

# Women's Political Parties in Europe

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In representative democracies, political parties organize the public will, giving expression to political differences in society (see Katz and Mair 1995; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Sartori 1967). Parties can also deepen democracy by broadening the connections between representatives and constituents, helping to hold political institutions accountable and increasing the participation of previously marginalized groups (see Costain 2005; Kitschelt 1993; Shugart 1994; Kittilson and Tate 2005; Young 2000).

A body of scholarship has emerged to address small parties, their organizational development, and their electoral success (see Harmel and Robertson 1985; Hug 2001; Ignazi 1992; Kitschelt 1988, 1989, 1990, 1993; Meguid 2005; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Tavits 2008). Virtually none exists on women's parties, however. There are rich case studies of women's parties (Cowell-Meyers 2011; Dominelli and Jonsdottir 1988; Krupavicius and Matonyte 2003; Levin 1999; Racioppi and O'Sullivan See 1995; Slater 1995) but almost no consideration of women's parties as a comparative phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Even the extensive literature on women's social movements fails to explore the development of women's political parties and their subsequent representation. Instead,

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1. Ishiyama (2003) and Leyenaar (2012) are notable exceptions, but Ishiyama's analysis is limited to nine parties in postcommunist states in Eastern Europe, and Leyenaar's covers material only until 1994.

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it tends to confine its analysis to allies within parties or movement support for political parties (Banaszak 2005; Banaszak, Beckwith, and Rucht 2003; Costain 1981) with occasional acknowledgment of the utility of women's electoral mobilization for their representation (see Lovenduski 2005; Matland 2003). And, yet, women's parties continue to contest elections; in May 2014 three women's parties stood for election to the European Parliament, and the Swedish Feminist Initiative won the first MEP seat for a women's party.

This neglect of women's parties is curious for two reasons: first, momentum is building within the study of social movements to consider the intersection of movements and other types of political organization (see Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Clemens 1997; Goldstone 2003; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; McAdam and Tarrow 2010). Second, feminist scholars increasingly acknowledge the relevance of the state to advancing women's interests (consider, for example, the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State [RNGS] project headed by Amy Mazur and Dorothy McBride Stetson). Feminist demands ultimately require state action for resolution. As an organizational innovation, women's parties may allow for tactical engagement with the formal institutions of the state in ways that expand the inclusion of women and women's interests in decision making. They may be a critically important tool for feminist advancement.

This project considers the emergence of women's parties, their nature, and development in a comparative framework. Using an original dataset derived from European electoral commissions, statistical offices, national libraries, media archives, party records, and interviews of experts from the respective countries, I document and describe 30 such parties contesting elections at the national level in Europe since 1987. I then conduct a series of tests on this panel data to determine when and under what conditions women's parties are likely to emerge. I argue that women's parties are indications of failures of the established political parties to include and represent women's interests. Additionally, I demonstrate that women's parties are more likely to appear where women are empowered unevenly than where they are already included or their marginalization is consistent.

## THE WOMEN'S PARTY

Women's parties present a fascinating series of theoretical puzzles and pose an equally compelling research agenda. First, the *raison d'être* of women's

parties — to represent women's interests in politics — would seemingly have broad appeal in every society where women comprise approximately half of the electorate but only a small fraction of the legislature. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the average percentage of women in parliaments the world over is only 21%, and in only a handful of countries worldwide do women comprise more than 40% of the legislature, suggesting widespread occasion for campaigns to increase women's representation. In addition, as an emerging literature calls for examining the relationship between movements and parties, specifically with regards to women's mobilization, there is a growing sense that movements and parties are linked (see Armstrong and Bernstein 2008, Clemens 1997; Goss and Heaney 2010); they are "different but parallel approaches to influencing political outcomes" (Goldstone 2003, 8). As Andrews argues, "formal organizations [such as political parties] become a necessary vehicle for advancing a group's claims in the policy-making process" (2001, 76). As women's social movements were represented in more than 70 countries by 1995 (Htun and Weldon 2010), women's parties might be expected to be commonplace and durable.

Yet, women's parties are few, small in scale, and transitory. Of course, mainstream democratic theory does not assume that substantive representation requires descriptive representatives; women's interests in politics may suitably be served by male legislators so that demand for such a party is not equally intense in all contexts.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the literature on social movements indicates that movements require resources and opportunities to mobilize and take root (see Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Tarrow 1994), which are supply-side forces that would not be uniform across states either. Because the issue of women's parties has been neglected to date, however, we do not know what social and political forces encourage a women's movement to form a political party. In other words, we do not yet know why gender is triggered as a mobilizing strategy in some contexts or why some women's movements choose to adopt this tactic. This article presents the first theory of women's party emergence and offers a preliminary analysis of the conditioning variables producing women's parties in Europe.

A second puzzle regarding women's parties reflects the fact that women's experiences are socially constructed, and the issues around which women organize are historically and culturally specific. This does not, however,

2. For a discussion of the politics of presence, see Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995.

render them beyond our ability to find common patterns and generate knowledge of use in social movement theory and feminist research (see Beckwith 2000). Women's parties may represent and mobilize women in markedly disparate ways and place very different kinds of demands on political systems, but they share a common agenda to advance the interests of women in politics. In the absence of a systematic study, we do not know which issues women's parties represent, the frames they employ to mobilize women, and the mechanisms they use to advance their agendas. This project offers the first examination of these fertile subjects for political research using comparative data.

