

their power by conquering and subduing, because they don't like to share and live in harmony (The City of God XIX.14,15).

CONCLUSIONS

I intended to emphasize this early contribution of Christianity in order to prove that human rights don't belong only to natural law. Freedom, equality of chances, and mutual respect are not just secular products. In a new Europe, if we want to defend human rights, we must not forget the importance of Christianity.

Of course, throughout the centuries, rulers, political or even ecclesiastical structures tried to justify injustice through Christian ideas. The writings of the first centuries prove that injustice does not have Christian roots. On the contrary, Christianity succeeded gradually in changing the pagan society, fighting for the rights of women and slaves.

It is true that there is injustice within the contemporary world, mainly because the two pillars of the Roman

Empire, the Oriental mentality and the Western pragmatism, survived. For this reason the Christians of our days have to pay attention to the heritage of the first centuries, to continue the direction initiated by early Christian writers.

Suggested Reading

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Gender Inequality in Politics

Gender inequality is a problem not only across Europe—all over the world there is a power gap between men and women. Women have less access to parliamentary and executive power; they are less educated, have fewer good jobs and are less wealthy than men.

The underlying reasons for gender inequality can be found in the patriarchal structure of the cultural background of every ethnicity, nation or people. Also all religious communities, whether Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, traditional or Christian, give more power to men than to women.

Lots of Europeans think that gender inequality is not as much of a problem in our generation as it was in our parents' and grandparents' generations, or not as much of a problem as in developing countries or Arab countries; but we Europeans are also living under unequal gender conditions.

This article aims to analyse gender inequality in the political system. Democracy—rule by the people—should include all segments of society.

One instrument for the empowerment of women in the government is a quota system, since aside from the aforementioned cultural, economic and social and historical reasons, female participation also depends on the electoral system.

MEASURING GENDER INEQUALITY

To measure inequality the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed two indicators: the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM).

The GDI measures (the same as the Human Development Index, HDI) life expectancy, knowledge and the quality of life. The indicators are (1) the life expectancy at birth; (2) the adult literacy rate and the combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools; and (3) the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP).

The GDI was developed in 1995 and measures women and men separately to show the differences in status between the genders. The outcome is a figure between 0 and 1; the perfect score of 1 (equal conditions) has not yet been reached by any country of the world (see table 1).

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) has the following indicators: (1) Seats in parliament held by women; (2) female legislators, senior officials and managers; and (3) female professional and technical workers. The scale is between 0 and 1, with 1 as well being the perfect as-yet-unreached score. Only six European countries have a GEM of more than 0.8. This result shows the extent of the problem of empowering women in Europe.

WHY GENDER EQUALITY IS NEEDED IN POLITICS

First, the Universal Human Rights Declaration of 1948 (HRD) states in Article 2, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status..."

Equal dignity, rights, power, and possibilities for all human beings are written down in many international declarations, conventions and treaties. Also lots of national constitutions call for equality and especially gender equality.

Every citizen of a liberal democracy should have human rights; like the right to freedom of opinion and expression (Art. 19 HRD), the right of peaceful assembly and association (Art. 20 HRD), and the right to take part in the government of her or his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives (Art. 21 HRD).

Human rights like the right to work, the right to free choice of employment, the right to equal pay for equal work (Art. 23 HRD) and the right to education (Art. 26 HRD) are important requirements of society and pertain directly to the issue of gender equality.



Democracy is defined or translated from the greek as "rule by the people." A good description of democracy is that it should be inclusive, participatory, representative, accountable and transparent.

But how can we describe a nation as democratic if women do not participate as much as men? How can we call it representative if women are 50 percent of the population but only 15.7 percent of the members of parliament in the world average (single house, lower house, upper house and senate)?

Not only the input-orientation of politics and democracy and the internationally recognised human rights constitute reasons for more gender equality. Also the output-orientation of politics is showing reasons for more gender equality.

Numerous reports state that increased women's participation will have a strong influence on policy results. Many scientists explain that women are often more trustworthy and public-spirited than men. A higher female participation would promote a more peaceful government.

A policy research report of the World Bank asks, "Are women really the 'Fairer' Sex? Corruption and Women in Government." This report from 1999 concluded: "We find that at the country level, higher rates of female participation in government are associated with lower levels of corruption."

