

Obstacles to Women's Participation in Parliament

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Women around the world at every socio-political level find themselves under-represented in parliament and far removed from decision-making levels. While the political playing field in each country has its own particular characteristics, one feature remains common to all: it is uneven and not conducive to women's participation. Women who want to enter politics find that the political, public, cultural and social environment are often unfriendly or even hostile to them. Even a quick glance at the current composition of political decision-makers in any region provides evidence that women still face numerous obstacles in articulating and shaping their own interests. What are the obstacles women face in entering parliament? How can women better cope with these hindrances? In this chapter we take the first step towards increasing women's parliamentary representation and effectiveness by identifying the common problems that women face. We categorize the problems into three areas: political, socio-economic and ideological and psychological (or socio-cultural). In the chapters that follow, we identify some of the strategies to overcome these obstacles and analyse what women can do once they enter parliament.

Political Obstacles

Men dominate the political arena; men formulate the rules of the political game; and men define the standards for evaluation. The existence of this male-dominated model results in either women rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics.

At the beginning of the 21st century over 95 per cent of all countries in the world had granted women the two most fundamental democratic rights: the right to vote and the right to stand for elections. New Zealand was the first country to give women the right to vote in 1893; and Finland was the first to adopt both fundamental democratic rights in 1906. There are still a few countries that deny women both the right to vote and the right to stand for elections.¹

In theory, the right to stand for elections, to become a candidate and to get elected, is based on the right to vote. The reality is, however, that women's right to vote remains restricted: principally because the only candidates to vote for are mostly male.

This is true not only for partial and developing democracies, but for established democracies as well. The low level of women's representation in some European parliaments² should be considered a violation of women's fundamental democratic right and, as such, of their basic human rights. This unequal rate of representation in legislative bodies signifies that women's representation, rather than being a function of democratization, is more a function of preserving the status quo.

In most countries *de jure* difficulties exist, either by virtue of laws being enacted and not followed or not even existing

Research indicates that political structures rather than social factors play a more significant role in women's parliamentary recruitment.

in the first place. The Argentinean law on quotas, for example, requires all parties to nominate 30 per cent women in electable positions onto their list of candidates. Without such a law, the number of women MPs is not likely to increase: a case in point is the elections in Ireland in 1997.

Research indicates that political structures rather than social factors play a more significant role in women's parliamentary recruitment. The system of elections based on proportional representation, for example, has resulted in three to four times more women being elected in countries with similar political cultures (e.g., Germany and Australia).

Table 2.1 Women in National Parliaments

Situation as of 4 February 2002. Statistics established by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on the basis of data provided by national parliaments.

WORLD AVERAGE

Both Houses Combined	14.3%	Single or Lower House	14.5%	Upper House or Senate	13.6%
Total MPs	41.138	Total MPs	35.105	Total MPs	6,037
Gender breakdown known for	38.933	Gender breakdown known for	33.457	Gender breakdown known for	5,476
Men	33.351	Men	28.619	Men	4.732
Women	5.582	Women	4.838	Women	744

REGIONAL AVERAGES

Regions *	Single or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	38.8 %	---	38.8 %
Europe OSCE Nordic countries included	16.8 %	14.8 %	16.4 %
Americas	15.8 %	16.6 %	15.9 %
Asia	15.6%	12.1%	15.4%
Europe OSCE Nordic countries not included	14.7 %	14.8 %	14.7 %
Sub-Saharan Africa	12.8 %	12.8 %	12.8 %
Pacific	11.3 %	25.9 %	12.8 %
Arab States	4.6 %	2.5 %	4.3 %

* Regions are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in the Lower or single House
Source: IPU, *Women in National Parliaments*, 4 February 2002. See www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world

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Generalizations such as this remain valid so long as there are cultural similarities, i.e., the same level of social and economic development between countries. In Russia, for instance, this generalization is inapplicable because of the lack of a political culture: specifically, the huge numbers of parties and blocks, their underdeveloped structure, the lack of confidence many women face and political parties' ignorance of women's interests. A voter's political literacy – that is, the capacity to make coherent choices and decisions when voting – which is clearly not dependent only upon the level of

formal education, plays a significant role, as does the political will to improve the situation.

