

# Women's Empowerment and Democratization: The Effects of Electoral Systems, Participation, and Experience in Africa\*

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This article investigates three hypotheses suggested in the literature on women's political empowerment, operationalized here as increased legislative representation. These hypotheses are that (1) electoral systems manipulate women's political empowerment; (2) increased popular participation empowers women in particular; and (3) accumulated experience gained over several electoral cycles facilitates increased political empowerment of women. In Africa, as well as in other parts of the world, majoritarian systems discriminate against women, while the effect of large parties in proportional representation systems is more ambiguous, and popular participation and repetitive electoral cycles are increasing women's legislative representation. This article demonstrates the value of studying gender relations under democratization, even with a narrow institutionalist focus using an elitist perspective. Finally, it shows that institutions can travel over diverse contexts with constant effects.

Claude Ake's assertion that "democracy is never given, it is always taken" (2000: 70) takes on new meaning given the contentious nature of women's political participation in Africa. Women constituted merely 8.1 percent of members of Parliament (MPs) globally in 1965. By 2002, 165 countries had ratified the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), but with the exception of the Nordic countries, women's representation in legislatures around the world remained very low, ranging from 4.6 percent among the Arab states to 16.8 on average among the European countries. In Africa, the mean percentage of seats occupied by women parliamentarians was 12.8 percent in 2002

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(Idea 2002), giving weight to the argument about female invisibility in post-colonial African politics. This article discusses how women's political empowerment, in terms of legislative representation, fares under democratization.

The case of Ghana highlights the rationale for the study described in this article. From Nkrumah's move away from multiparty politics under the banner of socialism and equality in early post-independence Ghana, to Rawlings' internationally pressured return to multipartism, women have often been relegated to the margins of political participation. Following extensive constitutional deliberations between 1991 and 1992, a plurality electoral system in single-member constituencies was adopted in Ghana. In the contested and partially flawed first multiparty elections in 1992, the main opposition parties boycotted the parliamentary elections, rendering the first parliament of the fourth republic an essentially "rubber-stamp" institution (Aryee 1999; Boahen 1995; Quaye 1995). Although gender-disaggregated data on participation is not available, the overall turnout was 29 percent in the parliamentary poll. Of the 200 seats in the first parliament of the fourth republic, only sixteen (8 percent) went to female MPs.

The second multiparty elections, held in 1996, were essentially free and fair, with a 70 percent turnout and only minor irregularities. While incumbent President Rawlings won the presidential slot for a second time and his NDC party regained a majority of 133 seats in Parliament, the number of female MPs only increased by one, to a total of 8.5 percent (Gyimah-Boadi 1999; Jeffries 1998; Smith 2001: 38). The third consecutive round of elections in 2000 was free and fair with all parties, and a number of independent candidates participated (Aryee 2002). Turnout was 61 percent, and the election resulted in an alternation of power, with John A. Kufour—the candidate for the National Patriotic Party (NPP), the opposition party—sweeping the run-off in the presidential election. Even though the NPP took 100 of the 200 seats,<sup>1</sup> the number of female MPs in this third parliament increased by only one seat for a total of eighteen, giving women just 9 percent of the total seats.

Specifically, Ghana's story highlights three theoretical puzzles which suggest alternative hypotheses about the causes of variation in women's legislative representation. First, is the electoral system to blame for women's poor showing in Ghanaian elections? More generally, does the choice of electoral system manipulate women's opportunities to enter the legislature in African states? The orthodoxy of electoral systems' design seems to predict such an outcome, while Africanists often argue that imported institutions do not have the expected effects in Africa. Second, does popular participation by women (rather than other factors) increase women's chances of being elected to the legislature? It might be hypothesized that women vote for women candidates to a higher degree than do male voters. Thirdly, does women's representation increase with experience in new democracies as organizational capabilities improve from founding to subsequent elections? Using a new data set of 127 parliamentary elections in Africa, this study attempts to provide tentative answers to these three questions. Each is subjected to empirical analysis after a brief look at the literature on democratization and women's representation. The results suggest that all three factors are strongly related to women's legislative representation in Africa and that mainstream theories in comparative politics have much to offer the study of African politics in this regard.

## Representation of Women in Democratization Studies

Despite the exponential growth in studies of democratization over the last decades, very few scholars have touched upon issues of women's empowerment and legislative representation. It remains true that in much of the mainstream literature on the third wave of democratization, gender issues are not a major concern, and when women are discussed, they are given fleeting references.<sup>2</sup> Gender is not featured as an issue in recent comparative reviews such as Bunce (2000) and Munck (2001), or critiques such as Carothers (2002). Even when democratic deficiencies are conceptualized in terms of hybrid regimes or diminished subtypes, as suggested by Collier and Levitsky (1997), Diamond (2002), Schedler (2002a), and van de Walle (2002), women's equal participation and representation has not been a concern. While this state of affairs does not necessarily render the field "flawed," as Waylen (1994: 327) puts it, the inclusion of gender certainly makes the causes and effects of women's political representation a highly relevant research subject. The present study does not attempt to enter the debate between liberal and radical feminist democratic ideals (e.g., Cooper 1993; Dietz 1992; Phillips 1992; Waylen 1994). Rather, the empirical state of affairs in Africa, where a representative form of elected governments rule, is taken as the point of departure.

## Women and Legislative Representation in Africa

Comparative studies of democratization in Africa are generally rare, with Bratton and van de Walle (1997) being the main contribution, and in which gender perspectives are virtually absent. Despite the lack of literature on the subject, women's low economic and social status and unequal access to education do appear to constrain their entry into African politics (Foster 1993). During democratization, the new political dispensation opens new opportunities for women to express and pursue their interests (Rai 1994). Empirical evidence from established democracies suggests that women legislators are more likely to further both the strategic and practical needs of women in terms of legislative action (Saint-Germain 1989; Sinkkonen and Haavio-Mannila 1981; Thomas 1994). Addressing women's needs is always, in part, a legislative struggle; much of the underlying economic, social and cultural conditions that tend to exclude women from politics in Africa (Geisler 1995) are the results of legislative and national policy actions within parliamentary jurisdiction. Hence, improving women's legislative representation is crucial to addressing women's strategic political needs.