Third, some women's parties, such as those in Iceland, Israel, and Northern Ireland, have had striking effects on women's representation in politics. Though small, short-lived, and marginal, these parties altered the discourse, behavior, and policy in the other parties in their respective systems (see Cowell-Meyers 2011; Dominelli and Jonsdottir 1988; Levin 1999). Their impact was not a consequence of their electoral success, but their presence triggered a process that expanded women's inclusion in the other larger, more powerful parties. Though not all women's parties can be expected to spark a process of gendered contagion in other parties, that some women's parties can have such effects on women's representation across the political system merits their consideration and motivates this study.

## CONCEPTUALIZING A WOMEN'S PARTY

Women's parties are autonomous organizations of or for women that run candidates for elected office. What makes them *women's* parties is the explicit agenda to advance the volume and range of women's voices in politics. In other words, a women's party is an organ designed specifically and primarily to increase women's representation in politics. Most typically, they are hybrids of social movements and political parties, a movement qua party, intended as a mechanism through which women may engage directly in the political process, achieving access and inclusion (see Cowell-Meyers 2014). Their autonomy is important to their definition: women's parties are independent of other political parties or structures — in Weldon's (2002, 80) words — “that do not make the condition of women their primary concern.” These are not women's wings or branches of established political parties, which allows them to focus solely on addressing women's issues rather than fitting their concerns into those of a parent organization.

Though all political parties by definition seek to elect their members to political office, electoral success is not typically the main strategic goal of small parties. Their goal instead is to draw attention to their cause (see MacKenzie's [2005] discussion of profamily parties in Canada). Women's parties succeed in increasing women's representation by embarrassing the other, more mainstream and more powerful parties for not including women in party leadership, putting women forward as candidates, giving enough attention to gender dynamics, or addressing the movement's concerns. For example, Monica McWilliams, one of the founding members of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, described this logic explicitly in an interview with the author, asserting that the NIWC intended to manipulate the political opportunism of the other parties' leaders, constituting a "sufficient threat to them [to get them] to put more women forward and to take the issues seriously." Kazimiera Prunskiene, founder of the Lithuanian Women's Party, also describes the function of the party in terms of threatening the male-dominated parties with the intent of changing their policies on women and women's representation (see Krupavicius and Matonyte 2003, 91). Thus, these parties can increase women's representation overall by improving women's status in the other parties, rather than by winning many votes/seats. Direct political engagement allows a women's movement to expand their opportunities to set the public agenda, draw attention to their issues, and influence the behavior and rhetoric of the conventional institutions of political power.

Some women's parties tie the marginalization of women in politics to overarching and oppressive systems of patriarchal dominance; these feminist parties are a subset of women's parties. Other women's parties may not embrace the feminist label, emphasizing "the primacy of women's gender experience, women's issues, and women's leadership and decision-making" (Beckwith 2000, 437) but not connecting their agenda to ending patriarchy. They are more about inclusion than transformation. In short, it is not the particular issues they represent that define parties as women's parties. Instead, women's parties are self-conscious and explicit constructions around gender, drawing from some common experience of women in a given society or sector of it and designating themselves as the representatives of women through their party label. It is their self-identification as the voice of women, suggesting that that voice is not being heard elsewhere through the other parties in the system, that makes them meaningful and interesting. And, because women's parties are rare, the situations in which they do emerge deserve analysis.

## THEORY/HYPOTHESES

We know from strong comparative scholarship on women's movements such as that by Lisa Baldez (2003) that gender is more likely to be a successful appeal for collective action during processes of democratic transition when women are excluded from decision making by male opposition leaders. We also know that levels of women's representation in national legislatures can be explained by structural factors such as proportional representation, measures of women's socioeconomic development or position within society, cultural factors such as hostility towards the advancement of women, as well as the presence or absence of gender quotas and (see Reynolds 1999; Rule and Zimmerman 1994; Siaroff 2000; Tremblay 2008). My argument ties these strains of previous scholarship together and constructs a theory of relative deprivation to explain the emergence of women's parties: women's parties are responses to low levels of opportunity for women to be represented through traditional or established mechanisms. Their emergence is an act of resistance to structures that exclude them and a measure of their disappointment in and neglect by the established parties. (See Hug [2001] and Tavits [2008], who theorize about the role of neglect and disappointment in the formation of new political parties.) In other words, I hypothesize that the likelihood of women's parties may increase where there is a disjuncture between these forces that both enable them to advocate for themselves and prevent them from inclusion in traditional forms. As Rosenbluth, Salmond and Thies (2006) attest, increasing women's professional opportunities should create the conditions under which parties would seek to compete for women's votes by increasing women's representation within the parties. However, where women's professional engagement occurs without opportunities for representation in the established mainstream parties, women's groups become frustrated by this lack of opportunity and choose to form a women's party to pressure the established parties to address their issues.