Among the political obstacles that women face, the following feature prominently:

- The prevalence of the “masculine model” of political life and of elected governmental bodies;
- The lack of party support, such as limited financial support for women candidates; limited access to political networks; and the prevalence of double standards;
- The lack of contact and cooperation with other public organizations such as trade (labour) unions and women's groups;
- The absence of well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership in general, and for orienting young women toward political life in particular; and
- The nature of the electoral system, which may or may not be favourable to women candidates.

Masculine Model of Politics

Political life is organized according to male norms and values and in some cases, even male lifestyles.

Men largely dominate the political arena; men largely formulate the rules of the political game; and men often define the standards for evaluation. Furthermore, political life is organized according to male norms and values and in some cases, even male lifestyles. For example, the political model is based on the idea of “winners and losers”, competition and confrontation, rather than on mutual respect, collaboration and consensus building.³ This environment is often alien to women. The existence of this male-dominated model results in either women rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics. Thus, when women do participate in politics, they tend to do so in small numbers.

«The most interesting aspect of the Swedish Parliament is not that we have 45 per cent representation of women, but that a majority of women and men bring relevant social experience to the business of parliament. This is what makes the difference. Men bring with them experience of real life issues, of raising children, of running a home. They have broad perspectives and greater understanding. And women are allowed to be what we are and to act according to our own unique personality. Neither men nor women have to conform to a traditional role. Women do not have to behave like men to have power; men do not have to behave like women to be allowed to care for their children. When this pattern becomes the norm then we will see real change.»

Birgitta Dahl, Former Speaker of Parliament, Sweden

Differences between men and women also appear with respect to the content and priorities of decision-making, which are determined by the interests, backgrounds and working patterns of both sexes. Women tend to give priority to societal concerns, such as social security, national health care and children's issues.

Women are overstretched and overworked. In addition to their party and constituency work they serve on committees, network within and outside their parties and play the role of mother, wife, sister and grandmother.

The male-dominated working pattern is further reflected in the parliamentary work schedule, which is often characterized by lack of supportive structures for working mothers in general and for women MPs in particular. Women are overstretched and overworked, since in addition to their party and constituency work, they have to serve on various committees, network with women within their parties, at multi-party levels and with women outside parliament. Furthermore, they have to play the role of mother, wife, sister and grandmother. Presently, most parliamentary programme and sitting times are not adjusted to take into consideration this dual burden that women carry. Many women MPs struggle to balance family life with the demands of work that often involve late hours, travel and few facilities.

Lack of Party Support⁴

Less than 11 per cent of party leaders worldwide are women.

Women play important roles in campaigning and mobilizing support for their parties, yet they rarely occupy decision-making positions in these structures. In fact, less than 11 per cent of party leaders worldwide are women.

Although political parties possess resources for conducting election campaigns, women do not benefit from these resources. For example, parties do not provide sufficient financial support for women candidates. Research indicates that the number of women nominees correlates very highly with the number of elected women MPs: more candidates equals more MPs.

The selection and nomination process within political parties is also biased against women in that “male characteristics” are emphasized and often become the criteria in selecting candidates. An “old boys’ club” atmosphere and prejudices inhibit and prohibit politically inclined women from integrating themselves into their party’s work. This results in an underestimation of women as politicians by those who provide money for election campaigns, thus further hindering women from being nominated. In fact, women are often put on a party list in order that they not be elected, if their party wins insufficient votes in an election. This method is used as a hook for voters. Women’s participation is better realized when there are quotas for women’s participation. In Sweden, for instance, the ratio of 40–60 per cent has had the effect of women occupying over 40 per cent of the seats in the current parliament.

