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Woman and European Parliament: Parity Goals

Introduction

Finland has just made history! In their most recent election, they voted in Sanna Marin, a female, and now, at age 34, the youngest sitting head of government in the world. On top of this exciting and groundbreaking feat, she will also head a four-party coalition that are all ran by women; three of whom are in their early thirty's. Not to mention she gave birth to a daughter just a year ago. (Los Angeles Times 2019) It seems like she is doing it all. Has she found the secret to having both family and a career? In the political world this is virtually unheard of. But why do we even care about political parity? Didier Ruedin said it best when he said,

“The proportion of women in parliament is of concern because of justice- the view that all humans are of equal worth, and therefore have an equal right to take part in decision-making”

It is well known to most people that when it comes to politics, it is usually a man's game, especially in the United States. In Europe, however, the numbers have been on the rise, albeit slowly, in both individual countries and in the European Union. In Great Britain, for example the number of women in parliament has risen from less than five percent in 1972 to thirty two

percent in 2017. (ipu.org) Most scholars attribute this rise to gender quota laws that have been implemented throughout Europe. A gender quota law is a law that requires a country to elect a certain percentage of women to office. However, despite having these quotas in place, most governments are still not on equal terms when it comes to women versus men representation. This begs the question: What are the factors that affect the number of women holding political positions in European Parliaments?

I believe the factors that contribute to the low numbers of women representation in European parliaments are directly affected by certain factors that are both limiting and detrimental to women and the quest for gender parity in politics.

Hypothesis 1a: When the double bind is in effect, woman do not run for parliament.

Hypothesis 1b: When women hold local offices, they go on to win higher level positions.

Hypothesis 1c: When non quota strategies are implemented, women run for office.

Hypothesis 1d: The type of Electoral system in place will either help or hinder women running for parliament.

First, I will discuss the research that supports the factors mentioned in my hypothesis'. I will introduce the research that has already been done using specific cases, and attempt to present data that already exists, to help support my hypothesis. Second, I will discuss the independent variables and I will consider the methods of data and analysis that I would have implemented had

we been required to fully execute the actual research numbers and data methods. Lastly, I will conclude with a summary of my findings, opinions and ideas for further research.

Literature Review

Although the variables that may affect whether or not a woman will run for a political position are great and wide-ranging, there has been research done on several of these factors. I will mostly focus on the research that has been done in Europe.

Variables Limiting Women

I will first start with the factor of the double bind. A double bind, when in reference to women, is the idea of the conflicting messages that are given to women, that often produce a double standard. For example; She must always be feminine, but that may lead to others saying she will not be a good leader, but then if she shows a strong more masculine side, then she may be thought of as being overbearing or a “Bitch”.(Dolan et al 2016)

More often than not, a double bind emerges from the culture surrounding the bind. In Ireland the double bind is very much present today due to conflicting morals that stem from the country’s historical ties to the Catholic Church. In the past women were made to dress and act innocent and uphold the idea of maintaining a chaste identity. (Inglis 2012) The traditional role

of wife and mother were to be of the up most importance in Irish society. This can play against a female candidate because often the caretaker identity is seen as weak and lacking the necessary leadership qualities to be a strong political leader. Inglis (2012) highlights the double bind in Ireland thoroughly, using a rape case from 2009 as an example. In his paper, he talks about the how the Irish Catholic religion is still in the forefront of how the society conducts itself, however, with the influx of mainstream media that portrays more sexually freeing images, it reinforces the double bind of family roles in context with women's sexuality. This double bind led 50 men to line up in a court room and shake a hand of a convicted rapist just before a judge sentenced him to seven years in prison.

In addition, when it comes to these role conflicts Kallah et al writes, "it is still common for powerful men to have stay at home wives to manage their households and rear their children, whereas women who find the time and energy for politics are often those who have forgone the traditional family role in favor of public life." She also mentions, that even if they do have families, but do not project a maternal type attitude, they are still chastised for coming across as being too ambitious and cold (Kalla et al 2018) Either way they cannot seem to win. The double bind issue of family roles, therefore, hinders many women from even entering the political arena in the first place.

Variables Helping Women

One factor that may actually help women in their quest for political power, is the fact that women do well at local levels, and that can be a terrific way for women to then advance to more powerful levels of political prowess. (Dolan et al 2016) One example of this is, when Irish women are elected at a local level, they are more likely to be elected at Dáil Eirean, Dáil Eirean

is the Irish Lower house of Representatives. According to Buckley et al, who did an extensive research design comparing the houses of Irish Parliament, concluded that, local government service “helps level the playing field” and, their research also stated that “Among candidates with local experience, women candidates receive a higher proportion of quota votes and are more likely to win elections than women candidates without local experience.” One reason for this, is because in Ireland, the tradition of localism still exists. This is the idea that if you are local you will put the needs of the constituents ahead of political agenda. In Ireland, localism even trumps political party affiliation.