*H<sub>1</sub>: Women's parties are more likely where women are empowered economically (i.e., women's participation in the labor force and education levels are high).*

*H<sub>2</sub>: Women's parties are more likely where women are disempowered or underrepresented by mainstream political parties and processes (i.e., where women's representation is low, there are not gender quotas for candidates or parliaments, and the dominant culture is biased against their inclusion).*

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *Women's parties are more likely where women experience high levels of economic empowerment but low levels of political empowerment (i.e., the interactions of H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>4</sub>).*

Women's parties can also be viewed through the lenses of both "new" and "fringe" parties. As Duverger's Law asserts, multiple, smaller parties are more common where electoral structures do not penalize them; district magnitude, electoral formula, and the size of legislature lower the barriers to entry for small parties and are generally recognized as the most significant factors determining the number of parties in a system (see Harmel and Robertson 1985; Hug 2001; Lijphart 1994; Salmond 2006; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Tavits 2008). Thus, I hypothesize that women's parties are more likely to emerge where these structural features suggest greater opportunity for larger numbers of parties in general.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** *Women's parties are more likely where (a) district magnitude is high, (b) the total number of seats is high, (c) systems use PR (as opposed to SMPD) electoral rules for most of the seats, and (d) many parties are present in the system.*

These structural features of a political system are typically static, however, and new features are not as common as the emergence of new parties. Instead, some variable of dynamism must be taken into consideration. Scholarship on the changing repertoires of social movements, including the emergence of new parties out of social movements, such as the evolution of Green parties, suggests that new political opportunities present occasions for social movements to adopt new structures and patterns of mobilization (Kitschelt 1988, 1989, 1990; Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Tarrow 1994). In addition, as Margit Tavits (2008) notes, new parties are more common in newer democracies as parties struggle to establish their reputations for electoral viability. Given the cases in the study include those in transition from communism, the immediate measure of new political opportunities can be reasonably conceptualized as a change in electoral law or even measured as age of democratic institutions. Thus,

**H<sub>5</sub>:** *Women's parties are more likely where political institutions and electoral laws are new.*

Table 1 explains the definitions of the variables used to test these hypotheses and the sources of this data.

## METHOD

This study uses an original dataset that was compiled by the author. The first portion of the study documents and describes the women's parties that emerged in the 47 countries that are currently members of the Council of Europe, in the period from 1987 to 2007.<sup>3</sup> The second portion uses pooled time series analysis and employs logistical regression on a more limited dataset to test the ability of the hypotheses to predict the likelihood of a women's party emerging.<sup>4</sup> Logistical regression is used because the dependent variable of women's parties is measured as a nominal level variable (presence or absence), and much of the data for the independent variables are interval. Although the panel data is cross-sectional, time-series data, the window does not provide enough electoral cycles for each case to make effective use of a fixed effects model. A random-effects model is used instead. The unit of analysis in these tests is, thus, each election year in each of the countries included ( $n = 161$ ). For the regression analysis, women's parties are defined as those running candidates for the national legislature; European-only and regional-only women's parties are excluded. [Table 1](#) contains definitions and sources of the data.

## HOW MANY WOMEN'S PARTIES, WHERE, AND WHEN?

The data reveal the existence of 30 women's parties registered at the national level in 20 states in Europe from 1987 to 2007. One more existed solely at the regional level (Greenland) and two at the European level (Spain and Greece). In six countries, more than one women's party emerged in this period, with the largest numbers of parties in a single country occurring in Poland (four) and in Russia (three) in the first few years of competitive elections after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The majority of these parties were created in the 1990s. Of the 30 parties, 20 were created between 1990 and 2000. Six were created between 2001

3. All data is available upon request from the author.

4. The dataset for the regression analysis covers the years 1992–2007. The year 1992 was used, as data are simply too difficult to obtain for the first few years of the post-communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and in many cases, the noise-to-signal ratio meant that it did not make sense to include the first elections after the collapse of the communism. This dataset also excludes states with less than 100,000 people, those from the former Yugoslavia, which were engaged in civil war through much of this period (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro), and Azerbaijan and Armenia (which were not admitted to the Council until the twenty-first century). It also excludes Turkey, as data are not consistently available for this period.



Table 1. Operationalization of variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St. Dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Women's party Y/N	At least one party explicitly referring to women, mothers, or feminists in its title or deeming itself a party dedicated to advancing the interests of women in its mandate was on the ballot for national election	Collected from numerous elections databases, national statistical offices, electoral commission records, national libraries, media archives, party records, and interviews with experts from the 38 countries in the study	158	.25	.44	0	1
<b>Independent Variables</b>							
<b>Structural Variables</b>							
Effective threshold	Base threshold is calculated using the formula $75 / (DM + 1)$ for the tier in parliament (including compensatory tiers with fixed numbers of seats) with the highest district magnitude. If there are a variable number of leftover seats distributed at a national rather than district level, and the base threshold figure was <i>lower</i> than the legal threshold for inclusion in the distribution of leftover seats, it was retained. However, if the legal threshold for winning seats was higher than this threshold, the legal threshold was used.	Calculated from District Magnitude, taken from Database of Political Institutions (DPI), Keefer (2010), and the European Elections Database	160	7.02	7.52	.01	37.5

*Continued*

Table 1. Continued

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St. Dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Electoral structure	Main mode of election to lower house of Parliament (Proportional Representation or other)	DPI, Keefer (2010)	161	.36	.48	0	1
Total number of seats	Total number of seats in lower house	DPI, Keefer (2010)	161	248.1	168.8	54	672
Party fractionalization	Herfindahl Index of party fractionalization of all legislative parties in the lower house	DPI, Keefer (2010)	153	0.71	.11	.24	.93
Age of democracy	Years democratic <sup>ab</sup>	DPI, Keefer (2010)	155	31.90	27.5	0	77
<b><i>Women's Empowerment Variables</i></b>							
Women's labor force participation <sup>c</sup>	Percent of female population 15 years of age and older that is economically active, modeled ILO estimate	World Bank, World Development Indicators	161	50.40	8.00	27.60	71.80
Women's representation	Percent women in the lower house lagged by one election	IPU, plus consultation with individual legislatures and electoral commissions for historical data	156	15.20	10.30	1.5	42.7