Table 2.2 Women Presidents or Speakers of Parliament

1945–1998	1 March 2002
In 52 years of world parliamentary history, only 41 of the 186 states with a legislative institution, at one time or another of their history, have selected a woman to preside over Parliament or a House of Parliament: this has occurred 77 times in all.	Of the 179 existing parliaments, 65 are bicameral.
Those concerned are 17 European countries, 19 countries of the Americas including nine Latin American countries, three African countries, one Asian country and one country of the Pacific.	Only 24 women preside over one of the 179 existing parliaments.
24 of the 41 states concerned had a bicameral parliament and the presidency was entrusted to a woman a little more often in the senate than in the lower house.	9.9% women are presidents or speakers of parliament.
Austria is the only state to have elected a woman to the presidency of the Bundesrat before the Second World War.	
The countries concerned are: Antigua and Barbuda (House of Representatives and Senate); Australia (Senate); Bahamas (House of Assembly); Belize (House of Representatives and Senate); Costa Rica (Asamblea Legislativa); Dominica (House of Assembly); Dominican Republic (Cámara de Diputados); Finland (Eduskunta); Georgia (Sakartvelos Parlamenti); India (Council of States); Jamaica (House of Representatives and Senate); Lesotho (National Assembly); Mexico (Cámara de Diputados); Netherlands (House of Representatives); Republic of Moldova (Parliament); South Africa (National Assembly); Spain (Congreso de los Diputados and Senado); Sweden (Riksdagen); Switzerland (National Council).	
Source: IPU, <i>Women Speakers of National Parliaments</i> , 1 March 2002, see http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/speakers.htm	
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«It is very difficult for a woman to make up her mind to enter politics. Once she makes up her own mind, then she has to prepare her husband and her children and her family. Once she has overcome all these obstacles and applies for the ticket, then the male aspirants against whom she is applying make up all sorts of stories about her. And after all this, when her name goes to the party bosses, they do not select her name because they fear losing that seat.»

Sushma Swaraj, MP India

Cooperation with Women's Organizations

During the last decade women's parliamentary representation in long-standing democracies has increased. One of the critical reasons for this rise is the impact of women's organizations both inside and outside political parties. Women's organizations were well aware of the effect of single-member plurality elections on women's candidacy. They worked with political and government institutions to secure electoral changes to facilitate women's nomination and election. This strategy resulted in increasing women's representation within legislative bodies.

«As women parliamentarians, we need to share our experiences. This in itself will inspire women. We will not feel that we are alone in this game and other women will not feel isolated from the process. At every opportunity, at every forum, each and every time we must share information, ideas, knowledge. We must make sure that women are the most informed people within society.»

Margaret Dongo, Former MP Zimbabwe

However, in recently developed or partially developed democracies there is limited contact and cooperation between women politicians and women's organizations or other broad interest organizations such as trade and labour unions. Moreover, women's movements and women's groups in these parts of the world either tend to keep their distance from women MPs, or do not invest in organized channels of communication and lobbying on issues related to promoting women to decision-making levels. This is the case either as a result of the lack of awareness of the potential benefits of this networking function, or the lack of resources to invest in such contacts.⁵

Although governments might declare their commitment to democratic forms of change, it is nevertheless unrealistic to expect governments alone to secure women's rightful place in all spheres of society. Civil society in general, including non-governmental organizations and women's groups, must play a role in advancing women's representation. To achieve gender balance in political life, it is necessary to ensure that commitment to equality is reflected in laws and national policies. Affirmative action is a necessary tool to maintain at least 30 per cent of women at all levels of decision-making.

In order to empower and enable women to participate in politics, it is necessary to extend the scope of women's involvement at the grass-roots level.

Women must also think carefully about their own goals, strategies and tactics. It is important to assist women already in parliament to be able to deliver on their promises and to equip them with the necessary skills and strategies to ensure that women's issues are taken into account in the debate and discourse that takes place in parliament. In order to empower and enable women to participate in politics, it is necessary to extend

the scope of women's involvement at the grass-roots level of women's movements and among local elected bodies. This also constitutes an important step towards confidence-building and facilitates the sharing of experiences.