WHY WOMEN NEED SPECIAL RIGHTS

The measurements of the GDI and GEM show that women's power, opportunities and quality of life are lesser than those of men. Globally two out of three illiterate people are women. In 1995, 24.5 percent of girls did not go to a school, compared with 16.4 percent of boys. In South Asia, especially in Pakistan, the situation is worse: there the school enrolment of girls is 50 percent less than that of boys.

Of the 1.2 billion people in the world living in extreme poverty, 70 percent are female. As a result women's health condition is worse. Violence against women is another specific problem; especially in the private or family setting. Statistics say that every 9 seconds a woman is violated by her boyfriend or husband in the United States. In India around 10.000 female newborns are killed every year because their parents cannot afford the dowry.

These are some of the reasons why everyone should start to fight for women's rights. Political rights and political participation are one aspect of women's empowerment and increasing women's life quality. To put it the other way around, an increased life quality will empower more women to participate in politics.

FEMALE PARTICIPATION

"Participation," from the Latin *participatio*, means taking part. In another way it can be understood as taking part, as well as giving part. Political participation comprises all actions of people to influence the political system at the local, regional, national or international level.

Participation could be conventional (in political parties, as voters); unconventional (in social movements or non-governmental organizations); legal or illegal (non-violent as in demonstrations or civil disobedience, or violent as in terrorism).

Generally women don't participate as much as men due to the aforementioned reasons. If they participate they use more non-conventional ways. They are more engaged in social movements and non-governmental organizations than in governments, parliaments or political parties.

Political participation can also be measured by means of political representation. Representation means that legally authorised citizens should be elected to the parliament and form the government. Generally the parliament should be a mirror of the society. All groups should be represented equally.

Female political participation or better representation can be shown by three indicators: what is the percentage of female members of parliament? How many women are in the government? And finally, which positions do women hold in governments or parliaments? Are they party leaders? Or do they lead any key ministries?

Parliaments reach a sufficient critical mass to allow a more gender-related policy when it has more than 30 percent female members. Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden are the only European countries out of the 14 countries of the world which have more than 30 percent of female members of parliament.

Regarding governments, political scientists and political journalists often talk about a "glass ceiling" effect: this means that women don't get to the highest level of government or business. Often women who are in government at the ministerial level have only less important or weak ministries, such as the ministries for social affairs, youth, women, family or environment. Seldom are they in charge of the ministries of finance, defence or foreign relations.

The first female prime ministers in the world were elected in Sri Lanka (1960) and India (1966). Countries of Europe

GDI and GEM of the European Countries

Source: UNDP: Human Development Report 2004

Country	HDI Rank	GDI	GDI Rank	GEM	GEM Rank
Norway	1	0,955	1	0,908	1
Sweden	2	0,946	2	0,854	2
Netherlands	5	0,938	5	0,817	5
Belgium	6	0,938	7	0,808	7
Ireland	10	0,929	14	0,71	16
Switzerland	11	0,932	11	0,771	12
United Kingdom	12	0,934	9	0,698	18
Finland	13	0,933	10	0,82	4
Austria	14	0,924	17	0,77	13
Luxembourg	15	0,926	16	.....	....
France	16	0,929	15	.....	.....
Denmark	17	0,931	13	0,847	3
Germany	19	0,921	19	0,804	9
Spain	20	0,916	20	0,716	15
Italy	21	0,914	21	0,583	32
Greece	24	0,894	25	0,523	43
Portugal	26	0,894	24	0,644	23
Slovenia	27	0,892	26	0,584	31
Cyprus	30	0,875	30	0,497	49
Malta	31	0,866	31	0,48	53
Czech Republic	32	0,865	32	0,586	30
Estonia	36	0,852	33	0,592	28
Poland	37	0,848	34	0,606	27
Hungary	38	0,847	35	0,529	39
Lithuania	41	0,841	37	0,508	47
Slovakia	42	0,84	38	0,607	26
Croatia	48	0,827	43	0,56	36
Latvia	50	0,823	45	0,591	50
Bulgaria	56	0,795	48	....	....
Russian Federation	57	0,794	49	0,467	55
Macedonia	60	....	....	0,517	45
Belarus	62	0,789	51	.....	....
Bosnia and Herzegovina	66	....	.....	.....	...
Romania	69	0,775	56	0,465	56
Ukraine	70	0,773	57	0,411	65



which have had a female president or prime minister in the modern era (1945-2003) are: Bulgaria, Finland, France, the German Democratic Republic, Great Britain, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Switzerland and Yugoslavia.

