



Chapter 3



Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems

The following two chapters examine strategies to overcome the obstacles to political participation outlined previously. This chapter focuses on two issues. First, we examine the principal steps involved in the process of recruiting to countries' legislatures. Second, we look at the effect of a country's electoral system. Which electoral systems are best suited to securing the election of women, and why? What specific factors should women be concerned about in the design of electoral systems? By addressing these questions, we hope to provide some insight into the effective and practical strategies that can be used to increase women's parliamentary representation.

1. The Legislative Recruitment Process and its Impact on Women

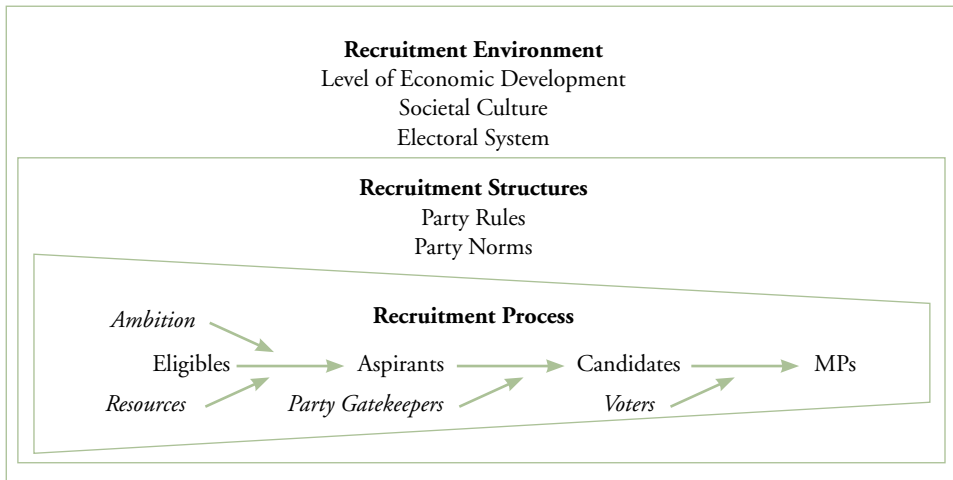
The legislative recruitment process refers to the process by which individuals move from meeting the legal criteria to serve to actually serving in parliament. The norm in most countries is for political parties to play an important role in this process by identifying possible candidates, selecting them as their official candidates, and putting them forward to the public for election.

For women to get elected to parliament they need to pass three crucial barriers: first, they need to select themselves; second, they need to be selected as candidates by the parties; and, third, they need to be selected by the voters. This process is elaborated in figure 1. While the steps involved in moving from eligible to aspirant to candidate occur in most political systems, the actual process varies dramatically from country to country. In particular, party rules and norms, along with the country's social culture and electoral system, affect the recruitment process at different stages

and influence the degree of openness to women candidates.

The stage at which the party gatekeepers actually choose the candidates is the crucial stage for getting women into office.

Figure 1: The Legislative Recruitment System



Source: Matland, R. and K. Montgomery, 2003. 'Recruiting Women to National Legislatures: A General Framework with Applications to Post-Communist Democracies', in R. Matland and K. Montgomery (eds). *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 21.

1.1. Selecting Yourself

The first stage consists of a person deciding to stand for elected office. The decision is influenced by personal ambition, resources and opportunities to stand. The decision to stand for office is generally portrayed as the decision of an actor who is rational, but has limited abilities to predict outcomes and estimate the possible benefits and costs of specific actions taken. Such a boundedly rational actor's personal ambition is tempered by an assessment of the resources the candidate can generate to help in the campaign, an estimation of how friendly the socio-political environment will be to the individual's candidacy, and calculations concerning the opportunities to stand for office, that is whether open positions exist. Already at this first stage there are more men than women. Men, across virtually all cultures, are socialized to see politics as a legitimate sphere for them to act in. This leads to men having a greater knowledge of and interest in politics, and greater political ambition. They also have access to more resources. In virtually every country women start out as more than 50 percent of those eligible to serve, but even after just the first step of selecting themselves the system is starting to become skewed towards men.

A women's movement or organizations focusing on women's political empowerment can contribute significantly to an increase in the number of potential women candidates aspiring for office. Even non-political organizations with predominantly women members can play important roles. These organizations can provide women with experience in public settings, help build their self-confidence, and provide a support base if a woman decides to contest an election. Women's organizations can also pressure parties both to address women's issues and to address the question of women's increased political representation. These are important resources a woman can draw on and they make it more likely that she will stand and that the party apparatus will see her as a viable candidate.