Major party quota Y/N	Presence of a gender quota for candidates for national office in a major party, defined as those that won more than 10% of the popular vote in that electoral year	Some of this data came from the Quota Project and Krook 2009. I consulted directly with scholars or the parties themselves to fill in holes, resolve discrepancies, or to recreate the historical record.	145	.56	.50	0	1
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*Notes:* <sup>a</sup>New Electoral Law and Age of Democracy are strongly related ( $t = 8.724$ ,  $df = 99$ ,  $p = .00$ ). Age of democracy was used in this model instead of the new electoral law dummy due to its precision. <sup>b</sup>Age of Democracy is also highly correlated with gender bias ( $R = -.872$ ), which is measured by the percent of respondents who agree with the statement, "On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do," in the World Values Survey (WVS), the Voice of the People Millennium Survey (2000), and the Eurobarometer 63.1 (2005). The data are from Cleary (2010). Because age of democracy is related so strongly to gender bias, it represents not just the age of the institutions, but also the political environment of public opinion in which women seek representation. <sup>c</sup>Women in the workforce was the only variable used to explain women's economic empowerment. I attempted to use two other measures. The first was women's education completion rates, but the data from the World Bank and the United Nations on percent women completing their secondary level of education and women's total years of schooling proved incomplete, inconsistent, and unreliable. Both were also not associated with other variables in the dataset in anticipated ways. For example, there is not a particularly close association between women's education and their labor force participation ( $r = .392$ ), gender bias ( $r = .216$ ), or women's descriptive representation ( $r = .222$ ). Instead, though there is a large range in completion rates, women's secondary education is likely a reflection of education rates in general in society and not of gender-specific effects. In fact, women's secondary completion rate and the overall completion rate in these countries correlates at  $r = .935$ . The second discarded variable on women's economic empowerment was women's percent of total income. It was collected from the same sources and had the same effects. In none of the regression models did either prove significant, but the data's quality undermines confidence in these results.

Table 2. Explaining the emergence of a women's party (panel random effects logit estimates)

<i>Model</i>	<i>1 (Structural Factors)</i>	<i>2 (+Women's Empowerment Variables)</i>	<i>3 (+Interaction Effects)</i>	<i>4 (+Interaction Effects plus E/W)</i>
Effective threshold	0.9** (-1.81)	0.86** (-2.16)	0.85** (-2.29)	.87** (-2.21)
Electoral structure	6.69** (1.95)	10.91** (2.21)	9.78** (2.04)	7.24** (2.01)
Total seats	1.00 (1.56)	1.01* (2.06)	1.01** (2.09)	1.01** (2.25)
Party fractionalization	22026.47** (2.50)	30031.33** (2.28)	15521.79** (2.09)	20952.22** (2.26)
Age of democracy	1 (-.32)	1 (.011)	1.02 (.66)	
Women's labor force part.		1.18** (2.23)	1.38** (2.21)	1.36** (2.35)
Women's representation in lower house (lagged by one election)		.95 (-.88)	2.34* (1.94)	2.25* (1.92)
Major party quota Y/N		.048 (-.90)	0.00* (-1.75)	0.00 (-1.59)
Lab force part.* (1-women's rep)			1.02** (2.07)	1.02** (2.02)
Lab force part* Absence of party quota			1.25* (1.69)	1.22 (1.55)
Postcommunist				1.22(0.18)
Constant	-9.85	-18.13	-26.68	-26.75
Sigma	1.69	1.62	1.58	1.48
Rho	.46	.44	.43	.40
N	138	132	132	137
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.16	.24	.30	.32

Note: Only election years are used. Odds ratios reported (Z-scores in parentheses). \*significant at 0.1; \*\* significant at 0.05.

and 2007, and four existed before 1990. Though not all of the parties created in the 1990s were in newer democracies, the five oldest parties existed in the more established democracies.

Almost all of these parties were tiny, receiving less than 3% of the vote (though parties in Armenia, Iceland, and Russia earned much higher). Approximately 60% of the parties had some durability over the course of the years in the study, existing for more than one electoral cycle. In fact, the norm was for parties to exist for two to three electoral cycles, or 8 to 12 years. The longest standing parties were from established democracies in Western Europe, such as in Germany, Belgium, or Switzerland.

The experience of these parties is hard to describe with a common narrative. The parties in Western Europe enjoyed stability in stark contrast to the parties in Eastern Europe. In the post-communist states where political systems, in particular party systems, were in flux for much of the period of the study, women's parties enjoyed some wild successes and dramatic collapses. For example, Armenia's Shamiram Women's Party won more than 130,000 votes in 1995, more than 17% of the vote. Though they won eight seats in a legislature of 189 that electoral cycle, the party won no seats in the next elections in 1999. Similarly, Women of Russia won more than four million votes in 1993, which is approximately 8% of the vote in the proportional segment of the ballot, and earned 24 seats in the Duma out of 304, but in 1995, they earned only three. In contrast, the German Feminist Party, in existence since at least 1990, has been able to churn out more than 100,000 votes in the last three EU elections though they have never won a seat at the national or European levels.

