CHAPTER 3

The Political Representation of Women over Time

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Over the past 100 years, the world has witnessed a remarkable transformation in women's representation in politics. In 1900, no woman had ever been elected or appointed to a national legislature. That changed in 1907 when Finland became the first country to elect women to parliament. In 1946, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was the first country to reach 10% women in its national legislature. Today, women make up over 50% of the national legislature in two countries (64% in Rwanda and 53% in Bolivia). Further, 80% of countries have at least 10% women in their national legislatures, and women are 23% of parliaments on average worldwide (IPU 2016).

Figure 3.1 illustrates the overall trend in women's representation from 1945 to 2015. The upward trajectory is clear, from less than 3% women in parliaments on average in 1945 to over 20% today. Although women remain underrepresented in politics in most countries of the world, the growth in women's political representation is one of the most important trends of the past 100 years. Still, it is important to recognize that women remain underrepresented in most national legislatures. Women make up half of the population of every country in the world, but 20% of countries today have fewer

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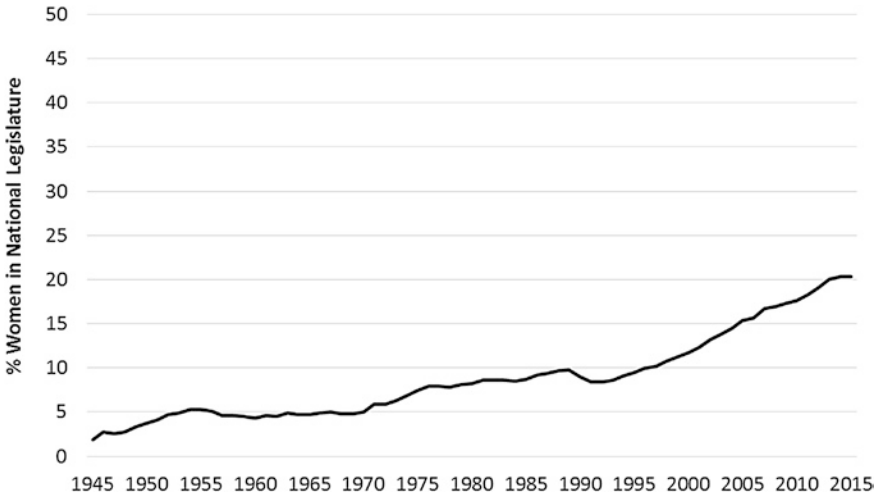

Fig. 3.1 Women's political representation, 1945–2015

than 10% women representing that half. Fourteen countries have less than 5% women in their national legislature, and 5 countries have no women at all. Despite remarkable gains in some countries, therefore, women have overall made less progress in the political arena than in education or in the labor force.

What this brief introduction to the history of women's representation also indicates is significant variation across countries. In some countries, such as Sweden, South Africa, and Rwanda, women have made remarkable progress in their political representation. In other countries, the struggle for equal representation proceeds slowly. Within and between countries, some populations, religions, and governments remain openly hostile to the notion of women in politics. Below, we discuss global patterns of representation over time and briefly describe some of the most common explanations for variation in women's representation. But first, we turn to a discussion of why it is important to elect women.

Why It Is Important to Elect Women

Does it matter if all political decision makers are men? In principle, the answer could be no. But in practice, the answer is often yes. In principle, most laws are gender neutral, and elected representatives pay attention to all of their constituents equally. In practice, however, feminist political theorists have argued that the appearance of neutrality toward gender or equality between men and women in government actually hides substantial gender inequality. Theorists such as Carole Pateman (1988, 1989), Anne Phillips (1991, 1995), and Iris Young (1990) have shown that abstract terms used

in political theory, such as *individual* or *citizen*, actually signify White men. Even more forceful arguments say that the state was structured from its inception to benefit men, both in Western (Lerner 1986; MacKinnon 1989) and non-Western countries (Charrad 2001).

