

Gender in politics. Prospects and recommendations

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Abstract

This study focuses on the issue of participation of women in politics, particularly in the area of gender equality in governance and access to the resources associated with it. The results available show an increase in women's participation in political life. There are definitely more women applying for offices and many of them achieve success. Indubitably, the easily discernible progress is overshadowed by the continuing gender gap, manifested in persistent, lower participation of women. In this chapter, it is primarily quantitative data and reports that have been considered, and analysis of the results available enables us to present the changes in the representation of women in political decision-making circles both at the national and supra-national levels. We have analysed the data describing the situation in Poland, the Nordic countries, and the European Union. In the context of initiatives for equal representation of women in representative bodies exercising functions and decision-making, it is worth noting that, even in countries which have achieved a satisfactory level in terms of numbers, this is not fully reflected in the implementation of gender equality in the area of politics. This is because the practice, often used, is to limit access to certain areas of political activism. There is still a well-established social, stereotypical division into areas traditionally "reserved" for representatives of both sexes, such as social affairs or education.

Key words: women, politics, European Union, Poland, the Nordic countries

Introduction

Empirical studies show a variety of motives for engaging in politics, which may indicate that for various individuals political activity may be valuable for various reasons. Here we can identify motivational factors such as: the need for influence, control or power, the need for affiliation, loyalty to specific groups of people, the search for strong incentives, new experiences, or the need to undertake specific tasks. As you can see, the motivation for political participation is multifactorial, so you can show various types of typologies of the dominant motivation. For example, in studies conducted in the years 1964–1990 on the activists of the

Democratic Party and the Republican Party, it has pointed out that there are four basic factors of motivation: ambition, sociability (affiliation), task orientation, and loyalty (Constantini and Valenty, 1996, pp. 498–524).

The motive referred to as ambitious (achievements, power) is combined with a strong ideological centrism; task-oriented people are more ideological extremists than activists seeking opportunities in politics for influence over policy, promotion, or public offices. The motives of affiliation and loyalty are in turn related with ideological centrism. Participation in political life, however, need not be exclusively instrumental to psychological needs, it can be an end in itself. If in the course of socialization the norm of activity will be produced and internalized, the impact on political life becomes an individual value for the person.

A prerequisite for activity motivated by the value of political influence is a sense of connection with the political system, in conjunction with a lack of sense of alienation, or in other words, political alienation. It is not clear, however, whether alienation leads rather to a withdrawal from participation in politics, or towards active forms of protest against the system. Political participation is thus linked to the level of confidence in the political system, the existing parties, and state institutions. Political distrust is a predictor of contestational activity, and political trust restrains people from participating in acts of protest and unconventional attempts to influence policy.

A low level of political trust characterises people who are passive, alienated, not interested in politics, and poorly educated. Many studies support the idea that the value of politics for the individual and their relation to the political system is largely related to their place in the social system. The higher the socioeconomic status (education, occupation, income), the more active is the participation in politics, especially in conventional forms. Who, therefore, participates in political life? The data acquired in the course of research show broadly that those who will actively participate are: men rather than women, people with higher education, people with high professional status (managers), working professionals and students, people from big cities, and people with high financial status. No interest in political activity, however, is shown by: people with lower education (primary), the unemployed, people from smaller towns, and people with low professional status (Lewicka 2004, pp. 65–82).

Although we continue to see lower participation of women in politics, gender equality in the exercise of power and access to resources has begun to play an important role. The increase in the participation of women in political life may be referred to as unusual. There are definitely more women applying for offices and many of them achieve success in this race, which is observable on a daily basis, but this applies rather to developed Western democracies (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010, pp. 318–333). This points to the growing number of women receiving a social mandate to sit in national parliaments, but also those performing important functions in the executive (Waring et al, 2000, pp. 7–8).

Indubitably, the easily discernible progress is overshadowed by the continuing gender gap, manifested in persistent, lower participation of women. This also ap-

plies to the developed democratic countries, which served above as examples of countries with a high number of political positions held by women (Dalton, 2008, pp. 76–98). This raises the idea that if we consider political participation as the main value of a mature democracy, we should look carefully at gender equality in this regard. Aiming to reduce gender inequality in the area of political participation is crucial, because the lack of reflection and suppression of any discussion of this topic may lead to serious repercussions in the form of deepening stratification between men and women in modern societies.

Participation in public life is seen by many researchers as a key factor and is referred to as a basic democratic right. Thus, the persistent unequal participation patterns observed in the political sphere represents a significant threat to political equality and the function of democracy. While in recent decades women have made noticeable progress, demonstrated by the deepening impact on political decisions, a more informal involvement is still clearly visible than that which would translate into a direct effect on real impact in terms of key decisions. Even in countries with a high degree of economic development and well-established democratic institutions (UK, USA), an adverse division conditioned by gender is still observable. It is true that this element is not determinant of the share of power to such an extent as is the case with race or wealth, but it is still identified as limiting participation in political decision-making bodies (Burns, 2007, pp. 104–124).

Many factors are indicated as those which are supposed to be an explanation for this, in particular, reference is often made to women's lower access to socio-economic resources. For example, men more often hold full-time jobs, and as is evident from the previously mentioned results (Lewicka, 2004), employment and its form translates into political participation, available information resources, and effectiveness (Schlozman et al., pp. 29–53).

This is, however, not the only explanation for the problem identified. The low level of knowledge in the field of politics, interest, and effectiveness in this area may also be caused by other factors. It is believed that the lack of political resources in the hands of women may also be conditioned by the underlying factors of socialization processes. Socialization is not abstracted from sexuality, because girls are taught to adopt a more passive attitude, focused on privacy, empathy and a reinforced sense of attachment to specific gender roles in society. Boys are rewarded in the educational process with leadership, autonomy and a strengthened conviction of the necessity of independence and reliance on themselves (Wojniak, 2012, pp. 2–18). This type of socialization pattern can not only cause, but also preserve the low level of political involvement observed among women.

