

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN GENDER AND POLITICS

The Principles of Gender-Sensitive Parliaments

Lena Wängnerud

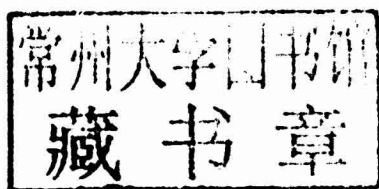


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Abbreviations

Cen	Center Party
CEO	chief executive officer
ChrDem	Christian Democratic Party
Con	Conservative Party
diff.	difference
EU	European Union
GDI	Gender-related Development Index
GDP	gross domestic product
GEM	Gender Empowerment Index
Grn	Green Party
Lft	Left Party
Lib	Liberal Party
Ln	natural logarithm
MP	member of parliament
n.a.	not applicable (party not represented in parliament)
NewDem	New Democracy Party
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OLS	ordinary least squares
RNGS	Research Network on Gender, Politics and the State
SE	standard error
sig.	significance
SNES	Swedish National Elections Study Program
SocDem	Social Democratic Party
SweDem	Sweden Democrats
UN	United Nations

Preface

I started work on this book when I was Visiting Research Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2009/10. I gained tremendously from attending the seminars, but most important, perhaps, were the frequent walks with a cup of coffee up to the top terrace. Standing there, I had a view over the Bay Area and the Golden Gate Bridge. This is the kind of environment that encourages big thoughts. Back at the University of Gothenburg I got stuck in to everyday life of academia – giving lectures, doing administrative work, writing papers and articles instead of a book. One morning, however, I woke up determined that I should finish the book on which I had started work, and here it is.

When I finally picked up the manuscript I realized that I had learned a lot from all the work that seemed like “bits and pieces” and I would like thank all the people I have collaborated with in recent years: Stefan Dahlberg, Carl Dahlström, Monika Djerf-Pierre, Peter Esaiasson, Mikael Gilljam, Marcia Grimes, Sören Holmberg, Anna Högmark, Bengt Johansson, Andrej Kokkonen, Staffan Kumlin, Elin Naurin, Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson, Maria Oskarson, Bo Rothstein, Helena Stensöta, Anders Sundell, Aksel Sundström, Rickard Svensson, Marcus Samanni, and Patrik Öhberg. We have worked together on papers, articles, and book chapters and I’m happy for all the good discussions! I know that Gothenburg is not Berkeley – I miss the view from the top terrace – but the research environment in Gothenburg is vibrant and, not least important, supportive. Big thoughts get criticized but always with the intention to make things better. A special thanks to Anna Högmark, who helped me with the statistical analyses.

I am grateful for the funding from The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences and The Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare, which made my visit to Berkeley possible, and also for other forms of funding that have supported my research. I am also grateful for the invitation I had from the Charles and Louise Travers Department of Political Science at UC Berkeley, and especially to Laura Stoker who helped me to organize the visit.

I want to dedicate this book to Sara, Sofie, Dejonge and Araceli. The four of you met at Oxford Elementary School in Berkeley and become friends. After a year, Sara and Sofie moved back to Sweden but I believe that the diversity at Oxford Elementary School had a long-lasting impact. You come from different backgrounds and you enriched each other's lives. I hope this book will enrich the lives of many readers and perhaps one day, when the four of you grow up, it will reach your hands too. At least, I have had you in mind while working on this book.

— Why did I want to write this book? The fact that gender matters in politics fascinates me. I was brought up to feel that it should not matter. I wanted to contribute knowledge on how structures such as gender affect our lives and how we, at the same time, are able to change our life circumstances.

Lena Wängnerud
Gothenburg, March 2015

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1 Introduction

At the Social Democratic Party Congress, Mr. Palme held one of his many visionary speeches. This time on equality for women. It is excellent. We all rejoice in the topic selection. But pretty speeches to women are nothing new, Mr. Palme! Women have been listening to many of those over the years. Speeches must be followed by action – otherwise there will be no equality or freedom of choice.

(Gunnar Helén, at the Liberal Party Congress, Sweden, November 25, 1972)

It is November 25, 1972. The leader of the Liberal Party in Sweden, Gunnar Helén, enters the scene. In front of him are members of his own party; however, it is obvious that he has a wider audience in mind. Helén is attacking the leader of the Social Democratic Party, Olof Palme. In September 1972 the Social Democratic Party had held its national congress, and the fact that Palme had devoted almost all of his speech to gender equality had attracted a great deal of attention. Now, Helén wanted to show that his party should also be taken seriously. Helén criticized Palme for his lack of concrete proposals, and he ended his speech at the Liberal Party Congress with the promise that internal boards of the Liberal Party would aim for an even distribution of women and men, with no less than 40 percent of either sex.¹ This was the first time in Sweden that a specific proportion, 40 percent, had been identified as a target for women's representation (Freidenvall 2006; Wängnerud 2001).