This is particularly true in Africa, where customary, statutory, and religious laws continue to discriminate against women (House-Midamba 1996; Yoon 2001). Neopatrimonialism is generally viewed as an important factor preventing women from entering politics. Conversely, authors such as Tripp (2001) have made the case that an increased political empowerment of women is antithetical to patrimonialism. The former hypothesis is subject to empirical testing here. It has also been argued that increased legislative representation by women can raise the level of legitimacy of the political system (Darcy et al. 1994). Increased legitimacy is certainly something that many political systems in Africa could use.

Only one study, by Yoon (2001), makes an effort to measure the comparative participation of women in the new multiparty era. Yoon's study suggests that proportional representation (PR) systems and the learning-by-doing experience from founding to second elections advance women's legislative strength. The study, which examines founding and second elections only, covers a period of nine years (1990–1999) and is limited to thirty-one of forty-eight cases in Africa. These limitations raise questions regarding the robustness of the author's findings. More serious however is the methodological flaw of the research design: the study does not differentiate between “fake” or manipulated elections and free and fair elections.

This methodological problem is not a danger in studies of the advanced industrial democracies, as these elections are always more or less free and fair. With regards to the newly established democracies in the Third World in general, and elections in Africa in particular, the situation is different. How is it possible to speak about the influence of electoral systems when no distinction is made between the purported effects of electoral systems in countries like Togo and Chad, where elections are at best a façade of a highly authoritarian regimes, and states like South Africa, Seychelles, and lately Ghana, where elections are free and fair and more or less true reflections of popular will? It is not, because there is simply no way of knowing if the level of women's representation is related to the electoral system in countries or states without free and fair elections. Therefore, control for the freedom and fairness of elections<sup>3</sup> is applied in this article when appropriate. The article also expands the scope of inquiry by both examining a longer time period and by including all cases in Africa, as well as by analyzing one additional aspect of the problem of women's political representation: popular, elite, and non-democratic participation.

At this point, it is appropriate to clarify what is meant by “democracy” and “democratization” in the present context. By democracy, I refer to Dahl's classic formulation of polyarchy as the empirical baseline for a democratic system of rule (Dahl 1974). In Dahl's definition, as in almost every definition of modern democracy, competitive elections is the main mechanism of translating rule by the people over the people into a system of government (Sartori 1997: 144). Given that competitive elections are essential to democracy, women's representation resulting from that selection is of great significance. Hence, democratization refers to a process supposedly leading towards democracy (or polyarchy, as it were). One would be mistaken, however, to assume a teleological character to democratization as a continuous process continuously with levels of democratic quality increasing with time. Rather, democratization may be reverted, stalled, truncated, or otherwise uneven in different respects (e.g., Schedler 2002b). Elections under these conditions may be free and fair, may be compromised to the extent of altering the outcome, or may even prevent elections from being competitive. Hence, it is important to study women's legislative representation in such variable contexts.

### **Methodological Notes**

The data set employed in this study covers all of the forty-four countries in sub-Saharan Africa which had held multiparty elections by the 1990s. The four troubled

countries that have not conducted competitive elections—the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Rwanda, and Somalia—are excluded. The universe of cases thus includes all elections held during the period between January 1989 and January 2003. In addition, elections were included for those countries that held multiparty elections before 1989 and continued into the 1990s, in order to include their founding and subsequent elections. The background data was collected by the author for a broader study on elections and democratization in Africa (Lindberg 2004) and aggregated into country files. The data on women's representation in Parliament was collected from IPU-publications. In the present data set, women's representation ranges from zero in Comoros and 1.2 percent in Niger to 30 percent in Mozambique and South Africa. In line with the standards of comparative social science (King et al. 1994), all data entries, the coder's translation, and background data for the data entries are available for inspection. Detailed information on the data set and specification of the indicators and methods used in the analysis are located in the Appendix. The entire data set, the coder's translation, and the background country files are all publicly available.<sup>4</sup>

### **Reliability**

This kind of research poses two principal threats to reliability: biases in the sources consulted and subjectivity in the coders' scoring. Non-subjective indicators besides party composition and voter turnout are indeed rare (Bollen 1990). Contamination has been minimized by the use of multiple sources of information whenever possible. For less than 10 percent of the 127 cases of elections, I had only one source. For most of the others, I have consulted three or more sources. The net effect of the filtering should therefore be minimized. The effect of eventual errors has also been lessened by the use of ordinal rather than binary categories for each indicator. The procedure was to pool the information obtained from all of the sources before making a judgment. Where sources disagreed, I was forced to use my own judgment to discriminate between categories, sometimes after consulting additional sources. This practice is virtually inevitable in empirical research, including research based on case studies (Bollen 1990; Coppedge and Reinicke 1990; Gasiorowski 1996).

### **Hypothesized Effects of Electoral System on Women's Representation**

Electoral system design constitutes one dimension of the proportional-versus-majoritarian distinction in democratic polities. The other dimension, outside this article's scope of inquiry, is the federal-versus-unitary state distinction (Cohen 1997; Lijphart 1984; Nordlinger 1972). What is usually referred to as "electoral systems" regards the rules concerning both the voting method and the method used in translation of votes into seats in the representative body (Sartori 2001). Hence, electoral systems are systems of rules, which in essence make up an institution (March and Olsen 1989). Institutions delimit political behavior and are often regarded as a powerful variable in explaining government performance. Yet institutions rarely, if ever, operate in a vacuum; rather, they are perhaps best conceptualized as "embedded" (Grofman et al. 1999; Przeworski and Teune 1970).

Even so, the extension of the law-like consequences of electoral systems first developed by Duverger (1954) and Downs (1957) have been evinced by the work of scholars like Bogdanor and Butler (1983), Lijphart (1984, 1994, 1999), Lijphart and Waisman (1996), Mair (1990), Powell (1982, 2000), Rae (1971), Reynolds and Sisk (1998), and Sartori (1968, 1986, 1997). Nohlen (1996: 44) suggests that “one must recognize that electoral system reform is perceived as a key, or perhaps the key, to reforming the political system.” The general orthodoxy is that majoritarian/plurality systems create and/or sustain intense competition and biparty systems, thereby enhancing governing capacity. Proportional systems on their part facilitate multiparty systems that improve representation and reduce conflict intensity but simultaneously reduce governing capacity. Mixed systems with components of both are disputed as either marrying the best of both worlds, or as unhealthy compromises.