Most of the above ideas also in terms of the insufficient participation of women in political life and in relation to their slender impact on the decision-making process are reflected in the data collected by American sociologists (Verba, 1997, pp. 1051–1072). This gives us a global view of the situation; however, it is worth referring to the data that is available to us closer to home, i.e. the European Union. Analysis of the results available enables us to present the changes in the representation of women in political decision-making circles both at the national

and supra-national levels. The methodology applied involves quantitative analysis of the available data and their development, consisting of the statement of the results of research conducted by both national and international institutions and included in the available scientific publications. The structure is based on the development of separate parts covering the subject on the basis of geography, including the European Union as a whole, then in terms of the particular, on the example of Poland. For comparative purposes, the situation will be outlined in the Nordic region, which is perceived as a kind of benchmark for pro-equality initiatives. The descriptive approach to the statistics cited has been supplemented with tables and charts, which aim to make the study transparent.

4.1. The European Union

The countries included in the European Union are generally considered to be those that had to meet certain standards in order to become a member of the Community. But it cannot be expected that we will be dealing with an equal dimension of participation of women in politics among all Member States. It is no surprise that in terms of the number of women serving in decision-making bodies, the lead is taken by the Scandinavian countries, which will be presented in more detail later in this paper. First, however, we will look at the more holistic participation by gender, based on data for Members of the European Parliament.

The European Union is home to approximately 495 million people of which over 51% are women, but in the penultimate European elections, only 35% of seats were won by women (elections to the Europarlament, 2009). It is not, however, to judge on this basis the underrepresentation of women in EU decision-making bodies, these indicate only the constant lack of equal distribution of instruments of authority between women and men, which may result, generally speaking, in a democratic deficit. EU institutions do not promote the idea that it is a women's right to be selected, but to have the opportunity.

One of the basic manifest problems is believed to be the infrequency of elections, which in itself is not contested, but has a crucial impact on the changes expected in terms of equal gender representation. Over the last few years, we can mention just a few of the possibilities for the reconstruction of the composition of this body. In addition, there is no doubt that the decision to become a politician is often a defined career choice, thus it is not surprising that many candidates will try again, applying for re-election. Thus, the fluctuation of MEPs is limited and leads to a reduction in the inflow of new politicians, in this case women (European Commission, 2009, p. 18).

The data show a much greater representation of women in the European Parliament than is the case in parliaments at national level. This applies both to the seats in the lower and higher houses. A particularly high disparity, reaching up to 25%, is observed in countries such as: Estonia, Ireland, Hungary, and Slovenia.

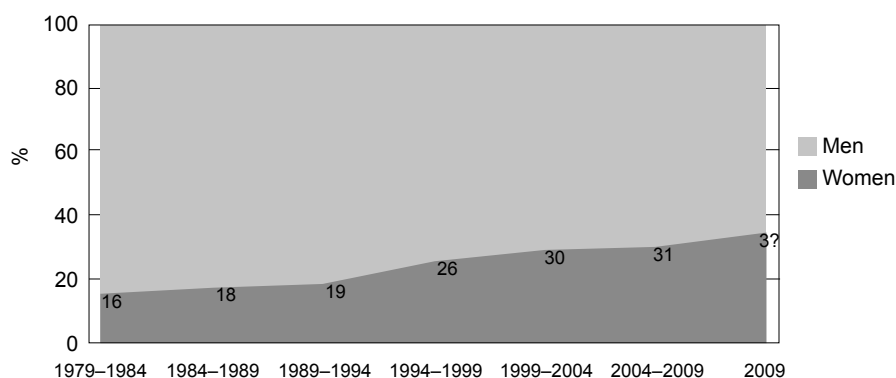


Figure 4.1. Distribution of seats by gender in the European Parliament

Source: European Parliament, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/> [accessed March 2014].

It is hard to pinpoint one reason for this state of things, but we can try to base it on a number of factors, which in turn will not be a uniform set, specific to each country. The first factor is the electoral system. Although each country has their own way of regulating the selection of MEPs, it is necessary to comply with the requirement of proportionality. It has been proved that, where we have a system that allows several candidates to win, more often there is a chance to elect a woman. However, in the situation of an electoral majority, which exists in some countries in the elections at the national level and where the winner takes all, women are statistically less likely to be selected. Moreover, we have to deal with the different types of pre-selection of candidates and how they are situated on the lists of candidates for local elections, and those at the European level (European Commission, 2009, p. 20). Table 4.1 and Figure 4.2 illustrate the disparity discussed. It is worth noting in particular the previously cited countries.

Yet another important factor that cannot be overlooked is the question of the importance that the voter attaches to the body that it is appointing. Although there is no doubt that the EU policy and decisions taken in the European Parliament are becoming increasingly crucial, and we have to deal with the increase in the competence of this body, most Europeans still have little interest in the elections at this level, treating them as less important (Special Eurobarometer, 2008).

This may also lead to the situation that women's representation will increase. Also important here is the informal pressure on the EU itself, that the issue of equal opportunities for women and men should be seen as a key. Perhaps this is also one of the reasons why the authorities of the party groups are willing to put women on electoral lists. Thanks to this, we can expect that their representatives will more often be included in the work of committees and parliamentary groups, under the premise of equal participation of women and men, which will translate into participation in power and influence over the shape of EU policy.

Table 4.1. Number of seats won by women in the European Parliament, taking into account the data from individual EU member states

Country	Seats	Women	Percentage
Finland	13	8	61.5
Sweden	18	10	55.6
Estonia	6	3	50.0
Netherlands	25	12	48.0
Bulgaria	17	8	47.1
Denmark	13	6	46.2
France	72	32	44.4
Austria	17	7	41.2
Slovakia	13	5	38.5
Latvia	8	3	37.5
Germany	99	37	37.4
Belgium	22	8	36.4
Hungary	22	8	36.4
Portugal	22	8	36.4
Romania	33	12	36.4
Spain	50	18	36.0
Cyprus	6	2	33.3
Luxembourg	6	2	33.3
United Kingdom	72	24	33.3
Greece	22	7	31.8
Slovenia	7	2	28.6
Ireland	12	3	25.0
Lithuania	12	3	25.0
Italy	72	16	22.2
Poland	50	11	22.0
Czech Republic	22	4	18.2
Malta	5	0	0.0
TOTAL	736	259	35.2

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (the state after the elections to the European Parliament in 2009, http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/womeninsight_en.pdf) [accessed March 2014].

