



“Gender Party Quotas in Poland”

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The Implementation of Quotas: European Experiences

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The process of democratization, observed in many parts of the world, has not been accompanied by a significant rise in the number of women in senior positions in economic and political structures, especially decision-making posts.

Analyses show that the presence of women in decision-making bodies is not directly related to the level of economic or social growth, or to the development of democratic systems in individual countries.¹ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart underline the importance of cultural factors because: (1) they make it easier to choose some careers; they impact on women’s aspirations to become decision-makers; (2) they influence the level of support for women candidates, affecting the electoral behaviour of men and women; (3) they determine which political goals are to be prioritized, such as gender equality, which are considered to be socially important by various groups and organizations; and (4) they shape the beliefs and behaviour of party gatekeepers, that is, those who decide who will be on the lists of candidates, and who will be appointed to political (governmental) and economic positions.

Therefore, traditional or egalitarian views on women’s participation in political and economic decision-making bodies influence both the supply-side of the equation (whether women want to run in an election and be appointed to such posts) and the demand-side (whether they attract the support of party gatekeepers and the media, as well as financial support from sponsors and actual backing (votes) from the public). However, several authors have pointed out that electoral legislation can facilitate an increase in the number of women in politics. A proportional system benefits women more than a majoritarian one.² Also, quotas, applied by political parties or established at the state level, as part of electoral law, are considered an important mechanism to bring more women into politics.

This paper analyzes Polish opinions on, and attitudes towards, quotas and the behaviour of members of society and the political elite with respect to gender inequality in politics. It also seeks to assess the effectiveness of quotas in according women and men equal access to top positions in politics. The analysis will focus on the parliamentary elections of 2001 and the local elections of 2002, following an introduction of quotas for women. It will demonstrate that quotas are important for increasing the number of women in elected bodies. The efficiency of quotas, though, depends on the level of the elections (national or local) and on the existence of several other factors that can aid or hamper their implementation. To verify the hypotheses, the elections will be discussed

separately.

The Representation of Women in Parliament

The proportion of women elected to the lower chamber of parliament in 1991, 1993 and 1997 was nine percent, 13 percent and 13 percent respectively. In the higher chamber, over the same timeframe, women held eight percent, 13 percent and 12 percent of seats. Formally speaking, the number of women has decreased compared to the communist period when the figure stood at over 20 percent (in 1985). At that time, women were considered 'tokens'—present, but with much less influence than the statistics might suggest. Usually, they did not represent the interests of women and for the most part, parliament simply 'rubber stamped' decisions made by Communist Party bodies.

The Debate on Quotas as a 'Positive Discrimination' Mechanism

The debate on women's low representation in elected bodies began in the early 1990s. At the time, feminists and other women activists rejected the idea of introducing quotas, remembering how members of parliament were selected under the communist regime (although a formal quota system was not in place in Communist Poland, women and men were picked by party decision-makers). However, some parliamentarians and members of women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to work on a law to grant men and women equal status in society in Poland.³

The proposed law has been changed several times (last time in June 2005), having been systematically rejected by members of the lower or higher chambers of parliament. The opponents are from the parliamentary opposition, consisting of male and female deputies of centre-right and right-wing parties. Parliamentary members of rightist parties point out, for instance, that there is no need for a new bill when everything to do with the issue has been incorporated into the Constitution and criminal and civilian codes. To some deputies, furthermore, the bill appears to be oriented towards feminists and hence is unacceptable. Finally, they highlight the cost of implementing the law, particularly with regard to the creation of a new office and monitoring.⁴ In the 1990s, women found it more difficult to secure placement on a candidate list (compared to men).⁵

The version of the bill submitted in 2002 included an article on the proportion of men and women in all elective bodies. It specified that, until 31 December 2003, the proportion of each sex should be at least 30 percent. Between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2011 the proportion should be at least 40 percent. And from 1 January 2012 it should be at least 50 percent. The proportion of candidates of each sex on party lists should be 30 percent until 31 December 2003, and at least 40 percent thereafter. Names of men and women should alternate (i.e. man - woman - man or woman - man etc.) on the lists of candidates to equalise the chances of men and women to be elected, since experience shows that candidates at the top of lists have higher chances to be elected. If a body consists of less than four persons, men and women should both be represented. The parliamentarians who submitted the latest proposal of the bill stress that the bill satisfies European Union (EU) recommendations and should be introduced so as to bring Polish law into line with EU law.⁶

Implementation of quotas by some political parties.

