

Power Inequalities for Women in Politics: from Historical Gender Socialization to Contemporary Formal Constraints

A. Introduction

Over the past 50 years, significant improvements have been made in gender equality overall across the world. The employment rate of women has increased since 1970 and the educational gap between gender has decreased substantially, especially for higher education (Paula). The ratio of women significantly increased in traditionally men-dominated fields, such as management, engineering and mathematics fields (Paula). However, despite the achievement in recent decades, the improvements in human capital [educational level, professional skills] for women did not reflect in comparable increases in employment prospects. The career choice and opportunities for women are still restricted in certain areas in formal or non-formal ways. Meta-analyses reveal that when being considered for male-typed [male dominated] jobs, female candidates are often evaluated more negatively and recommended for employment less compared with matched male candidates (Hunter). This inequality has been amplified in political aspects. Women in politics face challenges such as low participation rate, less opportunity for promotion and field restriction.

According to the map of Women in Politics released during the 63rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the overall participation rate for women in governance is 23% (UN Women). This rate varies by region. The Middle East and North Africa have the lowest participation rate, which is only about 15%. Despite Latin America and the Caribbean area having the highest proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, the rate still does not exceed 30%. The report demonstrates that compared with 2017, the overall participation rate for women increased by 2.4%, however, the number of women in senior

leadership positions fell from 5.7% in 2017 to 5.2% (Milazzo).

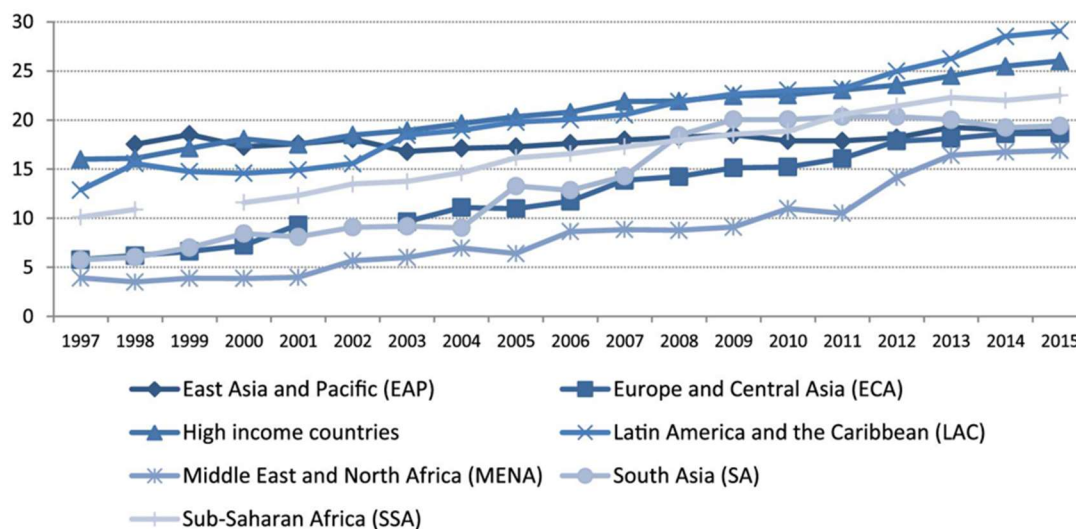


Figure 1. The proportion of women in national parliaments (%)

The overall trends are increasing in the past ten years.

However, the averages still do not exceed 30%.

The less opportunity for women to promote in governance is another issue for women who seek political appeals. For example, although it announced the male to female ratio reached 4 to 1 in members of the Chinese Communist Party, the rate of women in the Central Committee is only about 9% (BBC). The promotion for women engaged in politics seems to be harder than men, which engendered the power inequalities in higher positions.

The participation rate for women also was restricted to special fields which were thought to be more “feminine”, such as social welfare, culture, women, and family affairs (Cerrato). For example, although the proportion of women cabinet posts have been rising steadily in Africa since 1990, the policy areas that be assigned to them are still be confined to the traditional stereotype [social-division of labor] toward women, which will be discussed in the next section, rather than male-dominated financial, national defense or foreign (Milazzo). The result is

although it pointed out the increase of women in politics in decades, their influence is still comparatively low.

