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Driving Forces behind Gender Equality
– A Cross-Country Comparison

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Abstract:

There is a growing body of research acknowledging the lack of good cross-country comparisons that contribute to the understanding of what drives change in society, i.e. what make some countries more gender equal than others. In this essay, five explanatory factors—the number of women in elected office, gender sensitive legislation, the level of corruption, government effectiveness, and the level of democracy in a country—are tested in a regression analysis. Gender equality refers to women's position in their everyday life. The results show that the well-established notion that a high number of women in elected office is related to a high level of gender equality has to be revised. We suggest that a current world-wide quota trend has resulted in an increased divergence between the number of women in elected office and the status of women in society more generally.

Keywords: Gender equality, women in parliament, economic and social rights for women, corruption, government effectiveness, democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

It has become something of an international industry to produce indexes measuring gender equality. The United Nations produces a Gender Development Index, as well as a Gender Empowerment Index; the World Economic Forum has its Gender Gap Index; Social Watch its Gender Equity Index; and The Alliance Save the Children produces a Mothers' Index. So far, these indexes has fulfilled at least one important task; they have contributed to highlight prevailing inequalities between women and men, and put pressure on leaders in countries with less flattering results in world-wide comparisons.

The question is however, if these indexes also can contribute to develop scientific research in the field of gender equality. There is a growing body of research acknowledging the lack of good cross-country comparisons that contribute to the understanding of what drives change in society: Why are some countries more gender equal than others? What can be done in order to strengthen the position of women in their everyday lives?

The aim of this essay is twofold: First, and most important, we contribute to theory-development. The point of departure is the well-established notion that a high number of women in elected office is related to a high level of gender equality. We introduce four alternative explanatory factors in a cross-country comparison: that gender sensitive legislation is what matters, that the level of corruption is of importance, that government effectiveness is of importance, and also that the general level of democracy matters. The conclusion reached is that previous findings have to be revised. There is a present world-wide quota-trend that contributes to increases in the number of women elected to parliaments in many parts of the world. This quota-trend might however at the same time *undermine* the explanatory power of

this perspective. What comes out as the strongest determinant of gender equality in this study is gender sensitive legislation.

The comparison includes three ways of measuring gender equality: the Gender Gap Index from World Economic Forum, the Gender Equity Index from Social Watch, and the Mother's Index from the International Alliance Save the Children, and the second aim of this essay is to evaluate the international "gender equality industry."[1] The findings are rather promising in this respect; the indexes produced are useful in scientific research if adjustments are made. Our essay ends with a call for deepened collaborations between international organizations producing gender equality indexes and researchers analyzing mechanisms behind change.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ELECTED OFFICE

There are a substantial number of studies that underpins the notion that women in elected office contribute to strengthen the position of women in society (Wängnerud 2009 presents an overview). The theoretical reasoning behind this strand of research is, for example, elaborated in the book *The Politics of Presence*, by the British political scientist Anne Phillips (1995). Phillips argues that women have certain interests in common and that these interests will be inadequately addressed in a politics dominated by men. Equal rights to a vote, the argument goes, are not strong enough to guarantee transformative processes; there must also be equality among those elected to office.

The concept of women's interests is contested. Contemporary debates concern features of elitism in gender research—that is, a tendency to ascribe interests to women in a top-down fashion—and also features of essentialism: the tendency to view women and men as fixed, rather than changeable, categories. Debates also concern a "first-world-bias" and how gender

is related to categories such as ethnicity, age and class (Dietz 2003, Klasen 2006). However, Phillips's line of reasoning is an example of main-stream argumentation:

> Women have distinct interests in relation to child-bearing (for any foreseeable future, an exclusive female affair); and as society is currently constituted they also have particular interests arsing from their exposure to sexual harassment and violence, their unequal position in the division of paid and unpaid labor and their exclusion from most arenas of economic or political power. (Phillips 1995, pp. 67-68).

On the macro-level there is evidence that societies that elect a large number of women tend to be more gender-equal also in other respects than societies that elect few women (Inglehart & Norris 2003, Norris 1996). On the micro-level there is evidence that women in office display political attitudes and give priority to issues that are of special importance to women citizens (Diaz 2005, Dodson 2006, Lovenduski & Norris 2003, Thomas 1994). Studies following developments in Scandinavian countries, where the number of women in elected office has been high for quite a long period of time, display a *shift of emphasis* as the number of women in office increases—women's interests are given bigger scope and become more centrally situated on the political agenda. Typical examples concern issues of social policy, policy on the family, and gender equality (Bergqvist 2000, Skjeie 1992, Wängnerud 2000a, 2000b).