Another interesting pattern involves the independence versus cooperativeness of the parties. In some cases, such as the Women of Russia (see Ishiyama 2003), the parties were fiercely independent, concerned about sacrificing their integrity, or being coopted into the mainstream parties. In other instances, such as in Bulgaria, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, women's parties joined electoral coalitions with other parties, with the Feminist-Green Alternative in Switzerland contesting elections in coalition from 1979 to 2003. In Bulgaria, the coalition behavior of the women's party seemed designed to save the political system from collapse more than to deliver tangible electoral benefits for the party itself; in 2001 the Party of Bulgarian Women served as an electoral partner to the National Movement of Simeon II, the returned king who ran for president but whose own party was prevented from running on a

technicality. The coalition won 42.73%, though the women's party took no seats. This dilemma over whether to pool resources with other parties at the cost of compromising some portion of the mission or appeal of the party versus remaining pure but isolated is a key strategic challenge for new parties.

Reflecting the spectrum of women's organizing, the parties cover a range of agendas and perspectives on the degree to which they seek to challenge established patterns in society. As Goss and Heaney (2010) explain, women's movements typically appeal to maternal (essentialist-traditionalist), equality (feminist), or feminine/expressive frames (recasting gender stereotypes), or they may combine these frames into hybrid messages that, in theory, broaden the movement's appeal. In these cases, a clear pattern of different frames emerged across the two parts of Europe. In the West, almost every party, such as the Feminist Initiative of Sweden, or the Frauen Macht Politics! of Switzerland, are or were explicitly feminist in their titles or manifestoes, seeking to overturn patriarchy throughout society. For example, the manifesto of the Dutch Vrouwenpartij, founded in 1985, called for "structural change of our society . . . The present norms and values must be adjusted according to those of women" (quoted in Leyenaar 2012). These feminist women's parties argued that the established left-wing parties within their systems either did not set high enough standards in terms of challenging patriarchy or did not go far enough to achieve or enforce them, for example, by giving lip service to the concepts in party platforms but not directing resources or attention to the problem.

However, most of the parties from Eastern Europe were oriented toward traditional or essentialist women's issues, reflecting women in reproductive or caring roles. Parties such as the National Party for Hungarian Mothers, or Women & Family in Slovakia were more explicit about this identity, but many others such as the Shamiram Women's Party in Armenia, the Women of Russia Party, and the Lithuanian Women's Party, which do not bear the reference to family or motherhood in their title, were careful to focus party activities on such issues (see Ishiyama 2003; Matland and Montgomery 2003). For example, the Moldovan Women's Party platform from 1994 called for equal rights for men and women and programs to protect the labor market interests of women but also prioritized education reform, a national system of preschools, protection for pregnant women, children in poor families, the elderly, harmony among social classes and groups, fair ethnic relations, etc. The platform of the Georgia Women's Party for Justice and Equality in 2008 sought

benefits for pregnant women and large families to encourage a growth in the birthrate (see Schofield et al. 2010). Some of these essentialist parties were explicitly antifeminist, though this was rare. More typically, the parties represented appeals for equal rights, though not necessarily social reorganization.

This pattern of feminism in the West and essentialism in the East likely had three causes. As Baldez (2003) explains, in East Europe, feminism was tainted by its associations with the previous regimes. Communism's goals of integrating women into the workforce and into the institutions used to channel political participation seemed to overlap with international feminist agendas. In fact, Baldez (2003) notes that under communism, feminist slogans were used to encourage women to participate in official party organs in places such as Poland and East Germany. Marsh (1996, 6) also notes the distance between Eastern women's activism and Western feminism, observing that Western "femininski" are derided in Russia for being out of touch with the real concerns of Russian women. This skepticism of feminism meant that women in the East would not typically mobilize around feminist frames either in opposition to the regime or in the aftermath of the fall of communism.

Secondly, feminism in the East by many accounts also fell victim to the rise or resurgence of national conservatism that followed the collapse of communism (see Mostov 1999; Sauer, Lanzinger, and Frysak 2006). There is a strong and well-documented tie between nationalist/nativist projects and essentialist gender ideology: Molyneux, for example, notes of the postcommunist East, "The new conservative nationalisms with their distinctive re-invocation of religious morality have provided arguments for the patriarchal reordering of gender relations..." (1994, 309). These gendered roles, in the words of Mostov, "delimit the possibilities of equal citizenship" (1999, 58) and pit the nationalist cause against the feminist one. The political context of nationalist recovery in the East would have left little room for feminist mobilizations or may have left movements wary of connecting themselves to international or Western movements. And, the popular bias against women in political office in Eastern Europe would likely curb the appeal of an explicitly feminist party.<sup>5</sup>

5. One measure of this dynamic derives from a variable developed by Cleary (2010), in which he combines answers to a similar prompt in the World Values Survey (WVS), the Voice of the People Millennium Survey (2000), and the Eurobarometer 63.1 (2005). The value is a percent of respondents who agree with the statement "On the whole, men make better political leaders than

Finally, the pattern of feminism in the West and essentialism in the East may also stem from the age of democratic institutions and the levels of economic development in the two regions. Feminism could be viewed as one element in a shift towards postmaterialist values within mass belief systems in the advanced industrialized democracies of Western Europe (see Dalton 2002; Inglehart 1997). In the East, however, in at least the first half of the period under study, economic and political turmoil from the collapse of communism would have contributed to a different pattern in public opinion, emphasizing material concerns and more traditional values. The essentialist frames of women's parties in the East reflected preoccupation with the need to rebuild social welfare systems destroyed with the collapse of communism.