Generally, two different types of arguments are used to justify women's political representation. First, justice arguments suggest that women should be represented in politics, full stop. Because women constitute about half of the population in every country, women should also be half of elected and appointed leaders. Even if men and women in politics author bills, vote, lobby, and distribute resources in exactly the same way as men, women have a right to equal representation. A second set of arguments focus on the utility, or usefulness, of having women represented in politics. According to this line of thinking, women's presence is expected to change politics or society in some way. Whether it is improving the quality of deliberation, transforming the kinds of laws that are passed, or signaling to young women that politics is not solely a "man's game," utility arguments emphasize the difference women's representation makes. Looking more closely at justice and utility arguments that justify women's political representation, it is clear that arguments vary depending upon what is meant by "representation"—formal, descriptive, substantive, or symbolic representation.

Women's Formal Representation

Historically, the first arguments for women's representation called for women's formal representation—women's legal right to participate in politics alongside men. Formal representation requires the removal of legal barriers to women voting and standing for public office. To put it simply, women and men must be offered the same opportunities to participate in politics. Arguments for women's formal representation are typically framed in terms of justice. The language of rights and equality permeates the call to change laws and remove obstacles to women's participation.

However, allowing women to participate in politics legally does not guarantee that women will vote, run, or rise to political leadership. Today, all countries in the world have granted women the right to vote and stand for election, if men have those rights. But as noted earlier, many countries have less than 20% women in their national legislatures. Equal opportunity does not automatically result in women's representation in sizeable numbers.

Women's Descriptive Representation

During the 1980s and 1990s, faced with the slow rate of change in the number of women entering politics, feminist political theorists began to articulate a different conception of equal representation that focused on women's presence (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1991, 1995; Sapiro 1982;

Williams 1998; Young 1990). They called for descriptive representation—that elected bodies should share key characteristics with the citizens who elect them. If women are half of the population, they should also hold half of the seats in legislative and executive bodies. Over the same period, women activists around the world began making similar claims, calling for women's inclusion in political decision making.

Certainly, some contend that women have the right to be present in democratic institutions and the right to be represented in equal numbers as men. Yet, arguments for descriptive representation also go beyond justice arguments. Descriptive representation is expected to matter precisely because women and other marginalized groups are thought to be uniquely suited to represent themselves in political institutions (Williams 1998). As a consequence of their shared position in society, in the economy, and in the family, and their shared history of oppression, members of subordinated groups are expected to better represent the interests of group members (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Williams 1998). Consider language from the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which states this directly: "Women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account" (United Nations 1995, paragraph 181).

It is important to understand that this way of thinking was a radical departure from previous conceptions of representative democracy. Indeed, for two centuries of democratic life in the USA, wealthy White men were often seen as capable of representing all of their constituents, including the poor, people of color, and women, just as well as they could represent the interests of wealthy White men. But, feminist political theorists challenged this view. As Anne Phillips (1991, p. 65) articulates, "while we may all be capable of that imaginative leap that takes us beyond our own situation, history indicates that we do this very partially, if at all." Women have different interests than do men, and those interests cannot be represented exclusively by men; therefore, women must be present themselves in the political arena.

Women's Substantive Representation

A third form of women's representation—substantive representation—takes some of the emphasis off of women's presence and puts it on advocacy on behalf of women. Substantive representation requires that politicians speak for women's interests and act to support women's issues. Advocates of substantive representation point out that *standing for* is not the same as *acting for* (Pitkin 1967). Increasing the numbers of women in politics is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for women's interests to be served. Women politicians must willing to and able to represent those interests.

Arguments about the need to address women's substantive interests often focus on the difference women make. For instance, research shows

that women have demonstrably different policy priorities than men (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Gerrity et al. 2007; Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Swers 1998). In some cases, these differences in preferences translate to differences in laws. For example, men are less likely than women to initiate and pass laws that serve women's and children's interests (Berkman and O'Connor 1993; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Taylor-Robinson and Heath 2003; Childs and Withey 2004; Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Htun et al. 2013). Arguments for women's substantive representation often point to such evidence, articulating the need for women's interests to be served.