Recent studies do however bring some complexities to the field. In a longitudinal study of child-care coverage in Norwegian municipalities, covering the period 1975-1991, Bratton & Ray (2002) demonstrates that the number of women elected has influenced public policy outputs (increased child-care coverage), but the effect of women in office was most evident in

the period of policy innovation. In a cross-country comparative study of 31 democracies Schwindt-Bayler & Mishler (2005) focus on indicators of gender equality like maternity leave, indexes on women's political and social equality, and marital equality in law. The main conclusion from their study is that increases in the number of women elected increases legislatures' responsiveness to women's policy concerns, but the authors find the effects to be smaller than anticipated in theory.

One short-coming, of particular importance to us, is that conclusions on the role of women in elected office to a large extent stems from studies in established democracies. Developments in Scandinavian countries have for example been characterized as "incremental," indicating that they have been outstretched over a long period of time. The present quota-trend, including many countries in Latin-America and Sub-Saharan Africa, is in contrast characterized as "fast-track," indicating that changes are quick and dramatic (Dahlerup 2006).

Sweden and Rwanda can be used to illustrate the case we are making: During the 1970s Sweden crossed the threshold of 20% women in the national parliament; the proportion climbed past 30% during the 1980s and 40% during the 1990s. The current figure, as of late 2009, is 47% women in the Swedish national parliament. Whereas developments in Sweden spans over four decades, the number of women in the national parliament in Rwanda has tripled in a period of only 15 years. Gender quotas for seats in parliament were implemented in Rwanda as a part of the reconciliation process after the genocide in 1994. In 1994 women made up 17.1% of the national parliament in Rwanda. After the election 2008, the number is 56.3%.

Rwanda's situation is much different from Sweden. Sweden's twentieth-century history is characterized by political stability, economic growth, and peace. Sweden is also regularly placed on top of international lists ranking countries according to gender equality (Anthonsen & Wängnerud 2008). In contrast, Rwanda is one of the poorest countries in the world and its modern history contains disastrous wars. The conclusion has been reached that the increased number of women elected, so far, has had little effect on policy outputs in Rwanda (Devlin & Elgie 2008). Thus, a high number of women elected can be related to far-reaching gender-equality processes (Sweden), but it can also be related to a wish to start such processes (Rwanda).

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATORY FACTORS

A credible perspective in analysis of cross-country variation in gender equality is a cultural approach promoted by, for example, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris in their book *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World* (2003). Inglehart and Norris construct a gender equality scale from measurements on attitudes among citizens regarding women as political leaders, women's professional and educational rights, and women's traditional role as a mother. Through extensive empirical studies they demonstrate that egalitarian values are systematically related to the actual conditions of women's and men's lives. They conclude that modernization underpins cultural change, i.e. attitudinal change from traditional to gender equal values, and that these cultural changes have major impact on gender equality processes.

In this essay we will however put some other explanatory factors to the test: that gender sensitive legislation is what matters, that the level of corruption is of importance, that government effectiveness is of importance, and also that the general level of democracy

matters. These factors will be tested alongside with the number of women elected to office. The reason to exclude the cultural approach is that values deeply embedded in society are hard to change; we are interested in the impact of a number of factors easier to "engineer."

The focus in the *gender sensitive legislation* perspective is on certain principles embedded in countries' constitutions, codes, laws etcetera. There is a growing body of feminist research that focus on juridical aspects of gender equality in analyzes of women's position (Lovenduski 2005, Weldon 2002, Williams & Thames 2008, Skjeie & Squires 2009). For example, Eileen McDonagh demonstrates, in the article *Political Citizenship and Democratization: The Gender Paradox,* that women's citizenship is strengthened by legislation that combine "sameness" and "difference" principles. What is revealed in her study is the importance that states both affirm individual equality to women and women's group difference in order to enhance the situation for women (McDonagh 2002, 535).

The level of corruption is becoming a rather established factor in cross-country comparative gender research. Several findings point out that the higher the number of women in the national parliament of a country, the lower the level of corruption (Dollar et al 1999, Swamy et al 2001). The correlation as such has not been questioned, even though the causal mechanism behind the correlation is disputed (Goetz 2007, Sung 2003). Through our test we will get a first indication on whether corruption is decisive for gender equality—more widely defined than in terms of the number of women elected to the national parliament of a country.

Government effectiveness is included on the ground that a government needs certain strength in order to influence everyday life situations for citizens. However, in terms of gender equality this factor can work in either way: an effective government, less interested in

strengthening the position of women, might contribute to uphold "status quo" or even worsen women's position vis-à-vis men, whereas the opposite might be true for a government supportive of gender equality.