1.2. Being Selected by the Party

The second step is to be selected by the party. Selecting candidates is one of the crucial roles played by political parties. Nomination procedures vary across countries and parties and can be distinguished by a number of features, including the breadth of participation and the degree of centralization or decentralization of the process.¹ At one end of the spectrum are processes that provide a broad opportunity for people to participate in a decentralized context, such as primary elections in the USA and all-member party caucuses run by the major Canadian parties. At the other end of the spectrum are systems in which the party leader, national faction leaders, or the national executive choose the candidates. For example, the choosing of candidates by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan is very much under the control of party faction leaders. Depending on which of these procedures is used, party leaders, a broader set of party officials, or a significant portion of party rank and file play the gatekeeper role.

We can also distinguish between patronage-oriented and bureaucratic selection systems.² In a bureaucratic system of candidate selection rules are detailed, explicit, standardized and followed, regardless of who is in a position of power. Authority is based on legalistic principles. In a patronage-based system there are far less likely to be clear rules, and even when they exist there is a distinct possibility that they will not be followed carefully. Authority is based on either traditional or charismatic leadership rather than legal-rational authority. Loyalty to those in power in the party is paramount.

Clear bureaucratic procedures for selecting candidates can have a distinct advantage for women.

For women, bureaucratically-based systems that have incorporated rules to guarantee women's representation—that is, quotas—are a significant advantage. In many of the Nordic countries, parties have adopted quotas guaranteeing that either 40 percent or 50 percent of the party's list will be women. This has had a positive effect on women's representation in the Nordic countries (see the case study on Sweden).³ Even when there are no explicit rules to guarantee representation, clear bureaucratic

procedures by which candidates are chosen can have a distinct advantage for women. Clear and open rules provide women with the opportunity to develop strategies to take advantage of those rules. When the rules are unwritten it becomes much harder to devise a strategy to break into the inner circle of power.

Box 2. Candidate Recruitment in Norway

The case of Norway provides one example of how to take advantage of explicit and clear procedures. Norway has a closed-list proportional representation (PR) system.

Nominating starts with party committees in each county recommending a slate of candidates for the party list.* The committee recommendation is sent to a county-wide nominating convention where it must be approved, position by position. Local party members in local meetings choose the delegates to the nominating convention. With these explicit rules, even before quotas existed, it was possible for women to identify crucial decision points around which they could mobilize to press their demands.

This mobilization was aimed first at the committee recommendation stage, and second at the nominating convention stage. Women would start by demanding fair representation from the nominating committee. If the party nominating committee failed to take account of their demands satisfactorily, they would organize local female party members to maximize turnout at the local party organization meetings where delegates were selected. In so doing, they could guarantee that delegates who would vote to ensure representation of women were elected to go on to the country convention. Such a procedure could become highly contentious. Often, merely the threat of mobilization would be sufficient to get party nominating committees to accommodate demands for women's representation in their nominating recommendations, rather than risk having their proposals voted down by the party membership at the nominating convention.

* Valen, Henry, 1966. 'The Recruitment of Parliamentary Nominees in Norway'. *Scandinavian Political Studies*. Vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 121–66; and Valen, Henry, 1988. 'Norway: Decentralization and Group Representation', in Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh (eds). *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective: The Secret Garden of Politics*. London: Sage.

Under any nominating system an important consideration for a party is to present candidates that the party believes will maximize its vote.⁴ If certain types of candidates are seen as a liability, gatekeepers will shy away from nominating them. Research reviewing several individual country studies reveals that there is a set of characteristics party selectors look for in possible candidates across all countries. The most widely valued characteristic is the aspirant's track record in the party organization and in the constituency.⁵ Perhaps the strongest manifestation of this is the high rate at which incumbents are re-nominated. Even for new candidates, a past history of party participation and activism is important, although not a requirement. Visibility in the community either through one's profession, the holding of public office, or leadership positions in civil society organizations is also highly desirable. Because incumbents and community leaders are often disproportionately male, these criteria can damage women's opportunities.

An aspirant's track record in the party and in the constituency is the most widely valued characteristic in potential candidates.

The stage at which party gatekeepers choose the candidates is the most critical one for getting women into office. It is extremely hard to estimate the proportion of people who make the jump from simply being eligible to actually aspiring to elected office. Polling data show that the percentage of people who say they have considered standing for political office runs from a few percent to close to 20 percent of the population in industrial democracies. We also know that this pool of aspirants is skewed towards men. My estimate would be that in industrialized democracies somewhere between 25 percent and 40 percent of those who aspire to office are female. The important point, however, is that this pool is big enough for parties to be able to elect only women many times over *if they wanted* to. For example, in the 2002 German federal elections, the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD, Social Democratic Party) won approximately 20 million votes, which led to its winning 251 seats. Even if only 5 percent of the SPD voters might aspire to political office and of this aspirant pool only 20 percent were women, this would still mean there were 200,000 women in the aspirant pool. To put up a slate of candidates that was exclusively female, the party would have needed only 602 women, well below 1 percent of its total number of female aspirants.

