

# Gender Inequality in Political Representation: A Worldwide Comparative Analysis

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## **Abstract**

*We examine the determinants of cross-national variation in the share of parliamentary seats held by women in 1998. The findings of prior research on this issue have differed sharply. Studies focusing on the most affluent longstanding democracies have emphasized the importance of political factors, whereas three of the four studies to include less developed nations found that only socioeconomic and/or cultural factors matter. Our analysis uses improved variable measures, a more complete set of variables, and a larger sample of countries than has heretofore been examined. We find that political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors are each important. Specifically, electoral system structure, left party government, the timing of women's suffrage, the share of women in professional occupations, and cultural attitudes toward the role of women in politics each play a role in accounting for variation in the degree of gender inequality in political representation around the world.*

As the twentieth century draws to a close, gender inequality continues to pervade many aspects of society. Politics is the arena in which it remains perhaps most pronounced (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1997; Nelson & Chowdhury 1994; Staudt 1996; United Nations 1995). Although women in virtually all countries around the world have voting rights, the figures in Table 1 reveal that in only a handful of nations is their share of seats in the main national legislative body greater than

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30%, which is commonly considered the critical mass necessary for women to exert a substantial influence on politics (UNDP 1995:41). Worldwide, the average is just 10%. Despite having declined somewhat in the past several decades, the gender "representation gap" remains substantial.

Not surprisingly, the degree of gender inequality in legislative representation varies widely across countries. Among the affluent industrialized nations, Sweden has the highest share of female legislators at 40%, while in Japan the figure is a mere 5%. In a number of less developed nations the percentage is even lower. What accounts for this variation?

A number of studies have engaged this issue over the past two decades. Most have focused on the 15 to 25 wealthiest industrialized nations (Rule 1981, 1987, 1994; Norris 1985, 1987; Darcy, Welch, & Clark 1994; Lovenduski & Norris 1993). These analyses have tended to emphasize the importance of political factors, such as the structure of the electoral system and the partisan composition of parliament, as determinants of the proportion of legislative seats held by women. Socioeconomic factors, such as women's educational attainment and labor force participation, along with cultural attitudes have typically been deemed relevant but less central. Four recent studies have expanded the scope of analysis to include less developed countries. One found effects for political and cultural factors but not for socioeconomic variables (Paxton 1997). The other three, however, found political variables to have no impact; instead, only socioeconomic and/or cultural factors were found influential (Matland 1998; Moore & Shackman 1996; Oakes & Almquist 1993). This incongruity in findings warrants exploration. In addition, the most recent time period for which this issue has been analyzed is the late 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Since then more than 20 newly independent nations have been formed and a number of countries, particularly in Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa, have democratized their political systems. What explains gender political inequality in the late 1990s?

This article examines the determinants of variation in women's representation in national legislatures across 146 nations in 1998. For consistency with prior studies, we also conduct a separate analysis of the 20 wealthiest longstanding democracies. We find that political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors are each important — in both samples. Specifically, electoral system structure, left party government, the timing of women's suffrage, the share of women in professional occupations, and cultural attitudes toward the role of women in politics each play a role in accounting for variation in the degree of gender inequality in political representation around the world.

We begin in the first section by outlining a set of political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors that can be expected to affect gender inequality in political representation. The second section describes the data and method we use in our analysis. The third presents the results. The fourth discusses the findings, compares them to those of previous research, and assesses their implications for theories of

gender political inequality. We conclude by discussing prospects for reducing gender inequality in political representation worldwide and in the United States.

### Political, Socioeconomic, and Cultural Determinants

Previous research has identified three types of factors that may affect women's chances of gaining election to parliament: political, socioeconomic, and cultural.

#### POLITICAL FACTORS

The bulk of studies on cross-national variation in women's share of legislative seats have focused on the influence of political factors — particularly the structure of the electoral system. Women are expected to make greater headway in electoral politics in nations where voters choose among party lists in multimember districts rather than among individual candidates in single-member districts. Parties are more likely to nominate women for office, and voters are more likely to vote for them, if women represent only part of a larger group of candidates. As Pippa Norris (1987:129) puts it: "Rather than selecting individual representatives the voter is choosing a party, with a certain group of candidates, some of which happen to be women. Under this system, central party organisations have considerable influence over the nomination of candidates, and if they are committed to including more women, they have that option. As parties want to put forward an attractive slate of candidates, they will try to create a balanced ticket by including women and men." Indeed, in several Scandinavian countries political parties have adopted formal quota systems which ensure at least 40% female representation on party lists (Darcy, Welch, & Clark 1994:154-55; Norris 1997:221). By contrast, in electoral systems where votes are cast for individual candidates in winner-take-all contests, unfavorable attitudes toward women as politicians, on the part of party leaders and/or voters, are likely to play a more influential role in determining who gets elected.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence from studies of the wealthiest democratic nations strongly suggests that the structure of the electoral system matters. Research by Rule (1981, 1987, 1994), Norris (1985, 1987, 1997), Matland (1998), Darcy, Welch, and Clark (1994), and Lovenduski and Norris (1993) found that it is one of the most important factors, if not *the* most important, in accounting for variation in the female share of legislators across these nations. Several case studies (Matland & Taylor 1997; Rule & Zimmerman 1994) and one cross-country analysis (Paxton 1997) have found that it makes a difference in less developed countries as well. However, two analyses of samples that included both affluent and less developed nations, by Moore and Shackman (1996) and by Oakes and Almquist (1993), yielded no indication of an electoral system effect. In addition, Matland (1998) found a strong electoral system effect for affluent nations but no impact at all for a sample of 15 less developed countries. With the exception of those three studies, though, there

is general consensus that women tend to achieve greater legislative representation in countries with party list/multimember district systems than in those where voting is for individual candidates in single-member districts.

Most previous studies have implicitly treated the party list/multimember district system of balloting and the proportional representation method of seat allocation, whereby each party wins a number of seats in proportion to its share of the vote, as a single entity. For a worldwide study, however, the two must be disentangled. In Western Europe, party lists and proportional representation are always used in conjunction. But that need not be the case. In a number of countries in Africa and Asia party list balloting is used with a winner-take-all method of seat allocation. In such instances, the party receiving either the most votes or a majority of the votes (depending on whether a plurality or majority is required) in a district gets all of the district's seats. Yet as long as voters choose among parties and elect multiple candidates from a district, the logic remains similar (see Castles 1981; Taagepera 1994). The key feature of the electoral system, in other words, is not proportional representation but the use of party lists in multimember districts.

The logic does begin to change somewhat, however, as the number of seats per district gets small. The fewer the seats, the more the identity of the individuals on a party list will matter to voters, and therefore also to party leaders. Several studies have found that, among party list systems, a smaller number of seats per district is less advantageous to women's electoral fortunes (Matland 1993; Norris 1996a; Rule 1987, 1994; Taagepera 1994). We thus ought to expect more female legislators in nations with party list/multimember district electoral systems where the number of seats per district is reasonably large.

Women's share of legislative seats may also be affected by the partisan composition of the legislature. Leftist parties can be expected to express greater commitment to reducing gender inequality, and so ought to be more likely to nominate women as candidates. Thus, the larger the proportion of parliamentary seats held by leftist parties, the larger we should expect women's share of those seats to be. In one of the earliest studies of gender inequality in political representation, Maurice Duverger (1955) argued that party differences was the most important cause of variation among France, West Germany, Italy, and Norway. Studies by Norris (1987) and Rule (1987) of larger groups of industrialized nations in the early 1980s echoed this conclusion. On the other hand, partisan differences may have become less important in recent years, as nonleftist parties have moved to nominate more women in order to remove this as a characteristic distinguishing parties of the left (Matland & Studlar 1996; Norris 1993:320; Rule 1994:21). Several observers have noted that in Scandinavia and some other European countries, conservative parties have become nearly as likely as leftist parties to nominate women (Darcy, Welch, & Clark 1994:152; Sainsbury 1993; Skjeie 1991:236). Matland (1998) found that the party composition of the legislature had no effect

on women's share in parliament among the most affluent democratic nations as of 1990.