The *level of democratization* is included partly to pay tribute to the kind of cultural analyzes that Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris have conducted. As aforementioned Inglehart & Norris (2003), state that modernization underpins cultural changes that lead to higher levels of gender equality. It is reasonable to believe that what matters for women is modernization in political terms. Democracy does, among other things, open possibilities for people to mobilize and press for changes.

DEFINITION OF GENDER EQUALITY

It goes without saying that definitions—and visions—of gender equality varies. The ambition that guides this research is to develop a framework useful for world-wide comparisons since debates on gender equality follow the same routes in many countries; questions about the impact of women in elected office has, as already illustrated, been asked in such different contexts as Rwanda and Sweden. From this ambition follows that the definition of gender equality has to be rather straightforward; it should capture aspects that are possible to measure trustworthy and meaningful in a large number of cases.

Our definition focuses on individual's room to manoeuvre in society. We want to move beyond the question of formal rights for women but not go as far as to prescribe certain ways of living as gender equal. We perceive gender equality to be about women's possibilities for self-determination (c.f. Phillips 2007, 101). This way of defining gender equality is in line with the reasoning behind the guidelines for measuring human development developed by the

United Nations, which emphasize capability aspects like health, education and income (United Nations 2006). We study *gendered* aspects of capability.

The core issue is to what extent societies provide opportunities for women to manoeuvre and thus develop their everyday lives according to their own choices. Most contemporary societies are constituted in ways that more severely circumscribe possibilities for self-determination among women than among men, and total gender equality might not even be possible. What interests us is however that it obviously exist considerable cross-country variation in the strength of women's position. An empirical study is necessary in order to determine what factors that can explain such variation.

DESIGN AND DATA

It is a methodological challenge to empirically test the impact of factors like the number of women elected to office and gender sensitive legislation. The suggestion has been made that studies in the field ought to be longitudinal in design; that we, for example, should follow what happens "from the start" when women in elected office are few, up to the point where women are present in large numbers (Beckwith 2007). Longitudinal designs of this kind are hard to conduct and an alternative is to do cross-sectional analyses using a wide range of indicators and include a number of control variables in order to determine effects of a certain factor or perspective.

Our point of departure is, as stated previously, the notion that a high number of women in elected office is related to a high level of gender equality. As already hinted, we assume gender sensitive legislation to be the strongest "competitor," and other perspectives will basically serve the role as control factors; does results for the impact of women in elected

office and gender sensitive legislation hold when factors like the level of corruption, government effectiveness, and the general level of democracy in a country are introduced? We do not want to exaggerate results for the more gender specific explanatory factors. It has been suggested (Sung 2003, 718) that "[g]ender equality and government accountability are both great achievements of modern liberal democracy." Democracy might thus be the factor driving the results.

The comparison includes three ways of measuring gender equality: the Gender Gap Index from World Economic Forum, the Gender Equity Index from Social Watch, and the Mother's Index from the International Alliance Save the Children, however some adjustments have been made. We perceive the number of women in elected office as a factor that might cause variation (an independent variable) between countries and therefore it cannot be included in a measurement on the situation—the level of gender equality—it is supposed to explain (the dependent variable). In order to make the gender equality indexes useful, we have deleted most aspects concerning women's political participation from the original indexes (see Appendix 1 for more information about the indexes).[2]

The reason to include three indexes is to receive stability in results. The Gender Gap Index, the Gender Equity Index, and the Mother's Index, all captures aspects of self-determination for women but they use slightly different parameters. As hinted in the title, the Mother's Index put weight on women's possibilities to (safely and voluntarily) carry out motherhood. The index includes information on lifetime risk of maternal mortality, percent of women using modern contraception and percent of births attended by trained personnel. It differs from the other indexes in the sense that it focus on women's situation in *absolute* terms, and not only vis-à-vis men. The Gender Gap Index and the Gender Equity Index represents two

"purer" ways of measuring equality between the sexes; the focus is on *gender gaps* in the economic sector and in education. The major difference is that the Gender Gap Index also includes aspects of health and well-being.[3]

The explanatory factors included are mostly well-established and tried out in previous cross-country comparisons.[4] The number of women in elected office corresponds to the percentage of women in single or lower house of the national parliament in a country; the Inter-Parliamentary Union is the source for information. The level of corruption focuses on corruption in the public sector and the information has been gathered by Transparency International through surveys with business people and risk analysts. The information on government effectiveness comes from the World Bank and is based on several individual variables measuring perceptions of governance; the main focus in this specific index is on aspects required for a government to be able to produce and implement "good" policies, e.g. competent civil servants. The level of democracy is an index built on information both from Freedom House and Polity since Hadenius & Teorell (2005), show that an average index performs better both in terms of validity and reliability than its constituent parts.