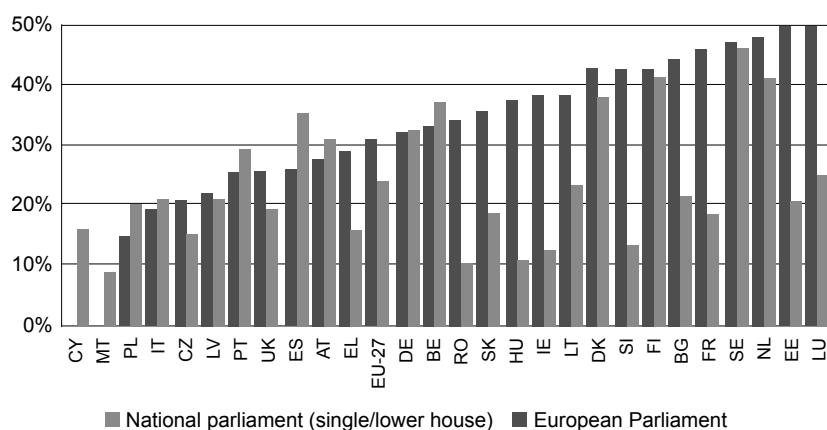


Figure 4.2. The difference between the percentage of women serving in the national parliaments and the European Parliament

Source: European Parliament, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/> [accessed March 2014].

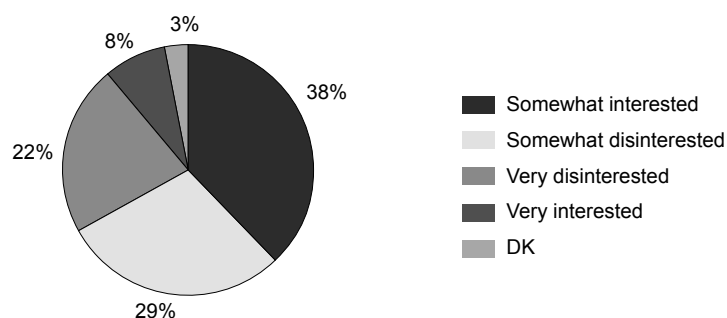


Figure 4.3. The results of studies identifying the level of interest in the elections to the European Parliament

Source: Eurobarometer, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_299_en.pdf [accessed March 2014].

Table 4.2. Participation of women in parliaments by region of the world (as of 2013)

	Single House or lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	42%	–	–
Europe – OSCE member countries including Nordic countries	24.6%	22.6%	24.2%
Americas	24.2%	23.8%	24.1%
Europe – OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	23%	22.6%	22.9%
Sub-Saharan Africa	21.1%	18.7%	21.7%
Asia	19.1%	13.8%	18.5%
Arab States	17.8%	7.7%	15.9%
Pacific	13.1%	38.6%	15.9%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> (data from 2013).

In national parliaments progress in increasing the number of women parliamentarians can also be observed. The change that has taken place since the mid-1990s is significant. At this time, the number of women present in parliamentary chambers was a few percent, and up to now this has increased significantly achieving an average value varying from 23–24% (The Party of European Socialists, 2007).

The data presented are global, but were grouped depending on the region. It is worth comparing these results with the data that were collected 10 years earlier. This will show the aforementioned change. Summary of these results gives us a picture of the transformation, which can be seen in the European countries. While the Nordic countries, which have been deliberately separated out, did not record significant progress in this area, in ten years, when it comes to general European countries belonging to the OSCE, there is a marked change. The difference is literally spectacular and reaches almost 10%, which over ten years gives an average of a 1% increase in the presence of women in parliaments per year.

Table 4.3. Participation of women in parliaments by region of the world (as of 2003)

	Single House or lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	39.7%	–	39.7%
Europe – OSCE member countries including Nordic countries	18.2%	17.5%	18.1%
Americas	17.6%	15.5%	17.2%
Europe – OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	15.4%	15.5%	15.4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	14.5%	14.3%	14.5%
Asia	14.9%	17.4%	15.2%
Arab States	11.6%	25.9%	13.1%
Pacific	6.0%	7.5%	6.2%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> (data from 2003) [accessed March 2014].

The change is not just in the national issue of sitting in legislative bodies, but we can also see another important dimension, which is women occupying key positions. Let us, therefore look at the function of Marshal, a responsible and prestigious office. For the first time a woman had the opportunity to perform this office in Austria, and this took place before the Second World War. By 1997 only in 42 countries of 186 had a woman been chosen to lead the legislative branch, and in total it took place only 78 times. It can be seen that somewhat more frequently a woman became the head of the upper house of parliament, and this may be related to the usually limited powers of this body. The situation in November 2013 developed only a little differently from what we have seen before. Namely, only 38 currently serve as the leader (Marshal) of any of the chambers, of which there are 188. It is therefore a negligible percentage of just 13.9% of the positions available (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013).

In addition to the supranational and national levels, we should also take into account the level of participation by women in local and regional bodies. Skipping these would result in inaccuracy in the analysis, which would then be incomplete and thus less authoritative. Today, however, we are looking at ever fuller implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, and this could not be performed outside the decentralized regional units.

It is no surprise that a correlation may be observed between the increased representation of women in parliaments at the national level, and their presence in gatherings at regional and local levels. A commonly occurring phenomenon should also be noted, greater representation of women in regional bodies in relation to the national. This is especially when we have a proportional system at lower levels, and a majority system at the national level. For example, in France we have a situation where at the national level there are only 19% of women, compared with 49% at the local level and 35% at the regional level (European Commission, 2009, pp. 23–24). This confirms the earlier thesis about the key influence of the electoral system on the chances of a woman gaining a seat.