### Majoritarian Electoral Systems

There are two main versions of the majoritarian system: single-member plurality and absolute majority. The former is the more typical in terms of anticipated effects. Regardless, the imperative of the majoritarian vision is the creation of stable legislative majorities through highly disproportional translation of votes to seats, typically in winner-takes-all single-member constituencies. Thus, it has a strong reductive effect on both the number of parties competing for legislative seats and the number of parties in parliament. Ideally, it leads to a *de facto* biparty system with intense competition but clear legislative majorities, hence, high governing capacity and one-party executives. Electoral competition typically focuses on the median voter, with a tendency to exclude extremist political supporters and peripheral voting populations (Lijphart 1984, 1999; Reynolds and Sisk 1998: 23; Powell 2000: 22–23; Weaver 2002: 112).

The possible dangers of majoritarian systems relate predominantly to divided societies, in which disproportionality is thought to engender alienation through a high proportion of wasted votes, thereby leading to the exclusion of minorities from power and lower incentives for participation (Lijphart 1984, 1999). Majoritarian systems appear to raise the stakes by their winner-takes-all nature and by further clientistic voting behavior through the close personal relationship between voter and representative in single-member districts (Reynolds and Sisk 1998: 24; Lindberg 2003). This is, in essence, what is often referred to as adversarial, as opposed to consensual, politics. In addition, studies of advanced industrialized democracies (e.g., Castles 1981; Norris 1985; Rule 1994) consistently find that majoritarian systems tend to discriminate against women’s equal representation; when only one candidate is elected from each constituency, the elected individual tends to be male.

Men also tend to have higher levels of education, more qualifications for job positions, and a higher average income, all of which are instrumental to political success. A recent study by Wantchekron (2003) has also confirmed that, in Africa, clientistic electoral campaigns (associated more with majoritarian systems) are strongly biased towards men in two inter-related ways. First, men are favored by the distribution of patronage in those systems—men receive services, handouts,

and other favors disproportionately—and hence, male political dominance tends to be reproduced. In addition, when campaigns are dominated by clientism, issues of practical concern to women (e.g., health care, education for children, and good marketplaces in which to sell local produce) are downplayed or simply ignored. Second, it takes great resources to sustain the “big man” politics of clientism in the multiparty era. Besides providing patronage in the form of jobs and services, copious funds must be expended to meet school fees, pay service bills, hand out small sums of money, contribute toward marriages and funerals, and cover similar outlays (Lindberg 2003). Men tend to have access to greater resources, facilitating their participation in such activities.

### Proportional Systems

Proportional representation (PR) systems differ to the degree of their proportionality in the translation from votes to seats. Generally, the higher the district magnitude and the lower the effective threshold, the greater its proportionality. The overall imperative of the proportional vision is representative justice. The proportional design lessens the reductive effect; hence, the number of parties competing for votes and winning legislative seats is typically greater than in majoritarian systems. The orthodoxy also holds that there is a trade-off between representative justice and governing capacity: PR systems are thought to lead to legislative-executive deadlocks in presidential systems and short-lived, unstable coalition governments in parliamentary systems, and hence, lower governing capacity. The level of competition may be high or low depending on the number of parties and their relative strength, yet the relative vote-and-seats shares of the parties tend to be lower than in majoritarian systems (Sartori 1997). In sum, PR systems are thought to breed peaceful conflict resolution and consensual politics.

It is often argued that PR systems tend to increase the share of legislative seats held by women (e.g., Darcy et al. 1994; Duverger 1955; Lijphart 1994; Norris 1987). Generally, it is easier for women to enter as second-rank (or lower) on a party list than to gain access to a single candidacy. In this context, empirical evidence suggests that while a higher threshold increases disproportionality, it also increases the size of parties, thus enhancing both governing capacities and the representation of women (Matland and Taylor 1997: 204–5). Women tend to be located toward the lower end of party lists, and therefore the larger the party's share of votes, the more women there should be in Parliament. The weakness of Matland and Taylor's argument is its reliance on thresholds. A party system with two or three large parties in a proportional system need not be the result of high thresholds; the effects of electoral system rules are known to be mediated by pre-existing divisions and structures that involve class, religious, ideological conflict and other lines of division. Such conditions can also make for large parties in PR systems without high thresholds, or indeed with no threshold at all.

In addition, the argument is that thresholds make for larger parties, which in turn is the operative variable in increasing women's legislative representation. Why measure the backwaters of thresholds instead of the real independent variable, which is party size? Rather, in PR systems, we expect the legislative representation of women to increase or decrease with rise or fall of the main party's share of votes.

## Mixed Systems

Weaver (2002) describes particular alternatives, such as the Alternative Vote (AV) and Single Transferable Vote (STV) used in the Australian House of Representatives, as mixed electoral systems. I prefer Sartori's (2001) proposal to label as "mixed" those electoral systems in which both the voting method and the allocation of seats are partly majoritarian and partly proportional. It has been argued that such systems offer the best solution for satisfying the two imperatives of representative justice and governing capacity (Dunleavy and Margetts 1995). Empirical cases are rare, however, and the African context now contributes five countries holding to date ten elections under mixed systems. To the best of my knowledge, there are no established hypotheses about the effects of mixed electoral systems on women's legislative representation. As a working hypothesis, it seems reasonable to assume that mixed systems will, on average, perform better than majoritarian systems but worse than PR systems in this area.

In sum, the main hypothesis is that the more proportional the electoral system, the larger the share of legislative seats that will be held by women. Among PR systems, the additional hypothesis is that the larger the share of votes for the main parties, the more women in the legislature. Other factors that would also be expected to affect the number of women in legislatures, such as national quotas and positive discrimination of women in intra-party nomination procedures, lie beyond the scope of this article.

## Empirical Analysis of Women's Representation

The analysis of the effects of electoral systems on women's legislative representation is reported in Tables 1 and 2. It is clear that the failure to control for free and fair elections in Africa in previous studies was indeed an omission with implications for the results: the relationship between free and fair elections and women's legislative representation is fairly strong and highly statistically significant. In other words, when elections are manipulated or serious irregularities take place, they not only lessen democratic quality but also infringe upon women's right to political representation. Thus, the more free and fair the election, the higher the share of seats occupied by women.