Women's Symbolic Representation

A final set of arguments involves symbolic representation—the "feeling of being fairly or effectively represented" (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005, p. 407; Pitkin 1967). When there are more women visible in politics, it acts as a signal to women citizens that they are represented and that politics may be receptive to them. "Just as the exclusion of women from politics at an elite level sends the implicit message that politics is a 'man's game'…the inclusion of women in politics at an elite level sends messages to women that politics is a woman's game too" (Barnes and Burchard 2013, p. 770). Regardless of whether women's presence matters for policy, their inclusion matters in other important ways.

Arguments for women's representation that focus on the symbolic realm generally articulate two different kinds of claims. One justification is that women political leaders act as role models for young girls and women. Women's political leadership may increase girls' career aspirations and educational attainment, women's civic engagement, and women's and self-esteem (Barnes and Burchard 2013; Beaman et al. 2012; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Fridkin and Kenney 2014; High-Pippert and Comer 1998; Johnson 2003; Reingold and Harrell 2010; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007). Role models effects can be political—women inspiring other women to participate in politics—or can be more general—improving the lives of women and girls in other ways.

A second set of arguments suggest that including women in visible positions of power may have transformative effects beyond girls and women. Women's political representation might send messages to men and boys that women are capable of leading. As Jane Mansbridge argues (1999, p. 649), if groups are excluded from politics, this creates the perception that persons in these groups are "not fit to rule" (Mansbridge 1999, p. 649). Other symbolic arguments sometimes generalize the benefits of women's representation to all of society. For example, having a diverse set of leaders may transform the ways that people feel about the democracies in which they live, and how constituents interact with their representatives.

The Quality of Representation Itself

A final utility argument is that women's representation may improve the quality of political decision making. When women are brought into the fold, it doubles the pool of talent from which leaders can be drawn. When women are boxed out of politics, valuable human resources are wasted (Norderval 1985, p. 84). Women's representation should also increase the diversity of ideas, values, priorities, and political styles that are represented. And, diversity should also make political decision making more flexible and capable of change. Having only the ideas and perspectives of men represented in a country's polity could make a country less flexible to changes in its internal or international environment.

Global Patterns in the Election of Women to Parliaments

Next, we consider how women's descriptive representation has changed over time. As Fig. 3.1 indicates, women's representation in national legislatures increased dramatically over the course of the twentieth century. Women moved from no representation in any parliament in 1900 to an average of 12% across the world's parliaments in 2000. Between 2000 and 2010, the average number of women in parliaments nearly doubled, reaching 19%. Today, women are 23% of parliaments on average worldwide.

But growth in women's representation over the course of the twentieth century varies widely among countries. In some countries, women have become commonplace as members of parliament (MPs), reaching 20, 30%, and even 50% of legislatures. In many other countries, however, descriptive representation for women has proceeded slowly, and women remain barely visible in legislatures. Some countries demonstrate that women can lose representation even after they have gained it. Trajectories of growth, or the pace of increases in women's representation, also vary substantially from country to country. In some countries, women appear in parliaments in substantial numbers by the 1970s, whereas in others, it would take until the 1990s to gain anything beyond token levels of representation. Women remain minimally represented, demonstrating little change, in other countries.

To provide an overview of the historical growth and decline in women's descriptive representation across countries, this section provides an overview of several typical paths. We adapt Paxton and Hughes (2016)'s country parliamentary histories into four basic paths: (1) No Change, (2) Incremental Gains, (3) Fast-Track Growth, and (4) Plateau. Here, we summarize each historical path, running from 1945 to 2010, and provide example countries.