A third political factor that may affect the proportion of women in national parliaments is women's voting rights. By the mid-1990s women had acquired suffrage rights in 96% of all nations around the world (Ramirez, Soysal & Shanahan 1997). But the timing of suffrage extension to women varied markedly, even among the affluent democracies. For instance, women in New Zealand gained voting rights in 1893, whereas in France they could not vote until 1944 and in Switzerland not until 1971. The longer women have had the right to vote, the larger we can expect the percentage of women who vote to be (at least relative to their male counterparts), and the more headway we should therefore expect women to have made in national politics. Thus, the year of female suffrage extension should be inversely related to the proportion of legislative seats held by women. Rule (1981) found this to be the case for 19 nations in 1970-71. Yet in their study of 100 countries in 1985, Moore and Shackman (1996) found this variable to have no effect.

The degree of political democracy in a country may also affect women's chances of winning electoral office. Paxton (1997) argues that the level of democracy should be positively related to women's political representation, since democratic processes decrease the likelihood that artificial and arbitrary barriers can be imposed. Her analysis, however, indicated an inverse relationship between democracy and women's share of parliamentary seats.

Lastly, countries with "Marxist-Leninist" oriented one-party governments are likely to have greater female legislative representation than nations with otherwise similar political systems, socioeconomic features, and cultures (Paxton 1997). While the legislatures in such nations may be elected by popular vote, the dominant party typically is in a position to influence election outcomes in a variety of ways. Given their ideological commitment to equality, such parties are likely to do so in a manner that increases the number of women in parliament. Paxton (1997) found a very strong effect for a "Marxist-Leninist" dummy variable she included in her analyses for 1988 and 1975, though with the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the democratization trend of the past decade relatively few such countries remain.

### SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Women's progress in attaining political power surely depends, at least in part, on the degree of progress they have made outside politics (Blumberg 1984; Chafetz 1984, 1991; Randall 1987). One important area is likely to be education. Educational credentials have long been a key feature distinguishing political elites from ordinary citizens (Loewenberg & Patterson 1979; Putnam 1976); hence, education may be important in expanding the pool of women who feel qualified and motivated to stand for office. Since education tends to be strongly correlated with voter participation, greater educational attainment by women is also expected

to spur higher female voting rates, which in turn should lead to election of more women.

Women's political opportunities are also likely to depend in part upon their labor force activity. Women who work outside the home tend to participate more actively in politics (Norris 1987, p. 122). A work career may result in enhanced confidence and independence, and therefore in a greater sense of political efficacy. Jobs can provide funds to help launch political campaigns; they can yield political contacts; and they may offer an organizational basis for political activity through business groups and unions. Higher rates of female labor force participation may thus lead to a larger number of motivated and well-connected female candidates willing to stand for office and to higher rates of female voting. Both should result in increased numbers of elected female representatives.

Then again, perhaps it is not women's work activity in general that is most likely to improve their opportunities in the political sphere, but rather their movement into certain types of occupations. In particular, elected political officials frequently are drawn from professional occupations. Lawyers, educators, journalists, and business professionals tend to be heavily overrepresented in parliaments compared with their numbers in the general population (Norris 1996a:188-90). Professionals are more likely to be well-educated, practiced in public speaking, and familiar with the political system and the law. The greater the share of women in professional occupations, therefore, the larger we should expect women's share to be among those elected to parliament.

In analyses of 19 to 23 democratic countries in the early 1970s and early 1980s, Rule (1981, 1987) found that the share of women with a college degree and the share of women in the labor force were each positively associated with women's proportion of parliamentary seats. Yet Norris (1985) analyzed a similar group of countries in the early 1980s and found that neither variable had a statistically significant effect. Matland (1998) found that women's labor force participation had a positive impact but women's educational attainment did not; and the labor force participation effect did not hold for a sample of less developed countries. In their 100-country study, Moore and Shackman (1996) found an effect for female labor force participation but not for women's educational attainment. Oakes and Almquist (1993) also found an effect for female labor force participation, though they did not include an education variable. Paxton's (1997) study found neither to matter. The only researcher to examine the impact of women in professional occupations is Norris (1985, 1987). Her findings, however, suggested a lack of any effect for this variable. Paxton (1997) and Oakes and Almquist (1993) each used a variable representing women's share of managerial occupations but also found no effect.

The size and strength of the women's movement is a fourth societal factor that may influence a country's degree of gender inequality in political representation (Bystydzienski 1995; Rule 1994; Sainsbury 1993; Staudt 1996). Nations with

organizations that are active in pressing for social, economic, and political equality should, *ceteris paribus*, tend to make more progress in these areas. As a result, women are more likely to run for office and voters are more likely to be willing to elect them. Such organizations can provide political and financial resources necessary for launching women into political careers and helping them get elected. They may also alter a country's political culture in ways favorable to women's electoral fortunes.

Finally, there is reason to suspect that gender political inequality will be affected by a nation's level of economic development. The wealthier the country, the less politics may be dominated by concerns of economic growth and well-being, and the more willing parties and voters may be to allow other considerations, including gender equality, to play a role in selecting political representatives. Economic development may also have indirect effects. As Richard Matland (1998:114) notes: "Development leads to weakening of traditional values, decreased fertility rates, increased urbanization, greater educational and labor force participation for women, and attitudinal changes in perceptions of the appropriate roles for women." Because most previous research has been confined to a small group of relatively affluent nations, the effect of national economic wealth has seldom been examined. Moore and Shackman (1996), Oakes and Almquist (1993), and Paxton (1997) each included this variable in their worldwide analyses but found no indication that it matters. Matland (1998) found evidence of indirect effects, though only for affluent countries.

#### CULTURAL FACTORS

Irrespective of such factors as women's socioeconomic progress and the structure of the political system, women may win greater political representation in nations where more liberal attitudes toward the role of women in politics prevail. To the degree politics is seen as an appropriate vocation for women and women are viewed as capable of serving effectively in that capacity, they should be more willing to stand for office, more likely to be nominated by party leaders, and more likely to be chosen by voters.

Several analysts have suggested that an egalitarian culture renders the environment more favorable for women's political representation in Scandinavia than is the case in other areas of Europe (Bystydzienski 1995; Norris 1993, 1996a). Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark are indeed leaders in women's political representation, having the world's four largest female shares in parliament as of 1998, with Iceland not far behind. Norris (1985, 1987) created a "political egalitarianism" index from responses to several survey questions regarding attitudes toward women in politics. Although the survey covered only nine European countries, Norris found that nations with more egalitarian scores on the index tended to have larger proportions of legislative seats held by women. Religious

TABLE 1: Women's Share of Parliamentary Seats in 146 Countries, 1998

Sub-Saharan Africa		Middle East and North Africa	
Angola	9.5	Algeria	3.1
Benin	7.2	Azerbaijan	12.0
Botswana	8.5	Cyprus	5.4
Burkina Faso	8.1	Egypt	2.0
Cameroon	5.6	Iran	4.9
Cape Verde	11.1	Iraq	6.4
Central African Republic	3.5	Israel	7.5
Chad	2.4	Jordan	0.0
Comoros	0.0	Lebanon	2.3
Congo	1.0	Morocco	0.6
Cote d'Ivoire	8.0	Syria	9.6
Djibouti	0.0	Tunisia	6.7
Equatorial Guinea	8.8	Turkey	2.4
Ethiopia	2.0	Yemen	0.7
Gabon	8.3		
Gambia	2.0	Asia and the Pacific	
Ghana	9.0	Bangladesh	9.1
Guinea	7.0	Fiji	4.3
Guinea-Bissau	10.0	India	7.2
Kenya	3.0	Indonesia	11.4
Lesotho	4.6	Japan	4.6
Madagascar	3.7	Kazakhstan	13.4
Malawi	5.6	Laos	21.0
Mali	12.2	Malaysia	7.8
Mauritania	1.3	Maldives	6.3
Mauritius	7.6	Mongolia	7.9
Mozambique	25.2	Nepal	3.4
Namibia	22.2	Pakistan	2.3
Niger	1.2	Papua New Guinea	1.8
Senegal	11.7	North Korea	20.1
Seychelles	27.3	Philippines	11.1
Sierra Leone	6.0	Singapore	4.8
South Africa	25.0	South Korea	3.0
Swaziland	3.1	Sri Lanka	5.3
Tanzania	17.5	Tajikistan	2.8
Togo	1.2	Thailand	5.6
Uganda	18.1	Viet Nam	26.2
Zambia	9.7		
Zimbabwe	14.7		