Some kind of 'positive discrimination' mechanism was implemented in 2001 before the parliamentary elections, despite of the above-mentioned lack of the legislation. Pressure Discussions among women NGO activists about the low level of representation of women in elected bodies and in positions where promotion is based on appointment and, about more frequent contact between Polish parliamentarians and West European politicians, culminated in changes. Under pressure from female party members, three political

parties agreed to introduce a 30 percent quota: the two coalition partners – the Alliance of Democratic Left (SLD) and the Labour Union (UP), and also the centrist Union of Freedom. But they did not agree on the order in which women and men should be placed on candidate lists (despite the demands of several women in these parties), which would have given men and women an equal chance in subsequent elections.

Following the introduction of quotas by the aforementioned parties, the number of women in the lower and higher chambers of parliament increased to 20 percent and 23 percent respectively (in the last (2001) parliamentary elections). However, only two women became members of the government: Barbara Piwnik was appointed Minister of Justice and Łybacka was appointed Minister of Education (Ministry of National Education and Sports). Actually, only one woman - Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka is in the government (beside of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Men and Women).

Summarizing, the increased presence of women was due to different events that occurred and different initiatives that were launched between the parliamentary elections of 1997 and 2001:

- **Some political parties introduced a gender quota:** The SLD–UP coalition and the centrist Freedom Union accepted the proviso that neither sex should make up less than 30 percent of all candidates, and that individual constituency lists should be approved only when they satisfy this condition. Moreover, even right-wing parties, such as the League of Polish Families (LPR), were influenced by these changes. While they officially rejected quotas, they included more women on their candidate lists than in previous elections.⁷
- **The electoral law was changed:** Poland uses a proportional representation electoral system, with open lists. In 2001 the total number of constituencies was reduced, creating larger constituencies with a greater number of seats. The reduction in the number of constituencies was the result of a new national administrative structure coming into being. This change also led (incidentally) to an increased number of women being placed on candidate lists: the more candidates there were per constituency, the greater the chance that a woman would be included on a list.⁸ Richard Matland identified this general relationship.⁹
- **Attitudes towards women in politics changed:** In 2001, 60 percent of women (compared to 50 percent in 1997) and 40 percent of men (compared to 28 percent in 1997) did not agree with the statement that 'men are better suited to politics than women'.¹⁰
- **The women's lobby became stronger:** This resulted in more pressure being placed on political parties and the wider public. Fifty organizations joined the Pre-Electoral Coalition of Women—an open agreement between women's organizations and groups entered into a few months before the 2001 elections. Members emphasized the apolitical character of the coalition. Ideologically, the Pre-Electoral Coalition of Women (as well as other women's groups and feminist organizations) was located somewhere between the centre and the left. It enjoyed the support of the Women's Parliamentary Group. Women parliamentarians from all parties organized an action entitled 'Women run, women vote' to convince voters to support women candidates.
- **The electoral preferences of society changed:** In the 2001 election, the SLD–UP coalition obtained the highest number of votes (shift from right to left). This was important from the standpoint of women, since the Alliance of Democratic Left has, for a long time, been willing to take women into consideration with respect to its political plans and reforms.

The number of elected women has depended to a great extent on the number of women listed as candidates, where party gatekeepers have positioned them on the lists (those in positions one to three are known to have the best chance of election), and the attitudes

of members of the general population in the different districts towards women in politics (Table 1).