Education and Training

«It's very difficult for women to talk, to argue, to press for their concerns. How can we encourage women to talk and to express themselves? Maybe the woman in the hut has a lot to say, but we have to encourage her to talk – not about politics, but about her problems, her life, issues that concern her. The answer is education. Education has led many women in my society to join political parties or participate in political activities. Education is the most important channel for encouraging women to speak out.»

Rawya Shawa, MP Palestine

Expanding the pool of women who are qualified for recruitment in political careers is also needed. This can be done by giving women access, from an early stage, to work patterns that are conducive to political leadership, such as special training in community-based or neighbourhood organizations. Common understanding of the concerns of women, gendered political awareness-raising, lobbying skills and networking are important for the process of training women for

political careers. To that end, women's leadership schools play a special role, since they are the places where links can be made between the wider groups of women and women politicians; and they are very often the only place where women can be prepared and encouraged for a political career in parliament. Special attention should also be given to the involvement of young women in political participation.

Electoral Systems

The type of electoral system a country has plays an important part in women's political representation, especially in the developed world. Most argue that proportional representation systems are better suited than majoritarian systems in increasing women's representation. This issue is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this handbook.

Socio-economic Obstacles

The economic crisis in countries with so-called “developing democracies” has intensified the risk of poverty for women, which, like unemployment, is likely to be increasingly feminized.

Socio-economic conditions play a significant role in women's legislative recruitment within both long-standing and new democracies. It goes without saying that the social and economic status of women in society has a direct influence on their participation in political institutions and elected bodies. For example, researchers point to the correlation between women's legislative recruitment and the proportion of women working outside the home, as well as the percentage of women college graduates. According to some researchers, socio-economic conditions take second place to electoral systems in women's legislative recruitment within established democracies.

Box 2.1. The Effect of Development and Culture on Women's Representation

One of the most important characteristics of society that correlates with women's representation levels is a country's state of development. Development leads to a weakening of traditional values, decreased fertility rates, increased urbanization, greater education and labour force participation for women and attitudinal changes in perceptions regarding the appropriate role for women – all factors that increase women's political resources and decrease existing barriers to political activity.

One characteristic of development that has proven particularly important for women's representation in Western countries is higher rates of women's participation in the labour force (Anderson, 1975; Welch, 1977; Togeby, 1994 see References and Further Reading Chapter 3). Moving out of the house and into the workforce appears to have a consciousness-raising effect on women; they become politicized. Greater development increases the number of women who are likely to have formal positions and experience, for example, in labour unions or professional organizations

Culture is related to development and, as development increases, women's standing in society relative to men becomes more equal. Culture can also have an independent effect. Two countries could be quite similar in terms of development, but women may have come substantially farther in terms of equality in one country than in another.

While culture has consistently been believed to be important, it has been difficult to directly test for an effect. As a possible proxy for culture, in some recent research I developed a measure using a cluster of variables, specifically the ratio of women's literacy to men's literacy, the ratio of women's labour force participation to men's labour force participation and the ratio of university-educated women to university-educated men (Matland, 1998a see References and Further Reading Chapter 3). The assumption was that when women approach men in levels of literacy, workforce participation and university education – and thus become men's equal in social spheres – they are more likely to be seen as men's equals in the political sphere and therefore their representation will increase. This hypothesis holds, as the described cultural measures very strongly correlate with women's representation.

It is important to note that while research modelling women's representation in established democracies has been quite successful at identifying causes of variations, attempts to model women's representation in developing countries has been much less successful. Factors driving variations in representation in the developed world are clearly understood. We have a much poorer understanding of representation in the developing world. In the developing world, none of the variables found significant among established democracies, nor several other plausible variables, are found to have a consistent effect (Matland, 1998b see References and Further Reading Chapter 3).