**TABLE 1: Women's Share of Parliamentary Seats in 146 Countries, 1998  
(Continued)**

<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>		<b>Eastern Europe</b>	
Antigua and Barbuda	5.3	Albania	6.0
Argentina	27.6	Belarus	4.0
Bahamas	15.0	Bulgaria	10.8
Barbados	10.7	Croatia	7.9
Belize	3.4	Czech Republic	15.0
Bolivia	7.0	Estonia	10.9
Brazil	6.6	Hungary	11.4
Chile	7.5	Latvia	9.0
Colombia	11.7	Lithuania	17.5
Costa Rica	15.8	Macedonia	3.3
Cuba	23.0	Moldova	4.8
Dominica	9.4	Poland	13.0
Dominican Republic	11.7	Romania	7.3
Ecuador	3.7	Russia	10.2
El Salvador	15.5	Slovakia	14.7
Grenada	20.0	Slovenia	7.8
Guatemala	12.5	Ukraine	3.8
Guyana	20.0		
Haiti	3.6	<b>Scandinavia</b>	
Honduras	8.0	Denmark	33.0
Jamaica	11.7	Finland	33.5
Mexico	14.2	Iceland	25.4
Nicaragua	10.8	Norway	36.4
Panama	10.0	Sweden	40.4
Paraguay	2.5		
Peru	10.8	<b>Western Europe and Anglo Countries</b>	
St. Vincent and Grenadines	9.5	Australia	15.5
Suriname	15.7	Austria	26.2
Trinidad and Tobago	11.1	Belgium	12.7
Uruguay	7.1	Canada	20.6
Venezuela	5.9	France	10.9
		Germany	26.9
		Greece	6.3
		Ireland	12.0
		Italy	11.1
		Luxembourg	20.0
		Malta	5.8
		Netherlands	31.3
		New Zealand	29.2
		Portugal	13.0
		Spain	24.7
		Switzerland	21.0
		United Kingdom	18.2
		United States	11.7

*Note:* Numbers listed are percents. For data source see Table 2.

doctrine may play an important role in shaping attitudes toward women's place in politics. Several studies have found the strength of Catholicism, which tends to emphasize traditional roles for women, to be negatively related to women's electoral success (Norris 1997; Paxton 1997; Rule 1987). Moore and Shackman (1996) and Paxton (1997) each used a set of geographic region dummy variables to capture cultural differences in their analyses of both affluent and less developed countries. Their findings suggested that, holding political and socioeconomic factors constant, women's share of parliamentary seats was greater in Europe and North America than in most other regions of the world. Interregional cultural differences may well account for this result.

### Data and Method

Using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, we analyze the political, socioeconomic, and cultural determinants of cross-national variation in the share of parliamentary seats held by women in 1998. We include all countries that have directly elected national legislatures and for which data are available for our variables of interest. Of the world's 191 independent nations, 146 qualify.<sup>3</sup> We also conduct a separate analysis of the 20 richest longstanding democratic nations, to assess the extent to which causal patterns for this group of countries are similar to those for the world as a whole and to examine whether factors found by previous studies of these countries to have mattered in the 1970s and 1980s continue to do so in the 1990s. For that analysis we include all countries which have been continuously democratic since 1950 and whose per capita gross domestic product (GDP) exceeds \$15,000: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.<sup>4</sup> Descriptions of the variables we use and data sources are provided in Table 2. For all variables the data used are for either the most appropriate year or the most recent available.

Our dependent variable is the share of seats in the main national legislative body held by women in 1998 (as of January 1). In some nations there is only one such body; in countries with bicameral legislatures, we use the share in the lower house. This figure ranges from a low of 0% in several countries to a high of 40% in Sweden (see Table 1 above).

We operationalize electoral system structure using a three-category ordinal variable. Countries are coded 2 if voters choose among party lists in multimember districts which average five or more seats per district; 1 if party lists are used but district size averages fewer than five seats, if a combination of party list and candidate voting is used, or if voters choose among individual candidates but in multimember districts; and 0 if voters choose among individual candidates in single-

member districts. (Results do not differ if this variable is treated as nominal, with two dummy variables used in the regressions.) The variable is expected to be positively associated with women's share of legislative seats. We use this coding to isolate the two "pure" systems that should produce the highest and lowest shares of women in parliament — those coded 2 and 0, respectively. A variety of mixed systems are lumped together in the middle category. The cutoff of five seats per district is an arbitrary one, but it follows Wilma Rule's (1994:18) conclusion, based on her review of the literature on district size, that "It is usually essential that the number of representatives per district be five or more for the election of women in meaningful numbers."

The measure we use for the partisan composition of government is the share of legislative seats held by leftist parties, which should be positively related to the share of seats held by women. Unfortunately, information on party orientation needed to code this variable is unavailable for many of the countries we wish to include in the analysis.<sup>5</sup> We are thus able to include the variable only in the analysis of the 20 most affluent longstanding democracies.

The timing of women's suffrage variable consists of the year women gained voting rights in national elections. Earlier suffrage is expected to be associated with higher levels of women's parliamentary representation, so the coefficient for this variable in the regressions should be negative.

We include a fourth political variable representing the degree of political democracy in each country. The variable is an ordinal scale constructed by the Freedom House (1997). It ranges from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating greater democracy. The Freedom House index is one of the most widely used measures of democracy available for a large cross-section of countries (e.g., Barro 1996; Burkhart & Lewis-Beck 1994; Helliwell 1994), and it is the one used by Paxton (1997), who is the only researcher to include this variable in an analysis of gender inequality in legislative seats. It takes into account the existence of free and fair electoral laws and practices, the degree of competition in elections, opportunities for minority groups, the effective ability of elected representatives to govern, and related issues. Like Paxton, we expect democracy to enhance women's electoral success.

Our final political variable is a dummy coded 1 for the four nations in the sample that still qualify as having a "Marxist-Leninist" government — Cuba, North Korea, Laos, and Viet Nam — and 0 for all others. This variable too should be positively related to women's legislative representation.

Positive associations are expected for each of the five socioeconomic variables we include. We measure women's educational progress using the female share of secondary education enrollees in 1980. Figures for 1980 are used in order to allow some time for women enrolled in secondary school to graduate and have an impact on female political representation. Data for earlier years or for the share with a degree (rather than the share of those enrolled) would be even better, but they are not available for a number of countries. For 20 nations we are forced to use 1990

figures; but since there is a very strong correlation ( $r = .96$ ) between the 1980 and 1990 figures for the countries for which data for both are available, this does not seem problematic. We also use data from 1970 for five countries; since there is a similarly strong correlation ( $r = .85$ ) between 1970 and 1980 figures for this measure, this too seems unlikely to substantially affect the results. (Excluding these 25 nations for which 1980 data are missing does not alter the findings.) Data for university-level education would be more appropriate for this variable, since college education seems more likely to have an effect on women's electoral fortunes than does high school education. But data for the female share of enrollees in university education are available for fewer nations. The results for the two measures are similar in any case.

For women's work activity we use the female share of the paid labor force in 1994. Analyses using an alternative measure, the labor force participation rate for women aged 15 and over, yielded similar findings.

Data on women in professional occupations are available for only 116 of the 146 countries, so we include this variable only in a separate analysis of those 116 countries. The measure we use is the female share of employees in professional, technical, and related occupations in 1990. This is a broader measure than we would like, as the "related occupations" category includes nurses, legal assistants, and a variety of other positions which differ in skill requirements, autonomy, pay, and status from professional positions and thus seem less likely to serve as springboards to political careers. Unfortunately, disaggregated figures for professional occupations *only* are not available for most countries.

To represent the strength of the women's movement we use the number of national women's political organizations in each country in 1990 whose mission is expressed by themes of emancipation, political participation, democracy, or socialism. This too is not an ideal measure, since a large number of organizations may indicate fragmentation within the women's movement and thus weakness rather than strength. Yet there is no better measure available.<sup>6</sup> Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan (1997), who compiled the data for this variable, found measures for earlier years to be a good predictor of the likelihood of a nation extending suffrage rights to women in the early part of this century. We substitute regional mean values for missing data for 10 countries. (Excluding these countries does not alter the results.) We use a logarithmic transformation of the variable to reduce skewness.