The results shown in Table 2 confirm that the orthodoxy of electoral system design is applicable to Africa, in that majoritarian systems discriminate against the representation of women in legislatures. Interestingly, this finding holds true even if we do not control for free and fair elections, but the relationship is much stronger among those elections that were free and fair. Within that category of elections, the analysis provides evidence that seems to corroborate the hypothesis that the more proportional the electoral system, the larger the share of the legislature that will be occupied by women MPs.

While majoritarian systems are worst for women's representation and mixed systems are in between, as hypothesized, not far behind are PR systems with medium-to-large multi-member constituencies (MMCs). PR systems with small MMCs, which performs just slightly better than majoritarian systems and a lot worse than mixed systems, pose a puzzle. It might be that in Africa, these PR/small systems are



**TABLE 1**  
**Free and Fairness and Women's Representation**

	<i>N</i>	Std. Dev.	Women MPs, % (Geo. Mean)
Not free	48	4.325	5.3
Free	79	7.278	7.8
Total	127	6.498	6.7

$F=7.746, p=.006, \eta^2=.058$

**TABLE 2**  
**Electoral System and Women's Representation.**

	Electoral System	<i>N</i>	Std. Dev.	Women MPs, % (Geo. Mean)
Unfree Elections	Plurality /Majority	40	4.095	4.8
	Mixed	4	6.498	8.4
	PR/small MMCs	4	3.353	8.4
	PR/large MMCs	0	–	–
	Total	48	4.316	5.3
Free Elections	Plurality /Majority	38	5.239	6.1
	Mixed	8	10.919	10.1
	PR/small MMCs	20	3.853	7.5
	PR/large MMCs	13	8.893	14.9
	Total	79	7.287	7.8

Women's Representations – Electoral system:  $F=13.785, p=.000, \eta^2=.252$ .

Women's Representation' – Free and Fairness – Electoral System: Corrected Model  $F=7.255, p=.000$ , adjusted  $R^2=23.0$

in fact more disproportional than the mixed systems—a possibility that merits further inquiry.

The hypothesis concerning women's increased share of seats in PR systems with at least one larger party, launched by Matland and Taylor (1997), is further ad-

**TABLE 3**  
**Women's Representation and Size of Parties in PR systems**  
**with large MMCs/pure PR.**

Country	Year	Largest party's share of seats	Women MPs, % (Geo. Mean)
Burundi	1993	80	12.3
Liberia	1997	76	7.8
Namibia	1999	76	25.0
Namibia	1994	74	18.1
Sierra Leone	2002	74	14.5
South Africa	1999	66	30.0
South Africa	1994	63	25.0
Angola	1992	59	9.5
Namibia	1989	57	6.9
Mozambique	1999	53	30.0
Mozambique	1994	52	25.2
Burkina Faso	2002	51	11.7
Sierra Leone	1996	33	6.3

dressed in Table 3. It is important to examine the relationship between the share of seats taken by the largest party and women's representation in the legislature. Given that the degree of women's representation should be possible to predict from the size of the largest party in PR systems with medium-to-large MMCs or from pure PR systems, no cross-national evidence supports Matland and Taylor's hypothesis. High and low levels of women's representation are found at almost all levels of largest party's size. It might be that their conclusion is conditioned by the fact that in Africa the winning party's share of seats, even in PR systems, tends to

be very high compared to many other parts of the world; the average share of seats for the largest party among all 80 free and fair elections in Africa is 60.5 percent, a high figure by any measure, and one which suggests a cautious approach to any comparative lesson citing women's political representation in Africa.

On the other hand, the little evidence we have on development within countries seems to support Matland and Taylor's hypothesis. Both South Africa and Mozambique have held two successive elections, and in both cases, the number of female MPs in the legislature has increased with the larger share of the seats occupied by the main party. Namibia has held three successive parliamentary elections, with the result that women's share of legislative seats has increased from 6.5 percent to 25 percent. The main party's share of seats has increased between these same elections from 57 percent to 76 percent. These country trends suggest that we should not yet dismiss Matland and Taylor's hypothesis. The theoretical argument makes sense in this case, and the methodology of within-country comparison also appears to keep a number of other factors constant. Future elections in these countries may enable us to address with greater confidence the relationship between the size of the main parties and women's legislative representation in PR systems in Africa.

### Effects of Participation on Women's Representation

Participation is a multi-faceted phenomenon and its measures and indicators are varied. Following Dahl's (1971) famous formulation of the two dimensions of democracy, participation and competition, participation has mainly been thought of in terms of *popular* participation. In the wake of the third wave of democratization, however, several scholars (e.g. Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Bratton 1998) have noted that participation by opposition parties, as such, is not a given. The relative share of votes and/or seats or calculations thereof, such as the effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979), are thought (correctly) to be related to competition. Yet the decision by opposition parties to contest or boycott an election is both analytically *a priori* and distinct from the outcome of the contest. In Africa, where many countries do not fulfill the basic requirements of polyarchy even if they hold multiparty elections regularly, the first relevant question is whether women's legislative empowerment is dependent upon the participation of the opposition. The literature on democratization holds the participation and representation of opposition parties to be of crucial importance to both the success of democratization and the quality of democracy. Is rallying behind the main opposition a useful strategy for women activists to increase women's legislative power in Africa? The Ghanaian experience described above seemed to suggest that this is not the case. Increased pluralism might not be the answer to increased gender equality.

Secondly, we need to analyze the traditional issue of if and how voter participation affects women's legislative strength. The literature offers only scant gender-disaggregated data on turnouts in Africa, yet what data exist appear to suggest that men are typically over-represented among politically active citizens. Hence, if voter turnout figures go up, we can expect the increase to be disproportionately biased towards increased women's participation. We can also hypothesize that women tend to vote for female candidates to a higher degree than men do. Higher turnout

should therefore benefit women candidates more than their male counterparts. However, there is supposedly an interaction effect here. Majoritarian systems, and in particular the plurality system, have been shown to reduce voter participation because of its inherent exclusionary logic. Nevertheless, controlling for electoral system and free and fairness simultaneously renders our statistical methods useless because too few cases are available.

