The Impact of Democratic Transitions on the Representation of Women in the National Parliaments of Southern Africa

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Is Democracy Good for Women?

When the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe adopted multi-party politics, the percentage of women in parliament dropped from an average of 30% to under 10%. In the one party-state under communism, representation of women was generally secured by a quota system, which meant that the ruling party reserved a fixed number of seats for women parliamentarians. With the advent of open political competition, however, women were marginalised in the political arena.

This rather alarming fact inspired the question: what has the democratic transition meant for women in Southern Africa? My focus is on the impact of democratisation processes on political participation by women, notably women's representation in parliament. I will briefly look at developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and then turn to the parliaments of Southern Africa.

In the parliament of the Soviet Union, one third of the seats were reserved for women. With the first multiparty elections in 1990, the percentage of women parliamentarians dropped to just 5%. Concerned about their marginalisation in politics, a number of women founded a new political bloc, Women of Russia. When in 1993 elections were held for the parliament of the Russian federation, Women of Russia won 13,5% of the seats in the State Duma, the lower house of parliament. But with the next election, women's representation declined to 9.8% in the State Duma, as the political bloc Women of Russia did not manage to overcome the 5% threshold on the party-list vote. Only four parties crossed this threshold. However, Women of Russia did make an impact, as other parties now saw themselves compelled to nominate women higher on their lists.

Does it matter? Yes, according to Nadezhda Shvedova of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Democracy in Russia has a masculine face. Women in parliament bring a new element to political culture, namely the gendered interpretation of politics:

> Women parliamentarians are redefining 'national security' to go beyond armies and arsenals to the quality of life of the people – their health, education, safety, and welfare .... Women are increasing accessibility, transparency and accountability and thereby strengthening all levels of government while working in partnership with citizens.[1]

The lessons of the former Soviet Union hold true for other countries in Europe and Asia which over the past ten years have relegated the one-party state to the scrapheap of history. In the countries of Eastern Europe, women have fared somewhat better than in the successor states of the Soviet Union. This can possibly be explained by the more developed state of civil society in Eastern Europe, as well as better linkages between political parties and civil society. The percentage of women in parliament in Eastern Europe now hovers between 3 and 15%.

Table 1: Representation of Women in Eastern European Parliaments after Multiparty Elections

Country	Year	% of women
Albania	1996	12,1
Bulgaria	1994	13,3
Czech Republic	1995	15
Hungary	1994	11,4
Macedonia	1994	3,3
Poland	1993	13
Romania	1996	7,3
Slovakia	1994	14,7
Slovenia	1992	14,4

Note: figures collected from various sources, notably the websites of IPU and UNDP and publications by International Idea. Differences between figures from various sources are frequent, but mostly of marginal signifance. Depending on

availability, these figures represent in most cases the outcome of the first multi-party elections In subsequent elections, women fared better in some countries and worse in others (Hungary, Slovenia).

In several of the countries that previously constituted the central-Asian states of the Soviet Union, women have all but disappeared from parliament. But the Ukraine, in the European part of the ex-USSR, did not perform any better.

Table 2: Representation of Women in Successor States of the Soviet Union

Armenia (1995)	3%
Bielo Russia(1997)	29,6%
Estonia (1995)	12,9%
Kirgizistan (1995)	1,4%
Latvia (1993)	15%
Lithuania (1996)	17,5%
Tadjikistan (1995)	2,8%
Turkmenistan (1994)	18% (1999: 26%)
Moldavia (1994)	4,8%
Ukraine (1995)	3,8%
Uzbekistan (1996)	6%

The Baltic states and Bielo Russia have a better showing than the Asian republics. An exceptional case is Turkmenistan, which now boasts 26% women in parliament. But Turkmenistan never abandoned the one-party system. Other countries where the one-party system still prevails show results similar to Turkmenistan.

Table 3: Representation of Women in One-Party States

Cuba	27%
Vietnam	26%
China	21,8%
North Korea	20%

(as there was no democratic transition, this table is based on the most recent election)

In the one-party states, women still can make their voices heard in parliament. But these parliaments themselves have very little say in processes of decision-making.

To put these figures in a global perspective: the world average for women represented in parliament stands at 13%. Figures vary greatly from region to region. Women are best represented in the Nordic countries of Europe, with an average of 36,7%, compared to 11,4% in sub-Saharan Africa and 3.5% in Arab states.[2]

Democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa make for an interesting comparison, because the onset of democratisation processes coincides in time, with 1989 as the rough point of departure. We can now look back over an experience of about ten years. A complicating factor in the comparison is the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. In sub-Saharan Africa, political liberalisation has meant constitutional change within the framework of existing states.

