

**Democracy and representation worldwide:
who gets elected and how?**
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Irene Tinker Lecture Series
International Center for Research on Women

Thank you all so much for coming to help celebrate the inauguration of this lecture series this evening. I delight in seeing so many friends who have supported the many projects and ideas that I have pursued over the years.

I feel deeply honored to have the International Center for Research on Women set up this yearly lecture in my name, and to be invited to give the inaugural address. These lectures will provide a forum for new ideas that enrich the understanding of ways to improve the lives and the livelihood of women around the world.

I no longer have the energy or innocence of youth to rush into projects where others fear to tread; but ideas continue to flow. Certainly, ideas do stimulate change, but they need institutions to persist.

Beginnings

As the second wave of the US women's movement took off in the 1960s and early 1970s, we women in Washington started innumerable new organizations and caucuses and committees to address women's inequality at home.

In 1972, I returned for a second time to Indonesia. Let me confess that during my first years studying their 1957 elections, I did not consider gender differences when I interviewed members of the state and country assemblies.

I was amazed and upset on my second visit to realized that development was having an adverse impact on women -- from the middle-class professionals -- to the batik makers -- to the rice growers. So of course, when I returned to Washington, I started a group: it was the Women in Development caucus of the Society for International Development. Often referred to as SID-WID.

Together we documented the negative effects of economic development on women based on the growing number of studies being carried out in many parts of the developing world. These studies reported what was happening to women when rapid

economic transformation undercut women's traditional activities while at the same time often adding to women's workload as men turned to cash crops or migrated to cities.

Sweden had pioneered the attention to women a decade earlier when they funded two positions at Economic Commission of Africa to give voice to women's concerns. Ester Boserup's path-breaking book, *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, stimulated the UN to hold an Experts Meeting on WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT in 1972.

Our distinctive contribution was to organize. First we presented panels at the SID meetings in Washington and in Costa Rica. During a State Department briefing about the upcoming World Conference for Women in Mexico City, organized by Virginia Allen, I reiterated that development was not good for women as it was then practiced. Mildred Marcy took this idea to the Hill, wrote an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act that was then being revised, and negotiated with Senator Percy's legislative assistance to introduce it.

At the time Percy had no understanding of the amendment, but since it involved no increase in spending, he agreed. Then he forgot about it and near the end of the debate on the bill was preparing to leave for Chicago, but his assistant went running after him. He read the amendment which was accepted without discussion, and rushed for his plane.

Since the amendment was not in the House version of the bill, it was dropped by conference committee -- until, that is, a blizzard of telegrams arrived: Mildred Marcy had called her friends who were members of the League of Women Voters ; Virginia Allen, attending a conference of the Business and Professional Women in Hawaii, urged everyone there to contact their Congressmen. Meanwhile, I talked to staff of every member of the conference committee explaining why including the amendment was imperative. It was a practical education in the power of networks and of organizations.

Once Senator Percy realized the political support for the amendment as well as its import, he championed it at the UN and in Mexico City. The concepts behind WID were incorporated in the Plan of Action adopted unanimously at the UN Mexico City Conference in 1975.

This model of idea to action was in my mind when I proposed setting up the International Center for Research on Women. USAID had set up an office for WID, and we wished to influence its policies. In 1976, ICRW was founded as a project under the Federation of Organizations for Professional Women. Coralie Turbitt, who

had obtained a grant from USAID to study its programs in three countries, became the full-time director. At that time, women's groups avoided hierarchy, so although I was president, I never used the title but merely headed the Board. When we received our tax exempt status the following year, the Center became independent.

Ideas are incredibly important. But without an institution at their base, they often fade. Taking the idea of a policy research center -- and growing an institution -- is a monumental task.

The three women who have headed the center: Coralie, Mayra Buvinic, and Geeta Rao Gupta, deserve heartfelt accolades for their dedication and innovation that have made ICRW the unique institution it is today.

Women and political participation

Those of you who know of my advocacy for "women in development" may have wondered about the topic of my talk tonight. The answer is power.

Democracy has become the preoccupation of this century just as economic development was the preoccupation of the world in the last half of the 20th century.

The women's movement worked hard to ensure that women received resources and benefits from economic development programs. Today our imperative is to ensure that women participate in political decision making. Without such institutionalized power, the gains of the women's movement may not last.

The Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing elevated political participation as a major goal. Representation in legislative bodies was identified as essential in order to protect the economic, human, social, and material power which women have accumulated during four decades of rapid economic transformation of their societies. The expansion of their rights and opportunities must be enshrined in laws and constitutions.