Table 1: Women Candidates and Deputies, Lower Chamber of Parliament (Sejm), 2001

Name of party or electoral coalition	Candidates**			Elected***			
	Number of districts in which women were on candidate lists	Women as a percentage of the total number of candidates	% of women in positions one to three on candidate lists	Total	% of total	Women	% of women
Alliance of Democratic Left (SLD)*	41	36.3	18.7	200	43.6	50	25.0
Polish Peasant Party (PSL)	41	14.6	6.5	42	9.1	0	0
Labour Union (UP)*	41	36.3	18.7	16	3.4	5	31.3
Civic Platform (PO)	41	16.8	15.4	65	14.1	13	20.0
Self Defence of the Polish Republic (SO)	39	20.3	13.0	53	11.5	9	17.0
Law and Justice (PiS)	40	17.9	12.2	44	9.6	6	13.6
League of Polish Families (LPR)	41	24.7	25	38	8.3	10	26.3
Social and Cultural Society of the German Minority in Silesia (MN)			16.7	2	0.4	-	-

Notes:

* The SLD and UP ran as part of an electoral coalition.

** Author's calculations.

*** See Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments", <http://www.ipu.org>.

Orientation of parties: SLD and UP (left); PO (centre-right); SO (populist); PiS and LPR (right); and PSL (Polish Peasant Party).

In several regions, the percentage of women elected was higher than the percentage of women fielded as candidates by political parties. In regions where the (post-communist) SLD amassed more votes, more women were elected. In the 1990s, there was a significant increase in the number of women and men who voted for men *and* women, as opposed to voting only for men. In 2001, 46 percent of men, in comparison with 31 percent of women, voted exclusively for men. But 39 percent of men and 55 percent of women voted for men and women.¹¹

Women's representation at the local level

In the 1990s, women continued to be under-represented in local government bodies.¹² The number increased slightly from 11 percent in 1990, to 13.2 percent in 1994, to 15.7 percent in 1998. In comparison, in 1989, 22 percent of the members of local councils were women. Consequently, there was a reduction of the number of women in elective bodies at the beginning of the 1990s at both the national and local level.¹³

It is a truism to say that the number of women selected is directly related to the number of women placed on candidate lists, the places that they occupy, and the political advantages of their opposing candidates. Yet an examination of lists of candidates and those elected revealed that at the highest, *voivodship* level (16 administrative regions in Poland), there were relatively more women candidates; women were least represented in the Poviats (intermediate level) and in communes with no more than 20,000 inhabitants. The pyramid pattern emerged, however, as a result of the elections. Most women are to be found in commune councils; women are least represented in the Voivodship Sejms (see Table 2). Like before, the district councils (commune councils before the reform) in Warsaw have proved to be an exception: the number of women candidates and elected women is definitely higher (more than 30 percent).

A comparison of the lists of candidates and the lists of elected persons also underlined how important it is to hold a high position on the list. Women made up 24 percent of all candidates occupying the first and second spots on the list; the number of women in third place was slightly higher (26.2 percent). Most women occupied first position in communes with 20,000 or less inhabitants (24.8 percent). Warsaw was an exception, with as many as 29.9 percent of women candidates occupying the first position on the lists.

Table 2: Candidates and women elected in the local government election of 2002

	Number of candidates	Number of women candidates	% of women among candidates	Number of councillors	Number of women councillors	% of women among councillors
Commune councils	232,753	60,151	25.84	39,978	7,233	18.09
Poviat councils	57,357	13,716	23.91	6,294	1,003	15.94
Voivodship Sejms	9,920	2,795	28.18	561	81	14.44
Commune administrators, mayors, city mayors	10,371	1,083	10.44	1,273	168	13.20

Over time, the behaviour of the electorate has changed. Being a male candidate in an election is less advantageous than it was in the years immediately following the political transformation. The number of men and women who vote for both women and men is increasing, and the number of voting only for men is decreasing. Changes in this regard are more significant with respect to men than to women. The number of people voting for men and women increased between 1994 and 2002 by around 20 percent (in the case of men) and by more than ten percent (in the case of women). Less than one percent of the electorate voted only for women in 2002, just like in previous local government elections.