A common claim that the other parties do not represent women's interests connects these parties, however. For example, the Lithuanian Women's Party, solidly anticommunist and Eastern, was founded to "decrease political dominance by one gender . . . we wanted to balance out the many male-dominated parties that did not recognize they were male parties . . . a female-dominated party permitted us to develop a party program that reflected women's political priorities" (Prunskiene, as quoted in Krupavicius and Matonyte 2003, 90). Alevtina Fedulova, a founding member and leader of the Women of Russia, explained the formation of her party using similar principles: "All other parties registering are, in fact, unisexual" (quoted in Weir 1993). "We realized these [other] parties do not understand women's problems. They don't even see women's problems" (quoted in Kunstel 1993). And, in the West, Monica McWilliams, founding member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, in familiar terms, described the decision to form a women's party as "the only opportunity to have our voices heard in Northern Ireland" (quoted in Sharrock 1996). This common agenda reflects a perception of exclusion from mainstream political processes, despite different conceptions of what women's issues are. It remains to be seen whether objective measures of exclusion can explain the emergence of these parties.

The extent of the parties' connections to women's organizations is difficult to ascertain. Some of these women's parties emerged from local bodies, campaigning in a few districts (and winning successes at the local level) before expanding to contend for national offices. In

women do" (min = 12, max = 80, mean = 39.40). In the dataset described below, this value is correlated with postcommunism at 0.92.



Switzerland, Moldova, Slovenia, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and Bulgaria, for example, national women's parties competed at the local levels as well. However, the percent that had local branches is almost impossible to ascertain as the data are not reliably available.

One way to assess the depth of the relationship between the women's movements in these separate countries and women's parties is to consider the strength and autonomy of movements in these countries at the time the parties were created. Data are not reliably available on these features of women's movements in all of the cases for all years, though Htun and Weldon (2010) have created a scheme for coding the strength and autonomy of *feminist* movements in many of these states for 1995 and 2005 using expert opinion. In six of the eight situations in which feminist parties emerged (Belgium, Finland, Iceland, and Netherlands as well as Switzerland, where there were two parties), the feminist movement was regarded as strong, according to Htun and Weldon, and in seven of the eight cases where feminist parties emerged (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Switzerland), the feminist movement was otherwise regarded as autonomous, organized outside of established political institutions such as parties, rather than through them. There are many other instances in which the feminist movement was either strong, autonomous, or both but in which women's parties did not emerge, suggesting that strong movements organized independently of other parties are a necessary, if not sufficient, condition to explain the emergence of feminist parties. This also suggests that where women's movements are represented by mainstream and established institutions such as political parties, as in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, and Sweden, women's parties are less likely to emerge.

Even more interesting is the fact that in 15 of the 16 women's parties that were not expressly feminist for which we have data, feminist movements in those countries were also regarded as autonomous, though only 5 of the 15 were regarded as strong. Again, this would suggest that an autonomous movement would be a necessary, though not sufficient, cause of a women's party. However, this is curious because an autonomous feminist movement should not theoretically be related to a women's party that is not feminist (and sometimes even antifeminist) in the sense that a movement is not likely to foster a party that does not reflect its values. There may be a number of reasons for this. It may be that the party and the movement do not overlap and these are separate phenomena that covary due to another factor, such as the extent of autonomous organizing in civil society as a whole. We would need either more data

or a close examination of each individual case to know this, which is, for now, beyond the scope of this article. A plausible alternative is that a movement might use its most publicly palatable and popular elements in creating a party, consciously eschewing the feminist label in order to avoid alienating more mainstream supporters. In Northern Ireland, for example, many in the women's movement were feminist but the party they created steered clear of the term in part to attract supporters who did not identify with the label and in part to avoid being easily pigeon-holed and dismissed by the other parties (Cowell-Meyers 2011). Adopting the tactical garb of a political party may introduce a set of constraints on movements about which issues they choose to emphasize and in which ways.

In Germany, Slovenia, and Sweden, the parties ran candidates for Europe as well as at the national level. These parties began at the national level first and then grew to vie for seats at the EU level. These parties also had greater durability, which suggests greater depth, than the two parties (Greece and Spain) that only ran candidates at the European level and only contested a single election. It is interesting to note that women's parties emerged in most of the countries with federal or devolved parliaments, such as in the UK, Denmark/Greenland, Switzerland, Russia, Germany and Belgium, and in all but Denmark/Greenland, women's parties contested elections at both national and regional levels. Decentralized governments typically create more opportunities for small parties and women's parties appear to follow this pattern.

Though most of the women's parties were inconsequential to broader election outcomes, women's parties won seats in the national legislature in seven instances between 1987 and 2007 (Armenia, Bulgaria, Iceland, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Switzerland). In addition, the NIWC won seats at the regional level within Northern Ireland.

## STATISTICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

To examine the conditions under which women's parties emerged, I used panel data logit estimates to test three models on the dependent variable of whether or not in that given election year a women's party was registered at the national level (0 = no women's party, 1 = at least one women's party). The first model includes the structural variables identified in the literature on small and niche parties as predictive of

their emergence.<sup>6</sup> These results indicate that women's parties fit the pattern of emergence of other small parties in that a lower threshold to win election, the greater number of parties in the system, and the use of proportional representation predict a higher likelihood that a women's party will emerge. For example, countries with a PR electoral model were nearly seven times as likely as countries with majoritarian electoral models to produce a women's party. This generic structural model's lack of overall explanatory power ( $R^2 = .16$ ), however, indicates the limitations of previous scholarship in explaining when a women's party would emerge.

Model 2 adds women-specific variables to the explanation for the emergence of women's parties. These variables include women's participation in the workforce, women's descriptive representation in parliament, and the presence or absence of a gender quota for candidates for national office within any major party in the system. In this model, all of the structural variables suggested by the extant literature, except age of democracy, are significant and in the theorized direction, as is women's labor force participation, but whether there is a party quota in place and women's representation are not significant. This gender-specific structural model improves the power of the explanation by nearly .10 ( $R^2 = .24$ ) over the first, more generic model, suggesting that women's labor force participation is, in fact, an important element in the explanation for the emergence of women's parties. Increasing women's labor force participation by 1% increases the odds of a country producing a women's party by 18%.

The third model incorporates all of the above variables and introduces two interaction terms designed to measure the effect of the asynchronism between high economic empowerment and low political empowerment. The first interaction term evaluates the combined effect of high women's participation in the labor force and low political representation. The second measures the effect of high women's participation in the labor force and the absence of a party quota. The results show that all of the theorized variables except age of democracy are significant and that all but women's descriptive representation are in the correct direction, including the two interaction terms and major party quota.

In this full model women's descriptive representation is significant and positive (i.e., the more women in the legislature in the previous election, the greater the odds of a women's party emerging), which suggests that

6. In Ishiyama's comparative study of 22 post-Communist states, structural factors like these were the only variables found to be significantly related to the emergence of women's party (2003).

the theory of women's parties emerging in situations where women are underrepresented ( $H_2$ ) needs modification. However, the results of the two interaction variables affirm the argument in  $H_3$  that women's underrepresentation through traditional mechanisms (i.e., the mainstream parties, the presence of gender quotas) relative to their labor force participation also matters to the emergence of women's parties. Taken together, these results from testing  $H_1 - H_3$  build the profile of women's parties as the consequence of both high levels of women's empowerment and also frustration with imbalance in the pattern of empowerment. The  $R^2$  of .30 confirms that this model offers a powerful explanation for the emergence of women's parties in Europe in this period.

Table 3 provides additional support for this argument about the interaction of women's economic and political empowerment. Of the 38 instances, 24 (or 63%) of the elections in which there was a women's party registered at the national level were situations in which women had less than average (15.3%) representation in the previous parliament. However, alluding to the explanatory power of women's economic participation, 74% (28) of these parties existed in situations where women's labor force participation was higher than average (50.4%), and only 26% (10) of the elections in which women's parties existed occurred where less than 50% of women were working outside the home. Of the 24 elections with women's parties in which women had less than 15% representation, 71% were also situations of women's relative economic empowerment. Of the 14 elections with women's parties that occurred where women had more than 15% representation, 79% were also situations of women's relative economic empowerment.

Because the women's parties in the established democracies of Western Europe tended to be feminist and the parties from Eastern Europe did not, Model 4 was designed to control for East versus West, using a dummy variable and dropping age of democracy. Because all the structural variables and the majority of the women-specific variables remain significant, this model shows that women's parties in the two regions, despite their different characters, are explained by the same forces. The one exception is whether or not a major party has a gender quota and the interaction of this variable and women's labor force participation. This is likely a consequence of the fact that almost no parties in Eastern Europe had female gender quotas through most of the time period of the study.

Table 3 shows the effect of women's labor force participation on the likelihood of a party emerging in the full model in more detail. It shows

Table 3. Women's parties by economic empowerment, controlling for political empowerment

<i>Economic Empowerment (women's labor force participation, percent)</i>	<i>Political Empowerment (women's descriptive representation lagged by one election, percent)</i>		
	Below average	Above average	
Below average	29.17% (7)	21.43% (3)	26.32% (10)
Above average	70.83% (17)	78.57% (11)	73.68% (28)
	100% (24)	100% (14)	100% (38)

that the predicted probabilities of a women's party emerging increase as women's labor force participation increases. In addition, as indicated above, the sign of the first interaction term, which models the gap between labor force participation and women's descriptive representation, indicates that the gap, too, is significant and in the correct direction to fit the theory.

Figure 1 unpacks the second interaction term by presenting the marginal effects of a party quota on the likelihood of a women's party for different levels of women's labor force participation. This figure confirms the prediction that the effects of party on the probability of women's party emergence declines as women's labor force participation increases.

## CONCLUSIONS

Political parties and social movements are both central to the degree to which groups are included in the state. Parties in particular are considered the gatekeepers for women's political representation; by choosing to recruit, train, and advance female candidates, promote women within internal structures in the party, or promote women's issues in their platforms, parties determine the levels of engagement and opportunities for women in the political process. And, because the behavior and policy commitments of parties are competitive and contagious, the undertakings of even small and marginal parties have been shown to be influential throughout multiparty political systems (Harmel and Svasand 1997).