In the attempt to assess the data and indicators previously presented, we should pay particular heed to percentage changes in the rate of participation of women in law- and decision-making bodies that have been observed over the space of just over a decade. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace was adopted. This document sets out the strategic objectives and actions that the international community, national governments, and civil society should take in order to promote and protect the human rights of women and girls, as an inalienable, inherent and indivisible part of universal human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women during their entire lifetimes (European Institute for Equality between Women and Men, 2012, p. 6).

The creation of the Platform for Action and the adoption of specific goals is an excellent starting point for assessing developments since that time in the representation of women in decision-making bodies. In 1995, only 10% of women sat in parliaments around the world, now it is estimated that this percentage has doubled. European Union countries are leaders in this regard, for the parliaments of the Member States are nearly a quarter women. In addition, in the twenty countries where the proportion of women is 30% or more, eight of them belong to the EU, and they are: Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Belgium, Germany, and Austria. On the other hand, in the EU we still have to deal with the countries in which the number of women sitting in legislative bodies is negligible and has remained at the same low level. In particular, this refers to Cyprus, Slovenia, Romania, and Malta, where the percentage of women parliamentarians has remained at 9%.

In the period indicated the most progress was recorded in Belgium, which increased the percentage of women elected to parliament by more than 20%. On the basis of analyses, the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) found that in countries where there was an increase to over 30% of women MPs,

firstly there is a proportional representation system, and secondly, there is some form of quota system. According to IDEA, these two factors are essential for the reduction of obstacles in the area of women's opportunities to participate in power at the national level (IDEA, 2013, pp. 14–15). At the local and regional levels, women have a much stronger voice, emphasizing their presence in legislative gatherings. The percentage of women elected to these bodies sometimes reaches almost 50%, although the average hovers around 30%.

For women in the composition of the governments of EU countries, men are the vast majority, taking a total of about 75% of ministerial positions. We do not have this type of situation in all Member States, for in the Nordic countries women are on average half of the government. In Sweden, this is on average 46%, in Finland 60%, and Norway 53%. Against this backdrop, Spain looks very positive, where the government is made up of 40% women. Unfortunately, only 8 of the EU countries can boast of having a woman as prime minister within their entire history. This refers to the UK, Portugal, Lithuania, France, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, and Poland (PES, 2007).

4.2. Poland

The Polish struggle for equal rights for women was associated with the process of raising their level of education started in the second half of the 19th century and, in 1918, obtaining political rights. These circumstances, however, were insufficient in the face of men's competition in the public sphere. Girls with higher social status did indeed participate in the educational process, but their upbringing was wholly impractical, and their education did not compare with that obtained by men. In turn, the girls of the lower classes rarely had access to the education obtained in the school system, and also had no material options. Given these relationships, women from the very beginning were condemned to occupy a lower position (Polkowska, 2012). In the interwar period there were few women MPs and senators – in total throughout the period 1919–1939, women in Poland occupied 41 parliamentary and 20 senatorial seats, which accounted for 1.9% of the Sejm and 3.8% of the Senate of the period (Fuszara, 2009, p. 187).

This situation changed in the post-war period, where in the first term women's representation in parliament was 17%, and then fell sharply to 4%, and in successive terms gradually increased and reach the highest point in 1980–1985 (Muchowiecka, 2011). As Małgorzata Fuszara (2009, p. 189) says, “it is a myth that there was a greater proportion of women in power in the period 1945–1989, and so when the official ideology appealed to slogan of equality between women and men.” Until 1989, the proportion of women in Parliament never exceeded a quarter of the total number of deputies. In the first term of the Sejm (1952–1956), women accounted for 17%, in the second term (1956–1961) – 4%, in the third

term (1961–1965) – 13%, in the fourth term (1965–1969) – 12% in the fifth term (1969–1972) – 13%, in the sixth term of office (1972–1976) – 16%, in the seventh term (1976–1980) – 20%, in the eighth term (1980–1985) – 23%, and in the ninth term of office (1985–1989) – 20% (Polkowska, 2012).

Table 4.4. The number of women deputies to the Polish Sejm in the years 1991–2005

Specification	Sejm terms				
	I	II	III	IV	V
TOTAL	44	60	60	93	94
In % of total deputies	9.6	13.0	13.0	20.2	20.4

Source: CSO report *Women in Poland*, http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/Kobiety_w_Polsce.pdf [accessed March 2014].

Currently, the share of Polish women in political structures is increasing from year to year, but it is still low. The most common barrier to women's public activities, in addition to historical reasons, are institutional, social and cultural determinants. The barriers to the access to the power structure are a series of stereotypes that impose marked gender roles, in which there is no room for political involvement by women. An important opinion-forming element are the media, giving rise to the stereotypical image of women as a housewives. Equally important impact on the participation of women in public life is a religion that sees women as the guardian of the household. A significant factor to women's political activeness is their social and economic status, a lack of sufficient financial resources, difficulties in the labour market, unemployment, and a double burden: professional work and housework (Lesiewicz, 2011).

Table 4.5. The participation of women in the Senate of the Republic of Poland in the years 1991–2005

Specification	Sejm terms				
	I	II	III	IV	V
TOTAL	8	13	12	23	13
In % of total deputies	8.0	13.0	12.0	23.0	13.0

Source: CSO report *Women in Poland*, http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/Kobiety_w_Polsce.pdf [accessed March 2014].

Also at the local government level there are significant disparities in the participation of men and women. Research shows that women are far less likely to occupy the top positions on electoral lists, which is known to have a large impact on the number of votes gained, which are most frequently given to those in first place. This helps to reduce their chance of getting a seat as a councillor and may partially explain why the number of women taking part in local elections is higher than the number of those that get into the council (Muchowiecka, 2011).