Finally, a specific type of actor has become a prevalent feature of many of these new democracies. Previously authoritarian rulers or their close associates, such as ministers and deputies, frequently head purportedly democratic parties under the new dispensation. Baker (1998) reported that twenty of the old authoritarian rulers still clung to power in Africa at the time of his research. If we added to that list rulers like Nicephore Soglo in Benin, who was a prime minister under President Mathieu Kérékou in the authoritarian era, it would be much longer. These are individuals known for their willingness to rule non-democratically; hence, it seems plausible to argue that their participation in multiparty elections constitutes a potential threat in democratizing countries. In the latest Nigerian presidential elections, for example, all three main candidates were former military rulers. Similar situations occur in many national legislatures, as well. The participation of the old guard of authoritarian leaders is both a threat to the practice of democracy—because we know these rulers do not refrain from using non-democratic means—and an indication of the persistence of old, male-dominated patronage networks.

With reference to contemporary African politics, Bratton and van de Walle (1997) (among others) have argued that the neo-patrimonial nature of political regimes on that continent is the most important factor determining democratization. One of the special characteristics associated with neo-patrimonialism is a “zero-sum” approach to politics: the winner takes all. The prevalence of such attitudes among the political elite makes competition for power particularly critical in any attempt at democratization. The clientistic approach to politics did not change with the return of multi-party elections in the 1990s: voters often choose representatives based on how good they are as “patrons” of their respective community or constituency (Barkan 1995, 2000). This is a probable explanation for why so many autocrats managed to stay in power as elected leaders in the 1990s (Baker 1998). The hypothesis I want to explore is that this prevalence of the old authoritarian guard impinges negatively on the legislative representation of women.

### *Empirical Results*

Following the theoretical discussion above, this article analyzes the levels of association between these three forms of participation and the level of female legislative representation. Political participation, however, does not occur in a vacuum but is thought to be associated with general economic development and education. Simply put, the more affluent and educated a person is, the more likely the individual will cast a vote at the polls. A similar argument can be made regarding opposition participation. Furthermore, since many of these countries are extremely dependent on aid, and donor countries frequently have increased gender equality on the agenda, it seems possible that donor priorities might affect the level of female legislative representation. Finally, it seems relevant and timely to assess whether

Islam affects women's participation in public representation, given the liberal orthodoxy about Islam's impact on women's empowerment. In order to check for these standard objections about confounding factors, we control for economic development (operationalized as GDP per capita), the level of female literacy (operationalized as percentage of illiterate females among the female population), and donor dependency (operationalized in terms of ODA as percentage of total GDP) in the regression analysis. It seems reasonable to measure GDP/c and ODA at a point two years before the election (*te-2*) to allow it sufficient time to affect the situation of the population, while female literacy can be measured at a point one year before the election (*te-1*). Lastly, I introduce a dummy for the potential influence of Islam as the world's dominant religion.

Participation is a behavioral concept and its operationalization here follows that basic understanding. The alternative explanatory (or control) variables are all structural factors. Reasonably valid quantitative measures exist for each of them and are available for most of the countries and years in question. In choosing a statistical procedure for the regression analysis, I follow Gasiorowski and Powell (1997) and use a two-stage stepwise regression procedure. Such regression analysis is known to have liabilities that do not make it suitable for rigorous hypothesis testing (e.g. Hanushek and Jackson 1997). However, because this article does not develop a model but rather explores a range of factors that may affect women's legislative representation, the method is suitable and the liabilities do not seriously undermine the analysis. In the first stage, standard stepwise regression is employed, including variables that have the fewest missing observations,<sup>5</sup> to identify those variables that remain significant at the .10 level. The second stage incorporates the four remaining variables that have only one more missing observation than those included in the first stage. Any variable that significantly increases the model's explanatory power at the .10 level is included. Finally, the last explanatory variable with the least number of observations is added. This approach ensures that missing observations of a particular explanatory variable do not affect the sample condition until the final stage of analysis.

Table 4 provides the results of the analysis. While the results first and foremost point to the importance of popular participation and economic development for women's representation in Africa, negative findings may be as significant as positive results (Popper 1972; King et al. 1994). It is important to note that opposition parties are no more benevolent than incumbent parties toward women's equal representation in the legislatures of Africa. It is true that a few former opposition parties, such as the African National Congress in South Africa, adopted gender quotas for the intra-party nominations, with a tremendous effect on women's legislative representation once these parties obtained a significant number of seats in the legislature. The general picture, however, is rather different. There is no reason for women to believe that opposition parties would benefit their strategic interests more than ruling parties do.

The presence of old authoritarian rulers, their close aides, and associated patronage networks do not seem to prevent women from increasing their legislative representation. On the face of it, this might seem to contradict the case-study findings reported above. We would expect the continuation of machine-like politics through political patronage in male-dominated networks to exclude women from represen-

**TABLE 4**  
**Women's Representation, Participation, and Alternative Explanatory Factors.**

	1	2	3
Free and Fair (dummy)	.171		
Turnout	9.980***	6.649*	7.626*
Opposition participation	.054		
Old Authoritarian Guard	.103		
Islam (dummy)		.010	
GDP per capita ( <i>t</i> -2)		1.607E-03***	.169
ODA (share of GDP, <i>t</i> -2)		.097	
Female Adult Illiteracy			-.073
Constant	2.615	3.121	3.640
R <sup>2</sup>	.076***	.172***	.045*
<i>N</i>	123	122	107

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized Beta. \* $p=.05$ , \*\* $p=.01$ , \*\*\* $p=.001$ . Dependent variable: Women's Share of Legislative Seats.

tation. The results seem to suggest that women today have the opportunity to engage in, and benefit from, clientistic politics as easily as men. However, it is also possible that the mere presence of the old guard in electoral politics is not an effective indicator of machine politics. Another significant negative finding is that neither Islamic domination<sup>6</sup> nor a low level of literacy are significant factors preventing women from achieving higher levels of political representation. Given the importance accorded to these factors with regard to political empowerment, these are not trivial findings. A caveat is necessary with regard to female literacy, however; data were missing on this variable for sixteen cases, and in conjunction with the missing entries on turnout and GDP/c, the analysis is based on only 107 out of the 127 valid cases. It is possible that filling those gaps would eventually change the picture of the influence of literacy.