No Change

The first historical trajectory is one of stability. Countries with nearly identical levels of women's representation from 1945 to 2010 follow a "No Change"

historical trajectory. Apart from the world's few remaining Communist countries with around 20% women over the entire 65 year period (e.g., China and Vietnam), most of the countries in this group never elected a significant number of women to their parliament. A good example of this trajectory is Georgia, which elected 7.1% women to its first parliament in 1991 and continued to hover within a few percentage points of that number for the next 20 years. Panel A of Fig. 3.2 presents an example of a low No Change trajectory—Lebanon—and an example of a high No Change trajectory—China.

Other countries have stayed at less than 5% women for decades. Many of these countries are in the Middle East and North Africa, including Kuwait, Lebanon, and Yemen. The concentration of countries that historically never incorporated women into politics in a few regions of the world suggests that there is something in these regions that acts as a barrier to women's political representation. Research suggests that one of these barriers is culture (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Paxton 1997; Paxton and Kunovich 2003; Paxton and Hughes 2016). Negative cultural beliefs toward women are based in either religious traditions or cultural attitudes suggesting that women should not participate in the political realm.

Incremental Gains

A second historical trajectory is one of "Incremental Gains." The key feature of this trajectory is that, regardless the level of representation women were able to obtain, the process was slow, steady, and incremental in any given year.

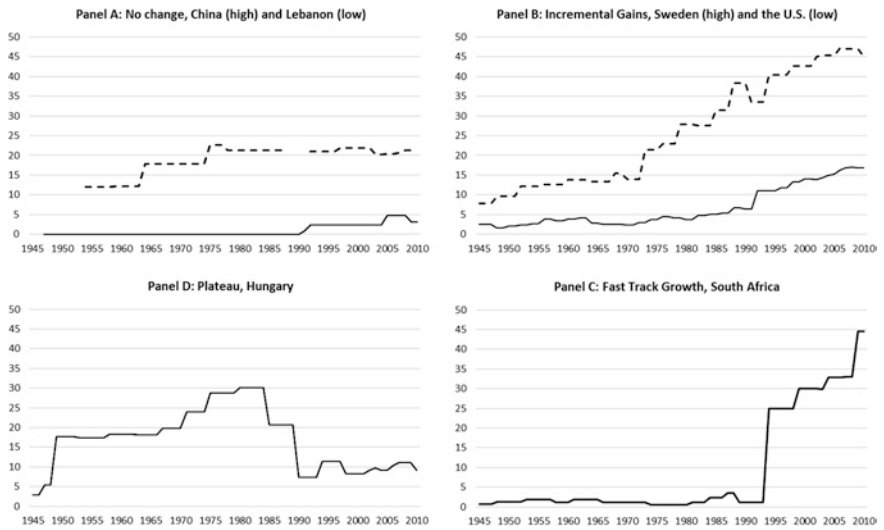

Fig. 3.2 Sample trajectories of women's political representation, 1945–2010

A diverse array of countries falls into this category, including countries from the West, Latin America, and Africa.

Incremental growth can lead to very high or still fairly low levels of representation for women. The Incremental Gains category includes some of the countries with the highest levels of women's parliamentary representation in the world in 2010: Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, and Denmark. All of these countries have more than 35% women in their parliaments. Further, among this group of countries, the timing of women's gains in political power started earlier than in other countries, often beginning their incline in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Finland and Sweden, for example, followed this trajectory, both crossing the 30% women in parliament threshold by 1985. Other countries in this broad category began their incline a little bit later and did not achieve quite as high levels of representation. For example, Austria did not make significant gains until the early 1990s.

What accounts for countries on a high Incremental Gains trajectory? First, many countries that made it the furthest through Incremental Gains are Scandinavian countries, and this reaffirms the importance of regional differences, and culture, in women's representation (Bystydzienski 1995; Rule 1987). But more is going on than simply a culture of equality. Countries in this category, too, often had a proportional representation (PR) system. Proportional representation electoral systems are considered more beneficial for women's representation than majoritarian electoral systems (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Matland 2005; Norris 1985, Paxton 1997; Paxton et al. 2010; Rule 1987).

