Huber and Stephens Measure of Women’s Mobilization

The feminist literature on comparative social policy argues that feminist movements have had a substantial impact on social policy outcomes. Unfortunately, there are no good comparable data on strength of feminist movements across countries, much less both across countries and through time within countries. In fact, it is not even clear what should qualify as a feminist or "gender equality movement". For instance, social democratic women's organizations were once primarily women's support groups for the parties but transformed themselves into "gender equality movements" at differing speeds and points of time over the past four decades in almost all advanced industrial countries. Thus, we find it preferable to measure women's mobilization in the form of women's organizational membership, or the extent to which women are members of non-religious organizations. Membership in such organizations is a valid indicator of women's mobilization because it captures the extent to which women are actively participating in public life.

Comparable data on participation by women in organizations for the 14 countries in our data set are available from the World Values Surveys (Inglehart 1997), which asked respondents to list organizations in which they are members. But the WVS have data for only 31 country/year data points between 1981 and 1997 and often not for the year for which the LIS data exist. However, the measures we developed from the World Values Surveys were highly correlated with the proportion of women in the lower house of the national legislature, which is available in an annual time series from the end of World War II to 2000 (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU] 1995).[[1]](#footnote-1) The notion that women's mobilization both within and outside political parties should be reflected in larger proportions of female legislators has face validity. One weakness in this link is that electoral rules strongly influence the proportion of female legislators. In proportional representation systems, parties can more easily increase the proportion of women in their parliamentary delegation by changing the gender composition of their lists of candidates. As citizens in these systems tend to vote for parties, not candidates, more women end up being elected. In single-member district systems, the strong incumbent advantage also works against increasing the representation of women, as the overwhelming majority of incumbents are men. Thus, women's movements of equivalent strengths will produce more women representatives in proportional representation systems.[[2]](#footnote-2)

We developed two different measures of women's organizational membership: the percentage of women in at least one nonreligious organization, and the percentage of women in at least one political or union organization. We excluded religious organizations, reasoning that these were unlikely to favor gender egalitarian social policies. To deal with the two distortions just mentioned we regressed the two measures of women's organizational membership on women in parliament, an indicator for proportional representation and an indicator for the last World Values Study wave. The fit was very good in both equations with an R2 of .82 for the total membership variable and .76 for the union and political organization membership variable. We then calculated the predicted value of women's organizational membership for the country/years of the LIS using the coefficients for women's parliamentary representation, the proportional representation indicator, and a constant.[[3]](#footnote-3) In the case of percent membership in any nonreligious organization, the equation was:

Membership = 30.39 + 1.58(women in parliament) – 16.36 (proportional representation)

Because we expect that policy would reflect the long-term strength of women's organizational membership and not any sudden increases in participation by women in organizations, we calculated the cumulative average of each of the two membership variables. This procedure makes these variables consistent with long-term measurement of the cabinet variables. Since the two measures of women's mobilization performed almost identically in the analyses, we report only the results for membership in any nonreligious organization.

1. The 1996-2000 data are available at the IPU website (http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. An additional problem specific to the World Values Survey Data is a wording change in questions on organizational membership in the last wave of the survey (mid 1990s). It is clear that this change inflated organizational membership because reliable aggregate membership data for union density, for example, show that the lower figures from the early waves were more accurate. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Because the last wave indicator measured error in the World Values Study last wave data, it was excluded from the prediction equation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)