After considering the current situation for women who work in governmental affairs, this article will study the common factors that contribute to world-wide gender imbalance as an outcome. From the review of policies and possible solutions for these inequalities, we will further discuss how the power inequalities could be changed through certain interventions and delivered long term influence.

B. Reasons: Culture and Institutions

a. Historical Gender Socialization

The term of gender socialization is that individuals are taught to behave accordantly with their assigned gender based on their sex phenotype (Andrew). The creation of gender socialization can be traced back to early human society. Anthropologist Linda Marrie Fefgan considers the early human society is the combination of both hunting and gathering patterns (Fefgan). In this society pattern, women are usually depicted as the mother, the obedient person, and the dedicator. Despite the Mariology being popular at one time, the worship of the goddess is still essentially the worship of the special character they were given, such as fertility and [mother's] benevolent. A similar thing also happened in male gods, which were usually positive, aggressive, and with [father's] authority. The specialization of male and female characters, which is also called gender socialization can be seen in culture and religion all over the world and have been passing through history. For example, in South Asia areas, girls were taught to be meek and the boys were asked to show their masculinity (Susanne). The similar thing happened in middle east countries where women are expected to put their family roles first (Assaad). The creation of gender roles is to better accommodate the social division of labor in ancient society,

however, as humans generally overcome the basic need for survival, this forced gender role has commonly become barriers and fetters, especially for the people who intend doing jobs which do not accommodate their gender socialization. According to social research, traditional gender socialization still guides females in doing a job that is less aggressive or dominant relative to males who should take the responsibility for the family and show his “manliness” such as become the major financial support for the family (Konrad).

Long term gender socialization results in the bias for female candidates in electoral environments. The report from Marymount University studied the potential barrier to women running for office states that compared with male candidates, women are substantially more likely to perceive the electoral environment as highly competitive and less likely to think they are qualified to run for office (Richard). Also, since women usually take the responsibility for child-raising and housework allocated by society, which further reduce or distract their passion for their career or politics, hence react more negatively than men to modern campaigns (Richard). Whatsmore, gender socialization also influences and restricts women who are already in politics. Because of the traditional belief for “women’s job”, a great part of women in politics still are restricted to special fields such as social welfare, women, and family affairs. This is like a kind of compromise to women, which on the one hand offers their jobs in government institutions, on the other hand, the offered field generally has less influence on society.

b. Vote, Legislation, and Inheritance

Women are able to participate in politics only for a relatively short time and the process may also be opposed or delayed by individuals against policies. For example, in Switzerland, women were allowed to vote in federal elections only in 1971, 65 years later than the first

European country Finland (Stämpfli). The reason is men systematically voted against female suffrage, which required a referendum on constitutional reform, and at that time only men were allowed to vote. In Kuwait, women did not have the right to vote until 2005. The Women's Suffrage Movement in the twentieth century largely increased women's participation in politics. From the first country that gives women the right to vote to the present is no more than a century compared with thousands of years of men dominating politics history. The late entry of women in politics might be another reason for the unbalanced situation.

Figure 2. Women's Suffrage Movement in the Twentieth Century, women's suffrage: London demonstrators, Suffragettes holding signs in London, c. 1912.



The limitation in legislation and inheritance are also considered to be reasons engendered low participation rates for women in politics. The average retirement age for women is 58.6, and for men is 60. The

average difference between males and females is 3-5 years higher for men (Gustman). This difference indirectly has affected the preferability for both company and government institutions when hiring people. Also, the early retirement for women limited their career path and reflected that historical stereotype which women's job is not as important as men. Besides, although the international community generally accepts equal inheritance for both male and female, according to the countries reviewed in the World Bank in 2005, surviving female spouses do not have the same inheritance rights as male surviving spouses, and daughters do not have the same rights as

sons to inherit from their parents. The restriction in financial resources would, on the one hand, influence girls' opportunities to receive specialized knowledge, which is the precondition for politics. On the other hand, it will sap their enthusiasm of being a citizen to participate in politics. Hence, in the next section, we will see how countries and areas use technical policies in order to solve this imbalance, and from the discussion of the successful/failures to consider the essential of gender inequality.

C. Policies: Reduce Gender Stereotype and Promote power equality

a. Release from Traditional Gender Role

The political rights for women are tightly related with their economic security and reproductive health. The limitation in vote, inheritance and economic status have blocked the women in politics for a long time. The 19th Amendment in 1920, US, has guaranteed millions of women move closer to equality in all aspects of American life. The Amendment not only give them the right to vote, but also provide them fairer wages, education, sex education and birth control, which all nessarity for the female candidates to running for office (Williamson).