"Democratisation" is the fashionable catchword, but "political liberalisation" seems a more adequate description of the actual process. The introduction of multiparty-politics by itself does not constitute a process of democratisation, as has been amply demonstrated by numerous examples, such as Kenya, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Togo, Gabon and a host of other countries. A combination of multi-party elections and heightened repression is by no means exceptional. But for convenience's sake, the phrase "democratisation" here refers to opening the political arena to multi-party competition.

Turning to Southern Africa, the process of political liberalisation has meant typically the opening of the political arena to multi-party politics, more space for civil society and more respect for fundamental human rights, such as the right to free association and to freedom of expression. In the cases of South Africa and Namibia, the transition was not one from a one-party state to multiparty politics, but from a limited racial franchise to a universal franchise combined with the unbanning of the liberation movements. Not all countries in the region have experienced democratic transitions. Botswana and Mauritius have an uninterrupted history of multiparty politics, right from independence. Swaziland is a neo-traditional monarchy which has outlawed political parties.[3]

I will briefly discuss four points:

- The representation of women in parliament under the one party-state;
- The representation of women after the democratic transition;
- Factors influencing the participation of women;
- Whether political participation results in improvements in the quality of life for women, and whether the quality of governance improves when women participate in politics.

Multiparty elections and women's representation

The UN Development Report of 1995 which analysed gender and development in 174 nations, found that:

> While it is true that no definite relationship has been established between the extent of women's participation in political institutions and their contribution to the advancement of women, a 30% membership in political institutions is considered the critical mass that enables women to exert meaningful influence on politics.[4]

As for national parliaments, only eight countries in the world have now achieved this 30% target, including the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, and since the 1999 elections, also South Africa. Between 1991–1993, the Seychelles also belonged to this vanguard group.

Political participation is of course not limited to parliamentary representation, but the percentage of women in parliament is one index of the state of participation by female citizens. The situation before 1990 was characterised by extremes: zero percent women in the parliament of Lesotho; 45.8% in the parliament of the Seychelles.

Table 4: Women's Participation Before the Democratic Transition in the SADC region

Country	Year	Number of seats	% of women
Angola*	1986	289 + 22	14,5 + 24,1
Botswana	1989	40	5
Lesotho	1985	80	0,0
Malawi	1987	112	9,8
Mauritius	1991	70	2,8
Mozambique	1986	249	15,7
Namibia	1989	72	6,9
Seychelles	1991	33	45,8
South Africa*	1989	178 + 85 + 45	2,8 + 1,2 + 2,2
Swaziland	1987	55	3,6
Tanzania	1990	255	11
Zambia	1991	150	6,7
Zimbabwe	1990	150	12

Note: The figures are based on statistics from the Inter Parliamentary Union, the UNDP and SADC. They are not always 100% foolproof. In some instances, different sources produced different statistics, but the differences were not significant. The figures are limited to representation in the lower house, as not all countries have senates or upper houses.

* In the case of Angola, the first figure indicates the percentage of elected female members, while the second refers to the percentage of women among appointed members of parliament. For South Africa, the three percentages refer respectively to the white, coloured and Indian houses of the tricameral parliament.

The most surprising figure here concerns the Seychelles. The 1991 elections brought the staggering result of 45,8% women in parliament. This may be a world record, surpassing even the respectable showings of the Nordic countries. In the period of military rule and the one-party state, which includes the 1991 elections, the Seychelles consistently had a high percentage of women in parliament. The picture has changed somewhat with the advent of multi-party politics, but the percentage of women has remained the highest in the region.

Next best are Mozambique and Angola, where the political model was inspired by the communist states of Eastern Europe. South Africa is at the bottom of this ranking. Only Lesotho has an even poorer showing. It is remarkable that women's representation is also very poor in the only two multiparty democracies at this time: Botswana and Mauritius.

Table 5: Representation of Women in Parliament after Multiparty Elections: SADC Region

Country	Year	Seats	% of women
Angola	1992	220	9,5
Botswana	1994	47	8,5
Lesotho	1993	65	4,6
Malawi	1994	194	5,6
Mauritius	1995	66	7,6
Mozambique	1994	250	25,2
Namibia	1994	72	18,1
Seychelles	1993	33	27,3
South Africa	1994	400	27
Swaziland	1993	65	3,1
Tanzania	1995	275	17,5
Zambia	1996	155	9,7
Zimbabwe	1995	150	14,7

The picture here is rather mixed. In some countries, women have lost out in multi-party elections, such as in Angola, Malawi, Seychelles. In other countries, women have made substantial gains. The most spectacular example is South Africa: with the 1994 elections, it rocketed at once to 7th place in the world ranking of equitable representation of women parliamentarians. In the 1994–99 parliament, women constituted 27% of parliamentarians. Within the region, South Africa was only surpassed by the Seychelles. The South African score was slightly improved upon in the 1999 elections, when the percentage increased to 30%. More important, however, was the unprecedented number of women ministers appointed in Thabo Mbeki's cabinet. Eight of the 29 ministers are women (27,6%) and more than half of the deputy ministers are women.