Most importantly, the analysis seems to corroborate the hypothesis about the

positive effects of increased voter participation on women's representation. Even after controlling for the free and fairness of elections, as in the first model, the level of turnout has a strong and highly significant effect on women's level of representation in the legislature. The level of economic development is a highly relevant factor which increases the explained variance by some 10 percent in the second model. Nevertheless, the analysis disappoints any expectations that economic development would cancel out popular participation as an explanatory factor. Thus, there seems to be no direct causal chain from economic development over political participation to increased representation of women.

Regardless, increased popular political participation can and is being achieved at various levels of economic development and appears to have a positive effect on women's political empowerment, in terms of legislative representation. Although we lack sufficient gender-disaggregated data on political participation in Africa, by all indications, African society and politics remains male-dominated, and there is little reason to believe that popular political participation would be any different. Given the assumption that higher turnout is propelled primarily by increasing the number of women showing up at the polls, this analysis can confirm that women tend to vote for women more than men do. Hence, increased legislative representation of women is dependent to a large extent on the empowerment of ordinary women asserting their political rights and exercising them effectively.

### **Effects of Electoral Cycles on Women's Representation**

An alternative explanation is that women gain legislative strength with increasing experience gained through consecutive electoral cycles. In the wake of liberalization and democratization, which expanded the scope of rights and freedoms, it seems reasonable to expect that women's movements would need some time to either form or reorient and to work with the political system of the new dispensation. Some scattered evidence supports such claims (e.g., Yoon 2001). Nevertheless, the story of Ghana suggests that there is no such link in the short-to-medium term. Women's legislative representation has not increased to any notable extent over three consecutive elections in Ghana. Does this represent a general pattern in Africa?

Yoon's 2001 study examined changes over founding and second elections only, and found that on average, women's legislative representation decreased as a result of democratization but improved again following second elections. The present study can present evidence from a wider range, as it goes beyond second elections. While forty-four of the African states have conducted so-called founding elections, thirty-seven countries have also conducted second elections and as many as twenty of these have managed to conclude a third round of polls in an uninterrupted sequence as of January 2003. At this point, seven countries have accomplishment at least four successive polls.<sup>7</sup> Out of the forty-four countries that held founding elections, thirty-one have continuously upheld a civilian regime. A few, of course, are rather discouraging examples of civilian regimes. Regimes like that seen in Chad under President Idriss Déby (in power since 1990), in Togo under President Etienne Eyadema (in power since 1967), and in Sudan headed by President Omar Hassan al-Bashir (in power since 1989) are civilian more in name than anything else. Nev-

ertheless, a qualified majority of countries in Africa have been governed by civilian regimes over the period in question. In sum, we do have a sufficient empirical basis for discerning what happens to women's legislative empowerment when countries progress from founding to second, third, fourth, and successive elections.

Two other arguments are of concern here. On the one hand, many scholars have followed Bratton and van de Walle (1997) to argue that there is a distinct difference in kind between countries that had some sort of electoral democracy before 1989 and those that held founding elections later. Consequently, the "old" regimes were not included in Bratton and van de Walle's analysis of the factors behind democratization and level of democracy in Africa. While exclusion of these regimes from the study of democratization might be justified, it is hard to see why the old electoral regimes were not included in the assessment of factors contributing to different levels of democracy (cf. Lindberg 2002). In any event, the distinction between "old" and "new" democracies (or electoral regimes, as I prefer to label them) has been widely accepted in the literature on African democratization. Within the group of "new" electoral regimes, a second distinction between "early" and "late" founding and second elections has become influential in the literature following comparative analyses by Bratton (1998) and Bratton and Posner (1997). The argument is that the "late" countries—those holding founding elections from 1995 and onwards—are the hardest nuts to crack. In other words, they are a group of countries that has liberalized their political spaces most unwillingly, slowly, and subject to reconsideration. While that analysis has been challenged both methodologically and substantively (e.g., Lindberg 2002, 2004; Solt 2001), the distinction has become so frequently referred to in the literature that it remains a subject worthy of further investigation. In sum, if there is an in-kind difference with regard to democracy and democratization between "old," "early new," and "late new" electoral regimes in Africa, such differences would be expected to noticeably affect women's legislative representation. Hence, in addition to comparing all fifty-one founding elections with all thirty-nine second elections, twenty third elections, and seventeen fourth and later elections, an analysis disaggregated on these three groups is also presented.

### *Empirical Results*

Table 5 presents the results of the compare-means analysis. The table should be read as a panel-group comparison that follows the distinctions between groups of countries identified in the comparative literature on democratization in Africa. The first panel consists of the "old" electoral regimes that held competitive elections before 1989. The second panel includes the "early new" electoral regimes that were authoritarian by 1 January 1989 but subsequently held founding elections before 1 January 1995. The third group consists of regimes that came late and did not hold founding elections until after 1 January 1995. For each of these panel-groups, as well as for the entire set of regimes, the table gives the mean shares of women's legislative representation over founding and later elections.

What does this analysis tell us? Overall, relatively small changes appear to occur with increasing experience over consecutive elections. While there are definitely changes pointing toward an improved legislative representation of women, these



**TABLE 5**  
**Women's Representation, Regimes, and Consecutive Elections.**

	Old Electoral Regimes	Early New Electoral Regimes	Late New Electoral Regimes	All
Founding Elections	3.9 (3.80) 6	5.7 (7.04) 28	5.1 (4.57) 17	5.3 (5.98) 51
Second Elections	5.6 (4.25) 6	6.3 (8.14) 25	12.8 (6.95) 8	7.1 (7.67) 39
Third Elections	7.0 (3.48) 6	10.9 (6.37) 14	–	9.5 (6.20) 20
Fourth* Elections	7.9 (5.01) 14	9.5 (.64) 3	–	8.2 (4.52) 17
All Elections	6.3 (4.45) 32	6.9 (7.29) 70	6.9 (6.41) 25	6.7 (6.50) 127

Note: \*Includes fourth and later elections grouped together.