These findings indicate that there is a threshold, a minimum level of development that is needed to create the foundation for other variables, such as electoral systems and women's labour force participation, to have an effect. Below that development level, the factors that assist women in gaining representation in more developed countries simply have no effect. It appears that in most lesser developed countries the forces aligned against female political

activity are so great as to permit only minimal representation. As development increases, however, cultural changes start to occur. In addition, more women start to acquire the resources needed to become politically powerful – resources such as education, salaried labour force experience and training in the professions that dominate politics. This leads to the formation of a critical mass. When the number of women with the necessary resources becomes substantial, they then start to become an effective interest group demanding greater representation. Development is a crucial part of this process.

Richard E. Matland

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The socio-economic obstacles impacting on women's participation in parliament could be further classified as follows:

- Poverty and unemployment;
- Lack of adequate financial resources;
- Illiteracy and limited access to education and choice of professions; and
- The dual burden of domestic tasks and professional obligations.

«The two most overwhelming obstacles for women in entering parliament are lack of constituents and lack of financial resources. Women move from their father's home to their husband's home to their in-laws home. They are like refugees. They have no base from which to develop contacts with the people or to build knowledge and experience about the issues. Furthermore, they have no money of their own; the money belongs to their fathers, their husbands or their in-laws. Given the rising cost of running an effective campaign, this poses another serious hurdle for women in the developing world.»

Razia Faiz, former MP, Bangladesh

The Feminization of Poverty and Unemployment

Women comprise 31 per cent of the total official labour force in industrialized countries and 46.7 per cent worldwide.

For the first time in more than 25 years, the 1990s witnessed a drop in women's labour force participation rates.

Many of the economic gains made by women in industrialized countries since the 1960s are now in serious danger of being eroded, which seems to be a result of the restructuring of both the global and domestic economies. This is evident in the reversal of the long-term trend of women entering the work force: for the first time in more than 25 years, the 1990s witnessed a drop in women's labour force participation rates.

At the same time, in the majority of countries women's unpaid labour activity is twice that of men and the economic value of women's unpaid labour is estimated to be from 10 to 35 per cent of the world's GNP (or US\$ 11 trillion). A significant gap exists between the status of women and men in all nations. Surveys reveal increasing gender discrimination in salaries, recruitment, promotion and dismissal, as well as growing professional segregation and the feminization of poverty. According to United Nations statistics, 1.3 billion persons in the world live in poverty and 70 per cent of them are women. The gender gap in earning is registered all over the world: a woman's average wage is equal to 75 per cent of a man's average wage (not including an agricultural worker's salary). The economic crisis in countries with so-called "developing democracies" has intensified the risk of poverty for women, which, like unemployment, is likely to be increasingly feminized.

Women are major contributors to national economies through both their paid and unpaid labour. As far as the latter is concerned, rural women's input and their role as a significant female electorate should not be underestimated. Although the importance of women's biological and social roles is clear, their input in all spheres of life often goes unrecognized. Eradicating poverty will have a positive impact on women's increased participation in the democratic process. The economic empowerment of women, along with education and access to information will take women from the limitations of the household to full participation in politics and political elections.

The Dual Burden

In most countries women are carrying a disproportionate share of domestic work. Women's participation in politics is further constrained by poverty, lack of education and access to information. It must be recognized that it is difficult for women to participate in political life when their major concern is survival and they have no choice but to spend much of their time trying to fulfil the basic needs of families. In addition to that, however, some women may have full-time jobs as wives and mothers as well as other full-time careers (e.g., as teachers, lawyers, doctors). Becoming a member of parliament in these conditions might then be considered a third full-time job.⁶

«Women believe that entering parliament means choosing between a private life or a public life. This is not the case. Instead, women should view their life as a continuum. They should decide what they want to achieve in life and prioritize these goals in chronological order. There is a certain right time to achieve each of these goals, whether it is becoming a wife, mother, professional or a parliamentarian. Life is long and women can achieve many things.»

Anna Balletbo, MP Spain

Ideological and Psychological Hindrances

When a woman becomes a politician she does not cease to be a woman. It is this womanhood which should be placed first, since it contains different creative potentials and intellectual strength.