Table 4.6. The number of women councillors in municipalities and cities with county rights in 1990–2006

Specification	Gmina councils				Councils of city in cities with powiat status
	total	urban	rural	urban-rural	
27 V 1990					
Total	5652	1378	2754	1520	x
In % of total councillors	10.9	16.5	9.2	11.1	x
19 VI 1994					
Total	6913	1651	3672	1590	x
In % of total councillors	13.3	17.1	12.3	12.7	x
11 X 1998					
Total	7797	1374	4348	2075	580
In % of total councillors	15.7	19.9	14.5	16.1	19.9
27 X 2002					
Total	6725	926	4163	1636	494
In % of total councillors	17.8	21.0	17.3	17.4	23.0
12 XI 2006					
Total	8051	1031	4968	2052	490
In % of total councillors	21.3	23.3	20.8	21.6	23.2

Source: CSO report *Women in Poland*, http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/Kobiety_w_Polsce.pdf [accessed March 2014].

Table 4.7. Number of women councillors in district councils and regional assemblies in the years 1998–2006

Specification	11 X 1998		27 X 2002		12 XI 2006	
	councils of powiat	voivodship regional councils	councils of powiat	voivodship regional councils	councils of powiat	voivodship regional councils
Total	1531	93	1000	80	1045	99
In % of total councillors	14.9	10.9	15.9	14.3	16.6	17.6

Source: CSO report *Women in Poland*, http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/Kobiety_w_Polsce.pdf [accessed March 2014].

The quota mechanism for electoral lists introduced into the Polish electoral law in 2011 was an important step towards equal opportunities for men and women in the electoral process. The elections in 2011 were the first in Poland where a quota system was in force, which guaranteed at least 35% of women on electoral lists. The Quota Act was introduced on the initiative of the Women's Congress (it was a civil bill that originally required parity, i.e. half the places on the list). Electoral lists to the Sejm included 42% women, but many of these were placed such that there was no chance of a seat; only 21% of women candidates made first place. As a result of the elections to the Sejm of the current term, women account for nearly 23% of the total number of deputies. This is 3 percentage points more than

in the previous term (2007–2011). The experience of other countries that have introduced quotas shows that it takes time to make this legal mechanism result in an increase in the number of women in parliament.

In the Global Gender Gap ranking in 2011, Poland was in 42nd place among 135 countries. It was weakest precisely in politics, defined as the degree of representation of women in parliament, the number of women in positions as ministers, and women holding the office of prime minister. In the five fully democratic presidential elections which have taken place in Poland since the Second World War, women candidates have run only twice – Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz in 1995 and Henryka Bochniarz in 2005. None of them, however, reached the second round of elections. Unlike the office of the president, Poland has already had woman prime minister – on 10 July 1992 Hanna Suchocka, a representative of the Democratic Union, was appointed Prime Minister. However, she only held the post for a little over a year.

Up to 2005, the share of women in subsequent governments was minimal, except for the cabinet of Jerzy Buzek (1997–2001), in which women accounted for over 16% of the government. Most frequently there was only one woman among the ministers, and in the government of Jan Olszewski there were none at all. Only in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, with the formation of the government of Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (Law and Justice) on 31 October 2005, did the share of women in the Council of Ministers reach 20%, and the following cabinets remained consistently at the same level (Druciarek et al., 2012).

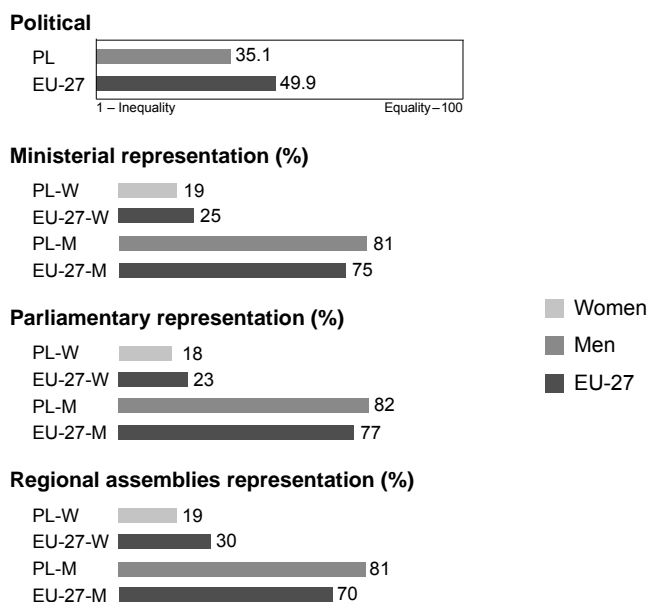


Figure 4.4. The participation of women and men in power structures and decision-making bodies in Poland in comparison with the EU average

Source: European Institute of Gender Equality, *Gender Equality Index*, <http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index#/domain/power/1?country=PL> [accessed March 2014].

Currently in the composition of the government (January 2014) of 18 ministerial portfolios 3 are in the hands of women: The Ministry of Education – Joanna Kluzik-Rostowska, Ministry of Science and Higher Education – Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development – Elżbieta Bieńkowska, who simultaneously acts as deputy leader of the Council of Ministers (Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej, 2014); this represents less than 17%.

To sum up the issue of gender considerations in Polish public life, we should refer to the *Gender Equality Index* report, presented in June 2013 by the European Institute of Gender Equality. The report examines, inter alia, the participation of women and men in power structures and decision-making bodies. According to these statistics, Poland is slightly below the EU average in terms of the involvement of women in political life.

4.3. Scandinavia

The Nordic region is considered to be the undisputed leader in the promotion and actual enactment of gender equality in public life. In asking about the source of this kind of approach, answers should clearly be sought in the Nordic model of democracy, which was formed and successfully developed over the 20th century. The determinants of this model should include openness, consensus, and pragmatism, on which in the development process in Scandinavian societies the ruling social democratic parties placed emphasis as markers of the state's welfare. It is obvious that in not all of the countries of the region has this model been implemented in the same way – despite some degree of homogenization it has shown some differences, resulting from the individual conditions in each of the countries in the region. The most advanced stage of this model has been seen in force in Norway and Sweden, somewhat less successful in this field is Denmark, and at the end of the list come Finland and Iceland (Bergquist et al., 1999, p. 5).