We use real GDP per capita in 1994 to capture level of economic development. These data, which come from the United Nations (1997), are translated into U.S. dollars using purchasing power parities (PPPs).<sup>7</sup> Here too a logged version is used to reduce skewness.

In her analysis Paxton (1997) included two additional socioeconomic variables. The first is an overall measure of women's social and economic equality, based on features such as gender segregation, gender pay differences, traditions favoring men, and practices of polygamy and female genital mutilation. The second represents

the degree to which women and men have equal rights in marriage and divorce. Both are from Charles Humana's *World Human Rights Guide*. Because data were available for only a subset of her countries, Paxton included these variables only in separate analyses, in which neither was significantly related to women's share in parliament. We experienced the same problem. The most recent data for the measures, from 1991, are available for only 91 of our 146 nations (Humana 1992). In regressions with those 91 nations the variables were never statistically significant, so we do not include them in the analyses reported here.

Culture is a notoriously difficult phenomenon to capture in quantitative form. Survey data on attitudes toward women in politics would be helpful. But unfortunately, comparable data of this sort are not available for a sufficient number of countries to be useful here.<sup>8</sup> We use a number of variables to tap cultural attitudes. First, we include a set of dummy variables representing the dominant religious tradition in each country. Of the major world religions, Protestantism is the least likely to emphasize traditional roles for women (Gardner 1989; Ahmed 1992), so we use it as the baseline (omitted) category. This follows Norris (1985, 1997), Paxton (1997), and Rule (1987). Dummy variables are used for (1) Catholicism, (2) Islam, and (3) other. Each of these variables should be inversely related to the share of parliamentary seats held by women. The "other" category includes African indigenous religions, Buddhism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Hinduism, Judaism, and countries in which no single religious tradition dominates.<sup>9</sup> Ancillary analyses not reported here in which we used separate dummy variables for each of these "other" religions yielded similar results. These religions are grouped together because each is dominant in a relatively small number of countries and because doing so preserves degrees of freedom in the regressions.

Second, we include a dummy variable coded 1 for countries that as of 1998 had ratified the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* and 0 for those that had not. Ratification of this treaty signifies a commitment by a country's government to modify its laws to conform to the tenets of the convention, which specify equality between women and men. Paxton (1997) included this variable in her analysis of women's legislative representation in 1988 but found no effect. Third, we use a dummy variable coded 1 for countries in which abortion is legal on grounds of economic or social reasons or on request and 0 for countries in which it is not. These two measures use the existence of government commitment to gender equality and national legislation granting reproductive rights to women as indicators of cultural orientations toward women's roles and rights in society. We expect a positive association between each of these variables and women's share in parliament.

For similar reasons, the timing of female suffrage, which we treat as a political factor, can also be considered a measure of differences in cultural attitudes toward women's role in politics. Indeed, Moore and Shackman (1996) treat it explicitly as such. To the extent that late adopters of female suffrage are characterized by less

TABLE 2: Variable Descriptions and Data Sources

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**DEPENDENT VARIABLE***Women's share of parliamentary seats*

Share of seats in the main national legislative body (lower house if bicameral) held by women, 1998 (as of January 1). From Inter-Parliamentary Union (1998). Range = 0.0–40.4. Average = 10.8.

**POLITICAL DETERMINANTS***Electoral system<sup>a</sup>*

Structure of the electoral system. Coded 2 if voters choose among party lists in multimember districts which average five or more seats per district (54); 1 if party lists are used but district size averages fewer than five seats, or a combination of party list and candidate voting is used, or voters choose among individual candidates but in multimember districts (48); 0 if voters choose among individual candidates in single-member districts (44). Authors' coding from Inter-Parliamentary Union (1998).

*Left party government*

Share of seats in the main national legislative body (lower house if bicameral) held by leftist parties, 1998. Authors' coding from Inter-Parliamentary Union (1998); Banks, Day, and Muller (1998); Derbyshire and Derbyshire (1996). Included only in the analysis of 20 affluent longstanding democracies due to limited data availability. Range for those 20 countries = 0.2–71.7. Average = 40.3.

*Timing of women's suffrage*

Year women gained voting rights in national elections. From Inter-Parliamentary Union (1995, Table 1). Range = 1893–1990. Average = 1946.

*Degree of democracy<sup>b</sup>*

Degree of political rights and freedoms, scored on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high), 1996–97. From Freedom House (1997). Range = 1–7. Average = 4.8.

*Marxist-Leninist government*

A dummy variable coded 1 for countries with a "Marxist-Leninist" government dominated by a Communist party (4) and 0 otherwise (142). From Derbyshire and Derbyshire (1996, Table 14).

**SOCIOECONOMIC DETERMINANTS***Women's educational attainment<sup>c</sup>*

Female share of enrollees in secondary education, 1980. From United Nations (1993, Table 15; 1995, Table 7). Range = 13–60. Average = 44.

*Women's share of the labor force*

Female share of the paid labor force, 1994. From United Nations (1995, Table 11). Range = 10–50. Average = 35.

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**TABLE 2: Variable Descriptions and Data Sources***Women in professional occupations*

Female share of employees in professional, technical, and related occupations, 1990. Authors' calculations from United Nations (1995, Table 11). Range = 12-70. Average = 42.

*Strength of the women's movement<sup>d</sup>*

Number of national women's political organizations whose mission is expressed by themes of emancipation, political participation, democracy, or socialism, 1990. Data compiled by Francisco Ramirez, Yasemin Soysal, and Suzanne Shanahan; see Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan (1997). Range = 0-17. Average = 1.5.

*Level of economic development*

Real gross domestic product per capita (in US\$), 1994. From UNDP (1997, Table 1). Range = 427-34,155. Average = 6,721.

**CULTURAL DETERMINANTS***Religion*

Three dummy variables representing the dominant religious tradition in each country — one for Catholicism (45), one for Islam (33), and one for Other (43; includes African indigenous religions, Buddhism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Hinduism, Judaism, and countries with no dominant religion). The baseline category is Protestantism (25). Authors' coding from Central Intelligence Agency (1997).

*Ratification of U.N. convention*

A dummy variable coded 1 for countries that had ratified the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* by 1998 (137) and 0 for countries that had not (9). From United Nations (1998).

*Abortion rights*

A dummy variable coded 1 for countries in which abortion is legal (as of 1994) on grounds of economic or social reasons or on request (99) and 0 for countries in which it is not (47). From United Nations (1995, Table 2).

*Region*

Six region dummy variables — one each for Sub-Saharan Africa (39), the Middle East and North Africa (14), Asia and the Pacific (22), Latin America and the Caribbean (31), Eastern Europe (17), and Scandinavia (5). The baseline region is Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (18).

<sup>a</sup> Bangladesh, Tanzania, and Uganda, which otherwise would be coded 0, are coded 1 because 9%, 13%, and 14%, respectively, of their legislatures' seats are reserved for women.

<sup>b</sup> In the original Freedom House scores, 1 denotes a high degree of democracy and 7 a low degree. We have inverted the original scores.

<sup>c</sup> Data are from 1970 for five countries and 1990 for 20 countries.

<sup>d</sup> For countries that formerly were part of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, or Yugoslavia, we use the number of national women's political organizations in the now-dissolved nation. In addition, regional means are substituted for missing data for 10 countries.

favorable attitudes toward women as politicians, that seems justified. However, recent research by Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan (1997) indicates that since the early part of this century the granting of suffrage to women has been driven more by government efforts to conform to a worldwide trend than by cultural or political dynamics specific to individual countries. This finding suggests grounds for caution in interpreting the timing of women's suffrage as a proxy for cultural differences across countries.

Finally, we follow Moore and Shackman (1996) and Paxton (1997) in using a geographic region measure. Each nation is classified into one of seven regions: (1) Sub-Saharan Africa; (2) Middle East and North Africa; (3) Asia and the Pacific; (4) Latin America and the Caribbean; (5) Eastern Europe; (6) Scandinavia; (7) Western Europe (excluding Scandinavia), the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. We then use six dummy variables, one for each of the first six regions, with the Western Europe et al. region as the baseline category. Each of the dummies for the first five regions is expected to have a negative coefficient; the dummy for Scandinavia should have a positive coefficient. Scandinavia is separated from the rest of Western Europe because cultural beliefs and practices there stand out as especially egalitarian along gender and other lines (Bystydzienski 1995; Norris 1993:312, 1996a; Paxton 1997). The region variables are intended to soak up residual cultural variation not captured by the religion, ratification, and abortion rights variables. Although region is a relatively crude operational measure of cultural differences, there is substantial variation across regions in gender-role socialization of girls and boys and in adult gender-role patterns (see, e.g., Giele & Smock 1977; Schneider & Silverman 1997).