The crucial point is that political parties have the power to compensate for the skewed nature of their pool of aspirants through the use of quotas or other party rules which can lead to greater gender equality. Because the eligibility pool is skewed, if the parties adopt gender-neutral nominating rules the consequence would be a pool of candidates skewed towards men. If the parties use selection procedures that hurt women the pool of candidates will become even more biased towards men than the eligibility pool. Whether party gatekeepers see women as desirable candidates who can help the party win votes will be influenced by a number of factors, including a country's culture as well as its electoral system, as discussed below.

1.3. Getting Elected

The final barrier to becoming a member of parliament (MP) is being chosen by the voters. It is a matter of some dispute whether there is a systematic bias against women at this stage. Most studies of elections in established democracies suggest that voters vote primarily for the party label rather than for the individual candidates.⁶ This is certainly true of electoral systems that use closed-list proportional representation (PR).⁷ In such cases, there is little reason to see the voters as a serious deterrent to women's representation. The crucial stage of the process under these conditions is actually getting nominated by the party.

While this is most typical, there are countries where the personal vote for the candidate is important (just how important is a matter of considerable debate in political science). Consistently, political scientists have argued that party loyalties, retrospective evaluations of the job done by the regime in power, and views on the prominent political issues of the day will tend to swamp the effect of candidates' sex. As researchers have

Most voters primarily vote for the party label rather than for individual candidates in established democracies.

pointed out, however, even if objectively the individual characteristics of candidates do not matter to the electorate, party officials are convinced that they are important. They will therefore continue to choose candidates carefully with an eye to those who they believe will strengthen the parties' chances of winning votes.⁸ The individual candidate is most likely to have some effect on vote totals in countries with plurality/majority, single-member district (SMD) electoral systems. Even in these countries, however, there is considerable evidence that female candidates do as well as male candidates when directly facing the voters.⁹

Some PR electoral systems use an open-list ballot or preferential voting, that is, the party nominates many candidates, usually in its preferred order of choice, but the voter has the ability, if he or she wishes, to influence which of the candidates on the party's list should be elected. When voting, the voter first chooses a specific party ticket, but then has the option of supporting a specific candidate by giving that individual a personal vote. How many personal votes it takes to influence the order in which candidates are elected is determined by the election laws and can vary tremendously.¹⁰

Party officials are convinced the individual counts, therefore they will continue to carefully choose candidates who they believe strengthen their party's chances of winning votes.

Under preferential voting systems such as the Single Transferable Vote (STV) or open-list PR voting systems, being a woman may be an advantage or a disadvantage. To the degree that women organize and actively encourage the striking out of male names and voting for female names, this procedure can produce a surprisingly

strong showing by women. A stark example of this occurred in Norway. Norway has open-list PR in local elections at the municipality level. In the early 1970s, women were able to organize a remarkably effective campaign to promote women. In the 1971 local elections, women's representation in several large Norwegian cities rose from approximately 15–20 percent of the city council to majorities on the council. This 'women's coup' became a source of great surprise and pride at women's abilities to take advantage of the electoral structure. It should be noted, however, that there was a counter-reaction in the following election, when many men who felt that striking out male candidates simply because they were men was unfair went out of their way to strike out women candidates. In the following local election and in every local election since, the number of women elected in local elections in Norway has been less than it would have been had there been no personal vote.¹¹

While this is only a cursory look at the barriers facing women as they try to move from merely being in the eligible pool of candidates to actually becoming MPs, it should be clear that among established democracies the crucial points are to convince women to stand and to convince the parties to choose women as their candidates.

2. The Effect of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation

When considering women's representation, a crucial factor is whether the electoral system has SMDs where only one legislator is elected in the district, or a multi-member district (MMD) system where several MPs are elected from each electoral district. This distinction tracks quite well, although not perfectly, with the distinction between plurality/majority (majoritarian) and PR systems.

In the short term, changing a country's electoral system often represents a far more realistic goal to work towards than dramatically changing the culture's view of women.