Such shifts in electoral behaviour are consistent with a change in attitude towards the presence of women in politics, as well as, more broadly, in public life.¹⁴ When analyzing

changes in the behaviour of the electorate, we also have to remember that the 'offer' has changed as well. In earlier elections, a specific party used not to include women on its lists much more frequently. As a result, the electorate was unable to vote for women, only being able to choose between men representing parties or local committees.

The electorates of the individual parties differ visibly in this regard. In some cases the behaviour of men and women is similar (*vis-à-vis* the SLD-UP and the PiS, for example) and in others it is noticeably different (*vis-à-vis* the LPR, the PO and the local committees, for instance).

As for the LPR electorate, most men voted for women and men; many more men than women opted to do so. A significant number of women and a very small number of men only supported men during the election. Like in the previous local government election 1998, in the case of local committees, the large number of women (compared to other electorates) voted for men and women. As for the PSL electorate, like before, a significant number of men voted only for men. The number of women who voted only for men was much lower.

Social class (based on the combined level of education and income) is a better variable with which to assess the behaviour of voters than education *or* income (analyzed separately). This indicator shows that: (1) the higher the social class, the more often women and men vote for representatives of both genders; (2) membership of a particular social class has more of an influence on the voting behaviour of women than that of men; (3) women belonging to higher classes (A and B) vote much more often for women and men than women belonging to classes C, D and E; (4) men belonging to class A (that is, those with the highest level of education and income) are more eager than other men to support women (voting for both men and women); and (5) women and men belonging to classes A and B differ significantly, however, with regard to the level of support that they extend to women and men during an election—men are much less willing to vote for women.

These results show that the pattern of electoral behaviour and the attitudes of voters observed during previous elections (in the 1990s) has been changing.

More Women Candidates?

Just like research carried out after the 2001 parliamentary election, analyses conducted following the local government election of 2002 revealed that, for most respondents (84 percent), the fact that some parties applied quotas (according to which women were to make up at least 30 percent of all candidates on their lists) was not important. For five percent of respondents, this was a reason to vote for a particular party; for one percent it was a reason not to vote for it.¹⁵

According to 23 percent of men and 38 percent of women, there were not enough women candidates. According to 71 percent of men and 58 percent of women, there were enough women. And according to four percent of men and one percent of women, there were too many women.

Those who said that there were not enough women were people with a university education, lower income respondents, who disagree with the opinion that 'men are better suited to politics than women', and those who have been in favour of Poland's accession to the European Union.

Differences between men and women *vis-à-vis* the number of women candidates are similar in all age brackets (except for persons between 30 and 39 years)

In social class A, differences in opinion between women and men were shocking. This showed once again that male decision-makers are not enthusiastic supporters of increasing the number of women in politics, at the local level, or the national level.

Conclusion

Women want to enter the world of politics and they are increasingly encouraged to run, although support for them is not evenly distributed among members of Polish society. Some voters believe that women are better suited than men to solving problems in many spheres of life; in other areas, though, they do not believe that there is much of a difference. The greatest problem is still the unwillingness of parties to include women on their lists of candidates. It is worth noting that, whenever we deal with less petrified structures, that is, the local ad hoc committees and not parties, there are more women among the candidates. Therefore, it seems quite reasonable to demand the introduction of legal regulations, without which it seems impossible to increase significantly the number of women decision-makers—as evidenced by the experiences of other countries.