We begin by analyzing the full group of 146 nations. We then add the variable representing women's share in professional occupations, which reduces the sample to 116 nations.<sup>10</sup> We also perform a separate analysis for the 20 wealthiest longstanding democracies. For each set of countries we initially include all independent variables in the regression model. We then eliminate, in backward stepwise fashion, variables that do not meet the minimal criterion of having an absolute *t*-value of at least 1.00 (Hicks & Swank 1984; Hicks & Kenworthy 1998).<sup>11</sup>

## Results

Results of the analysis for the full set of 146 countries are displayed in models A and B in Table 3. Model A includes all variables except, for reasons noted above, left party government and women in professional occupations. Model B includes variables with absolute *t*-values of 1.00 or greater following backward stepwise deletion. Three of the four political variables perform very much as expected. Party list/multimember district electoral systems, early women's suffrage, and Marxist-Leninist governments seem to promote women's political representation. However,

the degree of democracy in a nation appears to have no bearing on women's chances of election to parliament. Results for the socioeconomic variables are much weaker. Contrary to our expectations, women's educational attainment, female labor force participation, the number of national women's political organizations, and national economic wealth are not related to the share of legislative seats held by women. Though the coefficient for each of these variables has the expected positive sign in model A, none of the four is close to being statistically significant and three of the four get dropped in model B. Results for the religion, ratification, and region variables strongly suggest that cultural attitudes matter, though the abortion rights variable turns out not to be significant. Even controlling for socioeconomic and political factors, countries in which religions emphasizing traditional roles for women predominate, that have not ratified the U.N. convention on eliminating gender discrimination, and/or that are outside the Western Europe et al. region tend to have fewer women in parliament.

In models C and D we add the women in professional occupations variable. As noted earlier, this reduces the sample to 116 countries. The results suggest that the share of women in professional jobs has an impact on women's electoral success. Our suspicion that women's overall movement into the labor force is less important to their electoral fortunes than advancement in professional jobs appears to be borne out. It is not paid work per se that affects women's opportunities for legislative representation, but rather the particular *types* of paid work in which women participate. The coefficient signs and significance levels for the other variables are similar to those for the 146-nation analysis.

A number of the variables we include — particularly those for women's educational attainment, the share of women in professional jobs, the strength of the women's movement, and culture — undoubtedly suffer from measurement error. This may bias parameter estimates, as might the omission of potentially key but as yet unknown or unmeasured explanatory variables. To assess the robustness of our findings, we performed a number of sensitivity checks.

A simple way to check for robustness is via the jackknife diagnostic (see Mooney & Duval 1993). The regression in model D of Table 3 was reestimated 116 times, each time with one of the countries omitted. With one exception, all of the variables retained their signs and significance levels throughout. When Djibouti was dropped one of the culture variables, the dummy for ratification of the U.N. convention on eliminating discrimination against women, was no longer statistically significant at even the .10 level. Djibouti is one of the nine countries in the sample not to have ratified the convention, and it has no women in its parliament. None of the other variables turned out to be sensitive to the exclusion of any particular nation.

Measurement error is likely to be greatest in poorer nations. We therefore tried the analysis excluding countries with a per capita GDP of less than \$1,000; doing so omits the poorest 10% of the sample. All variables retained their signs and significance levels. Following common practice (e.g., Shen & Williamson 1997)

we also ran the analysis excluding countries with populations of less than 1 million, which drops the smallest 15% of the nations in the sample. Here again the ratification variable was no longer statistically significant, but none of the other variables was affected.

The finding of effects for some variables and lack of effects for others could be due to the presence or absence of particular variables in the model. For instance, if the effects of a nation's level of economic development are chiefly indirect, rather than direct, then the poor performance of this variable may be due to inclusion of other variables through which it has such effects. That, indeed, turns out to be the case. When we dropped the religion and region dummies from the regression in model D of Table 3 and added the economic development variable, the latter was statistically significant (in the expected positive direction). The adjusted  $R^2$  was reduced by almost half, however, which suggests that culture is more important than level of development.

We performed similar checks for the other variables that were dropped in the backward stepwise deletion. We also tried regressions in which we dropped each variable included in model D of Table 3 one at a time. The only noteworthy change in the results yielded by these checks concerns the ratification variable; when the Marxist-Leninist government variable was omitted from the regression, this variable was no longer significant. Together with the ratification variable's fragile results when Djibouti and/or low population countries are dropped, this suggests reason for caution regarding the effects of this particular measure of culture.

We tried the analyses using alternative measures for several of the variables. In particular, we ran the regressions with an electoral system measure similar to those used in most previous analyses — that is, centered around proportional representation seat allocation rather than party list/multimember district balloting (e.g., Moore & Shackman 1996; Norris 1985, 1987, 1997; Oakes & Almquist 1993; Paxton 1997; Rule 1981, 1987, 1994). For this measure we coded nations 2 if their electoral system uses proportional representation exclusively, 1 if it is a mixed system, and 0 if proportional representation is not used at all. As it turns out, the two electoral system measures are quite similar ( $r = .82$ ). It is no surprise, therefore, that the regression results using the proportional representation measure were virtually identical to those shown in Table 3. In an attempt to determine which of the two electoral system characteristics — party list/multimember district balloting or proportional representation — has a greater impact on women's opportunities for legislative representation, we reran the regression in model D of Table 3 with both measures included. Due to multicollinearity between the two electoral system variables neither performed well, but the standardized coefficient for the party list measure was twice as large as that for the proportional representation measure, and the former was statistically significant (marginally so at the .10 level) while the latter was not.

We also tried alternative measures and/or codings for the democracy, women's education, women's labor force participation, strength of the women's movement, level of national economic development, religion, ratification, and region variables. Only one yielded any appreciable change in the results: When we coded the ratification variable using the year the country ratified the U.N. convention (with nations that have not yet ratified coded as 1999), it was no longer statistically significant. This coding is somewhat problematic, since some countries (particularly in Eastern Europe) were formed more than a decade after the convention was first introduced in 1980. Nonetheless, this result further undermines our confidence in the relevance of ratification as an explanatory variable.

Finally, we investigated Matland's (1998) suggestion that electoral system structure affects women's parliamentary representation only in wealthy nations and not in less developed ones. We did so by adding a multiplicative interaction term between the electoral system variable and a dummy variable representing level of economic development. With the dummy variable coded 0 for less developed nations and 1 for more affluent countries (we experimented with various cutoffs, from \$5,000 in GDP per capita up to \$15,000), the coefficient for the electoral system variable reflects the impact of electoral system structure among less developed nations only (see Jaccard, Turrisi, and Wan 1990, pp. 26-27). The coefficient remained strong and highly significant. This suggests, contrary to Matland's findings, that electoral system structure has effects not only among the rich industrialized nations but for poorer countries as well.<sup>12</sup>

Are causal patterns similar for the most affluent democratic nations, which have been the focus of most previous research on gender inequality in political representation? To find out, we ran the analysis including only the 20 wealthiest longstanding democracies. For this smaller sample we are able to include the women in professional occupations variable as well as a variable representing the share of parliamentary seats held by leftist parties. The degree of democracy and Marxist-Leninist government variables are left out because all 20 countries score 7 on the democracy scale and none has a Marxist-Leninist government. The Islam religion variable is also inapplicable here. And only three of the region dummies are included because there are no countries from Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, or Eastern Europe in this group. Two of the remaining region dummies now represent just one country each — Israel for the Middle East, Japan for Asia. The "Other" religion dummy variable is dropped because it is so highly correlated with the Middle East and Asia region dummies.