A few token women in elected positions is simply not sufficient. Institutional culture in both political parties and legislatures undermines individual attempts to alter policies or procedures. Women are therefore demanding quotas in order to achieve a critical mass of 30% women in elected legislatures throughout the world. Before providing details about these electoral quotas, let me set the context by discussing two points:

***first, how women's accumulated power gives substance to this demand for electoral

quotas, and

***second, how current debates about democracy and representation in transitional states are relevant to women's demands.

Women accumulating power

As a result of the dislocations caused by the rapid economic transformation throughout every corner of the globe, women were able to challenge their traditional roles in the family and in the community. They were able to do so because significant economic resources designed to alleviate poverty were directed toward women.

BUT this flow of funding was not charity; it was directed at helping women with their work. Women were organized into groups -- an action that was itself liberating. Think how consciousness-raising groups in the US became the foundation of our second wave women's movement.

Women in the developing countries were brought together to learn about family planning, efficient cook stoves, micro enterprise, microcredit, trees for fuelwood, crops for urban gardening, house construction. The list goes on. All these programs were designed to increase women's economic value and reduce her expenses.

I argue that the success of the actual programs was less important than the fact that women were organized, could meet regularly away from their families, could learn from the more educated women who were organizing them.

**For example, suppose a woman borrows from the Grameen Bank to set up a small street food stand but loses money because her food is not appetizing, and because she uses some of the money to pay her husband's gambling debts. Nonetheless, the welfare of the family will be improved because she borrowed the money at 16% per year, not at the local moneylender's rate of 40% *per month*. Assuming the family still had the same amount of disposable income, more was available for other uses.

Over time, these poor women were empowered as they accumulated economic capital. They increased their human capital learning to write their names and to understand the market; the networks created by their groups increased their social capital; and many bought houses or land, increasing their material capital.

The women who organized them were also empowered through their own

organizations who ran the projects. At first many intermediary organizations were male dominated, but in many countries women broke off from such NGOs to form their own groups.

These national groups expanded their activities beyond providing service to the grassroots. They trained women about their legal rights to land and inheritance; and lobbied their governments for new laws. As we did in the US, these women lobbied from *outside government*.

In South Africa, rural women's organizations campaigned against provisions in the proposed constitution that reinstalled the power of traditional chiefs and gave precedence of customary law over civil law. Forming a coalition with urban groups, these women achieved their goal.

Unlike any other African constitutions, the South African constitution guarantees women's equality; women are no longer the property of the man in marriage; her material goods cannot legally be taken by male relatives upon her husband's death. Acquiescent to these provisions may take time, but the law shines in comparison with its neighboring countries.

The four remarkable World Conferences for Women brought together these women from the villages and slums with the women leading national organizations as well as with the women and men working with international agencies. Scholars mixed with the advocates and practitioners to identify issues and learn from each other.

**27 pioneers of women in development movement have written their stories of how they became WID advocates, and what they did to change development policy. The book, edited by Arvonne Fraser and myself, will be published next year by the Feminist Press. Next November I hope you will help celebrate its publication at a series of events held here in Washington DC.

At the 1995 Beijing Conference for Women, a new agenda was set. Women's rights are human rights became the mantra. What this means is that all laws should apply equally, that customary or traditional family law under which women are treated as minors or as property. must be changed. And once those laws governing marriage, citizenship, inheritance, land rights, and more, women must have power to prevent these laws from being changed again to their disadvantage. To accomplish this, the

Platform of Action called for 30% of seats in elected legislatures should be held by women. Clearly, the critical arena now for women's rights is political.

Democracy and representation

Current debates over the form of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan fill the media. Who will write the constitution, will women be represented? How will elections work? How will the various tribal and ethnic groups be accommodated? Or will these countries disintegrate into war and genocide as happened in Yugoslavia?

When India became independent in 1947, British India was divided between predominantly Hindu and Muslim areas; but the 237 princely states were theoretically allowed to choose between Pakistan and India. I say theoretically because Muslim Hyderabad in the heart of India was given no choice; the Hindu rajah who headed the state of Jammu [Hindu] and Kashmir [Muslim] chose India. That decision continues to bedevil relations between those countries and the world.

Partition resulted in weeks of civil unrest and killings as Muslims moved west, and Hindus and Sikhs moved east. Estimates go as high as 3 million killed; but no one knows for certain.