In 1972 a long journey started in Sweden. An election was held the following year, and the number of women in the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag, increased from 14 to 21 percent. This was a remarkable achievement. Since then, there has been only one occasion with a corresponding increase, seven percentage points, and that was the 1994 election, when the proportion of women in the Swedish Riksdag increased from 34 to 41 percent (Bergqvist et al. 2000).

What characterizes both the 1973 and 1994 elections is that issues of gender equality were high on the political agenda. More important to note, however, is that the major political parties promised to deliver visible changes. In 1973 the promises were about changes to internal party boards,

and in 1994 they were about external party lists. These examples illustrate this book's main point: *changes do not just happen*. To understand changes in gender equality, we need to analyze actors geared toward changing the status of women vis-à-vis men. We also need a benchmark against which actions can be evaluated; not all actions lead to success. This is the second major point of the book: there is *no linear process* leading to gender equality. The journey that started in Sweden in 1972 has not been easy, and it is by no means over.

Sweden is, by most standards, considered one of the most gender-equal countries in the world. From the Swedish case we can learn about the role that parliaments, or legislatures more broadly, play in transforming society.² More specifically, we can learn under what circumstances parliaments can play a role. As stated previously, changes do not just happen. In representative democracies, political parties are key actors, and parliaments do not change unless major political parties want them to (Dahlerup and Leyenaar 2013; Kittilson 2006; Osborn 2012). Moreover, political parties do not change automatically. In this book, we shall look at exogenous factors – external shocks – affecting parties, but even more energy will be devoted to endogenous factors, such as an effect of individuals within parties. Thus, there are three levels of analysis: the level of parliaments as institutions, the level of political parties, and the level of individual politicians. The argument is that gender-sensitive parliaments are made up of gender-sensitive political parties, which in turn are made up of gender-sensitive politicians. In this way a gender-sensitive parliament becomes a non-static phenomenon; the exact nature of a gender-sensitive parliament varies across time and across countries.

Why study parliaments?

The question arises: Why study parliaments? One way to answer this question is to look at transformations of citizens' everyday lives one country at a time. Over the past four decades Sweden has experienced major changes in spheres of society related to gender equality: In 1970 about 10 percent of children in Sweden aged one to six years were registered in day care; in 2009 the corresponding figure was 90 percent (the vast majority in municipal day care). In 1974 men in Sweden gained the right to parental leave on the same terms as women. The statistics tell us that in the 1970s no days (i.e. 0 percent of days) for which parental allowance was paid were claimed by men, but in 2009 the corresponding figure was above 20 percent. During the same period women's participation in higher education and in the paid labor force increased strongly in Sweden.³

Another way to answer the question "Why study parliaments?" is to highlight variations across countries. Several international organizations produce measurements of gender equality. In 2012 Sweden was ranked among the top countries in the Save the Children mothers' index, which

captures the situation of mothers and small children. Countries such as the United States and Japan were ranked lower on the list. Rankings produced by Social Watch and the World Economic Forum similarly placed Sweden among the top countries, ranking the United States and Japan considerably lower. Social Watch and the World Economic Forum focus on gender gaps in areas such as educational attainment, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, and empowerment.⁴ It is interesting to note that Sweden has a high number of female legislators, currently 44 percent in the Riksdag. The corresponding figure for the United States is 18 percent women in the House of Representatives, and for Japan, 8 percent women in the Shugiin, the Japanese House of Representatives (www.ipu.org).

The results presented above refer to three of the most economically developed countries in the world. Thus, we can conclude that gender equality is not determined by economic development or modernization alone (cf. Inglehart and Norris 2003). It would be reasonable to believe that political institutions such as parliaments matter, and more precisely that it is the composition of these institutions that is important, but this assumption cannot be taken for granted. The idea of this book is to provide new tools to study the role of parliaments in processes related to gender equality. This ambition includes development of theory as well as empirical investigation.

The argument

The argument, stated previously, is that gender-sensitive parliaments are made up of gender-sensitive political parties, which in turn are made up of gender-sensitive politicians. In this way a gender-sensitive parliament becomes a non-static phenomenon; the exact nature of a gender-sensitive parliament varies across time and across countries. The first step of this book is to present a tentative model of a gender-sensitive parliament. In this way we get a benchmark against which actions by political parties and individual politicians can be evaluated.

Distinguishing between numbers of women elected and gender sensitivity

The ideas presented in this book should be seen as a development of the ideas presented by Anne Phillips (1995) in her influential book *The Politics of Presence*. Phillips (1991, 1995, 2007) argues that societies will not achieve equality between women and men simply by disregarding gender-related differences. She contends that women's interests and concerns will be inadequately addressed in a politics dominated by men:

There are particular needs, interests, and concerns that arise from women's experience, and these will be inadequately addressed in a politics dominated by men. Equal rights to a vote have not proved strong

enough to deal with this problem; there must also be equality among those elected to office.