Of course, Incremental Gains can also be quite minimal. Some countries have experienced some change in women's representation over time, but the increases are marginal. An example is Brazil, which today has 10% women in its national legislature. Ireland and the USA are other examples. Today, both have achieved slightly higher numbers than in the past—Ireland has 16% women and the USA has 19%—but progress remains slow. Panel B of Fig. 3.2 tracks the USA over time as a good example of the low Incremental Gains trajectory and Sweden as an example of the high Incremental Gains trajectory.

Fast-Track Growth

In strong contrast to the Incremental Gains trajectory is the "Fast-Track Growth" trajectory. Countries following this trajectory experience extremely large gains in women's representation in short periods of time—often a single election cycle. Even though countries following this trajectory vary substantially in the timing and extent of their jump in women's representation, they all experience rapid increases. Rwanda's representation, for example, jumped from 25.7 to 48.8% in 2003, a gain of 23.1% in a single year.

It is no coincidence that countries on a Fast-Track Growth trajectory often experienced their jump in representation from the mid-1990s through the present. During that period, countries around the world began to implement

gender quotas in which individual parties or country constitutions or electoral laws mandate a certain percentage of women candidates or parliamentarians (Hughes et al. 2017). The vast majority of countries on the Fast-Track Growth trajectory introduced gender quotas into law just before large gains were made. For example, between 1994 and 1995, after the major political party in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), adopted a 30% quota for women, women's share of parliamentary seats rose from 1.2 to 25.0%—a 23.8% gain. Similar is the Iraq case, whose 2004 interim constitution introduced a quota requiring that one-quarter of parliamentary seats be filled by women. The 25% quota in Iraq led to a 24 point increase in women's parliamentary representation. Panel C of Fig. 3.2 illustrates the Fast-Track Growth category using the example of South Africa.

Noticeably, Rwanda, South Africa, and Iraq are all countries that adopted quotas as they were transitioning out of armed independence struggles. Many of the fast-track countries experienced recent civil wars, or other major armed struggles. As countries transition from war to peace, governments draft new constitutions, change their electoral systems, and adopt gender quotas, all of which may increase women's political representation (Anderson and Swiss 2014; Fallon et al. 2012; Hughes 2009; Hughes and Tripp 2015; Tripp 2016). Wars also transform societies in other important ways. Women's participation as soldiers and their activism to bring peace can mobilize women and profoundly change gender relations (Hughes 2009; Hughes and Tripp 2015; Tripp 2016). Overall, wars can bring terrible consequences to the security, health, and well-being of populations, but they can also set women on the fast track to political gains.

Plateaus

There is no guarantee that trajectories of women's representation are always increasing. Certainly, women can lose power over time. The "Plateau" trajectory documents exactly this scenario: countries that experienced a jump in women's parliamentary representation, followed by a period of general stability, and then a sharp decline. Examples include Hungary and Poland. Indeed, Poland is the exemplar trajectory in panel D of Fig. 3.2.

Indeed, most Plateau countries were formerly Communist countries, including Albania, Cambodia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, and the Soviet Union. During their Communist period, these countries espoused an ideology of political equality between men and women (Gal and Kligman 2000, p. 5; Matland and Montgomery 2003). But women politicians in these Plateau countries were not in truly powerful positions (Fodor 2002; Einhorn 1991; Hanley 2003). Thus, when these countries transitioned to democracy around 1990, making legislatures politically powerful, women's participation dropped sharply (Matland and Montgomery 2003; Saxonberg 2000). For example, Hungary had between 20 and 30%

women in its legislature between 1979 and 1989. But, as in other Communist countries, this legislature was not the seat of ultimate authority. When Hungary transitioned to democracy in 1990, women's participation in politics dropped to 7%.

Some Plateau countries, such as Guyana and Guinea-Bissau, were not formally communist but did have leftist authoritarian governments. Like the Communist countries, these governments kept the number of women in politics artificially high. Once free and fair democratic elections were held, the percentage of women in parliament declined sharply.