In addition to political factors, this strong commitment to respecting the principle of gender equality has historical roots. The realisation of the goals and aspirations of women to obtain their rightful position in the social and political life proceeded in the Nordic countries according to a schema similar to other European countries. The starting point was the traditional division of social roles, resulting in the dominance of men in prominent positions. A kind of breakthrough in this system happened, increasing women's access to formal education, and thus the professional aspirations of women started by the industrial revolution. These processes were accompanied by the development of emancipation movements whose activists emphasized the need for women to participate socially and politically.

The result of these changes was to grant women the right to vote, which took place relatively early in comparison with other European countries. First this

reform was introduced in Finland in 1906, then Norway – 1913, followed by Denmark and Iceland – 1915, and in Sweden in 1921. Although this did not lead to the introduction of a visibly increased representation of women in parliament and local government, it was undoubtedly a step towards the position of equality for both sexes, which we have in the region today. In Finland alone before the Second World War a 10-percent level of representation of women in parliament and local assemblies was achieved, and in the 60s their participation in these bodies reached around 15%.

Although at the end of the Second World War most of the provisions limiting economic, social and political activity of women had been abolished, this did not mean that the problem of discrimination based on sex was spontaneously resolved. The impetus for a debate on the roles of both sexes raging in the Nordic societies in the 1950s and 1960s was the fact that despite formal equal rights for men and women, and accompanying declarations, these were not visible in the actual situation, and discrimination was still strongly apparent in various aspects of social life.

The demands became more assertive in the early 1970s, when the Scandinavian countries were faced with the “second wave” of feminism. This was a reaction to the disenchantment which appeared in connection with the activities carried out so far in favour of equality, which, as already stated, focused primarily on formal guarantees. The changes in the law, however, did not bear fruit in terms of wage equality and access to leadership positions, and the presence of women in decision-making bodies still remained limited. At the same time they were still burdened with the responsibility for the household and childcare.

An especially dynamic development of initiatives for women’s rights was undertaken by a relatively wide range of organizations with varying degrees of formalization in Denmark, Iceland and Norway. Sweden and Finland were characterized by a lower degree of activity in this area, preferring recourse to more traditional methods of action taken by women’s political organizations. Common to all the countries in the region was the trend for a significant increase in the mobilization of women in political parties, which was reflected in the statistics on the representation of women in legislatures across the region (Skard, 2007).

Among the key determinants for these processes we should mention crucial elements for the level of participation as such, and so primarily socioeconomic factors. After the Second World War Scandinavian society noted fairly rapid economic development, and in the process of transition from industrial to post-industrial society they were able to achieve a high level of social development. Confirmation of this fact may be found in the high HDI, for which, as shown by data from the United Nations for 2012, almost all countries of the region occupy positions in the top twenty of the ranking (United Nations Development Programme, 2011).

Another important element is the electoral system effective in the Nordic countries. As already stated, the proportional system based on multi-member districts is more conducive to the electoral success of women. Indeed, if you can take a number of seats in a given constituency, political parties will be more willing to accommodate women among their candidates. On the other hand, in the case

of single-seat system, there will be a clear dominance of men, who usually occupy prominent positions in the parties and their names are associated with specific groups. As noted by Skard (2007), “In Norway, the nomination and election of women for Parliament was for a long time clearly related to the number of representatives the parties obtained in each constituency”.

However, despite the undeniably positive impact the proportional electoral system has had on the growth of women’s representation in the parliaments of the Nordic countries, it is not the determining factor. One example is Iceland, where, despite its use, the number of women parliamentarians over several decades of the 20th century was low. This was affected by such factors as: the small size of the Icelandic parliament and local councils, and the organizing of parliamentary primaries in which men were favoured. No lesser importance can be attributed to cultural factors and the structure of the economy based on agriculture and fishing, and so on sectors in which the leading role is traditionally played by men.

Table 4.8. The presence of women in the Nordic parliaments in the years 1945–1990 (%)

Year	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
1945	5	9	2	5	8
1950	8	15	0	5	10
1955	9	14	2	7	12
1960	10	14	4	9	13
1965	11	17	2	8	14
1970	11	21	5	9	15
1975	16	24	5	16	21
1980	16	26	5	24	26
1985	24	29	15	26	28
1990	31	32	21	36	38

Source: J.M. Bystydziński (1995), *Women in Electoral Politics. Lessons from Norway*, Westport CT: Praeger, p. 14.

The scope of the voters to decide on the shape of the party electoral lists may be important. The Scandinavian systems in varying degrees allow for the possibility of personalizing the vote in such a way that in addition to those proposed by the parties, voters can place the name or names of other people preferred on the ballot.

These instruments, however, would not yield results in the form of an increase in the number of women in the Nordic parliaments and local governments, if not accompanied by a range of strategies for involving them in the process of obtaining political support. Examples include the various types of campaigns, meetings, demonstrations, networking with NGOs, and inspiring public debate through the media.

Particularly noteworthy is an institution practiced from the beginning of the twentieth century in Iceland, “the female list,” which was to serve as a tool to implement the political aspirations of women from the moment they obtained their full electoral rights. It first appeared in 1908 on the initiative of women’s

organizations whose activists were running for places in Reykjavik city council. In 1922, the first Icelandic woman parliamentarian was elected from a separate list. The spokesperson for the functioning of the female list was the Women's Alliance active in the years 1983–1998 (Styrkársdóttir, 1999, pp. 88–92).

The result of these aforementioned trends were significant changes in legislation which, combined with consistently implemented activities in the field of gender mainstreaming, made the Scandinavian countries the leader when it comes to the position of both sexes in social and public life. Among the legislative changes were primarily legal solutions to combat gender discrimination in the labour market and on equality issues in the area of wages. The first country to introduce an Equal Pay Law was Iceland (1973). In 1976, this act was replaced by a larger regulation under the name of the Equal Rights Act. Similar solutions were used in Denmark (Equal Treatment Act – 1978), Sweden (1978) and Norway (1978).

