.aspx?mode=5050main**

The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics: a report published by the United Nations focusing on the collection of statistics and data related to women. To access the report, see **http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Demographic/products/indwm/wwpub2000.htm**

Center for American Women and Politics: a university-based research center that focuses on women's political participation and representation in the United States. For the center's homepage, see **http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/**

Institute for Women's Policy Research: a research organization focusing on economics and social policy issues affecting women and families. For the institute's homepage, see **http://www.iwpr.org/**
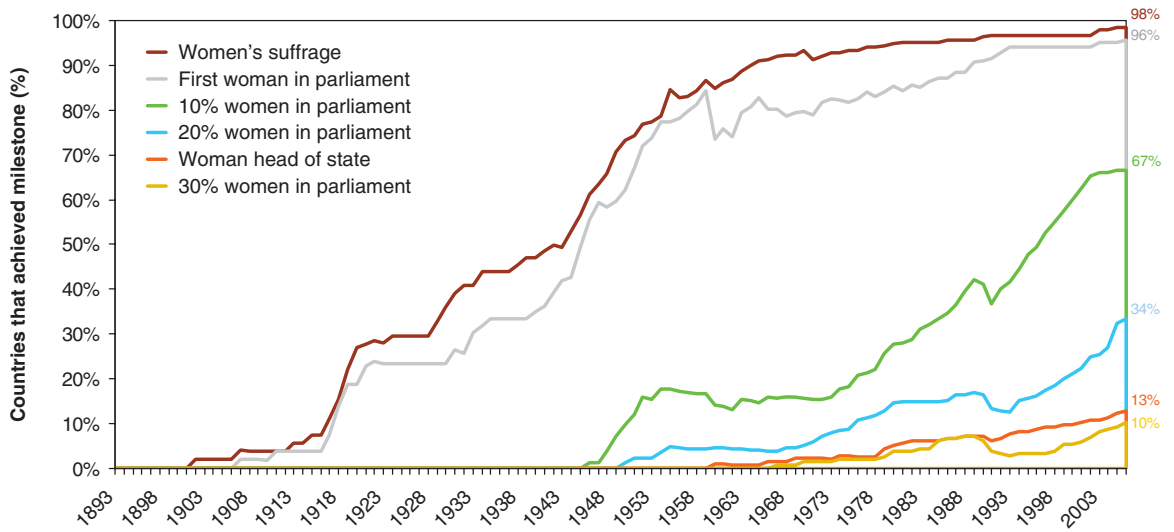
Figure 1

Countries achieving political milestones for women, 1983–2006.

Contents

Historical Sociology

Sociology and World Regions

Indexes

Errata

An online log of corrections to *Annual Review of Sociology* chapters (if any, 1997 to
the present) may be found at http://soc.annualreviews.org/errata.shtml