"Old Electoral" refers to countries that held consecutive competitive elections before and into 1989. "Early New" refers to countries that held a founding election in 1989 to 1994, while "Late New" refers to countries that held founding elections in 1995 to 2002. Women's representation – Consecutive Elections "Old"  $F=1.114$ ,  $p=.360$ ,  $R^2=.103$ ; "Early New"  $F=.955$ ,  $p=.419$ ,  $R^2=.028$ ; "Late New"  $F=10.715$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $\eta^2=.318$ ; "All"  $F=1.922$ ,  $p=.130$ ,  $R^2=.023$ . Women's representation – Panel Groups  $F=.529$ ,  $p=.562$ ,  $\eta^2=.009$ . Corrected Model (Women's Representation – New/Experienced Regimes – Consecutive Election – Intercept):  $-F=1.407$ ,  $p=.217$ ,  $R^2=.066$ .

remain somewhat tentative. The average share of seats held by women increases from about 5 percent after founding elections to over 9 percent in third elections, dropping again in later elections to about 8 percent. The statistical relationship is also weak and not significant ( $F=1.922$ ,  $p=.130$ ,  $R^2=.023$ ). The overall average difference between the groups identified in the literature is also insignificant, ranging from an average of 6.3 to 6.9 percent.

Acknowledging that the only statistically significant difference is between founding and second elections among the “late new” electoral regimes, there is room for further reflection. First of all, the evidence at hand seems to suggest that there are similar processes occurring among all groups of countries, albeit on different levels. Some start with higher numbers of women being elected in founding elections, others with fewer, and the pace of development over consecutive elections differs. For example, whereas the “late new” electoral regimes on average increased women’s legislative representation from 5 to 12 percent from founding to second elections, the old electoral regimes have only reached an average of 8 percent despite several more electoral cycles. Second, all groups advance over time as they move from these founding elections to second and, if applicable, to third and fourth elections. (Only the fourth elections among the “new early” regimes fall slightly below the benchmark. That figure is based on a small share of these regimes, since few of them have held fourth elections so far, and should therefore not be ascribed too much importance.)

Overall, women’s legislative representation follows the pattern of the general democratic quality of elections in Africa, which is evidently improving with increasing experience over consecutive elections (Lindberg 2004). Both the “good guys,” who have managed many elections, and the “bad guys,” who started later and in significantly worse terms, are improving. Women’s representation increases with experience in all groups of regimes—least so in the old African electoral regimes and more so in the younger ones. The development is incremental rather than dramatic, but nevertheless, the present analysis suggests that women’s legislative representation is to a significant extent affected by processes of accumulation of experience among women who manage to enter the political sphere in Africa. Exactly what these processes look like and what makes them succeed or fail, and whether additional processes (e.g., diffusion) are occurring, would need to be addressed via case-study methodology. While that goes beyond the scope of this article, the analysis presented here offers good reasons to embark on such ventures.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to improve our knowledge of gender relations within the framework of comparative democratization. The empirical analysis confirms that the introductory story about Ghana was typical of Africa in two respects. First, it exemplified the discriminatory impact of majoritarian electoral systems on the representation of women, but also revealed the unimportance of opposition participation. Full participation by opposition parties (versus total boycott of previous elections) increased women’s legislative representation by only 0.5 percent. Yet Ghana proved to be a deviant case in three other respects. Unexpectedly, the dramatic increase in popular participation from founding to second election and the

subsequent slight downturn in the third election, and the increasing level of fairness were not accompanied by any significant variation in women's empowerment. Third, few capacity-building processes seem to have taken place in Ghana from founding to third elections, at least to the effect of increasing representation in parliament.

Given the premise that a roughly equal gender representation in the legislature is desirable, the analysis of popular participation and the effects of successive elections provides a basis for some optimism. It takes relatively minor resources and capabilities to make more women go to the polls to cast their vote. It appears that this little extra effort, perhaps in combination with experience and organizational strength accumulated by women over several cycles of elections, can send more women to the legislature. However, no argument is made to the effect that women's interests cannot be forwarded by men. The Women's Caucus in the Parliament of Ghana has four men as official support-members, and the Ghana Parliamentary Caucus on Population and Development was founded by a well-respected northerner and Muslim MP, who came out as a strongly pro-women chair over his eight-year leadership of the caucus. Not only women can head women's causes, yet the importance of equal gender balance in African legislatures should be obvious, if for no other reason than that, in a part of the world where traditional notions of "womaness" are still very strong and young women's choices are constrained accordingly, female role models are important.

Overall, this study has demonstrated the value of studying gender relations under democratization, even with a narrow institutionalist focus using an elitist perspective. Naturally, this approach can only take us so far but that does not make it useless, as more radical students of democratization have argued. This study has confirmed that the choice of electoral system has significant implications for the women's political empowerment in the legislature in Africa. These findings are not trivial, since they extend established theories and since electoral systems can actually be changed relatively easily compared to deep-seated sociocultural norms and economic inequalities. Finally, the evidence at hand has implications for discussions of institution building. Despite what has often been argued by Africanists, imported electoral institutions are having the same effects on women's representation in Africa as in the established, industrial democracies. It remains to be seen whether other kinds of institutions recently imported to Africa will also display generally anticipated effects. At the very least, this study provides one example of how a typically Western political institution may travel across cultures and societies with constant effects, in this case on the election of women to legislatures.

## APPENDIX

The data set includes 132 elections in Africa. The data on women's share of legislative seats were collected from IPU. Out of the 132 elections in the data set, data on the dependent variable were found for 127 cases, making the total universe. The missing cases are, in four of the five instances, cases of legislative elections followed by a breakdown of the democratization process (the elections in Comoros and Republic of Congo in 1992, Niger in 1996, and Nigeria in 1998). The last missing case is Mauritania's legislative election in 2001, for which I have been unable to learn the distribution of seats according to gender. The main period is from January 1989 to January 2003, but for countries that already practiced multi-party elections by 1 January 1989, and continued that practice in that year, their earlier elections were included as well, the reason being that these countries' founding and successive elections would otherwise not be included in the analysis. Since the main theoretical point concerns the relevance of experience to women's empowerment that comes with practice, regardless of when this happens in time, this selection is justifiable on theoretical grounds.

