

HAS DEMOCRACY FAILED WOMEN?

Drude Dahlerup

"Drude Dahlerup offers an interesting, lucid and challenging argument about the many relationships between gender and democracy. This book should be read by anyone interested in feminism and politics."

Joni Lovenduski, Birkbeck College

"This wide-ranging and well-informed book offers an impressive overview of women's political empowerment in global historical perspective. Democracy, it concludes, has failed women, but women can revitalize democracy, providing a powerful impetus for future studies and advocacy for more women in political life."

Mona Lena Krook, Rutgers University

Why are women still under-represented in politics? Can we speak of democracy when women are not fully included in political decision-making? Some argue that we are on the right track to full gender equality in politics, while others talk about women hitting the glass ceiling or being included in institutions with shrinking power, not least as a result of neo-liberalism.

In this powerful essay, internationally renowned scholar of gender and politics Drude Dahlerup explains how democracy has failed women and what can be done to tackle this failure. Political institutions, including political parties, she argues, are the real gatekeepers to elected positions all over the world, but they need to be much more inclusive. By reforming these institutions and carefully implementing gender quotas, we can move towards improved gender equality and greater democratization.

Drude Dahlerup is Professor of Political Science at Stockholm University.

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Preface

Has democracy failed women? Many would claim yes, since women have less than a quarter of the seats in the world's parliaments, and since the elimination of gender inequality is not a salient issue high on the political agenda almost anywhere. Most of the political leaders in the world are men. Just take a look at the usual "family" photo taken at a world summit!

However, others would stress that women, from a position of total exclusion, are now gradually being included in elected assemblies all over the world, and more and more countries have experienced having a woman prime minister or president. We now even see women as finance and defense ministers – some of the last male bastions in politics.

The UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 represented a major shift of the global

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discourse away from the previous focus on women's (alleged) lack of qualifications and political interest to a new focus on the lack of inclusiveness of the political institutions themselves. This is also the approach that I will adopt in this book.

“There [in Beijing, 1995] was an almost universal or palpable desire to be in power, to be in leadership, to change the terms of the relationship with the great globe; the mode of operation shifted from one of stating demands and needs to one of seeking control over the decision-making process,” wrote Devaki Jain in her book *Women, Development, and the UN* (2005). But can this optimism be maintained today in a world of climate change, economic crisis, armed conflicts and Trumpism? Is the world on the right track towards full inclusion of women in political life, and can we rule out future backlashes?

Paradoxically, at the same time that *gender parity* in politics is included as a principle in most international declarations, we find no uniform position among feminists on the benefits or actual outcomes of including women in male-dominated political institutions, for instance by the adoption of quotas. It will, however, be argued in this book that old democracies as well as countries in transition to democracy need what British political scientist

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Anne Phillips has called the *presence* of women, based on the new principle of parity – both as a right in itself and because women from all walks of life and from all over the world need more inclusive and well-functioning democratic political institutions to counteract the discriminatory effects of free market forces. The complexity of achieving parity in political life will be illustrated with examples from my work as an advisor on the political empowerment of women around the world.

Drude Dahlerup
Professor of Political Science
Stockholm, April 2017

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Exclusion Without Words

As the daughter of a feminist mother, I knew that my high-school teacher was wrong when, without any reservations, he taught us that the ancient city-state of Athens was the “cradle of democracy.” Can one really speak of democracy when a large portion of the population, perhaps even the majority, is excluded from political decision-making, as was the case in ancient Greece for women as well as for immigrants, slaves and workers? As a schoolgirl I protested in class, though to no avail.

The feminist critique of the celebration of the city-state of Athens as the cradle of democracy focuses on what we might call the “who” of democracy, that is, those who are included in, and those groups which are excluded from, political decision-making. This perspective challenges the traditional discourse, be it in political theory or

Exclusion Without Words

in actual political life, which gives priority to the procedures – the “how” of democratic decision-making. Can one honestly speak of democracy if women and minorities are excluded, even if the procedures followed among the privileged men in the polity fulfill all the noble criteria of fair elections, deliberation and rotation of positions? In general, it is necessary to challenge the traditional definitions of democracy.

From a feminist perspective, the full and equal inclusion of women in politics is important as a right in itself because of the visible and highly symbolic value of political representation. Moreover, women’s movements have argued that the inclusion of women is necessary in order to change the political agenda and the political decisions. To those who say that the gender of politicians does not matter, feminists would respond: imagine a parliament or government with 80 percent women – would that not immediately cause a masculine uproar?

Two further dimensions of democracy are relevant here. The feminist critique also maintains that (although this is contested) there is a connection between those who participate in the decision-making and the policy result, that is, between women’s numerical representation and what we,