Comparing countries historical trajectories of growth helps us understand levels of women in parliaments today. That is, in comparing levels of representation across countries in the present, we should keep in mind where they came from. Countries with similar levels of women in their national legislatures in 2015 often took very different historical paths. In some cases, these historical trajectories continue to influence women's success today and what they might expect to accomplish in the future. In other cases, historical trajectories have been completely upended, often through the institution of gender quotas.

Women in Parliament Today

Where is women's parliamentary representation today? In this section, we consider how economic development, geographic region, democracy, and gender quotas shape women's representation in national legislatures.

By Economic Development

Countries with developed economies outpace countries with developing economies in many respects. Living in a developed economy often comes with lower rates of unemployment and poverty, greater access to education, and improved health outcomes. Yet, when we look at women's political representation today, level of economic development generally does not tell us what to expect.

Historically, wealthy countries often topped the world rankings for women parliamentarians. For instance, between 1988 and 2002, Finland, Norway, or Sweden had the highest percentage of women in its parliament. In 2003, however, Sweden was overtaken by Rwanda, which elected 48.8% women in its legislature. And in its next election, Rwanda became the first country in the world to breach the 50% barrier by electing 56% women to its parliament. With the help of gender quotas, economically developing countries were not always lagging in women's political representation; they began to lead.

Today, Rwanda continues to lead the world with 64% women. Economically developed Nordic countries still do well; Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden all sit in the top 20 of the global rankings, as do

Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands. But, economically developing countries occupy the top four spots in women's political representation (Rwanda, Bolivia, Cuba, and Seychelles), and 7 countries with developing economies rank in the top 20, including in Africa (Senegal, South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique), Latin America (Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Mexico), and Asia (Timor-Leste). Even outside of the top 20, economically developing economies often score better than countries with developed economies. Britain is ranked 48th in the world, behind Sudan, Guyana, and Philippines. Overall, there is no simple correlation between a country's wealth and its share of women parliamentarians.

By Geographic Region

Looking around the world, we see regional differences in women's political representation. Figure 3.3 shows how the percentage of seats held by women in national legislatures varies by region. Nordic countries have the highest average rates of women's participation, followed by the Americas (including the USA) and Europe. Sub-Saharan Africa is right at the world average, with 23% women in the national legislature. Asia and the Arab states rank slightly below the world average, at 20% and 19%, respectively. The Pacific has the lowest levels of women's participation in any region with just 14% women.

Our discussion has thus far focused on the countries that are leading the world in women's political representation. Countries at the low end of the spectrum are also concentrated in certain regions. Currently, there are five countries that have no women in their national legislature (in the upper or lower house). Of these, one is in the Middle East—Qatar. Other countries in the Middle East have at least one woman in their national legislature, but numbers are still low. Kuwait has one woman parliamentarian, and Lebanon has three. Four of the other countries with no women in their national legislature are all small Asian-Pacific island nations—Micronesia, Palau, Tonga,

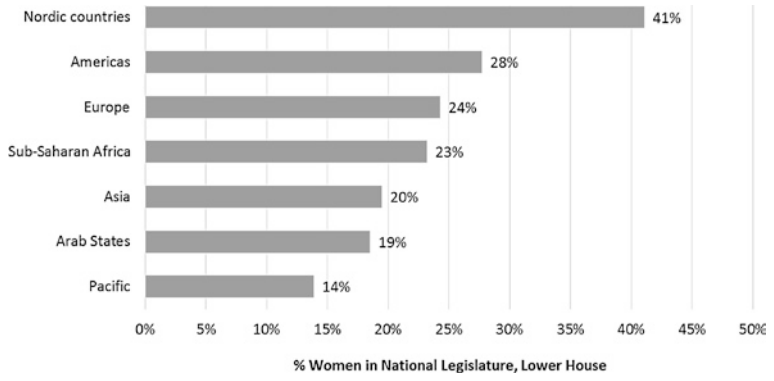

Fig. 3.3 Women's average political representation by geographic region

and Vanuatu. Micronesia has never had a woman represented in its national legislature. These two parts of the world have generally seen more opposition to gender quotas than elsewhere in the world.