The popularization of birth control and the rise of the marriage age is another resort for increasing the positivity for women in politics. According to the research from Guttmacher Institute, the ability for women to gain higher education and employment have positive correlation to state laws granting unmarried women early eligibility for contraceptives (Sonfield). In the 1960s and 1970s, contraception was a key factor in women's investment in education, which increased the proportion of women in skilled occupations by more than 30% from 1970 to 1990 (Sonfield).

b. Political Gender Quotas

The definition of Quotas was first brought up in Norway, 2003, which is the law stipulating the gender ratio in a company. This policy then is applied to the political field. Over the past 20 years, more than half of the countries have used some kind of quotas to increase the number of female representatives in parliament and government. Among all countries using quotas policy, Nordic countries successfully increased the ratio of females to 41% and relatively achieved the number without the use of quotas. However, despite the success of quotas to some degree, the increase of women in higher positions still remains a problem. Although it increased the gender ratio in first-line managers, prescriptive quotas can not change the deep-roots stereotypes toward women's ability. The opponents claim the quote policy would engender a decline in the quality of politicians. This claim is clearly lost empirical evidence, in contrast, as mentioned previously, the overall higher educational level for women in some regions have already equal or even surpassed men. The positive point of view for this question should be to increase the educational level for women instead of considering the introduction of quotas would decrease the "quality of politicians".

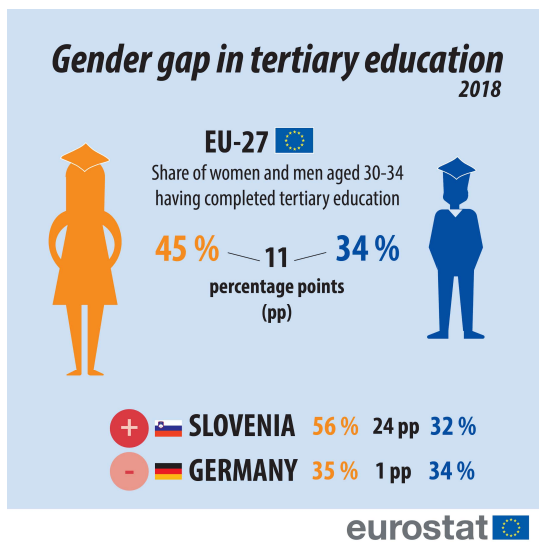


Figure3. The percentages for women and men received higher education in EU countries in 2018

D. Discussion: Aim and influence of the

Policies

The long-term gender socialization unconsciousness engendered inequality across class[status, vote and Inheritance right] is the essence of gender inequality. The current successful policies which directly or indirectly related with women in politics usually serve two purposes: In the short term, these resorts and policies are directly focused on raising the status of women. Such as the political gender quotas. In the long-term, these policies aim to decrease the stereotype between genders, and have firm laws to change people's traditional view about gender socialization. We can assume that all policies are the carries for culture and all can be traced back to culture. The policies toward women are not aimed to solve problems in a short term, but from culturally, and emphasize the concept of against traditional gender socialization.

E. Conclusion: Past and Future

Over the past century, the status of women has improved in great steps. However, the imbalanced gender ratio still remains in many areas, especially in politics. The stereotype toward gender still exists, and the historical gender socialization already becomes a barrier for both those who intend to do jobs that do not accommodate their gender socialization, such as women in politics. This cultural stereotype engendered women not being encouraged to participate in politics or be assigned in ears which is not as important as male-dominance fields. Also, the limited time of women participating in politics and the unequal policy for both genders could all be the institutional constraints for women in politics. Some policies have been made to solve this problem. Political gender quotas have achieved some degree of success in some countries, but the long-term stereotype still exists.

The imbalance situation for females in politics, just like other stereotypes and inequality, is a longer-term problem that cannot be solved in one day. The women's rights movement and affirmative action have made great achievements, and more and more policies are made intended

to solve this problem and already changed the situation. Taken together, we believed that the power inequalities could be changed through certain interventions and delivered long term influence, eventually minimizing the gender imbalance and formal constraints.

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