The least established factor in the following analyses is the gender sensitive legislation factor. We have used the Human Rights Dataset constructed by Cingranelli & Richards (2005) which includes information on women's economic and social rights. In their measuring of women's rights Cingranelli & Richards are interested in two things: one, the extensiveness of laws pertaining to women's rights; and two, government practices towards women. The scales run from (0) which means that there are no rights for women under law (systematic discrimination based on sex may even be built into the law) and the government tolerates a high level of discrimination against women, to (3) which means that all or nearly all rights are guaranteed

by law and, in practice, the government tolerates none or almost no discrimination against women. We believe that this is a reasonable way of measuring the delicate balance between both affirming individual equality to women and women's group difference highlighted by McDonagh (2002).

The data is from the year 2002 or the years most close. The dataset used is the Quality of Government Dataset available through the Quality of Government Institute at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden (Teorell et. al, version 17June09). The ambition has been to include as many countries as possible. We put five explanatory factors to the test and it is, in technical terms, problematic to receive significant results if the numbers of cases are few.

RESULTS

We conducted a preliminary analysis on correlations between the number of women in the national parliament and the institutionalization of gender sensitive legislation in a country. The results show a substantial number of countries where the number of women elected to parliament is high but the institutionalization of gender sensitive legislation rather weak; African countries like South Africa, Mozambique, and Uganda, can serve as examples here. At the same time, we found a number of countries where the institutionalization of gender sensitive legislation is strong but the number of women in the national parliament low; examples here are European countries like France, Greece, and Italy. The two factors are correlated but the preliminary analysis makes clear that they do not completely overlap.

Table 1 shows correlations (Pearson's R) between each of the five explanatory factors and the three indexes on gender equality. The Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum) and the Gender Equity Index (Social Watch) are constructed in such a way that high values equal high

levels of gender equality. The Mother's Index (Alliance Save the Children) is constructed the opposite way; low values equal a better situation for women/mothers. All of the explanatory factors are constructed in such a way that high values equal a "better" situation: more women in parliament, stronger economic and social rights for women, less corruption in the public sector, higher levels of government effectiveness, and higher level of democracy. This means that *positive* correlations for the Gender Gap Index and the Gender Equity Index should be interpreted as the factor contributing to increased gender equality, whereas the opposite is true for the Mother's index—in this case should a *negative* correlation be interpreted as a factor contributing to increased gender equality.[5]

Table 1.   Explanations for variation in gender equality (correlations)

	Indicators on gender equality		
Explanatory factors	Gender Gap Index (1)	Gender Equity Index (2)	Mother's Index (3)
Women in national parliament (4)			
Pearson's R	.414***	.462***	-.403***
No. of countries included	115	136	93
Economic and social rights for women (5)			
Pearson's R	.574***	.590***	-.570***
No. of countries included	128	155	105
Corruption in public sector (6)			
Pearson's R	.353***	.437***	-.638***
No. of countries included	128	153	103
Government Effectiveness (7)			
Pearson's R	.375***	.511***	-.672***
No. of countries included	128	155	105
Level of Democracy (8)			
Pearson's R	.480***	.523***	-.496***
No. of countries included	128	155	105

(***) $p < 0.01$

Dependent variables:
(1) Index constructed on World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index, including indicators on economic, educational and health gender gaps (higher values indicate higher level of gender equality). (2) Index constructed on Social Watch Gender Equity Index, including indicators on education and economic activity (higher values indicate higher level of gender equality). (3) Original index from International Alliance Save the Children, including lifetime risk of maternal mortality, percent of women using modern contraception, percent of births attended by trained personnel, percent of pregnant women with anemia, adult female literacy rate, participation of women in national government, infant mortality rate, gross primary enrolment ratio, percent of population with access to safe water, percent of children under age 5 suffering from moderate or severe nutritional wasting (lower values indicate better situation for mothers).

Independent variables:
(4) Women in national parliament: percentage women in single or lower house (Inter-parliamentary union). (5) Economic and social rights for women: varies between 0 (no economic/social rights for women under law) and 3 (all or nearly all of women's economic/social rights are guaranteed by law). Index constructed on Cingranelli & Richards (2005). (6) Corruption in the public sector: Transparency International, ranges between 10 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt). (7) Government effectiveness: World Bank, normalized with a mean of 0 and a standard

deviation of 1 (implying that virtually all scores lie between -2.5 and 2.5) (8) Democracy: average index built on Freedom House and Polity, scale ranges from 0 (least democratic) to 10 (most democratic).