In view of South Africa's history, this is a truly remarkable phenomenon. The decades of National Party rule were definitely not conducive to women's empowerment in politics. But the ANC was also characterised by a patriarchical political culture, in which "tradition" was frequently invoked to exclude or marginalise women from processes of decision-making. During the long decades of the liberation struggle, women's rights were routinely subordinated to the overall cause of national liberation. What happened after 1990?

The secret of succes is a combination of two key factors: the electoral system and a party quota system. Under South Africa's new constitution, the previous majoritarian system was abandoned in favour of proportional representation. And the ANC has adopted a quota system within the party, ensuring that at least 30% of the candidates on the ANC lists are women.

Countries where women's representation has improved after the democratic transition include South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. The countries with the best performance in terms of representation are the Seychelles, South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia. They have one thing in common: all four have adopted a system of proportional representation. At the level of local government, the picture is somewhat different: here, Tanzania (25%), Namibia (41%) and the Seychelles (52%) surpass the 18% women in local government in South Africa.[5]

Overall, the tendency in Southern Africa is towards better represen-

tation of women –unlike Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union, where the introduction of multiparty elections has generally resulted in women's marginalisation in parliament.

How to Secure the Presence of Women in Parliament?

It is of course not self-evident that only women can represent women's interests. "Women's interests" are not limited to the household sphere. To name just one example: women farmers in Southern Africa produce 60% of the crops and 80% of food crops for local consumption.

Nor is it self-evident that women parliamentarians are predestined to deal with women's issues: they may want to focus on other priorities. In a number of African countries, women MPs have not succeeded in putting women's issues on the national agenda or in bringing out the gender dimensions of seemingly gender-neutral policy decisions. The gender implications of apparently neutral policies are of course a crucial issue: see the innovative approach pioneered by the Women's Budget in South Africa.

Nevertheless, the presence of women in the political arena is clearly a mininum condition for balanced development policies. If women are marginalised politically, it is very unlikely that gender-sensitive policies will emerge from government.

What is to be done? Which factors impact on the representation of women in politics?

The General State of Development

One of the most important characteristics of society that correlate with women's representation levels is a country's state of development. Research in democracies in the developed world has demonstrated a clear correlation between the representation of women in politics and factors such as:

- women's participation in the labour force;
- the ratio of women's literacy to men's literacy;
- the ratio of university-educated women to university-educated men.[6]

However, when these variables are applied to democracies in the developing world, the picture is much less clear. None of the variables listed above were found to have a consistent effect. These research findings indicate that a minumum level of development is needed to create an enabling environment. Otherwise these variables, including

level of education and women's labour force participation, have no clear effect. Below a certain level of development, these factors were no longer decisive.

Quotas

Quotas have been succesful in creating a women's presence in politics. Nomination is the crucial phase, not the actual election. Quotas for women entail that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether a candidate list, parliament, or the cabinet. This system places the burden of recruitment not on the individual woman, but on those who control the recruitment process.

Quotas can be introduced on two levels:

- A **party informal quota** such as the ANC's rule that 30% of the candidates on the party's list must be women. This system also prevails in a number of parties in some developed countries, notably the Nordic countries.
- A **statutory quota or reserved seats** is written into the constitution or national legislation. In Africa this is the case for example in Uganda, Eritrea and Tanzania, where 15% out of 255 seats are reserved for women in the parliament. This was also the prevailing system in the one party-states of Eastern Europe under communism.

The system of reserved seats enables the rulers to achieve two objectives at the same time: to demonstrate that they are in favour of promoting women's participation, while making sure that the seats were taken up by "controllable" token women. Even in more open political systems, quota can be a double-edged sword, as stated by Anna Balletbo, an MP in Spain:

> On the one hand, they oblige men to think about including women in decision-making, since men must create space for women. On the other hand, since it is men who are opening up these spaces, they will seek out women who they will be able to manage – women who will more easily accept the hegemony of men.[7]

One pre-condition for the quota system to work is adequate preparation of women candidates and adequate linkages between parliament and civil society. Nothing is achieved by electing women representatives who feel powerless and ineffective.

Predictably, the issue of quotas generates frequent discussions, with heated exchanges both for and against. The discussion basically reflects two concepts of equality:

- equal opportunity (removing formal barriers), i.e. "may the best man win" (sic);
- equality of result (compensatory measures must be introduced to turn equality into a material reality).

Quotas can also be a transitional arrangement, to be abandoned when women's representation seems to be firmly established. "Mainstreaming" is very fashionable these days, but success is by no means guaranteed. Once special measures, policies or institutions are abandoned, the gender dimension is easily sidelined, rather than mainstreamed. Quotas can also be introduced as a permanent feature, to ensure a bottom line for women's representation.