Ideological and psychological hindrances for women in entering parliament include the following:

- Gender ideology and cultural patterns, as well as pre-determined social roles assigned to women and men;
- Women's lack of confidence to run for elections;
- Women's perception of politics as a “dirty” game; and
- The way in which women are portrayed in the mass media.

Traditional Roles

«Women have tried to enter politics trying to look like men. This will not work. We have to bring our differences, our emotions, our way of seeing things, even our tears to the process.»

Anna Tibaijuka, Professor, Tanzania

In many countries, traditions continue to emphasize and often dictate, women's primary role as mothers and housewives. A traditional, strong, patriarchal value system favours sexually segregated roles and so-called “traditional cultural values” militate against the advancement, progress and participation of women in any political process. Societies all over the world are dominated by an ideology about “a woman's place”. According to this perception, women should only play the role of “working mother”, which is generally low-paid and apolitical. In addition, in some developing societies, men even tell women how to vote.

This is the environment that many women face – one in which a certain collective image of women in traditional, apolitical roles continues to dominate. The image of a woman leader requires that she be asexual in her speech and manners, someone who can be identified as a woman only through nonsexual characteristics. Often it is supposed to be unacceptable, or even shameful in the mass consciousness, for women to be open about their feminine nature. In fact, the more authoritative and “manly” a woman is, the more she corresponds to the undeclared male rules of the game. That is why women politicians in general and women MPs in particular, have to overcome this difficulty of feeling uncomfortable in the political field – as though they are somewhere where they do not belong, behaving in ways that are

not natural to them.

Often women internalize many of these ideas and end up feeling a sense of guilt when they can not correspond to this almost impossible image. This sense of guilt is inextricably tied to a sense of having to be apologetic either for her own womanhood or for betraying her sense of womanhood, when women ought to be proud of both. Until they reconcile (or make the choice) between certain collective images, dominant stereotypes and their own feminine nature, their lives will be difficult and it will be hard for them to accommodate these clashing expectations. A woman should be prepared for the fact that when she becomes a politician, she does not cease to be a woman. It is this womanhood which should be placed first, since it contains different creative potentials and intellectual strength. The ability to make decisions and implement them is not a gender-specific trait, but a common human one; in other words, a man holding power is natural and a woman holding power is natural too – or ought to be.

«Women don't have the right to cry; it's only the privilege of men. A male MP, even a minister, can cry. It's normal. It's not being emotional, it's being intelligent. But women don't have the right to be weak, to cry, to show our emotions – because we live in a time when to be in politics, we have to behave more like a man.»

Rawya Shawa, MP Palestine

Lack of Confidence

Lack of confidence in themselves is one of the main reasons for women's under-representation in formal political institutions, including parliaments, governments and political parties. With confidence and determination women can reach the highest levels in the political process. That is why women should believe in themselves and should do away with the widespread perception that men have to be their leaders. Women are equal to and have the same potential as men, but only they can fight for their rights. Women are very good campaigners, organizers and support mobilizers, but fear sometimes prevents women from contesting elections and from participating in political life.

«Once we're in parliament, we should not give the impression that we are very special, gifted women, especially created by God to serve as special preachers. No, we should tell other women that you are just like us and you can also reach parliament, with some struggle, with some education, with some talent.»

Sushma Swaraj, MP India

The Perception of Politics as "Dirty"

In some countries, women perceive politics as a "dirty" game. This has jarred women's confidence in their ability to confront political processes. In fact, such a perception is prevalent worldwide. Unfortunately, this perception reflects the reality in many countries and although the reasons for this differ, there are some common trends.⁷

The basis of passive corruption can be explained by an exchange between the advantages and benefits of the public market (e.g., legislation, budget orders) and of the economic market (e.g., funds, votes, employment), which seek financial gains by escaping competition and by fostering monopolistic conditions. In addition to this, a significant increase in the cost of election campaigning has become obvious – which in turn increases the temptation of using any source of money that becomes available.