- In plurality/majority systems the winner is the candidate or party with the most votes, and typically there is only a single winner in each district.
- In proportional systems the electoral system is designed to ensure that the overall votes for a party or coalition are translated into a corresponding proportion of seats in the legislature. If a party wins 20 percent of the votes, it should get approximately 20 percent of the seats in parliament. All PR systems use multi-member districts.¹²

There are several reasons why scholars of politics and women activists emphasize the effect electoral systems have on women's representation. First, the impact of electoral systems is dramatic. As seen in table 8 and figure 2, the differences in women's representation across electoral systems are substantial. Second, and just as important, electoral systems can be, and regularly are, changed. Compared to the cultural status of women in society, or a country's development level (the two other factors known

to affect women's representation), electoral rules are far more malleable. Changing the electoral system often represents a far more realistic goal to work towards than dramatically changing the culture's view of women.

Table 8: Percentage of Women MPs Across 24 National Legislatures, 1945–2004.
Plurality/majority (SMD) Systems vs PR/Mixed, Multi-member District Systems

System/Year	1945	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1997	2004
SMD	3.05	2.13	2.51	2.23	3.37	8.16	15.42	18.24
MMD	2.93	4.73	5.47	5.86	11.89	18.13	21.93	27.49
Plurality/majority, SMD systems: Australia, Canada, France (from 1960), Japan (to 1990), New Zealand (to 1990), United Kingdom United States.				PR and mixed, MMD systems: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France (1945 and 1950), Greece**, Iceland, Ireland, Israel*, Italy, Japan (after 1993), Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand (after 1996), Norway, Portugal**, Spain**, Sweden, Switzerland and Germany (Federal Republic of Germany* prior to 1990).				

* Israel did not exist, and the Federal Republic of Germany did not hold elections in 1945. They are therefore not included in the 1945 numbers. They are included for all years following 1945.

** Greece, Portugal and Spain became democratic in the 1970s and are therefore only included in the calculations from 1980.

Key: SMD = Single-member districts systems: only one member is elected in each electoral district.
MMD = Multi-member district system: more than one representative is elected in each electoral district.

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Table 8 and figure 2 present data for 24 established democracies over the post-World War II period. They show that women have always had a slight advantage under PR as compared to plurality/majority systems. Until 1970, however, this advantage was very small: the difference in women's representation across the different systems is 3 percent or less. After 1970, however, there is a marked change and there has been a consistent and substantial divergence in women's representation across electoral systems.¹³

In the 1960s and 1970s all of the developed world saw the spread of 'second-wave feminism' (suffrage movements were the first wave feminist movement): women were demanding equal rights on a whole array of issues, among them greater representation in politics. In countries with PR systems, women were able to translate those demands into greater representation. In plurality/majority systems, on the other hand, the same demands were made but they were largely unsuccessful or only very modestly successful.

2.1. The Advantages of PR Systems

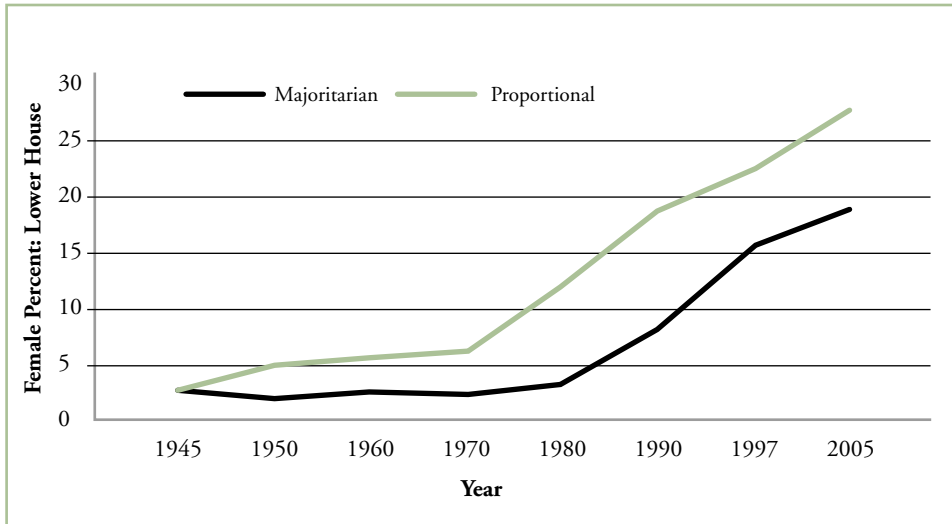
The obvious question is why countries with PR electoral systems should show such a strong increase in representation and plurality/majority systems show such a modest effect? There are a number of explanations. First, PR systems have consistently higher district magnitudes, which lead to higher party magnitudes. (District magnitude is the number of seats per district; party magnitude is the number of seats a party wins in a district.) Party and district magnitudes are important because they affect party strategy when choosing candidates. The party gatekeepers, who choose candidates, will have a different set of concerns and incentives depending upon the electoral system.