This first analysis show a significant effect of all five explanatory factors on all three indexes: more women in parliament, stronger economic and social rights for women, less corruption in the public sector, more effective government, and a higher level of democracy in a country, means higher levels of gender equality. However, this first analysis should be interpreted with caution; the different factors are, as previously mentioned, correlated to each other and relationships reported in Table 1 might, in a tougher test, turn out to be spurious.

In order to single out reliable relationships we will do regression analysis. Table 2 shows a bivariat regression testing the impact of each explanatory factor (taken in isolation) on the three indexes. The regression analysis covers countries that have information on *all* included variables, which means that the number of cases is reduced in comparison to the analysis presented in Table 1. The range here is between 92 (the Mother's Index) and 136 (the Gender Equity Index) cases.

Table 2.   Explanations for variation in gender equality (bivariat regression; coefficient, standard error, adjusted R² and constant included)

| | Indicators on gender equality | | |
Explanatory factors	Gender Gap Index	Gender Equity Index	Mother's Index
Women in national parliament			
Coefficient	.002***	.533***	-1.274***
Standard Error	(.000)	(.087)	(.306)
Adjusted R²	.164	.211	.151
Constant	.813	67.53	69.39
Economic and social rights for women			
Coefficient	.048***	9.886***	-29.459***
Standard Error	(.005)	(1.083)	(3.776)
Adjusted R²	.365	.378	.396
Constant	.778	61.41	89.57
Corruption in public sector			
Coefficient	.009***	2.281***	-9.049***
Standard Error	(.002)	(.368)	(1.151)
Adjusted R²	.147	.216	.400
Constant	.806	65.41	88.31
Government Effectiveness			
Coefficient	.021***	5.509***	-21.542***
Standard Error	(.004)	(.772)	(2.287)
Adjusted R²	.160	.269	.490

Constant	.842	74.57	50.68
Level of Democracy			
Coefficient	.007***	1.743***	-4.945***
Standard Error	(.001)	(.265)	(.914)
Adjusted R²	.175	.237	0.236
Constant	.792	63.13	82.46

(***) p<0.01. Number of cases Gender Gap Index 115; Gender Equity Index 136; Mother's Index 92. For more information see Table 1.

The picture we get from this analyse correspond with the earlier finding: there are significant and easily interpretable results for all explanatory factors. We here refer to the fact that all results point in the same direction; higher values on the independent variables are significantly related to stronger positions for women in society. However, if scrutinized more in detail the results in Table 2 indicate some important differences between the five explanatory factors. Most important to note at this stage is that the factor economic and social rights for women consistently show high figures for the Adjusted R², which indicates that this factor is a powerful determinant of the outcome, i.e. the level of gender equality in a country.

The next step is to put the different explanatory factors up against each other in a multivariate regression analysis. We use what we consider the most established explanatory factor—the number of women in elected office (here concretized as the percentage of women in national parliament) as the starting point. We then introduce the other factors one by one in a stepwise multivariate regression. The principle is based on our interpretation of previous research. It is reasonable to believe that gender sensitive legislation (here concretized as economic and social rights for women) is the strongest "competitor" to the assumption that women in elected office contribute to strengthen the position of women in society, and therefore this factor is introduced as number two in the regression. We also perceive the level of corruption as a potential "competitor" since previous research has highlighted this factor as an important determinant of gender related aspects of society. Government effectiveness and level of democracy are two factors drawn from more general discussions on "good" societies and

included in order to enable trustworthy interpretations. The multivariate analyses are presented in five different models for each of the three indexes (explanatory factors introduced one by one).

Table 3. **Explanations for variation in gender equality (step-wise multivariate regression; coefficients and adjusted R² included)**

Explanatory factors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender Gap Index					
Women in national parliament	.002***	.000	.000	.000	.000
Economic and social rights for women	-	.044***	.049***	.049***	.046***
Corruption in public sector	-	-	-.002	-.001	.000
Government Effectiveness	-	-	-	-.001	-.006
Level of Democracy	-	-	-	-	.002
Adjusted R²	.164	.365	.365	.359	.360
Gender Equity Index					
Women in national parliament	.533***	.200**	.200**	.207**	.214**
Economic and social rights for women	-	8.324***	8.294***	7.431***	6.555***
Corruption in public sector	-	-	0.014	-1.373*	-1.164
Government Effectiveness	-	-	-	3.736**	2.820
Level of Democracy	-	-	-	-	.469
Adjusted R²	.211	.395	.391	.407	.412
Mother's Index					
Women in national parliament	-1.274***	-.179	.069	.034	.038
Economic and social rights for women	-	-27.959***	-17.594***	-14.915***	-14.558***
Corruption in public sector	-	-	-5.471***	3.603	3.293
Government Effectiveness	-	-	-	-22.196***	-21.278***
Level of Democracy	-	-	-	-	-.263
Adjusted R²	.151	.392	.460	.528	.523

(*) $p<0.10$, (**) $p<0.05$, (***) $p<0.01$. For more information see Table 1 and 2.