It is worth noting that the Scandinavian legislative initiatives are essentially aimed in two directions (Borchorst, 1999, pp. 191–195). Firstly, there are the provisions concerning equal treatment and neutrality of gender. In each of the countries the constitutions provide for prohibition against discrimination on the basis of sex, and ordinary legislation includes provisions to exclude differences in treatment of the sexes. In this context, the Norwegian legislature defined differential treatment as “treatment which *de facto* results in an unreasonable disadvantage for one sex compared to the other” (Act no. 45 of June 9th 1978 on Gender Equality). In the light of the provisions of section 3 of The Act Relating to Gender Equality 2005, “Direct or indirect differential treatment of women and men is not permitted”. The phrase “direct differential treatment” means in this case, on the one hand, discrimination against women or men due to biological gender (sex), and on the other deterioration of women's situation because of motherhood. In turn, “indirect differential treatment” shall mean any apparently gender-neutral action that in fact has the effect of placing one of the sexes in a worse position than the other (The Act Relating to Gender Equality, 2005). Similar solutions have appeared in Finnish legislation, where the concept of discrimination is defined as that which has “*de facto* resulted in differential treatment” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Finland, 1989).

The second trend of anti-discrimination measures taken by the regulators and governments of the Nordic countries are initiatives that can be characterized as positive discrimination. These include all types of manifestations of preferential treatment of women as the under-represented sex. This type of instrument in the fight against discrimination on grounds of sex raises some doubts and has its strong opponents. They point to the fact that positive discrimination leads to the violation of the rights of the individual, and biological sex should not be a criterion for the allocation of jobs or places at universities.

The preferential treatment of women or representatives of disadvantaged groups isolated because of criteria other than gender is also recognized as a factor negatively affecting the result of the selection process of candidates for a particular position, as a person with lower qualifications may be selected. The proponents of

the mechanism of positive discrimination indicates that stereotypes and prejudices against women deeply rooted in the social consciousness can only be effectively eliminated by taking radical or controversial steps. The removal of structural barriers to women's access to high political, leadership, and scientific positions is recognized at the same time as a priority that is worth pursuing, even if part of the public expresses their scepticism towards these actions.

The scope of positive discrimination in each of the Scandinavian countries in the region is diverse. For example, in Norway, the aforementioned Act Relating to Gender Equality concerning affirmative action in favour of one of the sexes says that:

Different treatment that promotes gender equality in conformity with the purpose of this Act is not a contravention of section 3. The same applies to special rights and rules are regarding measures that are intended to protect women in connection with pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. The King may prescribe provisions as to which types of different treatment are permitted in pursuance of this Act, including provisions regarding affirmative action in favour of men in connection with the education and care of children.

The solution, whose introduction in the 1970s was decided on by party authorities in the Nordic countries in order to increase the representation of women in top positions, was the quota system. The initiators of the introduction of at least 40 percent representation of the sexes in all party boards and committees were the Swedish liberals, and the socialists in Norway followed their example. In 1975, this resulted in making Berit Ås party leader, and in 1979 – the election of Liss Schanke as Secretary General of this organization. Subsequently, the quota system was introduced by the Labour Party, the Centre and the Christian People's Party.

It should be emphasized that the quota system has found its application not only in internal party politics associated with their management, but also in the general elections to representative bodies. Initially (1975) in Norway a quota of 1/3 was adopted, and then it was increased to 40%. The Norwegian Labour Party went the furthest, when in 2005 it adopted a quota of 50% (Arbeiderpartiet, 2005).

It should be noted that in all the Nordic countries, the quotas are voluntary, as there are no legal instruments which would impose on political parties a requirement ensure a minimum representation of women in decision-making bodies, either at parliamentary or local government levels. Among the Nordic countries, Finland has not adopted the quota system in their party system. However, thanks to the activity of women's movements, women's representation in the representative bodies in the country has clearly risen. Also interesting is the case of Denmark, where after some time two of the parties deviated from the quota system due to the fact that it did not give significant results.

On the other hand, in the case of public bodies quotas were legally sanctioned during the 1980s. This practice was initiated in Norway, where in 1973 this system came into force in state committees, councils and boards of institutions whose members were appointed by nomination. Each of them was obliged to put forward a male and female candidates for the vacant post, and the final selection was the

Table 4.9. Vertical political segregation: Proportion of women in a number of key political positions in the Nordic countries in the 1990s and 2005–2009

Positions	Denmark		Finland		Iceland		Norway		Sweden	
Parliament and government/year	1994	2007	1995	2009	1995	2009	1993	2005	1994	2006
MPs	34	38	34	42	25	43	39	38	40	47
Speakers (or equivalent)	40	0	67	0	0	100	17	17	50	50
Committees	38	38	31	39	29	34	–	36	44	47
Committee chairpersons	31	38	20	41	25	50	33	31	47	44
Ministers	35	42	41	60	10	42	42	47	50	41
Municipalities/year	1997	2005	1996	2008	1994	2006	1995	2007	1994	2006
Municipal assemblies	27	27	31	37	25	36	33	38	41	42
Diplomatic service/year	1995	2009	1997	2008	1995	2008	1995	2008	1995	2007
Ambassadors	3	15	7	27	5	14	9	28	10*	32*

* Both heads of missions and ambassadors to international bodies.

Source: K. Niskanen (ed.) (2011), *Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries*, Oslo: Norden, p. 23.

choice of the relevant minister, taking care that proportional representation of women was preserved. Rules determining the participation of representatives of both sexes in Norwegian public life defined by the provisions of Section 21 of The Act Relating to Gender Equality, referring to the representation of both sexes in all public committees:

When a public body appoints or elects committees, governing boards, councils, boards, etc. each sex shall be represented as follows: 1. If the committee has two or three members, both sexes shall be represented. 2. If the committee has four or five members, each sex shall be represented by at least two members. 3. If the committee has six to eight members, each sex shall be represented by at least three members. 4. If the committee has nine members, each sex shall be represented by at least four members, and if the committee has a greater number of members, each sex shall be represented by at least 40 per cent of the members. 5. The provisions of nos. 1–4 shall apply correspondingly to the election of deputy members. Exceptions may be made from the provisions of the first paragraph if there are special circumstances that make it obviously unreasonable to demand that the requirements be fulfilled. The provisions of this section shall not apply to committees, etc. which pursuant to statute shall consist only of members from directly elected assemblies (The Act relating to Gender Equality, 2005).