When district magnitude is one, as it is in almost all plurality/majority systems, the party can nominate one person per district. By definition, the party has no chance to balance the party ticket. In nominating decisions in single-member districts, female candidates must compete directly against all men; and often when nominating a woman a party must explicitly deny the aspirations of the most powerful male politician in the same district. When district magnitude increases, the chance that a party will win several seats in the district increases. When a party expects to win several seats, it will be much more conscious of trying to balance its ticket. Gatekeepers will divide winning slots on the party list among various internal party interests, including, possibly, women's interests.

There are several reasons for this balancing process.¹⁴ First, party gatekeepers see balance as a way of attracting voters. Rather than having to look for a single candidate who can appeal to a broad range of voters, party gatekeepers think in terms of different candidates appealing to specific sub-groups of voters. Candidates with ties to different groups and different sectors of society may help attract voters to their party. A woman candidate can be seen as a benefit to the party by attracting voters without requiring the most powerful intra-party interests represented by men to step aside, as would be required in a plurality/majority system. Conversely, failing to provide some balance, that is, nominating only men, could have the undesirable effect of driving voters away.

A second reason is that within the party balancing the ticket is often seen as a matter of equity. Different factions in the party will argue that it is only fair that one of their representatives should be among those candidates who have a genuine chance of winning. Especially when a women's branch of the party has been established and is active in doing a significant amount of the party's work, women can argue that equity requires that they get some of the slots in winnable positions. A third reason for balancing the slate is that dividing safe seats among the various factions within the party is a way of maintaining party peace and assuring the continued support of the different factions.

Proportional representation systems can also help women because a process of 'contagion' is more likely to occur in these systems than in plurality/majority systems.

Figure 2: Percentage of Women in Parliament: Majoritarian vs PR Electoral Systems

Contagion is a process by which parties adopt policies initiated by other political parties. In this case, once one party starts to nominate women in prominent positions, parties in PR systems will be much quicker to adopt this policy. The cost to a party of responding to the adoption of such a policy by another party or other parties that it is competing with is likely to be lower in PR systems, compared to plurality/majority systems, and the gains may be greater. The costs will be lower in a PR system because the party will have several slots from which to find room to nominate a woman; in plurality/majority systems, where the party has only one candidate, in order to open a space for a woman it might have to deny re-nomination to an incumbent or deny a slot to the male candidate of an internal faction that has traditionally received the nomination. The gains may be greater because in PR systems even a small increase in votes, produced by adding women to the party ticket, could result in the party winning more seats.

To study this question, we looked for contagion effects in Norway and Canada. In Norway, looking for contagion effects in elections prior to the dominant Labour Party adopting quotas, we found that contagion occurred within local districts. The Norwegian Labour Party increased the number of women in winnable positions in exactly those districts where it faced a serious challenge by the Socialist Left, the first party to adopt quotas in Norway. When we tested for a similar effect in Canada—that is, whether the Liberal Party was more likely to nominate women in those districts where the New Democratic Party had nominated women—we found no evidence of such an effect. In other words contagion occurred in the country with a PR electoral system and did not in the country with a plurality/majority electoral system.¹⁵

More generally it is worth noting that gender quotas as a policy have clearly

been contagious in Norway. In 1977, only two parties with less than 4 percent of the parliamentary seats had quotas. By 1997, five of the seven parties represented in the Parliament, with approximately 65 percent of the seats combined, had officially adopted gender quotas.¹⁶

2.2. Why Some PR Systems are Better than Others

While proportional representation systems are more advantageous for women, not all PR systems are to be equally preferred. There are two particular aspects that can help or hinder women's representation within the broader umbrella of PR systems.

Higher district magnitude: parties have the chance to compete for and win several seats, allowing them to go further down the party lists, where women are usually listed.

High electoral thresholds: these discourage the creation of 'mini-parties' which often elect only one or two representatives, usually male.

2.2.1. District Magnitude

As already noted, the driving force behind women doing better in PR systems is the ticket-balancing process which occurs when the party sets up its election list in each electoral district. What is crucial if women are to win seats in parliament is that parties win several seats so that they go deep into the party list when selecting their MPs.

Above, party magnitude was defined as the number of seats a party wins in an electoral district. In designing electoral rules, women will be helped both by having high district magnitudes and by electoral thresholds, because of their effects on average party magnitude. Not surprisingly, there is generally a strong positive correlation between average district magnitude and average party magnitude. As the number of seats per district increases, parties go further down their lists (that is, win more seats) and more parties will have multi-member delegations. Both should increase women's representation. This suggests that women's groups should be supportive of moves to increase the total number of MPs in the parliament and of moves to reduce the number of electoral districts. The limiting case, and the one that may be the most advantageous for women, is that of the whole country being simply one electoral district. There are, of course, other considerations apart from women's representation that are important in evaluating an electoral system, and these considerations in turn may render a proposal to have the whole country as one district unattractive. In many countries, for example, it is often seen as important to guarantee regional representation, in which case some geographic form of districting may need to be accommodated.