The introduction of a quota-based system by the SLD-UP and the Freedom Union during the local government election of 2002 did not bring about similar results to the parliamentary election in 2001. This undoubtedly shows that, in the case of local government elections, other mechanisms play a part and that objectives are different—such an election is about solving everyday problems. There are very specific influences and very concrete forms of power which can be executed in local communities. Moreover, the women's lobby may have had more impact at the national level than in the numerous constituencies, where its presence may have been very weak or even non-existent.

Endnotes

¹Inglehart, R. , Norris, P., 2003, *Rising Tide. Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

² See, for example, Matland, R. , 1998 *Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems*. W: *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* ed. A. Karam (Stockholm:IDEA,ss.65-88)

³ Fuszara, M. and E. Zielinska. 1995, *Obstacles and Barriers to an Equal Status Act in Poland*. In: *Women: The Past and the New Roles* (ed.) Siemienska, R.. Warsaw: Information and Documentation Unit on the Council of Europe. Warsaw University.

⁴ Siemienska, R. (ed.) 2005, *Płeć -wybory -władza (Gender - Elections- Power)*. Warsaw: Scholar.

⁵Siemieńska, R., 1996, *Kobiety: nowe wyzwania. Starcie przeszłości z teraźniejszością.*(Women: New Challenges. Clash of the Past and the Present). Warszawa:Instytut Socjologii- Uniwersytet Warszawski; Wesołowski, W., and P.Mielczarek. 1999."Zmienność i stabilizacja warstwy politycznej: cztery Sejmy okresu transformacji". *Studia Socjologiczne*, nr 3. 37-82.

⁶ Unpublished materials of the Parliamentary Women's Group of the Polish Parliament

⁷ Siemieńska, R., 2000, *Nie mogą, nie chcą czy nie potrafią? O udziale kobiet w życiu publicznym.* (They Have No Opportunities, They Do Not Want, They Are Unable, Do They? About Attitudes and Women's Political Participation in Poland). Warszawa: Scholar.; Siemieńska,R. 2003, *Women in the Polish Sejm: Political Culture and Party Politics versus Electoral Rules*. In: *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe* (eds.) Richard E. Matland and Kathellen A. Montgomery. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 217-244.

⁸ Siemienska, R. 2000. *Nie mogą, nie chcą..op.cit.*

⁹ Matland, R..E. and K. A. Montgomery (eds.) .2003, . *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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¹¹ Siemienska, R. 2000 op. cit.; Siemienska 2002. op. cit

¹² Siemienska, R. 1994a Women Managers in Poland: In Transition from Communism to Democracy. In: Nancy J. Adler and Dafna N. Izraeli (eds.) *Competitive Frontiers. Women Managers in A Global Economy*. Cambridge - Oxford: Blackwell. 243-262; Siemińska, R., 1996a, „Women’s Political Participation in Central and Eastern Europe: A Cross-Cultural Perspective”. In: Wejnert, Barbara, Metta Spencer, Slobodan Drakulic (eds.) *Women in Post-Communism*. Greenwich-London: JAI Press. Inc. 63-92; Bartkowski, J. 1996, *Lokalne elity władzy w Polsce w latach 1966-1995* (Local Elite of Authorities in Poland 1966-1995). Warsaw: Interart.; Jasińska-Kania A., 1998, „Kim są przedstawiciele lokalnych elit władzy?” (Who are representatives of local authorities?). In: Wiatr, Jerzy (ed.), 1998, *Władza lokalna w warunkach demokracji* (Local Authorities in Conditions of Democracy). Warsaw: Institute of Sociology - University of Warsaw; Scholar. 35-45. ; Wiatr, J. (ed.), 1998, *Władza lokalna w warunkach demokracji* (Local Authorities in Conditions of Democracy). Warsaw: Institute of Sociology - University of Warsaw; Scholar.; , Siemienska, R. 2000 Nie mogą, nie chcą... op. cit.

¹³ Siemienska, R. 2002, op. cit.

¹⁴ Siemienska, R. 2003. op. cit.

¹⁵ Siemienska, R. (red.) 2005 Płeć – wybory – władza op. cit.