We will start by commenting on the results for the factor women in national parliament. For two of the indexes, the Gender Gap Index and the Mothers Index, this factor shows a significant effect in the first regression (Model 1). When other factors are introduced (Model 2—Model 5) this factor turns insignificant. However, for the Gender Equity Index the factor women in national parliament remain significant throughout the whole series of tests but the coefficient becomes notable smaller.[6] We are a bit surprised over this result and have to agree with Schwindt-Bayler & Mishler (2005); effects are smaller than anticipated in theory.

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What is really worth noticing is that the factor economic and social rights for women show significant results—consistently at the 0.01 level—in all tests for all three indexes. This is a convincing result, no other factor display such a robust pattern. Coefficients are also large which underlines the importance of this factor. There is little doubt that what we have at hand is a reliable and trustworthy finding: gender sensitive legislation is an important determinant for the level of gender equality in a country. Few of the other factors show any consistent pattern in the multivariate regressions, even though it is reasonable to believe that government effectiveness is decisive for the situation for women/mothers. Government effectiveness show significant results for the Mothers Index and values are high, which means that this might even be the most important factor when gender equality is defined in a way that relates to women's possibilities to carry out motherhood.[7]

TAKING REGIONAL ASPECTS INTO ACCOUNT

There are many trade-offs in comparative studies including a large number of countries. What can possibly be gained by comparing established democracies like France, Greece, and Italy—mentioned in an earlier section—with struggling countries like South-Africa, Uganda, and Mozambique? In order to enrich our study we have conducted two sets of analysis taking regional aspects into account. In the first set of analysis we repeated the regressions reported in Table 1 (results not shown in table) in a sub-set of (i) OECD countries versus (ii) non-OECD countries. In the second set of analysis (results not shown in table) the same regressions were repeated in (iii) countries in Latin-America and Sub-Saharan Africa versus (iv) countries in the rest of the world.

The overall impression from the analyses taking regional aspects into account is that the main findings of our study remain robust: the factor women in national parliament show few significant results whereas the opposite is true for the factor economic and social rights for women. It should be noted however that with five explanatory factors and few cases—as in the sub-sets described above—it is hard to reach any significant results at all.

JURISDICTION AS A ROUTE TO INCREASED GENDER EQUALITY

Our results do not rule out that the number of women elected to office is important for the level of gender equality in a country. The design we have applied is not ideal for capturing effects of such transformations; developments need to be followed more closely over a long period of time. Studies of the effect of women in elected office should preferably also take the suggestion from Bratton & Ray (2005) into account; effects might be strongest in periods of policy innovation and therefore country-specific characteristics needs to be built into the theoretical model.

We do however believe that our case is strong: "fast-track" quotas resulting in quick and dramatic changes in the number of women elected have, on the over-arching level, meant an increased divergence between changes in the number of women elected and changes in the status of women in society more generally. This situation is rather new and the consequences have to be scrutinized further. The strongest argument for parity, from a normative point of view, does not concern certain policies or transformation of society in "women-friendly" directions but democracy and justice per se. Many hopes for change are nonetheless connected to the implementation of quotas and other measures to increase the number of women elected, and there certainly is a risk that a world-wide quota trend turns into a world-wide backlash if hopes are not met.

We do not suggest that gender sensitive legislation should substitute increases in the number of women elected as a route towards a strengthened position for women in their everyday lives. There is a growing body of feminist research that focus on juridical aspects of gender equality in analyzes of women's position and our findings provides further evidence for the credibility of this perspective. However, an alternative interpretation of the result that women in parliament did not have a significant effect on gender equality when economic and social rights for women was included, is that the latter could be a mechanism through which the former works. That is, more women in parliament mean more economic and social rights for women, which lead to better gender equality. This would mean that women in parliament does not lack an effect on gender equality, only that it is further back in the "causal chain."