Corruption can have many faces. Bribery and extortion in the public sector, as well as procurement of goods and services, constitute key manifestations of corruption. Although emerging democracies need time to establish and to develop roots, corruption has spread further in countries where the process of political and economic transformation is taking shape in the absence of civil society and where new institutions are emerging. However, in many places where the changes in the political and economic system have already taken place, market economy has become synonymous with

the law of the jungle, the mafia and corruption.

Moreover, hypocrisy is an increasingly common feature developing in countries with established centralist and authoritarian regimes. There are “survival rules” in an economy of persistent scarcity which stand in stark contrast to the ideas officially proclaimed by the state. In poor countries the financing of political parties and the survival of an independent press remain major unresolved problems for the development of democratic functions.

The high cost of bribery and extortion for a society has been recognized. Many governments and business leaders have

Corruption and organized crime scare women and provoke their fears of losing members of their families, all of which militates against their political involvement or their running for elected bodies.

expressed their desire to curb and eliminate corruption. But this is not an easy task; corruption is rooted in the system by some parties who continue to pay bribes. Corruption inevitably results in the creation of favourable conditions and opportunities for the existence of the most negative manifestation of organized crime. These factors combine to scare women and provoke their fears of losing members of their families, all of which militates against their political involvement or their running for elected bodies.

Although the perception of corruption may not always be a fair reflection of the actual state of affairs, it is itself having an impact on women's attitude towards a political career. Is it a coincidence that countries with a small or moderate degree of corruption seem to have a higher rate of women's representation in elected bodies? For example, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and New Zealand are perceived as the least corrupt and in these countries women MPs comprise from 30 per cent to 43.4 per cent – in other words, five to ten 10 times higher.

Women who have made the decision to stand for election should take all of these circumstances into consideration and be ready to resist the corruption “disease”. Since corruption requires secrecy and democracy means increased openness resulting from political pluralism and the freedom of the press, political liberalization should diminish corruption. Democracy, by ensuring the real participation of the people and the establishment of efficient countervailing powers, will contribute to curbing corruption.

At the same time, market forces cannot replace the rule of law. Economic liberalization should contribute to a reduction in the phenomenon of corruption, although this will not occur automatically. A legally supported market economy will reduce the opportunities for corruption. Hence, it remains important to have the political commitment and the will to eliminate this negative phenomenon of contemporary societies by putting this issue high on the political agenda. Women can contribute a great deal in this area.

The Role of Mass Media

The mass media deserves to be called the fourth branch of power because of its influence on public opinion and public consciousness. The media in any society has two roles: to serve as a chronicler of current events and as an informer of

The mass media tends to minimize coverage of events and organizations of interest to women.

public opinion, thereby fostering different points of view. Often, the mass media tends to minimize coverage of events and organizations of interest to women. The media, including women's publications, does not adequately inform the public about the rights and roles of women in society; nor does it take issue with government measures for improving women's position. Most of the world's media has yet to deal with the fact that

women, as a rule, are the first victims of economic changes and reforms taking place in a country, i.e., they are the first to lose their jobs. The fact that women are largely alienated from the political decision-making process is also ignored by the media.⁸

The media can be used to cultivate gender biases and promote a stereotype about “a woman's place”, helping conservative governments and societies put the blame on women for the failure in family policy and reinforce the idea that women are responsible for increasing social problems, such as divorce and the growth of minor crimes. Another widespread trend in the media is to depict women as beautiful objects. In this case, women are identified and objectified according to their gender and are made to internalize certain notions of beauty and attractiveness which relate more to a woman's physical capacities than to her mental faculties. Such an approach encourages the long-standing patriarchal stereotype of the “weaker sex”, where women are sexual objects and “second-class” citizens.

Admittedly, the mass media also tells stories about women politicians and about businesswomen and their successes, but this kind of coverage is rare and infrequent. More typical is the presentation of topics such as fashion competitions, movie stars, art and the secrets of eternal youth. Not surprisingly, such views hardly promote women's sense of self-worth and self-respect or encourage them to take on positions of public responsibility.