Other Variables

Even though it is general knowledge that gender quotas have helped increase the number of women in European parliaments, it is important to mention specific non-quota strategies that can do the same thing. In a research article written by Krook and Norris (2014) they discuss the issue that although gender quotas are increasing the number of women to elected office, that quotas alone will not be enough to reach political parity. They state, “The diversity of measures uncovered- implemented by civil society groups, political parties, parliament and state agencies- reveals a broad array of creative solutions that might be pursued”. They go on to mention such strategies as, “recasting the political recruitment process to motivate more women to consider a political career, encourage political parties to select more female candidates, or enhance women’s prospects of electoral success”. The authors explain that the people behind the scenes need to do their part in implementing these strategies so that women do not have to rely on gender quotas to move their number towards an upward trajectory. That it is up to us to change societies

views in relation to women politicians and not for governments to force women politicians on society.

Variables That May Help or Hinder Women

The last, factor that affects political parity as it stands now, is how the electoral system itself is set up. Across Europe Parliament use a system that is often referred to as a PR system. This means Proportional Representation. Proportional Representation basically means, that if a certain government party wins a certain percentage of the vote then that is how many seats it will have in the government, in other word if it wins fifteen percent of the votes then it gets fifteen percent of the seats available in the house. This Proportional Representation system can be either open listed or close listed. When a system is close listed is mean that the voter has no influence on the list provided and can only really vote for the party itself. If the list is open, then, the voter has some influence over the list and can select individual candidates rather than just a party.

Rittberger et al, (2015) expands on this idea, and talks about how the fact that if a party list is open or closed, directly affects who is going to win and who takes the seats elected. She also expands on this idea, stating that, who is on the list and in what order they are listed is very impactful to who is voted in. In other words, when we are talking about female candidates, it is important for the list to be not only open, but for female candidates to be listed near the top so that they are in front and center, in order for them to have the best chance of being voted into the position to which they are running.

A study done by Górecki and Kukolowicz, uses two consecutive elections, where gender quotas are required to prove the point that they help in achieving gender equality in elections.

However, it is clear that by the end of the study they show, that yes, it helps jump start the numbers, but also shows that other factors come into play as well. In fact, in their conclusion they write, “Second, relevant background-especially political experience- increase substantially the probability of a candidate winning elected office”. They then go on to say that “Finally, when quotas are in play open-list PR allows us to see adequately the gender bias held by both parties’ selectorates’ and the electorate. In Poland, the extent of both types of bias seemed to be substantial enough to preserve the rather slow pace of the gradual increase in women’s descriptive representation observed over the last two decades”. So, what they are saying is that we need to look at more than just having the required number in seats, we need to look deeper below the surface to figure out how to get beyond just requiring a certain number of women in office.

Rittberger et al. (2014) also wrote another article that talks a little bit more about not only the PR systems but the rules that accompany the systems and how that in of itself impacts political parity. This particular article focuses on the European Parliament and says that in general it is one of the most “gender equal elected bodies in the world”. However, the article goes on to explain, that once again achieving political parity is more than just one thing. Yes, having an open listed PR electoral system helps, but you must also as, Rittberger et al says, “take into account things such as ideological orientation of political parties, the cultural orientation of societies, socioeconomic factors, the role of women in society and the timing of women’s enfranchisement”. In other words, you can not narrow the scope down to just one factor. You have to take a macro and a micro view of society and where it is at when it comes to a so-called woman’s place in society, and that will in turn affect a women’s place in government.

Data and Methodology

For this section we are not required to do the actual research. But if I were to run a study, I would need both qualitative and quantitative data to test my hypotheses'. There is already an abundance of quantitative measures on the website ipu.org. I would also implement a survey where I would ask many European women already holding office at the various levels, from city positions up to parliament and including the European Parliament questions regarding how they came to run for their political position. I would ask qualitative information such as; what variables helped or hindered your ability or desire to run for political office. The variables would be, socioeconomic factors, family roles, family responsibilities, party recruitment issues and cultural issues. After receiving the responses, I could then quantitate the answers into a regression to see in fact if my hypotheses are proven correct. I would also do several case studies where I could interview the female politicians in detail regarding the before, during, and possibly the after (if they are done with their duties) and find out what affected their running for office. I would guess, however, based upon the research that has already done, that my hypothesis regarding the double bind is what hinders women running for politics therefore contributing to the lower numbers. I would also say that running for local office will help a woman and therefore help the numbers rise. Concerning which PR systems are employed, I would say can help or can hinder the number of women elected based upon whether it is an open or closed system. The third hypothesis regarding the other various factors is something that I think should be further investigated due to the lack this information regarding European women. There are extensive studies in the United States to which further research could be based upon.

Conclusion

For this paper we have explored some of the many factors that affect the number of women in European parliaments. I have shown that the double bind along with the traditional female roles that many European countries still hold, have a direct effect on the number of women in European parliaments. I have also shown that when women run for local office it attends to their credibility and help springboard them to upper levels of political office. I have also shown that although gender quotas help increase number at first, one needs to take a closer look at the other contributing factors that come into play such as socioeconomic factors, party recruitment and cultural factors. Lastly, I have shown that the type of electoral system a country has also directly affects how many women are elected to office. I would also argue that more extensive research needs to be done into the other limiting factors that are mentioned as there seems to be a research gap into the individual micro factors that may affect women from running for parliaments in the first place.

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