Conclusions

Based on the above considerations, the conclusion seems justified that a group of complex factors decide on increased presence of women in political life in modern societies. Undoubtedly, the solution in the form of the application of a quota system would provide a clear answer to the question of the success of the

Scandinavian countries in balancing the sex ratio in politics. However, it should be noted that the fact that the representation of women in parliaments in some of the Nordic countries was already noticeable before the political parties began to use this instrument. Thus, as a factor for achieving this state of affairs the fact should be recognized that it was largely the activity of women themselves and their organizations, also in the historical perspective, associated with their struggle for the right to vote. Also, the type of political system, so that the chances of finding women on the electoral lists of each party have become larger, is not irrelevant here. However, the introduction of quotas only strengthened this trend, paving the way for women party candidates to seats in parliaments or to posts related to the exercise of decision-making functions.

For comparison, it is worth referring to the statistics showing the effects of quotas, and therefore the degree of parliamentary representation of women in other regions of the world (Table 4.9). Based on these data, the conclusion can be drawn that the application of the quota system in electoral processes is becoming a global trend, and not limited to the developed countries of Western democracies and societies that have a historically established tradition of women's emancipation. However, this solution should not be treated as an unfailing instrument, which will have the desired effect in every case. It may be only a formal solution, devoid of factual reflection in the political reality, if it is not accompanied by a broader context.

Table 4.10. World ranking list of female representation in parliament

Country	Women in parliament (%)	Type of quota system	Electoral system
1. Rwanda	56.3 (2008)	Quota law	PR*
2. Sweden	47.3 (2006)	Party quotas	PR
3. South Africa	44.5 (2009)	Party quotas	PR
4. Cuba	43.2 (2008)	Non-democratic election	SM**
5. Iceland	42.9 (2009)	Party quotas	PR
6. Finland	42.0 (2007)	–	PR
7. Argentina	40.0 (2007)	Quota law	PR
8. Norway	39.6 (2009)	Party quotas	PR
9. Costa Rica	38.6 (2006)	Quota law	PR
10. Denmark	37.4 (2007)	–	PR
11. Angola	37.3 (2008)	Quota law	PR
12. Belgium	36.7 (2007)	Quota law	PR
13. The Netherlands	36.7 (2006)	Party quotas	PR
14. Spain	36.3 (2008)	Quota law	PR
15. Mozambique	34.8 (2004)	Party quotas	PR
16. New Zealand	33.6 (2008)	–	Mix***

*PR – proportional representation (party lists with multiple candidates),

**SM – single mandate constituencies (each party nominates candidate who received the majority of the votes,

***Mix of proportional representation and single-mandate constituencies.

Source: Interparliamentary Union, www.ipu.org; International IDEA, Stockholm University, www.quota-project.org.

First of all, the type of quota system used should be consistent with the relevant national electoral system. Second, the system should be implemented in such a way that the electoral lists use a mechanism for placing the names of male and female candidates alternately. This is justified to the extent that even if a 40% of quota is introduced, the names of the women candidates may be at the end of the electoral lists, and so the likelihood of their winning a seat will be much smaller. Another requirement associated with the quota system should be the existence of a sanction mechanism if the parties fail to comply with the regulation, for example in the form of refusal to register an electoral list so constructed (Dahlerup, 1999, p. 65).

Table 4.11. Women and men in the selected parliamentary committees (%) and total number of members/committees in the selected years

Committee	Denmark			Finland			Iceland			Norway			Sweden		
	F. %	M. %	Tot.	F. %	M. %	Tot.	F. %	M. %	Tot.	F. %	M. %	Tot.	F. %	M. %	Tot.
Labour Market and Equality	29	71	17	65	35	17	–	–	–	42	58	12	59	41	17
Civil	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	41	59	17
Finance	24	76	17	29	71	21	18	82	11	11	89	18	41	59	17
Defence	0	100	17	29	71	17	–	–	–	13	87	8	47	53	17
Justice	41	59	17	47	53	17	–	–	–	50	50	10	53	47	17
Constitutional Affairs (Judicial and Constitutional Review)	–	–	–	41	59	17	44	56	9	22	78	9	41	59	17
Culture and Education; Family and Culture	47	53	17	–	–	–	–	–	–	64	36	11	53	47	17
Environment and Agriculture; Environment and Energy	–	–	–	59	41	17	56	44	9	33	67	15	41	59	17
Agriculture and Forestry; Agriculture and Fisheries	24	76	17	24	76	17	11	89	9	–	–	–	–	–	–
Industry (Trade)	35	65	17	41	59	17	33	67	9	21	79	14	47	53	17
Taxation	29	71	17	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	41	59	17
Social Insurance	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	35	65	17
Social Issues	71	29	17	65	35	17	56	44	9	–	–	–	53	47	17
Transport and Communications	12	88	17	29	71	17	33	67	9	27	73	15	47	53	17
Education	59	41	17	53	47	17	67	33	9	47	53	15	53	47	17
Foreign Affairs	35	65	17	35	65	17	56	44	9	50	50	17	47	53	17
EU and Europe	47	53	17	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	41	59	17

* The data relates to the following years: Denmark, 2003–04 (total number of parliamentary committees, 23); Finland, 2008 (total number of committees, 16); Iceland, 2009 (total number of committees, 12); Norway, 2005 (total number of committees, 13); and Sweden, 2006 (total number of committees, 16).

Source: K. Niskanen (ed.) (2011), *Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries*, Oslo: Norden, p. 53.

In the context of initiatives for equal representation of women in representative bodies exercising functions and decision-making, it is worth noting that, even in countries which have achieved a satisfactory level in terms of numbers, this is not fully reflected in the implementation of gender equality in the area of politics. This is because the practice, often used, is to limit access to certain areas of political activity. There is still a well-established social, stereotypical division into areas traditionally “reserved” for representatives of both sexes, such as social affairs or education.

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