(Phillips 1995, 66)

Numerous empirical studies show that women politicians all over the world tend to be more active than their male colleagues when it comes to placing equality policy on the political agenda.⁵ The conclusion from Scandinavian countries, where the number of women elected has been high for quite some time, is that there has been a shift in emphasis as the number of women in parliament has increased, with women's interests being accorded greater scope and a more prominent place on the political agenda (Bergqvist et al. 2000; Skjeie 1992; Wängnerud 2000). However, the closer one gets to outcomes in the everyday lives of citizens, the fewer empirical findings there are to report. A typical conclusion from research on outcomes is that effects of having a high number of women elected are smaller than anticipated in theory (Bratton and Ray 2002; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Wängnerud and Sundell 2012).

Scholars in the field distinguish between *descriptive representation*, the number of women elected to parliaments, and *substantive representation*, effects of women's presence in parliaments (Celis and Childs 2008; Krook and Childs 2010; Wängnerud 2009). The theory of the politics of presence gives reason to expect a link between descriptive and substantive representation. Phillips's line of reasoning represents mainstream argumentation in research on women in politics:

Women have distinct interests in relation to child-bearing (for any foreseeable future, an exclusively female affair); and as society is currently constituted they also have particular interests arising from their exposure to sexual harassment and violence, their unequal position in the division of paid and unpaid labor and their exclusion from most arenas of economic or political power.

(Phillips 1995, 67–68)

Women politicians are expected to be better representatives of women's interests and concerns, since they, at least to some extent, share experiences with women voters. However, based on her studies in the United States, Deborah Dodson (2006, 8) writes about a relationship between descriptive and substantive representation that is probabilistic rather than deterministic. Along the same lines, Karen Celis and Sarah Childs (2008, 419) state that the argument is simple: Women, when present in politics, are more likely to act for women than men are. However, the conclusion is complex; there is no guarantee that they will actually do so.

Phillips (1995, 188) uses the metaphor "a shot in the dark" to mitigate high expectations. Her doubts stem from knowledge about rigid institutions; parliaments do not change easily. Joni Lovenduski (2005, 48), a

distinguished scholar of British politics, argues that the most difficult obstacle that female politicians meet is the deeply embedded culture of masculinity in political institutions. She recognizes hindrances to women politicians, such as hostile reactions to women, working conditions that are incompatible with family responsibilities, and the existence of male-dominated networks.

I want to push this research further by recognizing the distinction between numbers of women elected and gender sensitivity. The fundamental research question is the same in this book as in *The Politics of Presence* (and a plethora of other studies): *What are the necessary conditions for women's interests and concerns to be adequately integrated into political processes?* I take as my point of departure the insight that the mere presence of women politicians is not enough – that is, that the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation is probabilistic rather than deterministic, and I present tools for analyzing this relationship.

Figure 1.1 visualizes the separation of the dimensions “number of women elected” and “gender sensitivity.” The theory of the politics of presence predicts that when the proportion of women increases, the political process will work better in terms of integrating women's interests and concerns. In Figure 1.1 this idea is represented by Country A. However, it may be the case that gender-sensitive *political parties* compensate for the lack of women politicians, for example, through a feminist party leader or strong connections with non-parliamentary women's organizations. Then we could end up with the

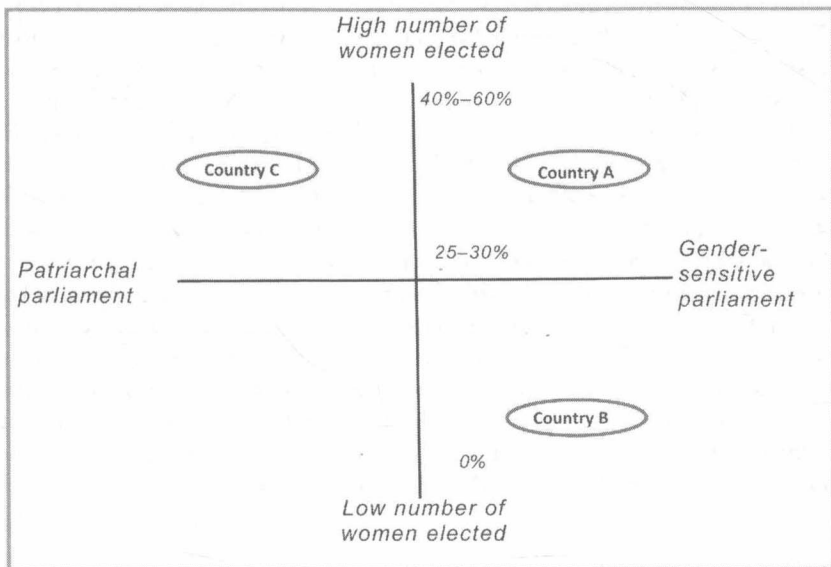


Figure 1.1 Distinguishing between numbers of women elected and gender sensitivity

same result as Country A in terms of gender sensitivity, but with other mechanisms at work. In Figure 1.1 this idea is represented by Country B.