The whole country is one electoral district in the Netherlands, which has a comparatively high level of women's representation (37 percent) and in Israel, which

has an average level of women's representation (15 percent). One lesson learned from Israel is that electoral systems cannot *guarantee* high representation levels. A second lesson is that having a high electoral threshold, which is the minimum percentage of the vote that a party must have in order to win a seat in the legislature, is important to increasing women's chances. In Israel the level of support needed to win a seat has been extremely low. The low threshold, 1.5 percent, has encouraged the creation of many mini-parties, which often elect only one or two representatives. Overwhelmingly, parties tend to have male leaders, and party leaders inevitably take the first few slots on the list. Women first tend to show up a little farther down the list when the party concerns turn to ensuring ticket balance. If only one or two representatives of a party win election, even though many of its candidates in mid-list positions are women, women are quite likely not to win any representation.

2.2.2. Electoral Thresholds

When designing electoral systems there is a trade-off between representing the voters who choose small parties and increasing the 'descriptive representation' of the legislature by having more women representatives from the larger parties. Data from Costa Rica and Sweden, used to test this hypothesis, confirm the trade-off. Both these countries use electoral thresholds. Simulations show that without thresholds very small parties would have won representation; with thresholds the smaller parties are eliminated, but more women are elected from the largest parties in the country. Women's groups may support proposals to establish the whole country as one electoral district, but it would be an important strategic addendum to make sure that electoral thresholds are included in the proposal.

2.3. Type of Electoral List

Another distinction between different PR systems is that some systems have closed party lists, where the party determines the rank-ordering of candidates, and some have open party lists, where the voters are able to influence which of the party's candidates are elected by means of personal voting. The crucial question is whether it is easier to convince voters to actively vote for women candidates, or to convince party gatekeepers that including more women on the party lists in prominent positions is both fair and, more importantly, strategically wise. I suspect that the answer varies from country to country. It is worth noting that, if effective parliamentary quotas have been adopted, closed lists do help guarantee women's representation.

Figure 3: Why PR Systems are Better for Women

HIGHER DISTRICT MAGNITUDES	CONTAGION
Has higher number of seats per district (<i>higher district magnitude</i>)	Party lists present greater opportunities to nominate women
Party can expect to win several seats in each district (<i>higher party magnitude</i>)	Greater capacity to promote women when challenged by another party (contagion)
Party more likely to balance ticket by including women (<i>balancing</i>)	Party does not have to pay the cost of denying a slot to an incumbent or male candidate in order to nominate a woman

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For the initial version of this Handbook, published eight years ago, on the basis of the limited empirical work that had been done up to that point, I cautiously suggested that closed lists were preferable. Since then further research has analysed the effect of the open-list system in several countries. The most recent research indicates that it is not possible to make a general recommendation: the effects of open-list systems on women's representation in fact vary dramatically, depending on the party's supportiveness of women's candidacies.

The open-list system is used in Norway for local elections. In developing their party lists, many of the Norwegian parties strictly follow a principle of making every other candidate a woman. Research finds that voters appear to have a slight preference for male candidates.¹⁷ In other words, in Norway, where the parties are highly supportive of women candidates, preferential voting hurts women. In Poland, on the other hand, my analysis of party parliamentary nominating lists and electoral results found that women do better with voters than they do with the party committees putting together party lists, that is, the preferential vote leads to greater representation of women. Party leaders undervalue women candidates, either because of sexism among members of the selection committees or, possibly, because members of selection committees have a misplaced fear of sexism on the part of the voter.

Furthermore, Gregory Schmidt found in Peru that open-list voting did not disadvantage women. Women activists in Peru ran a campaign urging voters to give their preferential votes to 'one of each' (i.e. pick one man and one woman) and this led to female candidates in open-list voting doing as well as men.¹⁸ Based on a review of this (admittedly limited) research, it would appear that no strong or unambiguous recommendation can be made one way or the other in terms of whether preferential voting helps or hurts women.¹⁹

It is true, however, that open lists let the parties 'off the hook': they are not responsible for the final outcome. The final outcome rests with thousands of individual voters making individual decisions. If the sum of all those individual decisions is that

women are voted down and out of parliament, the parties cannot be held responsible, as they cannot control how their supporters vote. With closed party lists, however, it is clear that it is the party's responsibility to ensure balance in the party delegation. Under these conditions parties could be held responsible for women's representation. If representation fails to grow, women could search out parties that were more willing to consider their demands for representation.