Women's pressure groups

The Zambia Women's Lobby Group has worked hard to sensitise women on the need to participate in leadership politics, and has trained women in campaign skills, public speaking and communication skills. They have also set up a campaign support fund for women candidates for the 1996 elections, and it was reported that this campaign contributed to increasing the number of women parliamentarians to 14, the highest so far in Zambia's history.

A similar programme, run by Emang Basadi in Botswana, aims at increasing the number of women in decision-making positions. It organises training workshops for female political candidates and has facilitated the formation of a Caucus of Women Councillors and Parliamentarians. The caucus is intended to ensure that gender and women's issues are put on the agenda of decision-making institutions.[8]

The combined force of persuasion of the women's movement in Southern Africa has led SADC to adopt a Declaration on Gender and Development.[9] The SADC countries committed themselves to achieving a minimum level of represention of 30% women in all spheres of public decision-making by the year 2005. At a stock-taking meeting in March 1999 in Gaborone, it was noted that the actual sitution was still far removed from these targets. At that time, the average percentage of women in parliament for the region (excluding the Democratic Republic of Congo) was 17%; that for cabinet 11,9% and for administrative heads of the civil service 13,7%.[10]

Electoral systems are not gender neutral

Electoral systems based on constituency representation can make it difficult for women to break through conventional stereotypes of

women's roles. As the 1994 elections in South Africa demonstrated, proportional representation systems can allow politically progressive elites to break through patriarchial bias and fast-track women into public positions.[11]

Changing electoral systems is a lot easier than changing cultural perceptions of the role of women. Over the past decades, there has been a clear pattern in the established democracies: women's representation in systems of proportional representation has increased substantially. In majoritarian systems (based on one seat per electoral district), there has been very little progress. In both cases, the starting point in 1945 was around three percent of women in parliament.

The top ten countries in terms of women's representation (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Netherlands, the Seychelles, Germany, New Zealand, South Africa and Iceland), all utilise various forms of proportional representation. By contrast, in established democracies using a majoritarian system, such as the United States, Great Britain and France, the percentage of women in the national parliaments keeps hovering around 10%.

In a majoritarian system, the party can nominate only one candidate per district. Female candidates must compete directly against male candidates. Both the nominating process and the election process are a zero-sum game: winner takes all. And the loser loses all, which can mean that substantial amounts of money invested in the election campaign are lost. In systems of proportional representation, parties are more likely to balance their party tickets, to accommodate various sections of the electorate. They do not have to look for one single candidate who can appeal to a broad range of voters. Including a female candidate on the party list might win more votes from women voters, and it does not mean that male candidates will have to step aside.[12]

Turning Presence into Power

Has the participation of women in politics resulted in improving the quality of life for women? In other words: does it matter how many women sit in parliament?

Table 6: Ranking on the gender-related development index, UNDP, 1998 (situation as of 1995) In the first column, the first figure indicates the ranking on the UNDP index on a world scale and between ( ) the relative ranking within the SADC region. Ranking in terms of women's participation in parliament is in the last column.

Country	Ranking on UNDP Index	Ranking within SADC region	Ranking i.t.o. women's participation
Seychelles	n/a	(1)	1
Mauritius	54	(2)	10
South Africa	74	(3)	2
Botswana	85	(4)	9
Namibia	99	(5)	4
Swaziland	105	(6)	13
Zimbabwe	118	(7)	6
Lesotho	123	(8)	12
Zambia	134	(9)	8
Tanzania	137	(10)	5
Angola	145	(11)	7
Malawi	150	(12)	11
Mozambique	156	(13)	3

(Indicators used: Human Development Index, plus life expectancy, adult literacy and school enrollment among women, as compared to men. Plus female share of income earned.)

If a direct relationship exists between political representation and improvement in the quality of life for women, there should be a correlation between the ranking on the UNDP's gender-related development index and on the representation in parliament-index. The conclusion here is inevitable: there is no clear visible relationship between women's representation in parliament and the quality of life for women. Not yet, at least.

Does democracy benefit from the participation of women?

A recent report, produced by the IRIS center of the University of Maryland, concludes that gender makes a substantial difference, both in attitudes towards corruption and in actual behaviour in corruption-prone circumstances. Societies with more women in the labour force and/or more women in parliament have lower levels of corruption. Women pay bribes less frequently and are less likely to condone corruption. The researchers found strong evidence that women's presence in parliament is negatively correlated with corruption in government. Women's share in the labour force shows a similar negative correlation with corruption.[13] A recent World Bank report on "Corruption and Women in Government" reports similar conclusions.

A substantial body of research has produced accumulating evidence that corruption undermines economic development. The conclusion therefore is obvious: strengthening women's representation and participation in parliament and in public affairs is not only in the interest of equity and equitable development, but also in the interest of good governance and economic growth.

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Part Three

Civil Society and African Union