A third alternative to reflect on is that obstacles to women politicians are so severe that despite their presence in higher proportions, few visible changes are taking place. This is Country C in Figure 1.1. A Country D (not included in Figure 1.1), representing the ultimate patriarchal situation is, of course, a fourth potential alternative. This book, however, focuses on modernized countries considered free, according to established measures of democracy, and alternative D thereby becomes less interesting. It becomes more relevant if one thinks of the model in Figure 1.1 as a tool for comparing political parties, not entire parliaments. There are, for example, good reasons to expect radical right parties to be found in the lower left corner of the model. Empirical research shows that radical right-wing parties tend to be heavily male dominated in terms of personnel as well as ideas (Norris 2005).

At this stage, the model in Figure 1.1 is a tentative one. A more elaborate model will be presented in the last chapter of the book. The intention is to develop a theory of gender-sensitive parliaments that works for comparisons across time, across countries, and also across political parties within countries.

Before moving on, we need a definition of gender sensitivity. What are the endpoints on the horizontal axis in Figure 1.1? This introductory chapter discusses only gender-sensitive parliaments. Political parties and individual politicians will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

A preliminary definition of a gender-sensitive parliament

I believe that we need new tools for studying women in politics. The number of studies in the field is growing and analyses are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Still, there is a lack of research in which scholars try to put pieces of information together. In order to give a credible answer to the research question, *What are the necessary conditions for women's interests and concerns to be adequately integrated into political processes?* we need several pieces of information. First, do women entering politics meet gender-specific obstacles and, if so, how great are those obstacles? Second, we need information on who, if anyone, is creating room for women's interests and concerns on the political agenda. Finally, we need information on success: Do parliaments produce gender-sensitive legislation? One cannot judge the quality of the political processes on sole indicators.⁶ Representative democracies are complex systems, and in order to understand the role of parliaments correctly we need information from a multitude of sources. This does not mean that everything is equally interesting. In this book, I square the circle in the following three parts.

Internal parliamentary working procedures

The concept of "critical mass" is intensely debated in scholarship on women in politics. Some scholars seek to identify a threshold number or a tipping

point at which the impact of women's presence in parliament becomes apparent; a figure of around 30 percent is often mentioned. Others criticize the concept of critical mass as being too mechanical and implying immediate change at a certain level. They focus instead on "critical acts" (Dahlerup 1988) to explore two questions: Who is pushing for change consistent with women's interests, and what kinds of strategies are useful (Dahlerup 2006a)? Still others (e.g. Grey 2006) suggest that different thresholds have to be recognized in studies on women in parliament; for example, attaining a proportion of 15 percent may allow women politicians to change the political agenda, but 40 percent may be needed for women-friendly policies to be introduced.

The question of how the presence of women affects behavior and culture within political institutions is multilayered. The question is not just about whether women politicians behave differently, or whether they meet certain obstacles, or whether, beyond a certain threshold of numbers, they are able to make an impact. The question also concerns whether their presence has an impact on the behavior of men, either reinforcing gender differences or modifying them. For example, one area of contention is how to interpret functional divisions between women and men; that is, the existence of gender patterns related to areas of responsibility, such as women politicians being well represented in committees dealing with gender-equality or social welfare issues but not in committees dealing with foreign affairs or financial issues. Is the existence of such patterns a hindrance or not? Analyses of parliamentary internal working procedures also need to cover information on formal power positions from a gender perspective, and how male and female politicians themselves perceive their ability to make an impact.

Room for women's interests and concerns

What do women do in parliaments? In most Western democracies, it is possible to find examples of prominent women politicians in areas such as foreign affairs and finance, as well as in education or family policy. However, the core issue in research on substantive representation does not concern "what women do in parliaments" but, more specifically, the extent to which the number of women elected affects women's interests. Phillips (1995, 47) argues that gender equality among those elected to office is desirable because of the changes it can bring about: "It is representation ... with a purpose, it aims to subvert or add or transform." This corresponds with Hanna Pitkin's (1967, 209) classical definition of political representation: "Representation here means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them." For interests to get attention, someone needs to act.

Empirical research shows that not all women politicians are active in the area of gender equality. Moreover, it is obvious that some male politicians are active in this field. Anne Phillips states that there *must* be equality among those elected to office. A slightly different approach is found in the writings of