This article focuses on women's parties, which have been almost entirely neglected by both the literature on women's movements and that on political parties. The project develops the historical record for women's political parties in Europe in the past two decades, drawing from an

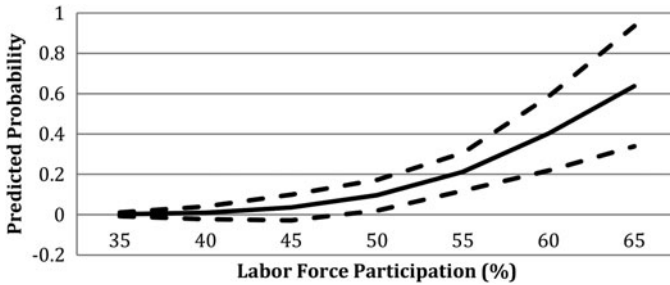


FIGURE 1. Predicted probability of a women's party, conditional on women's labor force participation. Dashed lines denote 95% confidence intervals. Remaining covariates are set to their modes (categorical data) or means (interval data). Estimates are based on Model 3.

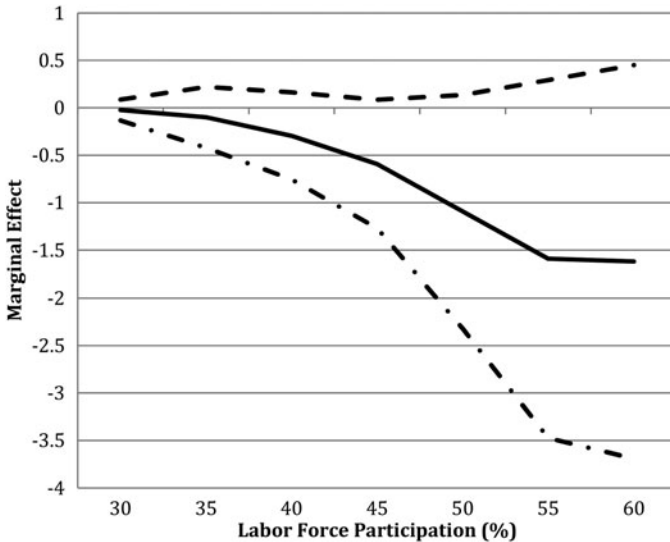


FIGURE 2. Marginal effects of party quota on the probability of a women's party, conditional on women's labor force participation. Dashed lines denote 95% confidence intervals. Remaining covariates are set to their modes (categorical data) or means (interval data). Estimates are based on Model 3.

original longitudinal dataset that includes 38 countries in Europe from 1987 to 2007. The dataset shows that women's parties are not common, but they are not rare either. In fact, 30 such parties existed in 20 countries in this time period. Most of these parties were small, marginal,

and short-lived, though some had a measurable impact on their societies. Though they represented different sets of issues and constituencies of women, these parties shared a common commitment to increase the representation (substantive as well as descriptive) of women in their respective states.

The article focuses on explaining the conditions under which these parties emerged, arguing that women's parties constitute a tactical choice by women's movements to contend with their exclusion from decision making through such formal means. Women's parties emerge under similar structural conditions to other new parties, indicating that the choice to form a party reflects rational calculations about strategic entry into electoral politics by women's movements. But the results here are even more interesting. The descriptive data support the argument made by Hug (2001) and Tavits (2008) that the impetus for new parties lies in frustration with the established party system; women party leaders frequently complained that the established parties excluded women from decision making and ignored women's interests. Though 63% of women's parties emerged in situations where women had less than 15% representation in parliament, the quantitative data do not, however, support the theory that women's parties are more likely when women's parliamentary representation is relatively low. Instead, the data indicate that women's parties occur when women are empowered professionally, through their work, and politically, in parliament. It is important to recognize, however, that 90% of these countries had less than 33% female representation, so the term "political empowerment" overstates what access women had to decision-making roles. And, it must be acknowledged that women's representation in parliament is not a complete picture of women's political empowerment. But the data also show that women's parties are more likely where there is discrepancy between the degree to which the political establishment empowers women (through electoral opportunities or through gender quotas) and the degree to which they participate in the workforce. This suggests that where mainstream parties undertake efforts to include women at levels consummate with their participation in the workforce, women's parties are less likely. Thus, women's parties should be understood as indications of failures in the established party system to adequately incorporate women and as decisions of the movements to hybridize their efforts and institutionalize protest against this pattern of exclusion. The impetus for women's parties is, the data reveal, fundamentally connected to the marginalization of women.

These findings allude to many avenues for further research. The dataset focuses on Europe in part because I expected data to be easier to attain there than in other regions of the world, but it leaves open the question of whether similar patterns could be observed in other places, especially where women's empowerment in general is lower. Additional limitations stem from the difficulty of attaining consistent and reliable information. For example, it may be fruitful to consider additional measures of women's economic and political empowerment beyond those used here in order to develop a more complete picture of this dynamic. The idea that asymmetries in empowerment contribute to the formation of parties of the marginalized also suggests that other groups may follow similar paths to increase their access, and this calls for further research into the formation of parties based on ethnicity, religion, linguistics, and so forth. It may also suggest that the intersection of these parties and women's parties may be important; in other words, are women's parties more or less typical in situations where identity trumps ideology? Finally, this project has not been able to tackle the deviling question of when women's parties are able to change the behavior of other parties versus when they are less effective. I will leave the question of impact to a later examination of particular case studies.

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