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Elections, generally to choose amongst political parties or candidates for a house of representatives, can be held in different systems. There are two main systems of representation: proportional and majoritarian representation.

In the majoritarian system, the winner of the electoral district is the candidate who gets the relative majority (first past the post) or the one who has the absolute majority (more than 50 percent of the votes). If no one gets 50 percent in the first run, there has to be a second run, as in the last French presidential elections.

The proportional system represents political parties proportionally. The delegates come from party lists. The percentage of party delegates represents exactly the percentage of votes the party got in the election.

Both systems have positive and negative aspects. The majoritarian system is simple to understand and the person elected is directly accountable and responsible for her or his decisions.

The proportional system makes sure that minorities are represented as well. It is not only the relative or absolute majority of votes that brings a candidate into power. Every single vote is counted and sends party delegates into the house of representatives. On the other hand, the representative is more accountable to the party than to the voter, because the representative has to take care to get a good place on the list for the next elections.

From a gender perspective the proportional system is much more helpful to elect female representatives than the majoritarian system. The reasons for this are:

- 1) The gender identity in the mind of the majority (women and men) is still that men are better in politics than women are. So if a woman runs for elections in the same electoral district as a man, the chance for the male candidate is higher.
- 2) Male candidates are often better equipped than female candidates. They are richer and have better networks to support them. That makes the majoritarian system more difficult for women, who generally get less support from their parties.
- 3) If a political party does not put enough women on its party-list, you can make the party responsible for the gender gap and put the party under pressure.

QUOTAS TO INCREASE FEMALE PARTICIPATION

The core idea of quotas is to increase the political participation of women or religious or ethnic or other minorities. Quotas are an instrument against under-representation and especially they are helpful to realise a critical minority instead of only a few token women in political life.

Quotas could be laid down in constitutions and national legislation or by political parties on their own. They can exist only for a limited period of time to tear down the barriers of female political participation. Once female participation is established there won't be any need for quotas anymore.

Negative aspects are that politicians could be chosen only by gender criteria; or that voters cannot decide on

their own which politician they want to choose; or that the candidates are not equal anymore because there is a quota for women—and not for men. Positive aspects are the destruction of existing barriers, an increased participation of women and more equal gender representation.

Some people argue that quotas are discriminatory. However in the end they are against discrimination as they result in more equal representation. Furthermore, a step forward could be a gender-neutral quota such as: "Males and females should each represent at least 40 percent of the parliament, the working group, the committee or the government." This kind of quota ensures that themes are not female- or male-dominated.

The problems with quotas are that they sometimes only increase the female representation and have no influence on female participation. For that, the political parties have to train their female candidates to get enough qualified candidates to fulfil quotas. Also, reaching a critical mass of women to influence political norms and culture is important.

POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

Women's political participation and representation is not democratic. The causality of the power gap between women and men is very difficult to explain. There are lots of reasons for female under-representation: family background, cultural and religious background, gender identity, education, age, job, income, and time budget, all these influence the political career of a woman.

All the reasons for under-representation are the *results* of female under-representation as well. Women all over the world each fit into their own special context which is created by their religion, nation, ethnicity and economical situation. It is not only gender that defines identity.

There is no general instrument to increase women's power in every society. The introduced example of quotas might be one instrument to increase the number of female parliamentarians. An increased participation of women will be helpful to change peoples' minds about their fitness to govern.

But before that the political internal efficacy must be trained. Women have to be trained for political discourses and motivated to speak up for their rights or their political interests. Another important point is to show that the difference between women and men is just a result of their respective behaviours.

Men as well as women have to learn that gender identities belong to history and that it is not the sole option for women to stay at home and take care of children. A higher political representation of women will also be helpful to break down this kind of stereotypes and reasons for inequality.

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