It would be a mistake if gender researcher, or policy-maker wanting to speed up gender equality processes, started to "side-step" parliaments and electoral democracy. In order to pinpoint the mechanisms that drive change in society we need comprehensive approaches that can capture interplay between the political and juridical domains of society. At the same time we have to admit that the findings in this essay are fascinating and the micro-foundations for the gender sensitive legislation perspective really deserves to be developed: How does gender sensitive legislation make an impact on the position of women? What parts are important? A further aspect to develop is how robust results are when within-country variation is taken into account; are results stable across dimensions like ethnicity, age, and class?

The last theme we want to touch upon is collaboration between international organizations producing indexes over gender equality and gender oriented researchers. We believe that much could be gained if international organizations started to gather and pile information

from the perspective of causal relationships. We had to devote quite a lot of energy to "clean" indexes in order to make them useful and still we could not reach a perfect solution. The indexes produced by World Economic Forum, Social Watch and the International Alliance Save the Children do already fulfil important tasks, but instead of being focused on "blaming" or "hailing" countries through different rankings they could be focused on developing the understanding of *why* some countries are more gender equal than others. In the best of worlds, it is possible to do both.

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APPENDIX

I. Dependent variables

Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum)
(2007 or most recent year available)

The variable varies theoretically between 0 and 1, where higher values indicate a more gender equal society.

The index is a mean of three underlying variables from the World Economic Forum: economic gender gap, educational gender gap and health gender gap. The economic gender gap is based on the ratio of female over male labor force participation, the female over male wage ratio (for similar work), the female over male ratio of legislators senior officials and managers and the female over male ratio of professional and technical workers. The educational gender gap is based on the female over male literacy rate, the female over male net primary education enrollment, the female over male net secondary education enrollment and the female over male gross tertiary education enrollment. The health gender gap is based on the female over male healthy life expectancy and the female over male sex ratio at birth.

Gender Equity Index (Social Watch)
(2008 or most recent year available)

The variable varies theoretically between 0 and 100, where higher values indicate a more gender equal society.

The index is a mean of two variables: education gap and economic activity gap. The education gap is estimated on the gender gap in the following indicators: literacy rate, primary school enrolment, secondary school enrolment and tertiary education enrolment. The economic activity gap is based on gender gaps in economic activity rate and estimated earned income.

Mothers' Index (International Alliance Save the Children)
(2002)

The variable is a ranking of 105 countries, which means that *lower* values indicate a better situation for mothers.

The index is an original index produced by the International Alliance Save the Children and is based on the following indicators:

• Lifetime risk of maternal mortality
• Percent of women using modern contraception
• Percent of births attended by trained personnel
• Percent of pregnant women with anemia
• Adult female literacy rate
• Participation of women in national government
• Infant mortality rate
• Gross primary enrollment ratio
• Percent of population with access to safe water
• Percent of children under age 5 suffering from
moderate or severe nutritional wasting

II. Independent variables

Women in National Parliament (International Parliamentary Union) (2002)

Percentage women in single house or lower house.

Economic and Social Rights for Women (Cingranelli & Richards) (2002)

The index varies between 0 and 3, where higher values indicate more economic and social rights for women.

We have constructed this index as a mean of two variables from the Cingranelli & Richards Human Rights Dataset: women's economic rights and women's social rights.
Practices. Cingranelli & Richards base their coding of variables primarily on US State Department Country Reports on Human Rights.

The coding of the two variables underlying the index is described as follows in the coding guide from Cingranelli & Richards.

Women's economic rights: "In measuring women's economic rights we are primarily interested in two things: one, the extensiveness of laws pertaining to women's economic rights; and two, *government practices* towards women or how effectively the government enforces the laws.

Regarding the economic equality of women:
(0)   There are no economic rights for women under law and systematic discrimination based on sex may be built into the law. The government tolerates a high level of discrimination against women.

(1)   There are some economic rights for women under law. However, in practice, the government DOES NOT enforce the laws effectively or enforcement of laws is weak. The government tolerates a *moderate level* of discrimination against women.

(2)   There are some economic rights for women under law. In practice, the government DOES enforce these laws effectively. However, the government still tolerates a *low level* of discrimination against women.

(3)   All or nearly all of women's economic rights are guaranteed by law. In practice, the government fully and vigorously enforces these laws. The government tolerates none or almost no discrimination against women."

Women's social rights: "In measuring women's social rights we are primarily interested in two things: one, the extensiveness of laws pertaining to women's social rights; and two, *government practices* towards women or how effectively the government enforces the law.

Regarding the social equality of women:

(0)   There are no social rights for women under law and systematic discrimination based on sex may be built into the law. The government tolerates a high level of discrimination against women.

(1)   There are some social rights for women under law. However, in practice, the government DOES NOT enforce the laws effectively or enforcement of laws is weak. The government tolerates a *moderate level* of discrimination against women.