Despite cordial ties between Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, their parties supported separation. Voters at the time were divided by their religion, with Muslims voting for Muslims, and Hindus for Hindus. Overall, some 25 groups had separate electoral lists. Obviously, such an arrangement encouraged extremism and made any type of compromise extremely difficult. I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the 1952 elections in India, the first election in the world where all citizens, educated and illiterate, male and female, could vote. I speculated that perhaps a different type of electoral system might have preserved South Asia as one country.

If Iraq has elections in a centralized state, Shiites will dominate the government; but a federal system would provide a measure of autonomy for the Sunnis and the Kurds. A party list system would limit choices for the electorate and increase competition between parties while a single member constituency system --as we have-- might allow for a greater range of opinions. Yet this system would diminish the likelihood for many women representatives.

Most commentators about democracy seem automatically to assume an electoral system similar to ours. Indeed, over half, or 54%, of independent states and semi-autonomous territories in the world which have direct parliamentary elections use

the single member constituency system according to the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, known as IDEA.

Under this plurality-minority system, candidates stand in a particular territorial area and are elected to represent the voters in that specific district. The winning candidate is the person receiving the highest number of votes; where three or four people are standing, the winner may not even enjoy a majority.

Because of the highly competitive nature of running one person against another, parties have often been reluctant to run a woman or a minority person because they assume some voters will switch loyalties to vote for a man from the majority group.

The other major electoral system utilizes proportional representation and is used alone or in combination with the single member constituency system in 45% of the countries. Proponents argue that PR utilizes all votes which, under the plurality-majority system are wasted.

Under the basic PR method, contesting parties draw up lists of candidates for the electoral district: a county, province, or country. Each district is allocated a set number of seats for the legislature. After voting, the total ballot count is divided by the available seats. If 10,000 votes are cast in an area with 5 seats, then a seat requires 2000 votes. Parties are allocated seats by their vote count. Very small parties lacking a certain per cent of the vote are usually disqualified. Since the party controls the list, they also control who from the list is selected. Unless agreement is reached that the candidates are selected by their place on the list from top to bottom, [a closed list] women or other minorities may appear on the list and not be selected.

How do you design a system that more accurately reflects the population? And how accurately? Think of the current spectacle in Texas over redistricting. Think of the difficulties in this country trying to elect African Americans to office. How much democracy is enough?

Since becoming an adult I have lived in Maryland, California, and Oregon, three states with the longest ballots in the country, or in the world, I would guess. Once I took several foreign students to the polling booth to observe democracy in action. They could not believe the list of issues voters were expected to understand and decide. In most countries a voter is only expected to vote for one or two candidates. No wonder their voter turn-out is higher than ours.

How intelligently do you vote? Most of us get references from groups we trust. Still, even with Oregon's mail in ballot, I ponder many hours over the 50 page voter's'

guide with my extended family before marking the 60 or 70 candidates, initiatives, or constitutional amendments.

On the west coast ballot initiatives have become big business: people gathering signatures are paid, voters are inundated with literature and TV info-mercials. Worse, the art of misnaming the initiatives is a method of recruiting uninformed voters: in California the “Civil Rights Act” was against affirmative action.

The effect of these initiatives is that many legislators simply avoid making hard decisions, even leaving the voters to decide tax increases [as is the present case in Oregon.] They have lost their political power and will as representatives. After the recent California recall election, an example of populism run wild, many are calling for a reexamination of its constitution.

Systems and institutions of democracy clearly can be altered and manipulated to a purpose. Should this be done to elect women? And how?

Electoral quotas for women

The time seems propitious to make this demand. The voting public, disgusted with widespread mal-administration and corruption, has begun to consider women in politics as acceptable, even desirable, because they are perceived as being more concerned with outcomes than the accumulation of power.

- Over 25 countries have adopted legal or constitutional quotas for women in legislatures, primarily at the national level but also at the local level.
- Women hold at least 30 percent of the seats in eleven countries. Most are in Europe: Sweden has the most with 42.7% followed by Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Netherlands, and Germany. The rest are scattered: New Zealand, the first country to give women the vote, has women in most of the top executive posts as well; Argentina in Latin America, still riding on the Eva Peron legacy. More surprising, perhaps, are two countries in Africa: Mozambique and South Africa.

Every one of these eleven countries with over 30% membership of women use the proportional representation system. In all these instances, the high percentage of women was due to quotas established within the parties.

Further, both New Zealand and South Africa switched from the single member

constituency to PR in the last decade. South Africa adopted PR in the 1994 Constitution to create an “atmosphere of inclusiveness and reconciliation” in the post-apartheid era and allow an ethnically heterogeneous groups of candidates, many of them women, to be elected. Creating provincial districts for voting also avoided trying to redraw the white, Indian, and Coloured constituencies that prevailed under apartheid.