By Level of Democracy

Women's attainment of political power varies based on a country's level of democracy. The level of democracy also influences how effective women are once they have obtained representation in a legislature. Since women's political representation can be justified on grounds of democratic justice, one might expect that women would be more adequately represented in countries with entrenched democratic processes. Certainly, democracies have clear and consistent rules, which should aid women in seeing how they can work within the system to attain power. But non-democracies lack true elections, meaning that women can be placed into power even when citizens do not support them.

Large, cross-national statistical studies generally show that women are not better represented in democratic countries than less in democratic countries (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Paxton and Kunovich 2003; Reynolds 1999). In fact, some research has even found that women are less well represented in democratic systems (Paxton 1997; Tripp and Kang 2008). One reason for this surprising finding is that Communist countries, such as Cuba and China, have high numbers of women in politics due to the continued use of affirmative action strategies by Communist party elites (Norris and Inglehart 2001). Further, authoritarian countries in Africa such as Rwanda often reserve large shares of parliamentary seats for women. Thus, it appears that some non-democracies are indeed placing women into power. Yet even excluding Communist countries, level of democracy and the number of women in parliament appear to be unrelated.

But, level of democracy is different than democratization. Many countries experience changes—transitions to and away from democracy, and these have consequences for women's representation. Countries that democratize often have early disappointing gender outcomes, including reductions in women's political representation (Waylen 2007). For example, during the 1990s, 31 countries in sub-Saharan Africa transitioned to multiparty democracy, and many of these experienced an initial decline in women's political representation (Yoon 2001). This pattern has been the same for democratic transitions in Eastern Europe and in Latin America. And, even if women are very active during the democratic transition, as they were in Latin America, once democracy is established and political parties are formed, women may be pushed aside (Franceschet 2005; Friedman 1998; Htun 2003; Viterna and Fallon 2008; Saint-Germain and Metoyer 2008).

However, such declines and exclusions are often only temporary, and women's political representation is seen to bounce back in a range of

countries (Lindberg 2004; Yoon 2001), depending on pre-democratic conditions (Fallon et al. 2012). In fact, many scholars of African politics link democratization to the sweeping gains in women's political representation across the continent in the last two decades (Bauer and Britton 2006; Fallon 2008). And when looking over long periods of time, expanding civil liberties help explain growth in women's representation (Paxton et al. 2010; Paxton and Hughes 2015). Civil liberties like free speech and a free press may be necessary for women's movements to be able to organize and pressure governments for women's greater inclusion.

Apart from women's numbers, however, there are important differences in women's representation across democracies and non-democracies. Non-democratic systems limit the ability of any legislator, man or woman, to influence legislation or otherwise make an impact. So, in a non-democratic system, even if women successfully pass legislation in parliament, a powerful president may simply dispose of the parliamentary reforms (but see Bauer and Burnet 2013). Unlike democratic systems constraints on executive power, the legislature in an authoritarian state may have no way to dispute or oppose a president's intervention. For example, in Goetz and Hassim's (2003) study of Uganda and South Africa, women's ability to change the law (not just propose legislation) depended on whether they were in a democracy or a semi-democracy (see also Sater 2007).

In some ways, women's presence matters regardless of the political system. As discussed above, the position of parliamentarian is visible and carries prestige, having important symbolic effects that may improve women's status in society. Watershed moments, such as the election of the first woman to parliament, were likely just as significant to women in Syria or Kenya as to women in the USA or the UK. Furthermore, as women's numbers in parliament increase, perceptions of women may change (Norris 1993; Beaman et al. 2009; Alexander 2012; Morgan and Buice 2013). When only a few women are present in politics, people perceive that women's political roles are exceptional. But as countries move beyond token membership, it changes perceptions about how a parliamentarian looks and acts.