Because the analysis now includes just 20 nations, only a limited number of independent variables can reasonably be entered in the regressions. We tried a variety of combinations of the variables and then performed a backward stepwise deletion from the best performing model. Model E in Table 3 shows the results, which are strikingly consistent with those for the worldwide analysis. As with the larger sample, the political variables perform well. Electoral system structure and

TABLE 3: Regression Results

	146 Countries		116 Countries		20 Countries
	A	B	C	D	E
<b>Political determinants</b>					
Electoral system	.21 / 2.10*** (3.36)	.22 / 2.23*** (3.71)	.21 / 2.07*** (2.94)	.22 / 2.17*** (3.28)	.47 / 5.73*** (4.54)
Left party government					.22 / .12** (2.12)
Timing of women's suffrage	-.16 / -.07** (2.06)	-.19 / -.08*** (2.51)	-.12 / -.05* (1.34)	-.12 / -.06* (1.51)	-.26 / -.14** (2.59)
Degree of democracy	.09 / .35 (.98)		.04 / .19 (.45)		
Marxist-Leninist government	.35 / 17.54*** (5.26)	.31 / 15.31*** (5.25)	.31 / 20.10*** (4.34)	.29 / 18.37*** (4.62)	
<b>Socioeconomic determinants</b>					
Women's educational attainment	.04 / .04 (.53)		-.03 / -.03 (.26)		
Women's share of the labor force	.08 / .07 (1.03)	.08 / .07 (1.14)	.03 / .02 (.33)		
Women in professional occupations			.20 / .13** (1.66)	.21 / .13*** (2.42)	.20 / .22** (2.02)
Strength of the women's movement (log)	.05 / .64 (.68)		.01 / .06 (.06)		
Level of economic development (log)	.08 / .64 (.77)		.08 / .67 (.68)		

the timing of women's suffrage once again have strong and significant effects in the expected direction. The same is true for left party government. Women's share in professional occupations again is the lone socioeconomic variable related to women's political representation. Catholicism remains less conducive to women's success in winning election than Protestantism. And two of the three region dummies, those for the Middle East and for Asia, are significant with the expected negative sign. It is worth noting that these region dummies might well be picking up the influence of religious factors. Japan is the only Asian country in this group but also the only one dominated by Shintoism/Buddhism. Similarly, Israel is the only Middle Eastern nation and the only one in which Judaism is dominant. Unfortunately, separate dummy variables cannot be included for both religion and region since they would be identical. Once again, women's educational attainment<sup>13</sup> and labor force participation, the number of national women's political organizations, level of national economic development, and abortion access are all unrelated to gender inequality in political representation.

TABLE 3: Regression Results (Continued)

	146 Countries		116 Countries		20 Countries
	A	B	C	D	E
<b>Cultural determinants</b>					
<b>Religion<sup>a</sup></b>					
Catholicism	-.20 / -3.47** (2.14)	-.22 / -3.84*** (2.41)	-.27 / -4.76*** (2.72)	-.29 / -5.19*** (3.14)	-.46 / -10.12*** (4.85)
Islam	-.26 / -5.05** (2.21)	-.36 / -7.04*** (3.59)	-.19 / -3.85* (1.57)	-.24 / -4.75** (2.17)	
Other	-.27 / -4.91*** (2.81)	-.31 / -5.57*** (3.31)	-.26 / -5.00*** (2.64)	-.27 / -5.25*** (2.88)	
<b>Ratification of</b>					
U.N. convention <sup>b</sup>	.09 / 3.16* (1.56)	.10 / 3.29** (1.70)	.11 / 3.46* (1.57)	.11 / 3.68** (1.79)	
Abortion rights	-.02 / -.42 (.29)		-.07 / -1.24 (.81)		
<b>Region<sup>c</sup></b>					
Sub-Saharan Africa	-.01 / -.20 (.07)	-.15 / -2.78* (1.31)	-.15 / -2.77 (.90)	-.19 / -3.52* (1.59)	
Middle East and North Africa	-.15 / -4.24* (1.50)	-.20 / -5.46** (2.10)	-.31 / -8.36*** (2.66)	-.32 / -8.76*** (3.11)	-.45 / -20.90*** (4.85)
Asia and the Pacific	-.17 / -3.79* (1.51)	-.24 / -5.38*** (2.52)	-.30 / -6.99*** (2.52)	-.32 / -7.46*** (3.31)	-.25 / -11.89** (2.64)
Latin America and the Caribbean	-.12 / -2.34 (1.02)	-.18 / -3.63** (2.08)	-.28 / -5.45** (2.14)	-.31 / -6.01*** (3.22)	
Eastern Europe	-.20 / -5.01** (1.94)	-.27 / -6.85*** (3.27)	-.19 / -6.61** (1.98)	-.22 / -6.01*** (3.22)	
Scandinavia	.24 / 10.86*** (3.56)	.22 / 10.09*** (3.43)	.24 / 10.73*** (3.12)	.22 / 10.07*** (3.19)	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.59	.59	.62	.64	.87

*Note:* Standardized and unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, with absolute *t*-values in parentheses. Dependent variable is the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women in 1998. Models A and C include all variables of interest; models B, D, and E include only those with absolute *t*-values equal to or greater than 1.00 following backward stepwise deletion. For variable descriptions and data sources, see Table 2.

<sup>a</sup> The baseline category is Protestantism.

<sup>b</sup> Results for the ratification variable are sensitive to coding and to the countries and variables included in the analysis. See the text for discussion.

<sup>c</sup> The baseline region is Western Europe (excluding Scandinavia), the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

\*  $p < .10$     \*\*  $p < .05$     \*\*\*  $p < .01$  (one-tailed tests)

The principal change in findings in this 20-nation analysis is that the Scandinavia dummy, which is consistently influential in the larger samples, is now so ineffectual as to be dropped from the model altogether. This suggests that the high level of female political representation in the Scandinavian nations relative to the other affluent democracies is attributable to political, socioeconomic, and/or religious differences, rather than to any region-specific nonreligious cultural effect (see also Matland 1994). The variable representing government ratification of the U.N. convention on eliminating gender discrimination also is not significant here. Since the results for this variable in the worldwide samples were sensitive to the cases and variables included in the regressions and to the way in which the variable is coded, that is not especially surprising.

Given the small sample size, the results of this analysis of the most affluent longstanding democracies may be especially sensitive to individual cases. To assess this possibility we again performed a jackknife, dropping the 20 countries one at a time from model E in Table 3. The results changed very little. The variables for electoral system structure, Catholic religion, and the two regions were always significant at the .05 level or better. The left party government and timing of women's suffrage variables were always significant at the .10 level or better and almost always at the .05 level. The women in professional occupations variable, while frequently significant at the .05 level, reached significance at only the .10 level when Canada, France, Luxembourg, or Switzerland was dropped and failed (narrowly) to reach even that lenient level when Australia was omitted. While this suggests some grounds for caution regarding the professional occupations variable, such a result is not surprising in a regression with seven variables and only 19 cases.

## Discussion

The results of our analysis are relatively clear and straightforward. Political factors clearly play a central role in determining the degree of gender inequality in political representation. We find strong support for the effect of electoral system structure. Party list/multimember district systems are more conducive to the election of women to national legislatures than are candidate-centered/single-member district systems. The timing of women's suffrage is also persistently related to women's political representation, with earlier suffrage associated with larger women's shares in parliament. The same appears to be true of the proportion of seats held by leftist parties, though we are unable to include this variable in the worldwide analysis of both affluent and less developed nations. While only a handful of Marxist-Leninist governments remain in existence, those that do tend to boost women's legislative representation.

Of the five socioeconomic factors we consider, only women's share in professional occupations is consistently associated with the proportion of parliamentary seats they hold. Where more women work in professional-type jobs, they tend to make greater headway in political representation. Women's share of employees in professional jobs varies considerably across the world, ranging from around half in Europe and North America to one-quarter in the Middle East and Africa (where informal labor for women, particularly in agriculture, is much more pervasive) as of the late 1990s. This appears to be part of the reason why women have obtained greater political representation in the former regions than in the latter. Neither women's overall participation in the paid labor force nor their educational attainment is relevant. Level of economic development also does not appear to have a direct effect, net of other socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors. Nor, finally, does the number of national women's political organizations in a country matter. Because this is such a crude measure, however, we are hesitant to conclude that this indicates a lack of impact for the strength of the women's movement itself — particularly since case studies tend to suggest that a vibrant women's movement can play a critical role in reducing gender political inequality (Bystydzienski 1995; Sainsbury 1993).