(2)   There are some social rights for women under law. In practice, the government DOES enforce these laws effectively. However, the government still tolerates a *low level* of discrimination against women.

(3)   All or nearly all of women's social rights are guaranteed by law. In practice, the government fully and vigorously enforces these laws. The government tolerates none or almost no discrimination against women."

Corruption in Public Sector (Transparency International)
(2000-2007)

The variable varies between 0 (highly corrupt) and 10 (highly clean)

The index from Transparency International focuses on corruption in the public sector and defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain. The surveys used in compiling the index tend to ask questions in line with the misuse of public power for private benefit, with a focus, for example, on bribe-taking by public officials in public procurement. The sources do not distinguish between administrative and political corruption. The index relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people, risk analysts and the general public.

Government Effectiveness (World Bank)
(2002)

The variable is constructed to bee normally distributed with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 each year of measurement. This implies that virtually all scores lie between -2.5 and 2.5, with higher scores corresponding to better outcomes.

The World Bank indicator on government effectiveness is based on many underlying variables measuring perceptions of governance, drawn from several separate data sources constructed by different organizations.

The index combines into a single grouping responses on the quality of public service provision, the quality of the bureaucracy, the competence of civil servants, the independence of the civil service from political pressures, and the credibility of the government's commitment to policies. The main focus of the index is on "inputs" required for the government to be able to produce and implement good policies and deliver public goods.

Level of Democracy (Freedom House/Polity)
(2000-2005)

Scale ranges from 0-10 where 0 is least democratic and 10 most democratic.

Average of Freedom House political rights and civil rights score is transformed to a scale 0-10 and the revised version of combined Polity score is transformed to a scale 0-10. These variables are averaged into level of democracy score. This is the imputed version, with imputed values for countries where data on Polity is missing by regressing Polity on the average Freedom House measure. Hadenius & Teorell (2005) show that this average index performs better both in terms of validity and reliability than its constituent parts
NOTES

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[1] These organizations have been chosen since they have a good international reputation and their indexes are often referred to. Social Watch describes itself as an "international NGO watchdog network monitoring poverty eradication and gender equality" (www.socialwatch.org). "The World Economic Forum is an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging leaders in partnerships to shape global, regional and industry agendas" (www.weforum.org). International Alliance Save the Children ''is the world's largest independent organization for children, making a difference to children's lives in over 120 countries" (www.savethechildren.net).

[2] The exception here is the Mother's Index form the International Alliance Save the Children. It turned out to be very complicated to delete values on participation of women in national government but since the Mother's Index consists of several parameters we perceive this as less problematic.

[3] We made a reference to the United Nations for our theoretical definition, however we do not include the UN Gender-related Development Index (GDI) or the UN Gender Empowerment

Measure (GEM) in our empirical analyses. The UN states that the GDI index only is meaningful in relation to the HDI index (the GDI imposes a "penalty" on each country score on the HDI index according to the size of the gender gaps in the three development components health, education and incomes) and warns against rankings based on this index solely. The GEM index is seen as better suited for "pure" gender equality rankings, but the problem from our perspective is that the index, as reflected in the title, focuses on *empowerment* and great importance is attached to women's shares of parliamentary seats.

[4] We started off with a comprehensive test using more than one indicator on each explanatory theme: women in national parliament and female state leaders on "women in elected office"; economic/social rights for women and labor rights for women on "gender sensitive legislation"; corruption in public sector and quality of government more widely on "clean society" (later renamed to corruption in public sector); government effectiveness and rule of law on "effective society" (later renamed government effectiveness): We also used indicators like freedom of the press, attitudes towards gender equality, and GDP per capita in this first test. Three criteria were used in the decision on which factors to keep: correlations (Pearson's R) should be significant at the 0.01 level for all three gender equality indexes; numbers of countries covered should be comparatively high; and, patterns displayed should be interpretable (which include a theoretical judgement).

[5] In strict terms this table (Table 1) is not necessary. However, we wanted to show that the factors selected passed a "first test" which convinced us that they were all equally important to include in the regressions.

[6] The regressions for the Gender Equity Index were also done in a smaller sample including only those countries with values also on the Gender Gap Index and the Mother's Index (a subset of 77 countries). The factor women in parliament remained significant (at the 0.10

level) so "sample selection" is not the explanation for the deviant result. We want to stress the value of using several different indexes in order to reach stability in results.

[7] We want to comment on the result that corruption does not turn out to be significant: We believe that further studies should be conducted using multiple ways of measuring corruption, however our study gives some support to the strand of research arguing that relationships between corruption and gender equality is spurious.