3. Lessons for Expanding Women's Representation

A number of lessons for increasing women's representation can be drawn from the above discussion.

1. Women should organize both inside and outside political parties. Being organized either in interest groups outside or as women's caucuses inside political parties provides valuable experience for women and gives them a power base on which to build if they aspire to office. Political as well as professional groups such as women doctors or women lawyers' associations can play an important role as a recruiting ground for women candidates. Being organized also increases visibility and legitimacy. In addition, in political parties, where women commonly do a considerable amount of the essential party work, it is important to be organized into a women's caucus that can lobby for improved representation.

2. Women should urge parties to set down clear rules for candidate selection. Generally, women will benefit if parties have clear bureaucratic procedures for selecting candidates rather than a system based on loyalty to those in power. When the rules of the game are clear, it is possible for women to develop strategies to improve representation. When the process is dominated by patronage, rules can be unclear and decisions are often made by a limited number of persons, who are almost certainly predominately male.

3. PR systems are better than plurality/majority systems for increasing women's representation. In looking at the countries that are defined as free or partly free by Freedom House, the ten that rank highest in terms of women's representation all use proportional representation electoral systems. Single-member district plurality/majority systems have consistently proved to be the worst possible for women.

4. Some PR systems are preferable to others. Systems that guarantee high party magnitudes through a combination of high district magnitudes and electoral thresholds are expected to be superior for women. Just having a PR system is not sufficient. Ireland, for example, which uses the STV form of PR, has very small district magnitudes (between three and five members) and has lower levels of female representation than plurality/majority systems in countries such as Canada, Australia

and the United Kingdom. The optimal system for women is likely to be a PR system where the whole country is one district. As noted earlier, however, this will not always be a viable option, and often there will be good reason to divide the country into several geographically-based electoral districts.

5. Women should carefully evaluate all parts of any proposed electoral system for their possible advantages or disadvantages for women. Even when there is broad agreement on a system based on geographical electoral districts, there will usually be different ways of implementing such a system. Those interested in increasing women's representation should not neglect these alternatives. The existing research suggests that the more seats in the national legislature the better for women, because this will increase party magnitude. When deciding how many geographic districts should be formed, the smaller the number of districts created the better for women, again because this will increase party magnitude. Meier, for example, asserts that much of the significant increase in women's representation that occurred in Belgium was due to a decrease in the number of electoral districts which has led to a significant increase in average party magnitude.²⁰ In addition, women should be watchful when the number of seats in each electoral district is determined. Often this process results in rural districts being over-represented and urban districts being under-represented. It is in urban districts, where non-traditional roles for women are more common and where there are far more resources for women interested in participating in politics to draw on, that women tend to do well, especially when they are just starting to make significant gains. Women's groups should watch carefully to see that, when the number of seats per district is determined, the distribution of seats is as close to 'one person, one vote' as possible.

6. While PR systems are better in the long run, immediate results cannot be guaranteed. While changes in the electoral system make greater women's representation more likely, and in the long run there is no question that electoral system changes help women improve their representation levels, an immediate effect is not guaranteed. While PR systems have, on average, higher proportions of women than plurality/majority systems, this is not true for every case. While there are several striking cases of women gaining significant representation in developing countries with PR systems, there are many more cases where no gains have been made despite an advantageous electoral system. The non-effect for the electoral system variable in these countries is an important example of a more general point: while certain institutions or rules may benefit one group or another, an effect will appear only if the group is sufficiently well organized to take advantage of the situation. If not, the institutional arrangement can have no effect on outcomes. The relatively small difference for women's representation between proportional systems and plurality/majority systems for the period 1945–70 well illustrates this point. If the forces interested in women's representation are not effectively organized, then the electoral system is expected to have only a limited effect.

7. Changing the electoral system is only one part of a more comprehensive strategy for improving women's representation. Women need to become active and effective voices within their individual parties and within society as a whole to be able to take advantage of the institutional advantages certain electoral structures provide.

Women have made steady, albeit slow, progress in terms of parliamentary representation, with women now holding nearly 16 percent of seats in lower houses of parliament across the world. Some of that progress has occurred thanks to improvements associated with increased development, education, and incremental changes in women's standing in society. Much of that change has, however, been due to activists becoming more astute to the intricacies of electoral system design and legislative recruitment, and pushing for institutions that maximize women's chances of representation. These processes are complex and often difficult to follow, but when they are understood, as they are increasingly are, gender equality activists can more effectively and successively press their demands for more equitable representation.