New Zealand adopted a mixed PR system in 1993 to allow greater ethnic representation while retaining a constituency base. Elections since the system was instituted have resulted in more Maoris, Pacific Islanders, and women being elected.

Another 23 countries have at least 20 percent of the seats. These countries expand the European coverage to include Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Spain, Poland, and Bulgaria. In this hemisphere are Canada; the three small Caribbean islands of Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Sao Tome and Principe; Guyana and Nicaragua in Central America. In Asia the countries of Australia, Seychelles, Turkmenistan qualify. Also included in this list are four communist countries: Cuba, China, Vietnam, and Laos.

Two points need commentary.

****First** is the inclusion of seven countries which do not have directly-elected national parliaments. The Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, that published these data, note that elections are free only in 98 of the countries in transition and in 36 established democracies.

****Second**, this list includes a few countries using the single member constituency system. But the numbers reflect the women’s movement, not quotas.

Setting up quotas in the single member constituency system is much more problematical than under PR. Reserved seats for women are usually separate from the regular general election. Both Taiwan and Uganda require quotas for women in national legislatures; the constitution under discussion in Kenya would have one overlapping constituency for each three general seats.

In the Pakistan elections in October 2002, 17% of the seats in provincial and national assemblies were reserved for women. These seats were filled by separate party lists of women by province; winners were elected on the basis of the total number of general seats won by each political party in the National Assembly. Thus women are beholden to the party to get a spot on the list.

Shortly before the parliamentary elections of May 2003, Jordan passed a law reserving six seats for women in the national parliament.

Quotas for seats in local bodies seem easier to set up. India passed a

Constitutional Amendment in 1993 to require that one-third of all seats in local councils must be filled by women. France required parties to nominate women for 50% of mayors with the result that 48% won seats in 2001 as compared to only 9% in the national assembly which had not quota. In the Philippines, an executive order recommends a 30% quota for seats in the barangay councils.

Once elected, women face a the male culture embedded in the Parliament. Evening meetings and the lack of child care are major obstacles. A critical mass was needed in Congress to obtain a beauty parlor and access to the gym -- as well as more toilets.

Many women run only once.

Creating a feminist agenda

Is the justification of having more women in parliaments based on the concept that equality means sameness? Or are we equal -- but different from men -- with unique perspectives?

But if women are different, what about Margaret Thatcher or Indira Gandhi? Hardly feminists, these prime ministers! This why a critical mass of women is necessary, backed up by a strong women's movement outside government.

Do numbers of women in legislatures in fact translate into power to implement a feminist agenda?

Research is sparse on this issue.

***In India, elected women in the *panchayats* or local councils, have focused their energies on local needs from water to schools to housing. Their main impact seems to be using government funds for the purpose intended. This contrasts to wide-spread misuse of funds by male leadership.

***In Uganda, women have tried to combat traditional clientelism at the local levels, so that, as in India, moneys are used as intended.

***In the US, a study of community based organizations in nine sites in found that those community organizations controlled by women expanded the agenda from housing and enterprise development to child and elder care, leadership training, battered women shelters.

***In Minnesota, a 20 year analysis of women in the state legislature supports the need for a critical mass. Once women members were more than 20%, women became chairs of committees and were able to introduce new policies.

***The Institute for Women's Policy Research compared the number of women in electoral offices by state in the US during the 1990s with the levels of women-friendly policies in the state. The study concluded that: Having women in elected office cannot guarantee better policy for women, but it clearly helps.

Another argument for electing women is the belief that women are less corrupt than men. Several studies show that women, confronted with corruption, opt out of electoral politics. A candidate in Uganda was disillusioned, not only by the extent of corruption, but by the way voters had come to expect politicians to hand out money.

A recent World Bank study found a correlation between significant rates of women in government and lowered levels of corruption. More specifically, women are less likely to be involved in bribery.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

- Electoral systems can be manipulated to elect more women. Party quotas in a PR system is the most efficacious way to get the numbers, but strong party control may be inconsistent with a feminist agenda.
- Without a critical mass in the legislature, the institutionalized male culture makes even survival problematic.
- Without a strong external women's movement, women will have a minimal impact of policies or legislation.
- Women in local bodies have the most direct affect on the lives of women in their communities.

Women's effectiveness in the legislature is largely determined by the underlying social system which controls relationships between women and men. It is this social system that is being altered by women's growing power, the economic power, human capabilities, social capital, and material power, that women have accumulated through economic development that is making the difference.

Now, our goal is political power.