With and Without Gender Quotas

As a fourth comparison, we look at the current state of women's parliamentary representation in countries with and without gender quotas. At a basic level, gender quotas simply require that women must make up a certain percentage of a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee, or a government (Dahlerup 2002). As affirmative action policies, gender quotas are designed to help women overcome obstacles to their election such as less political experience, cultural stereotypes, or incumbency. Most governments and political parties adopting quotas are attempting to move beyond token representation to reach at least a critical minority of 20, 30, or 40%

women in parliament (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2016), but some are aiming even higher—equal numbers of men and women. Gender quotas can help women meet these goals (Paxton et al. 2010; Paxton and Hughes 2015; Tripp and Kang 2008). Quotas are not only pervasive, but they can also be a game changer for women.

As discussed above, quotas are an important reason why many countries have experienced sizable gains. Quotas can put women on the fast track to relatively high levels of women's representation with a single election. And, over time, quotas have become more effective at increasing women's numbers in national legislatures (Paxton and Hughes 2015). In 2015, if we look at countries without any gender quotas, the average share of women's legislative representation is just 15%. This figure jumps by 10 percentage points for countries with gender quotas.

Of course, not all gender quotas are created equal. One clear and simple difference between quotas is the level at which representation is required, and countries that require more women tend to elect more women. Samoa, for example, reserves 10% of legislative seats for women and has 10% women in its legislature, whereas Spain requires 40% women among a party's candidates and currently has 39% women parliamentarians. Some countries even require parity—equal numbers of men and women (Baudino 2003; Bird 2003; Murray 2010; Murray et al. 2012; Opello 2004). Today, eleven countries set the bar at 50% women overall, and four others require parity for at least a subset of legislative seats.

Setting a high bar is not a foolproof method for reaching high levels of descriptive representation for women, however. France has had a parity law for more than 15 years, but women are still only 26% of legislators in its National Assembly. Or consider Brazil, which adopted a 25% quota in 1997, and upped the threshold to 30% in 2000; in the four national elections since, women have never been elected to even 10% of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Although quotas improve women's political representation, on average, opposition to women's inclusion may remain formidable.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have briefly introduced the reader to historical trends in women's representation in national legislatures, arguments for such representation, and variation across countries in their attainment of high levels of women's representation. A final way to summarize progress in women's electoral representation appears in Table 3.1, which provides the number of countries that have reached significant thresholds of women's representation—10, 20, 30, 40, and 50%—by mid-2015.

Table 3.1 is a powerful indication of the variation that exists in women's representation in national legislatures around the world. By 2015, two countries, Rwanda and Bolivia, have achieved gender parity, or more than 50% women in

Table 3.1 Thresholds of women's parliamentary representation for 190 countries, 2015

Threshold	*No threshold reached*	*10%*	*20%*	*30%*	*40%*	*50%*	*Total*
Number of countries	37	62	48	31	10	2	190
Percentage of total (%)	19.5	32.6	25.2	16.3	5.2	1.1	100.0

Source IPU (2016)

parliament, and 10 other countries have crossed the threshold of 40% women in parliament. Thirty-one countries have at least 30% women in their parliaments, and these countries represent all regions of the world. Forty-eight countries have passed the threshold of 20%, again from all regions, levels of development, and democratization. Low numbers of women's representation persist in the 50% of countries that have less than 20% women in parliament, and the one-fifth of countries that have not reached 10% women.

Still, taking a historical perspective, it is clear that over the last 100 years, women around the world have made inroads into every area of political decision making. From the scattered and sporadic power of queens and tribal leaders, women are today presidents, prime ministers, parliamentarians, and local councilors. In fact, women are not only political leaders but also grassroots activists, revolutionaries, and everyday voters. Truly, the increase in women's representation in national legislatures over the past century is one of the major trends of the modern world.

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