Mass media still needs to recognize the equal value and dignity of men and women.

The role of mass media in an election process cannot be emphasized enough and is yet to receive adequate global and comparative research. Practically speaking, if there is

lack of proper coverage of women's issues and the activities of women MPs, this results in the lack of a forum for provoking public awareness about these issues. And, in turn, this translates into a lack of constituency for women MPs. Mass media still needs to recognize the equal value and dignity of men and women.

The main mission of the women's movement is to inculcate the right type of confidence and belief among women and to cultivate assertive stances among them. Nothing comes on a silver plate. Women's job is to build a civilized society according to a paradigm that reflects their values, strengths and aspirations, thereby reinforcing their ability to be attracted to and to participate in political processes.

In Summary

«To succeed, women parliamentarians must possess two qualities: good health and an unwavering commitment to achieve our goals. We need to be sure of our objectives and be single-minded in our determination to reach these goals. If we hesitate, we lose.»

Anna Balletbo, MP Spain

Various factors can complicate women's entry into parliament, such as those that we have addressed in this chapter, including:

- Women's weak access to and integration into political institutions;
- The tailoring of many of these institutions according to male standards and political attitudes;
- Lack of party support, including money and other resources to fund women's campaigns and boost their political, social and economic credibility;
- The lack of media attention on women's contributions and potential, which also results in the lack of a constituency for women;
- The lack of coordination with and support from women's organizations and other NGOs;
- Women's low self-esteem and self-confidence, supported by certain cultural patterns which do not facilitate women's access to political careers; and
- The type of electoral system as well as the lack of quota reservations.

Obstacles vary with the political situation in each country. In established democracies for example, an obstacle may be inequality within political parties where there is a legal limitation, such as the five per cent threshold vote, which political parties must obtain. In developing democracies, it may be access to the mass media or access to resources for conducting an election campaign. In military or authoritarian systems, it may be access to the political elite. Regardless of the political situation, in all countries the electoral system must be reformed to give women the effective right to be elected.

Excluding women from positions of power and from elected bodies impoverishes the development of democratic principles in public life and inhibits the economic development of a society. The majority of governing institutions are dominated by men who further their own interests. Male-dominated political institutions of government do not promote women or women's issues. Thus it remains imperative to emphasize that women themselves must organize and mobilize their networks, learn to communicate their interests with different organizations and push for mechanisms to enhance their own representation. To that end, the following two chapters look at two of the most significant mechanisms which have been used to overcome many of the obstacles to women's legislative representation: namely, electoral systems and quotas.

Endnotes

1. These include Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. See IPU, 2001. *Women's Suffrage: A World Chronology of the Recognition of Women's Rights to Vote and to Stand for Election*, at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/suffrage.htm>.
2. 14.5 per cent (in lower houses of parliaments) and 13.6 per cent (in upper houses) or both houses combined 14.3 per cent as of February 2002, see <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.
3. Dahlerup, Drude. 1991. "From a Small to a Large Minority: A Theory of a Critical Mass Applied to the Case of Women in Scandinavian Politics". In Hem Lata Swarup and Sarojini Bisaria. eds. *Women, Politics and Religion*. Etawah, India: A.C. Brothers. pp. 267–303. Janet C. Beilstein. 1996. "Women in Decision-Making: Progress

towards a Critical Mass”. *Paper for SADC regional Parliamentary Seminar in cooperation with UNDP*. Cape Town, South Africa. September. pp. 1-4.

4. This is also discussed in Chapter 3.
5. Editor’s addition.
6. Editor’s addition.
7. Transparency International. April 1997. “The Fight Against Corruption: is the Tide Now Turning?”. *Transparency International Report*. Berlin: TI.
8. Shvedova, N. 1994. “A Woman’s Place: How the Media Works Against Women in Russia”. In *Surviving Together*. Vol. 12. No. 2.

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