All data were collected between 2000 and 2003 using several sources. The main reason I used multiple sources, rather than one for each indicator, was to avoid contamination of the data by biases in the sources, which is more likely to be non-random when only a single source is employed. All background information was collated into country files, one for each country. These forty-eight country files contain narrative as well as quantitative information and consist of between four and fifteen pages per country, in all close to 400 pages of compressed country-specific information on elections. When the compilation was completed, each instance of an election was coded according to the coder's translation book. Unfortunately, due lack of resources the author did all of the coding; needless to say, no inter-coder reliability test has been performed.

All processing was done in SPSS 10.0. The data set, coder's translation, and background data are freely available from the author's website (see note 4), and preparations are underway to make the materials available from the UK Data Archive at Essex University. Most of the indicators are interval or ratio measures. In the calculation of means, the geometric mean is used instead of the arithmetic mean because the geometric mean is not as sensitive to outliers and skewness as is its arithmetic cousin (Blume 1974; Datton et al. 1998). The only exception is the estimation of the corrected models, since SPSS does not have a function for using geometric means in the univariate means analysis for model estimation.

## VARIABLES

**COUNTRY:** Name of the country.

**PRE\_PAR:** Presidential or parliamentary system.

**NEWDEMO:** Dummy for new electoral regimes (countries that did not have competitive elections by 1 January 1989).

**DATE:** Date of the current election.

PRMUSLIM: Percent muslim adherents, circa 1985.

DU\_ISLAM: Dummy for Islam as dominating religion.

FE\_ILLIT: Female illiteracy as percentage of total adult women (te-1).

GDP\_C: Total GDP per capita, in '000 const US\$1985 (te-2).

ODA\_GDP: Total ODA as percentage of total GDP (te-2).

FE\_MPS: The share of legislative seats obtained by female candidates in each legislative election.

FE\_MPS\_GM: The share of legislative seats obtained by female candidates in each legislative election; values of less than one replaced by one for the calculation of geometric means.

ELECTSY4: Electoral system. This has four values: "0" for plurality/majoritarian systems, "1" for mixed systems, "2" for proportional systems using small multi-member constituencies (majoritarian effects), and "3" for elections conducted using pure proportional representation or PR with medium-to-large multi-member constituencies. The analysis of the effects of electoral systems was first performed with five main categories and independent variables (plurality, majoritarian, mixed, PR/small MMCs, and PR/large MMCs). As no substantial differences in effect were obtained between plurality and majoritarian systems, these two categories were combined into a single indicator for majoritarian systems. Finally, the presence of a few decisively mixed systems forced me to include a third category.

TOUT: Voter turnout measured as the percentage of registered voters (given as the decimal figure indicating a percentage).

F\_F: Free and Fairness. This has four values: "0" for elections that were totally unacceptable, "1" for elections with registered flaws that significantly affected the results, "2" indicating that there were irregularities but not to the extent of altering the outcome of the election, and "3" for essentially free and fair elections. In the analysis presented here, the first two categories and the last two categories have been conflated to make two categories: "0" for unfair elections, and "1" for fair elections.

F\_F2GR: Dummy. Same foundation as "F\_F" but collapsed into two categories: values 0-1 coded as "0" and 2-3 coded as "1."

O\_PA: Opposition participation. This has three values: "0" for none, "1" for elections in which some parties of the opposition participated but not others, and "2" for cases in which all of the significant opposition parties contested the election.

INCUM: Participation by the "old authoritarian guard" (proven non-democratic actors). This has three values: "0" is assigned for elections in which the leadership of one or more of the parties is made up of former top-ranking officials from an authoritarian regime. "1" is assigned to elections in which no former authoritarian ruler participates but some in the leadership of at least one party have served as ministers/deputies or on a council or similar office in an authoritarian regime. "2"

is assigned to elections in which none of the main contestants has been in top positions in previous authoritarian regimes.

**CAND\_PAR:** The total absolute number of parties contesting each legislative election.

**P\_PAR:** The total absolute number of parties obtaining seats in the legislature (Lower House in bicameral systems).

**NO:** Current election's number.

**NO\_CATE:** Current election's number (4 and later coded as "4").

**N\_NO\_PAR:** Number of next election to legislative branch.

**NNOCATPA:** Next number of election to legislative branch (5 and later coded as "5").

**N\_NO\_DU:** Number of elections held. This is divided into two categories: Less Experienced (0–3 elections) and Experienced (4 or more elections).

**D\_NO\_CAT:** Number of poll (4+ elections coded as 4, and including only cases of elections in countries that have held two or more elections during the period).

**WIN\_P:** The share (percentage) of seats in Parliament (Lower House in bicameral systems) by winning party.

**WIN2ND\_P:** The share (percentage) of seats in Parliament (Lower House in bicameral systems) by second biggest party.

## Notes

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1. This refers to the results as per the end of December 2000. Later, a number of by-elections have further increased NPP's parliamentary strength.
2. For a useful review of this literature, see Waylen (1994).
3. The coding of elections in the data set is based on reports by international (bilateral as well as multilateral) and domestic election observation organizations/missions. Based on the documentation, elections were initially coded as: "0" – totally unacceptable, "1" – elections with registered flaws that significantly affected the results, "2" – there were irregularities but not to the extent of altering the outcome of the election, and "3" – essentially free and fair elections. For the analysis in the present article, the first two and the latter two categories have been conflated to make two categories: "0" for unfair elections and "1" for fair elections. See further comments on the methodology and the data set in the Appendix.
4. The data set and complete documentation are available for download from the author's website: <[http://www.svet.lu.se/Staff/Personal\\_pages/Staffan\\_lindberg/Staffan\\_lindberg.html](http://www.svet.lu.se/Staff/Personal_pages/Staffan_lindberg/Staffan_lindberg.html)>. Preparations are underway to make it available from the UK Data Archive at Essex University: <<http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>>.
5. This coincides with the three indicators of the three types of participation.
6. I use the dummy for Islam as the dominating religion in relative terms. Using the alternative measure, percentage of the population adhering to Islam, produces essentially the same result.
7. Botswana, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal and Zimbabwe.

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