Conventional expectations about the relevance of cultural attitudes are confirmed in our analysis. Holding political and socioeconomic factors constant, nations in which religions emphasizing traditional roles for women predominate tend to have fewer women in parliament. Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, in the Middle East and North Africa, in Asia and the Pacific, in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in Eastern Europe tend to have smaller proportions of their parliamentary seats held by women than do countries in the Western Europe etc. region. And Scandinavian nations, longtime bastions of egalitarian gender beliefs and practices, tend to have more women in their national legislatures than any other countries. It is not certain that these regional differences are due to culture, but that seems a highly plausible explanation. Nations whose governments have not ratified the U.N. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* also tend to have fewer female legislators, though this variable is significant only for the worldwide samples and even then is sensitive to the countries and variables included in the analysis and to the way the variable is coded. Our one other measure of culture, legalization of abortion, is not significant in the analyses.

Several of our findings reinforce those of previous studies on gender inequality in political representation. Our results reaffirm the importance attributed by most such studies to political factors. The bulk of prior research has concentrated exclusively on the most affluent longstanding democracies and has found the structure of the electoral system to be among the most important determinants of women's success in achieving legislative representation (Darcy, Welch & Clark 1994; Lovenduski & Norris 1993; Norris 1985, 1987; Rule 1981, 1987, 1994). Our results,

like those of Paxton (1997), echo this finding and extend it to countries throughout the world. The same is true of the timing of women's suffrage (Rule 1981). We also find strong positive effects for the share of parliamentary seats held by leftist parties (Duverger 1955; Norris 1987; Rule 1987), though we are able to include this variable only in the analysis of 20 industrialized countries. Marxist-Leninist governments are also more likely to promote women into legislative positions (Paxton 1997), though such positions may be of less consequence in such countries than elsewhere. Several previous studies have also noted the relevance of cultural attitudes toward women in politics (Moore & Shackman 1996; Norris 1987, 1997; Paxton 1997; Rule 1987). Our results provide strong confirmation that they matter, both among the affluent democracies and worldwide.

On the other hand, our findings differ sharply in several other respects from those of prior research, particularly regarding the effects of socioeconomic factors. In contrast to Norris (1987) and Rule (1981, 1987, 1994), we find no indication that women's educational attainment has an effect on the degree of gender inequality in political representation. Our finding of a lack of effect for female labor force participation contradicts the findings of Moore and Shackman (1996), Oakes and Almquist (1993), and Rule (1981, 1987). Our results suggest that analyses finding an effect for women's educational attainment or labor force participation may have done so in part because they failed to include a variable representing women in professional occupations. Unlike the only two previous studies to include such a variable (Norris 1985, 1987), we find women's share of employees in professional jobs to be an influential determinant of women's electoral success among both less developed and affluent countries. This difference is likely due to our use of improved variable measures and a more complete set of variables than were available at the time of Norris's research a decade ago.

Our results for several key variables are contradictory to those of Matland (1998), Moore and Shackman (1996), and Oakes and Almquist (1993), three of the four prior studies to have examined both industrialized and less developed countries. In contrast to our findings, these studies indicated no effect of political factors such as electoral system structure or the timing of women's suffrage in less developed nations. The difference in results could be due in part to sample composition, sample size, or changes in effects over time, but they are very likely a product of these studies' failure to include a number of relevant variables — in particular, multiple measures of culture (Oakes and Almquist included no cultural variables at all), separate region dummy variables for Eastern Europe and/or Scandinavia, a variable for women in professional occupations, and a Marxist-Leninist government variable.

By contrast, our findings are largely consistent with those of Paxton (1997). The principal difference is that Paxton found no effect for socioeconomic factors. She did not, however, include a variable for women's representation in professional occupations. We also find effects for the timing of women's suffrage and (in the

20-nation sample) left party government, variables not included by Paxton but used by several other researchers. Paxton found democracy to have a negative effect on women's parliamentary representation, while our analyses suggest no such adverse effect. In addition, we find the variable representing ratification of the U.N. convention on eliminating gender discrimination to be significant (though tenuously so, and only in the worldwide samples) whereas Paxton did not. To assess the reasons for these differing results, we tried an analysis with our 1990s data but using only the countries and variables included by Paxton in her analysis for 1988 (1997: 453, model 5). Although we were unable to include 8 of Paxton's 108 nations and one of her variables (ineffectiveness of the legislature, which she found to be insignificant), we were otherwise able to replicate her analysis. The results were very similar to hers, except that in our replication democracy had no effect. We then used Paxton's variables with our 1990s data and our larger sample of countries, of which 132 could be included. Again the results were quite similar to Paxton's, with the exception of the democracy variable once again and several religion and region dummies; the latter were insignificant in Paxton's regressions but, likely due to the increased number of cases, reached significance in ours. This suggests that, aside from the divergent finding for the democracy variable,<sup>14</sup> the differences in results between our study and Paxton's owe largely to the variables included in the analyses and, to a lesser degree, to sample composition rather than to changes in effects over time. Given our findings of significant effects for women's share in professional occupations, the timing of women's suffrage, and left party government, we believe these variables merit inclusion in analyses of gender inequality in political representation.

Our model is able to account for nearly two-thirds of the variation in women's share of legislative seats around the world. That is not bad, but it leaves one-third of the variation unexplained. Yet as already noted, a number of the variables we use likely suffer from a nontrivial degree of measurement error. In addition, we are unable to include a variable representing left party government in the full-sample regressions. Furthermore, there are a variety of potentially important factors, such as individual political motivation and time availability (see Norris 1996a, 1997), that macro-level data cannot adequately capture. Finally, even for the measures that are available, data for some countries are likely to be of questionable reliability. Given these inherent limitations, we view our analysis as relatively successful. Indeed, when the analysis is confined to the affluent longstanding democracies, for which data are both more complete and more reliable, the variables we highlight account for nearly 90% of the variation in women's political representation (*after* adjusting for degrees of freedom).

Our findings indicate that political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors each play a role in accounting for cross-national variation in the degree of gender inequality in political representation. In this respect, women's political representation appears to be similar to many other important societal phenomena,

from government policies (Evans, Rueschemeyer & Skocpol 1985; Esping-Andersen 1990; Putnam 1993) to organizational strategy and structure (Powell & DiMaggio 1991; Hollingsworth, Schmitter & Streeck 1994; Lincoln & Kalleberg 1990) to political economic performance (Hicks & Kenworthy 1998; Porter 1990; Dore 1987). It is worth emphasizing, however, that socioeconomic factors seem less important than theoretical perspectives on gender political inequality sometimes presume. A relatively common view holds that reduction of gender inequality in the socioeconomic sphere, from education to the labor force, is critical to women's success in obtaining political power (Blumberg 1984; Chafetz 1984, 1991; Randall 1987:124-30). Our analyses suggest that women's movement into professional occupations does advance their opportunities in the political sphere. But this is the only one of the five socioeconomic factors we consider that matters. And its effect, as indicated by the standardized coefficients in models D and E of Table 3, is weaker than those of political and cultural determinants. Altering political institutions and cultural beliefs and practices would seem to be a more effective, albeit not necessarily an easier, route to gender political equality.

### **Prospects for Reducing Gender Inequality in Political Representation**

Increasing women's political representation seems a worthy goal in its own right, on egalitarian grounds. But would it have any substantive impact on politics and policies? Enhancing women's opportunities for election might well improve the quality of policy making by increasing competition for seats and by heightening the diversity of views and experiences among representatives (Darcy, Welch, & Clark 1994:15-18; Kahn 1996:138). In addition, recent research suggests that female legislators help to steer political debate — within parties and within parliaments — toward issues significant to women (Burrell 1994, chap. 8; Center for the American Woman and Politics 1991; Karvonen & Selle 1995; Norris 1996b; Thomas 1994; Vega & Firestone 1995).