Notes

- ¹ Gallagher, Michael, 1988. 'Conclusions', in Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh (eds). *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective: The Secret Garden of Politics*. London: Sage.
- ² Norris, Pippa, 1996. 'Legislative Recruitment', in Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Niemi and Pippa Norris (eds). *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*. London: Sage.
- ³ While quotas are often credited with being responsible for the lead that Nordic countries have in terms of women's representation, it should be noted that Nordic countries were generally world leaders in this area even before such rules were adopted. Causality may run from being a world leader to adopting rules, rather than the rules causing one to become a world leader. See Dahlerup, Drude and Lenita Freidenvall, 2005. 'Quotas as a "Fast Track" to Equal Representation for Women'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. Vol. 7, no. 1, March, pp. 26–48.
- ⁴ Clearly, this is not the only concern and sometimes not even the primary concern. Concern for party unity or intra-party factional fights may from time to time trump the desire to maximize votes, but in the long run parties in democracies are forced to be concerned about winning votes. If they are not they run the risk of disappearing from the political stage.
- ⁵ Gallagher 1988, op. cit., p. 248.
- ⁶ LeDuc, Niemi and Norris 1996, op. cit.
- ⁷ On the different electoral systems referred to in this Handbook, see 'Glossary of Terms', in Reynolds, Andrew, Ben Reilly and Andrew Ellis, 2005. *The New International IDEA Handbook of Electoral System Design*. Stockholm: International IDEA, annex B.

- ⁸ Bochel, John and David Denver, 1983. 'Candidate Selection in the Labour Party: What the Selectors Seek'. *British Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 45–69.
- ⁹ Darcy, R. and Sarah Slavin Schramm, 1977. 'When Women Run Against Men'. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Vol. 41, pp. 1–12; and Welch, Susan and Donley T. Studlar, 1986. 'British Public Opinion Toward Women in Politics: A Comparative Perspective'. *Western Political Quarterly*. Vol. 39, pp. 138–52.
- ¹⁰ For an extended discussion on the various thresholds found for preferential voting systems see Katz, Richard S., 1997. *Democracy and Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ¹¹ Hellevik, Ottar and Tor Bjørklund, 1995. 'Velgerne og Kvinnerepresentasjon' [Voters and women's representation], in Nina Raaum (ed.). *Kjønn og Politikk* [Gender and politics]. Oslo: Tano Press.
- ¹² For an extensive review of electoral systems see Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis 2005, op. cit.
- ¹³ There is a considerable accumulation of comparative evidence that underlines the structural advantages of PR with respect to women's representation. Among countries that have Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) systems, where some portion of the electoral system is based on single-member districts while another portion is based on proportional lists either at the regional or at the national level, women's representation is consistently higher on the proportional part of the electoral systems. Furthermore, several countries have changed their electoral systems, and there is a consistent finding that when changes are made from plurality/majority to PR systems there is an increase in women's representation. Most recently these results were confirmed in a study of the changes in electoral systems in post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe: see Matland, Richard E., 2003. 'Women's Representation in Post-Communist Europe', in Richard E. Matland and Kathleen A. Montgomery (eds). *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ¹⁴ Valen, Henry, 1988. 'Norway: Decentralization and Group Representation', in Gallagher and Marsh (eds), op. cit.
- ¹⁵ Matland, Richard E. and Donley T. Studlar, 1996. 'The Contagion of Women Candidates in Single-Member and Multi-Member Districts'. *Journal of Politics*. Vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 707–33.
- ¹⁶ Quotas are elaborated upon in chapter 4 in this Handbook.
- ¹⁷ I am fairly confident this is caused by a limited number of males who are 'local notables' and are initially placed quite low on the party list being raised above women who are initially higher than them on the party list but are relatively unknown to voters in the municipality.
- ¹⁸ Schmidt, Gregory D., 2003. 'Unanticipated Successes: Lessons from Peru's Experiences with Gender Quotas in Majoritarian Closed List and Open List PR Systems', in International IDEA. *The Implementation of Quotas: Latin American Experiences*. Stockholm: International IDEA.
- ¹⁹ There are, however, strong arguments both for and against open-list voting that are not tied to gender effects. Proponents emphasize that open-list voting provides the citizenry with greater input into choosing their representatives and as such it is seen as 'more

democratic'. Opponents of open-list voting argue that it reduces a party's control over its representatives and therefore threatens the 'responsible party' model of democracy many political scientists prefer.

- ²⁰ Meier, Petra, 2004. 'Gender Quotas or Electoral Reform: Why More Women Got Elected during the 2003 Belgian Elections'. Paper presented at International IDEA conference on The Implementation of Quotas: Experiences from Europe, Budapest, 22–23 October.

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