What do our results suggest regarding prospects for improvement in women's legislative representation around the world? Our analyses highlight five key determinants of the degree of gender inequality in political representation (in non-Marxist-Leninist nations): the structure of the electoral system, the party composition of government, the timing of women's suffrage, women's share in professional occupations, and cultural attitudes. The first two, electoral system structure and the party composition of government, may not provide much impetus for further progress in the near future. To be sure, a shift in electoral system structure from a candidate-centered/single-member district system to a party-list/multimember district system would boost women's legislative representation in many countries. And countries certainly are able to alter their electoral system, as have France, Italy, and New Zealand within the past two decades. Yet few other

countries seem likely to do so, and changes from a candidate-centered/single-member district system to a party list/multimember district system in some nations (such as New Zealand) might well be offset by changes in the opposite direction in others (such as France and Italy). The share of legislative seats held by leftist parties shifts regularly, of course, but there seems no reason to expect a sudden surge in representation by parties of the left around the world. Party orientation may come to matter less and less in any case as nonleftist parties boost their share of female candidates to take this issue out of play.

On the other hand, the other three factors seem likely to yield gains. Our findings suggest that the longer women have been able to vote, the greater their success in obtaining legislative representation. A number of less developed nations did not extend voting rights to women until the 1950s or 1960s, or even later. It may be only now, or at some point in the future, that female voting begins to produce increases in the number of women elected to political office in these countries. Women's share in national legislatures is also likely to be boosted by increased numbers of women in professional jobs, which almost certainly will occur in many nations — partly as a result of greater female educational attainment. Although shifts in cultural attitudes are extremely difficult to predict, there is good reason to expect that as women in many nations make further inroads in education, in the labor force, and in political representation itself, acceptance of women in politics will increase. That appears to have been the case in Western Europe and North America over the past several decades (Lovenduski & Norris 1993; Darcy, Welch, & Clark 1994; Bystydzienski 1995).

What about the U.S.? Among the most affluent longstanding democracies, the U.S. has one of the smallest proportions of female legislators. As of 1998 only Japan, Israel, France, and Italy had smaller shares. Indeed, the share of U.S. congressional seats held by women is only slightly higher than the average for the world as a whole. What, if anything, do our results suggest could be done to increase women's legislative representation in the U.S.?

The timing of women's suffrage obviously cannot be altered. Absent a change in our electoral system, the likelihood of a genuine left-oriented political party gaining significant congressional representation in the near future is limited at best.<sup>15</sup> As of 1998 women already held 49% of professional jobs in the United States. Hence, relatively little further progress is likely to occur in this area. The same may be true of cultural attitudes toward women in politics. Women have been gaining greater acceptance in the political sphere over the past generation. As a result, there may be limited room for further improvement (see Darcy, Welch & Clark 1994).

That leaves the structure of the electoral system. Although this is the least likely factor to change, a shift to a party list/multimember district system for elections to Congress would in all likelihood produce the greatest increase in women's political representation in the shortest time. Evidence of the benefits of such systems for

women's electoral success is consistent and striking. The unstandardized coefficient for the electoral system variable in our analysis of the 20 most affluent longstanding democracies (Table 3, model E) suggests that, on average for these countries, a party list/multimember district system increases women's share of parliamentary seats by nearly 12 percentage points compared to a candidate-centered/single-member district system. In addition to the cross-national evidence from our analysis and a number of previous studies, there are several particularly telling bits of anecdotal evidence. In Australia, women hold 16% of the seats in the lower house of parliament, which is elected via a single-member district system. In the upper house (Senate), which is elected in multimember districts, women hold 30% of the seats. In Germany, which uses a mixed system for its lower house, 13% of the representatives elected in single-member districts are women, compared to 42% of those chosen via party lists in multimember districts. And the share of women elected to New Zealand's parliament jumped from 21% to 29% following a switch in the mid-1990s from single-member districts to a mixed system similar to Germany's.

Interestingly, the story is quite similar in American state legislatures, some of which use multimember districts — though with votes cast for candidates, rather than for party lists. The share of women elected from multimember districts tends to be larger than from single-member districts, and states that have switched from multimember to single-member districts have usually experienced declines in the number of female representatives (Darcy, Welch & Clark 1985, 1994:160-67; Matland & Brown 1992; Moncrief & Thompson 1992; Welch & Studlar 1990).

One common explanation for the relatively slow progress in reducing gender inequality in political representation in the U.S. is the power of incumbency. It is not just women but all challengers, according to this argument, who find it difficult to win election (see Seltzer, Newman & Leighton 1997, chap. 4; Darcy, Welch & Clark 1994:176-78). Yet the incumbency advantage in the U.S. Congress is itself partly a function of the exclusive use of single-member electoral districts. Turnover among legislators tends to be greater in countries that use multimember districts (Matland & Studlar 1995; Katz 1986:97-101).

There is reason to be at least cautiously optimistic about the future of women's political representation in the U.S. Women's share of seats in state legislatures has grown from 4% in 1970 to 22% in 1998. While the rate of change has been less rapid, the trend for Congress has also been up — from 2% in 1930 to 4% in 1960 to 12% in 1998 (Center for the American Woman and Politics 1998). American politics is almost certain to approach a state of gender parity at some point in the future. To the extent that women continue to advance in professional occupations and societal attitudes toward women in politics continue to become more favorable, that day is likely to be hastened. Electoral success by a genuinely leftist political party might also hasten it. A shift to a party list/multimember district electoral system for congressional elections would probably have the greatest effect.

## Notes

1. Norris (1996a) examined a sample of 44 nations, including some less developed ones, using 1994 data; but no socioeconomic variables were included in her analysis.
2. That such attitudes still exist, albeit to a diminishing extent, is little disputed. Surveys in the U.S., for instance, indicate that people are less likely to vote for a "qualified woman" for public office than for a "qualified man," and that their support for female candidates declines as the prestige of the office increases. See Huddy and Terkildsen (1993), Fox (1997), and Burrell (1994).
3. Of the 45 nonincluded countries, 17 are left out due to the lack of a directly elected legislature and 28 due to lack of data. There is no indication of selection bias: variable means for the 45 nonincluded countries do not differ markedly from those of the 146 that are included, though the former are slightly lower on level of economic development.
4. Iceland is excluded due to missing data for the women's share in professional occupations variable.
5. Even the most comprehensive sources of information on party orientation, such as Banks, Day, and Muller (1997), are insufficiently detailed to enable reliable coding of a government partisanship variable for many countries.
6. Paxton (1997) operationalized the influence of women's movements using two dummy variables representing the presence in a country of, respectively, a "first-wave" and a "second-wave" women's movement, with data from Chafetz and Dworkin (1984). We view these data as less reliable, and they are available for fewer countries. We nevertheless tried including these variables in our regressions, both together and separately. As in Paxton's analysis, neither was significantly related to women's share of legislative seats.
7. Purchasing power parities, which take into account differences in the real cost of living in different countries, are preferable to exchange rates for use in translating currencies. Another commonly used set of GDP per capita figures based on PPPs are the Penn World Table data (see Summers & Heston 1991; National Bureau of Economic Research 1994). However, these data are available for fewer countries.
8. The most likely source of such data is the World Values Survey (World Values Study Group 1994), but it does not include a question on this issue and it covers only 39 countries in any case.
9. In Mongolia and Nepal the dominant Mahayana school of Buddhism tends to emphasize traditional roles for women to a lesser degree than does the Theravada school dominant in countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Laos or the Shintoism-Buddhism combination that predominates in Japan. It might also be argued that Judaism is inappropriately included in the "other" group, given the importance placed on education and professional advancement for both genders in that religion. We tried the analysis with alternative codings for Mongolia, Nepal, and Israel (the only nation in which Judaism predominates), but it made no difference to the results.
10. The countries excluded in the 116-nation analysis are Albania, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Chad, Czech Republic, Estonia, Gabon, Guinea, Iceland, Kenya, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Macedonia, Madagascar, Malta,

Moldova, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Niger, Russia, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda, Ukraine, and Viet Nam.

11. Variables are dropped from the analysis one at a time, starting with the variable with the smallest *t*-value, until the regression yields only variables with absolute *t*-values greater than or equal to 1.00.

12. We also tried simply dropping the 20 wealthiest longstanding democratic countries from the regressions, with similar results.

13. The results did not change when we used the university-level education measure or a variable representing the share of women aged 25-64 with a university degree (from OECD 1998).

14. Paxton's (1997) democracy measure was created by combining the Freedom House index of political rights and freedoms with its index of civil liberties, whereas in our analyses we use only the political index. The results for our replication of Paxton's analysis turned out the same irrespective of which democracy measure was used.

15. Most political experts consider the Democratic Party to be "center-left," rather than "left of center."

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